

## **Does the Legal Framework Favour the Process of Co-Management in Small-Scale Fisheries: A Review of Diverse Laws Governing Fisheries in Sri Lanka**

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The significance of a robust legal framework for promoting community involvement in resource management is well-recognized. This paper attempts to highlight the contribution of the legal framework of Sri Lanka's fisheries sector for co-management, a participatory management approach involving fishers, the state, and other stakeholders, for the sustainable use of resources. The paper explores the extent to which the existing legal framework in the fisheries sector of Sri Lanka favours the establishment and functioning of co-management. A systematic review of current Acts, Regulations, and other related legal instruments was conducted to assess the impact of existing legal provisions. Key person interviews were held with relevant officials of the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, community leaders, and other users of coastal resources to examine the implications of the legal provisions at the ground level. The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act of 2013 has been recognized as the principal legal foundation supporting co-management. The provisions for the establishment of a Fisheries Management Coordinating Committee (FCC) with the participation of representatives of fishers from the Fisheries Management Committees (FMC), government organizations, and other key stakeholders for every Fisheries Management Area (FMA) designated by an Order could be identified as the most salient step favouring co-management. The review sheds light on the deficiencies in the legal framework, including the lack of provisions to make the establishment of FMCs and FCCs compulsory and to have regular meetings. The study also finds that the law does not work perfectly well at the ground level, revealing that certain legal provisions are not robust enough to ensure good governance. The legal framework in Sri Lanka's fisheries sector generally supports co-management, but there is room for improvement. The government should take necessary steps to address the legal, and administrative issues that restrain the effective implementation of co-management initiatives.

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