

(56)

Opportunities and Challenges of Pescatourism: Insights from Small-Scale Fishers in Rekawa, Southern Sri Lanka

Waduge, K.W.S.H.* , Dushani, S.N.

*Department of Fisheries and Marine Sciences, Faculty of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences,
Ocean University of Sri Lanka, Tangalle, Sri Lanka*

**sanduwaduge@gmail.com*

Abstract

Pescatourism is an emerging concept within the blue economy in which tourism merges with fisheries. Usually, it consists of a voyage on a fishing vessel where artisanal fishers welcome tourists onboard and a visit to a fishing village to experience the way of life of an artisanal fishing community. However, this sustainable tourism approach is still new to Sri Lanka and Pescatourism initiatives have not yet been implemented. The potential of introducing Pescatourism in Sri Lanka is largely unknown. To fill this research gap to a certain extent, we studied the perceptions of small-scale fishers in Rekawa about their intention to engage in Pescatourism. Further, we assessed the opportunities and challenges of Pescatourism in achieving sustainable development. A convenience sample of 150 small-scale fishers was selected from Rekawa, Southern Sri Lanka. Participants were briefed on the concept of Pescatourism before the data collection, due to its novelty in Sri Lanka. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a pre-tested structured questionnaire to collect data from the fishers from November 2023 to January 2024. Data analysis consisted of Descriptive Statistics, Binary Logistic Regression, and Friedman Test. The majority (91.3%) expressed their willingness to consider participating in Pescatourism. Most of the fishers recognized Pescatourism as an opportunity to increase their income (99.3%), improving social recognition for their profession (84%), and a way of fishers' women empowerment (58.8%). Key challenges identified by the fishers included lack of infrastructure facilities (63.3%), tourists' safety concerns (75.4%), and communication barriers (79.2%). The results of the Binary Logistic Regression revealed that Rekawa fishers who were intended to engage in Pescatourism were significantly more likely to invest money in Pescatourism enterprise, had faith in the Pescatourism that would improve the quality of life in their fishing community, and believed that Pescatourism would allow them to sustainable use of their natural resources. According to the Friedman Test, there was a significant difference among three quality dimensions in Pescatourism; quality of the land-based excursions, quality of the Pescatourism service provider, and quality of the food offering during the Pescatourism journey ($\chi^2=105.05$, $df=2$, $p<0.05$). Approximately, half of the respondents would prefer to receive a Pescatourism operating license through their fisheries cooperatives. In conclusion, this case study offers some insights to decision-makers in the tourism sector by highlighting the potential of introducing Pescatourism initiatives in southern Sri Lanka addressing the key challenges identified.

Keywords: *Blue economy, Sustainable tourism, Pescatourism initiatives, Small-scale fishers, Women empowerment*