

Empowering fisherwomen by generating additional income from the cultivation of Aloe vera (Phase 1)



Aloe vera plantation, Puttalam, Sri Lanka © K. Ekaratne

local crop-growing conditions are generally unfavourable, alternative ways of generating household income are needed that are cost-effective and environmentally friendly. To this end, the project sought to encourage households to cultivate Aloe vera (*Aloe vera*) to meet the high demand for its products in the medicine and cosmetics industries.

Aloe vera (known locally as *komarika*) is a multi-purpose plant, providing medicine and drink. Aloe gel is the base for soaps, body lotions, skin care products, foot creams and many modern cosmetics, and reportedly has antiseptic properties. The latex is a well-known laxative. In recent years the demand for Aloe vera products has grown rapidly both locally and internationally.

Aloe vera thrives in the dry, sandy conditions around Puttalam lagoon, and wild plants collected from this area have long been used for soaps, lotions, creams and other products by cosmetic manufacturers in Sri Lanka. Using an MFF small grant, the Marine and Coastal Resources Conservation Foundation (MCRCF), an NGO based in Kalpitiya, launched a programme to cultivate Aloe vera on the homesteads of 15 selected fisher families.

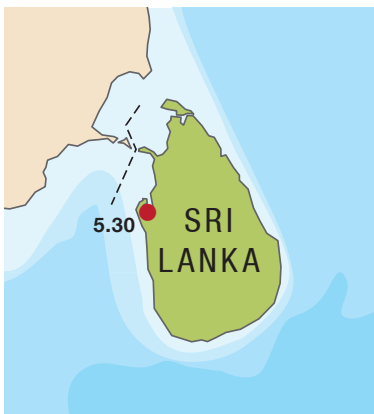
The introduction of a supplementary means of generating income, especially for local women, was considered a feasible approach to reduce fishing pressure. MCRCF implemented the project in collaboration with three local fishery societies: the Semuthu Fisheries Cooperative Society in Kudawa, and the St Sebastian Fisheries Cooperative Societies in Kudawa and Anawasala.

Target beneficiaries

Fifteen fisher families in Puttalam lagoon.

Outputs

- ▶ Training of 15 fisher families, especially the women, in cultivating Aloe vera.



LOCATION

Puttalam, Sri Lanka

PRIORITY POWS

- Sustainable Livelihoods

DURATION

Five months from January to May 2009

MFF GRANT AMOUNT

US\$4,386

Objectives

This project had four main objectives:

- ❶ to reduce pressure on Bar Reef and its associated marine and coastal resources;
- ❷ to increase the income of poor coastal householders;
- ❸ to empower women; and
- ❹ to stimulate income generation.

Background

Puttalam lagoon is renowned in Sri Lanka for its finfish and crustacean fishery. The lagoon supports over 3,000 fishermen from 28 registered fishery societies, who together are responsible for increasing exploitation pressure on the natural resources. Communities around the lagoon have responded to declining fishery production and rising fuel prices by intensifying their fishing efforts, causing negative impacts on the vital reef ecosystem and its biodiversity. Because land-based income opportunities are limited, and

- ▶ Provision of plants and necessary tools to the families. About 575 Aloe vera plants were given to each family.
- ▶ The establishment of a buy-back system operated by MCRCF.
- ▶ Provision of an improved income-generating activity for 15 fishing families.

Accomplishments and challenges

Fifteen poor fisher families now have an alternative source of income. The project also successfully linked the families to Janet Ayurveda, a cosmetics company wanting to procure Aloe vera for its products.

Self-confidence was built up among poor families who used to be engaged only in fishing activities. More fishermen now focus on cultivating Aloe vera and spend less time fishing.

Contributions to cross-cutting themes

Gender equality

Aloe vera cultivation has been aimed primarily

at women, giving them a livelihood of their own and empowering them economically.

Lessons learned

Demand for Aloe vera plants has grown rapidly among fisher families. A plant nursery should be established to meet this demand.

Mulching is required, but chemical fertilisers are unnecessary. Too much shade has a negative impact on plant growth.

The creation of market linkages by MCRCF was an important contributor to success. With MCRCF's support, an Aloe vera cultivators' society was formed and links made to reputable private companies, allowing households to expand cultivation.

The diversification of livelihoods has helped to reduce pressure on coastal ecosystems and resources, as fishermen spend more time on cultivation and less time fishing.

MCRCF is continuing to support the project by giving free technical advice to local people interested in cultivating Aloe vera. More and more fisher families are turning to Aloe vera cultivation as it is proving to be not just a supplement to their income but also a profitable business in its own right.

“The project built trust in the alternative livelihood option among the communities dependent on coastal resources.”

– HASANTHA AMARASEKERA
PROJECT MANAGER, MCRCF

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