

CLAM PROCESSING METHODS IN SRI LANKA: ISSUES AND CONSTRAINTS

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The clam, *Meretrix casta*, fishery, which is practicing in Chilaw lagoon, supports around 1 100 fishing families. Presently, the clam industry is based on wild catches which is increasingly threatened by over exploitation, improper reclamation, and destruction of ecologically sensitive areas. The processing of harvested clams is predominantly done by women, hence, it is one of the activities that could easily be used to alleviate the poverty among women in coastal areas. However, due to poor knowledge on the potential for improving processing methods the industry has not been developed into mass scale production. Therefore, this study tried to identify the issues and constraints of clam processing industry in Chilaw lagoon. Data were collected through personal interviews; semi-structured questionnaires; direct observations, and group discussions, from June 2013 to February 2014, covering 90% of randomly selected fishers, processors, collectors, and exporters. Demand for the clam meat for the shrimp farming industry and for lime production has increased the pressure on wild clam stocks decreasing total annual production and size of the harvested clams. The current processing practices of poor hygienic and crude traditional practices leads to poor product quality, poor recovery rates of the products, and less recognitions for the products in the local and export market. Ecosystem approach with promotes conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources in an equitable way has been identified for the management of clam resource. Techno-economic empowerment of women with proper processing and preservation technologies and diversification of products in accordance with global market trends are the main interventions identified for the sustainability of the processing industry.

Keywords: Clam processing, Ecosystem approach in Fisheries, Techno-economic empowerment