

APRIL 2021



Oceanswell

Oceans for all, forever

THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS ON COASTAL FISHERIES IN SRI LANKA

SUMMARY

Written by: Nadiya Azmy, Arpana Giritharan, Hafsa Jamel,
Sangeeta Mangubhai Ph.D. & Asha de Vos Ph.D.

Oceanswell, 9 Park Gardens, Colombo 00500, Sri Lanka

The following is a summary of an extensive report that analyses the impacts of lockdowns imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on coastal fisheries in Sri Lanka prior to August 2020.

Full version - Azmy, N., Giritharan, A., Jamel, H., Mangubhai, S., de Vos, A. (2021). The impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns on coastal fisheries in Sri Lanka. Oceanswell, Colombo. Retrieved from <https://oceanswell.org/publications/the-impacts-of-covid-19-lockdowns-on-coastal-fisheries-in-sri-lanka>

- In response to the surge of COVID-19 cases across the globe, the Sri Lankan government imposed an island-wide police curfew on 20 March 2020, followed by lockdowns and travel restrictions of varying nature¹. This study was conducted by Oceanswell to analyse the impacts of these restrictions on the coastal fishing communities around the island.
- Four hundred and fifteen surveys were conducted across 13 study sites along the coast of Sri Lanka from 29 July to 29 August 2020. The government had not reported community spread during this period. The main known impacts of COVID-19 on fisheries in Sri Lanka prior to the survey period were due to the island wide curfew, cross border mobility restrictions and trade regulations.
- Among the surveys conducted, 25% were from female fisheries actors, a majority of whom were processors.
- The study included fishers, sellers/traders and processors, all of whom reported that restrictions negatively impacted their respective fisheries related activity. The inability of fishers to go to sea disrupted the whole fisheries value chain. Eighty four percent of the respondents reported a decrease in their income, which could be attributed to the inaccessibility to the fisheries related activity, the decrease in consumer demand and the steep decline in export.
- A comparatively lower number of processors reported that the lockdown negatively impacted their work. This could be due to the longer shelf-life of their product, which renders more control over their stocks during market shocks such as this.
- Sea food price showed no clear trend in any direction. However, a larger number of offshore/deep-sea fishers reported a decline in seafood price. This could be attributed to the fact that they catch high value seafood², which was impacted by the decrease in purchasing power, trade restrictions and the decrease in export demand.
- The most common adaptation strategies reported were utilising savings and credit services, while a small number of respondents mentioned that they depended on the government allowance provided. The respondents requested financial assistance and better suited financial services such as lower interest loan schemes.
- Overall, this study showed that the inaccessibility to the ocean, and thereby fishing, negatively impacted small scale fisheries communities due to limited coping strategies and lack of alternative modes of income.

- The results of this study can be used as a model to predict and prepare for unforeseen shocks that can limit access to seafood stock and disrupt the fisheries value chain. The consequences of overfishing, climate change and climate change-induced factors such as storm surges, sea level rise and coastal flooding are examples of potential future shocks that can threaten seafood stocks and limit access to them. The results of which would render traditional fishing grounds unproductive and fishing gear and methods ineffective³. In response, larger vessels, longer trips and the development of new gear will be crucial to a viable future of the industry, these adaptation strategies will be more challenging for the increasingly vulnerable small-scale fishers⁴.
- These compounding effects, along with pre-existing vulnerabilities, related to structural, social and economic inequality, can in turn increase the effect that COVID-19 and similar shocks will have on health and socio-economic factors in fisheries communities⁵.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Marine Conservation Action Fund of the New England Aquarium for funding this project. We acknowledge the respondents for their participation, cooperation, and contribution to this research. Furthermore, we wish to extend our gratitude to Mrs. Jegatheeswary Ehamparam Gunasingham for coordinating our research assistants in the North and East coasts and assisting with the quality checking process of the surveys. In addition, we acknowledge the work of our research assistants who conducted the interviews: Kaushalya Balasooriya, Dilini Gamage, Manuja Hendawitharana, Iflal Ilyas, Thamiliny Kaneshalingam, Mohammed Mujas, Kajanthini Rajanalendran, Shalanka Ranjula, Rifdha Riswan, Antony Santhosh, Saranya Sinnathurai, Sathiavakeesparan Sivanthan, Abilagini Vickraman and Muththulingam Yuhinthan. We acknowledge the support by Isha and Naduni Mallika Arachchi when writing this report. We also acknowledge Dr. Nelly Kadagi for her support during the data analysis process of this report.

References

1. Foreign Ministry - Sri Lanka. (2020, March 20). Declaration of police curfew island wide [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://mfa.gov.lk/declaration-of-police-curfew-island-wide/>
2. National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA). (2019). Fisheries Industry Outlook- 2018 (7-24). <http://www.nara.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/fisheries-industry-outlook-2018-converted-Copy.pdf>
3. Edirisinghe, K., Wansapala, J., & Wickramasinghe, I. (2018). Review of marine fishery status along the supply chain in Sri Lanka. *International Journal Of Food Science And Nutrition*, 3(4), 10-23.
4. Arulanathan, K. (2017). Proceedings of the Workshop on Present Status of Research Activities on Climate Change Adaptations. *Proceedings of the Workshop on Present Status of Research Activities on Climate Change Adaptations* (Ed. B. Marambe), 121-126.
5. Nathan J. Bennett, Elena M. Finkbeiner, Natalie C. Ban, Dyhia Belhabib, Stacy D. Jupiter, John N. Kittinger, Sangeeta Mangubhai, Joeri Scholtens, David Gill & Patrick Christie (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic, Small-Scale Fisheries and Coastal Fishing Communities, *Coastal Management*, 48:4, 336-347, doi: 10.1080/08920753.2020.1766937



Oceanswell

Oceans for all, forever