

Negombo Revisited

Photo Essay by S Jayaraj

Nearly 27 years ago, the third issue of *Bay of Bengal News* (December 1981) carried a feature on “Negombo, yesterday, today and tomorrow” by journalist Neville de Silva. He said that despite the thriving fishing activity, government assistance and a booming tourist industry, “much remains to be done”.

Negombo is synonymous with Sri Lankan fisheries. At one time, traditional fishing craft (such as teppams and orus) dominated Negombo. Today, you see greater variety. There are some 400 multi-day boats and 129 single-day boats, some 1 845 fibreglass boats with outboard engines, 2 024 non-motorized traditional crafts, and 34 beach seine boats. As many as 22 fishing methods have been identified. The fish produced includes lobster, tuna, prawn and a variety of small species. The productivity of the Negombo lagoon is high, there is a moderate shrimp and finfish fishery, tuna is captured, so are crabs and many food fish species. Some of the poorer fishermen collect ornamental fish too.

But Negombo’s 65 000 strong fishing community (13 000 fishing families) is likely to say, like citizens everywhere, “much needs to be done.” Management is the need of the hour. Community-based fisheries management would be ideal, considering that the fishers of Negombo are by and large aware and well-informed.





Fish are auctioned on the beaches, also sold in fish markets (Negombo has Sri Lanka's second largest fish market). Most of the fish vending is done by women. They don't go out to fish but are active in processing and marketing, and run their families as well.

Negombo is also known for tourism as much as for fisheries. Its beaches lure tourists into spending a day or two there – to observe the daily fish auctions, meet the colourful fishermen, go on fishing trips into the lagoon, take part in water sports or diving, or gaze at varieties of fish around coral reefs. Some stretches of the beach house hotels, the rest are busy with fishermen.

The pictures in this photo feature provide glimpses of Negombo's thriving fishing community.



