



# “LIVES ON THE MOVE”: GENDERED ASPECTS OF MIGRATION IN FISHING VILLAGES IN SRI LANKA

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*Migration and collectives/networks as pathways out of poverty: Gendered vulnerabilities and capabilities  
amongst poor fishing communities in Asia project  
NTNU/ICES/UEA/AIT/FishMARC/CIRD*

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# Collaborative research project

## Partner research organizations

### Lead organization

- Norwegian University of Science and Technology

### Other organizations

- Asian Institute of Technology, Cambodia
- University of East Anglia, England
- Cambodia Institute for Research and Development, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- Fisheries Management Resource Centre, Trivandrum, India
- International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka

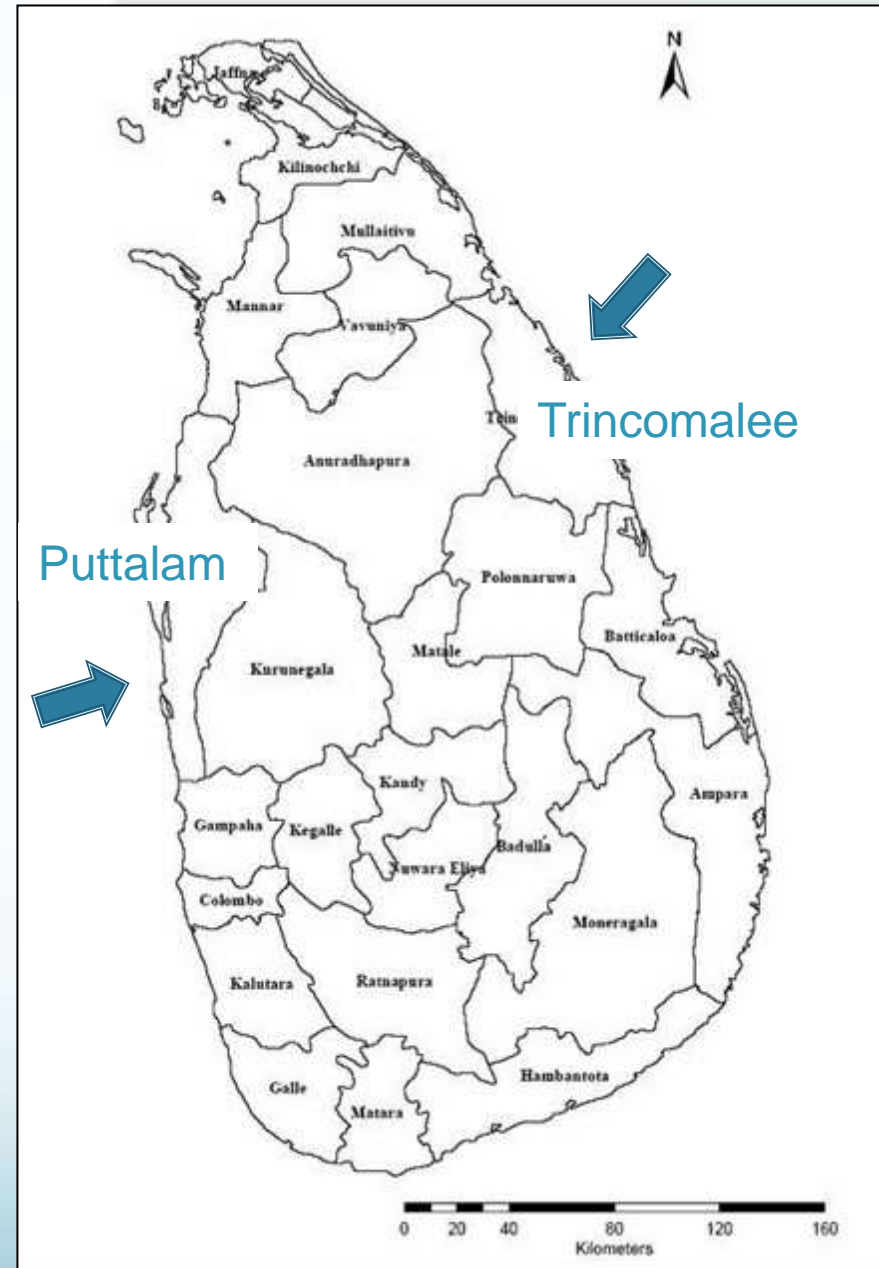
*Funded by the Research Council of Norway*

# Research Questions

- Does internal fisheries migration affect women and men similarly and/or differently?
- What motivates women and men to migrate internally for fishing?
- How do respective social networks and relations of women and men enable or disable migration?
- What are positive and/negative outcomes of migration on women's and men's material, relational and subjective wellbeing?

# Study villages in Sri Lanka

- **Puttalam district (West coast)**
  - *Kadalpalli*: Sinhalese Catholic community based primarily on marine fishing in OFRP boats
  - *Cattiyur*: Tamil Hindu community based largely on marine beach seine fishing, using large wooden canoes; fishing with OFRPs and rafts
- **Trincomalee district (East coast)**
  - *Selippur*: Muslim community based on marine and lagoon fishing in OFRP boats and canoes
  - *Uppukadal*: Tamil Hindu community based on lagoon and marine fishing in OFRP boats and canoes (majority of households displaced and resettled after the tsunami/war)



# Rationale for selection of research sites

- The Puttalam and Trincomalee districts have traditionally been sending and receiving districts of migrant fishers respectively
- These districts involve migrant and host communities of the same/similar castes and/or of different ethno-religious backgrounds, thus adding a socio-cultural dimension
- The Puttalam district is the largest fish producing district in Sri Lanka bringing in 16.2% of the total fish catch in Sri Lanka, but still engages in seasonal migration to the east coast.
- The sites in both districts had adequate numbers of households for quantitative sampling
- Migrants from study sites in Puttalam sites could be traced to the study sites in Trincomalee district

# Methods

- **Qualitative methods:**
  - FGDs of men, women, youth (12)
  - Portfolios of a set of livelihoods through semi-structured interviews (40)
  - In-depth open-ended interviews of women and men, including life histories and social network mapping (80)
  - Key informant interviews
  - Review of secondary sources
- **Quantitative methods:**
  - Survey of 800 HHs (separate wife/husband interviews)

*Presentation based on on-going analysis of qualitative and quantitative data*

# Conceptual Approach

Social Wellbeing Approach - migration as a strategy employed by women and men who act on socio-economic, political and ecological factors to achieve material, relational and subjective wellbeing goals.

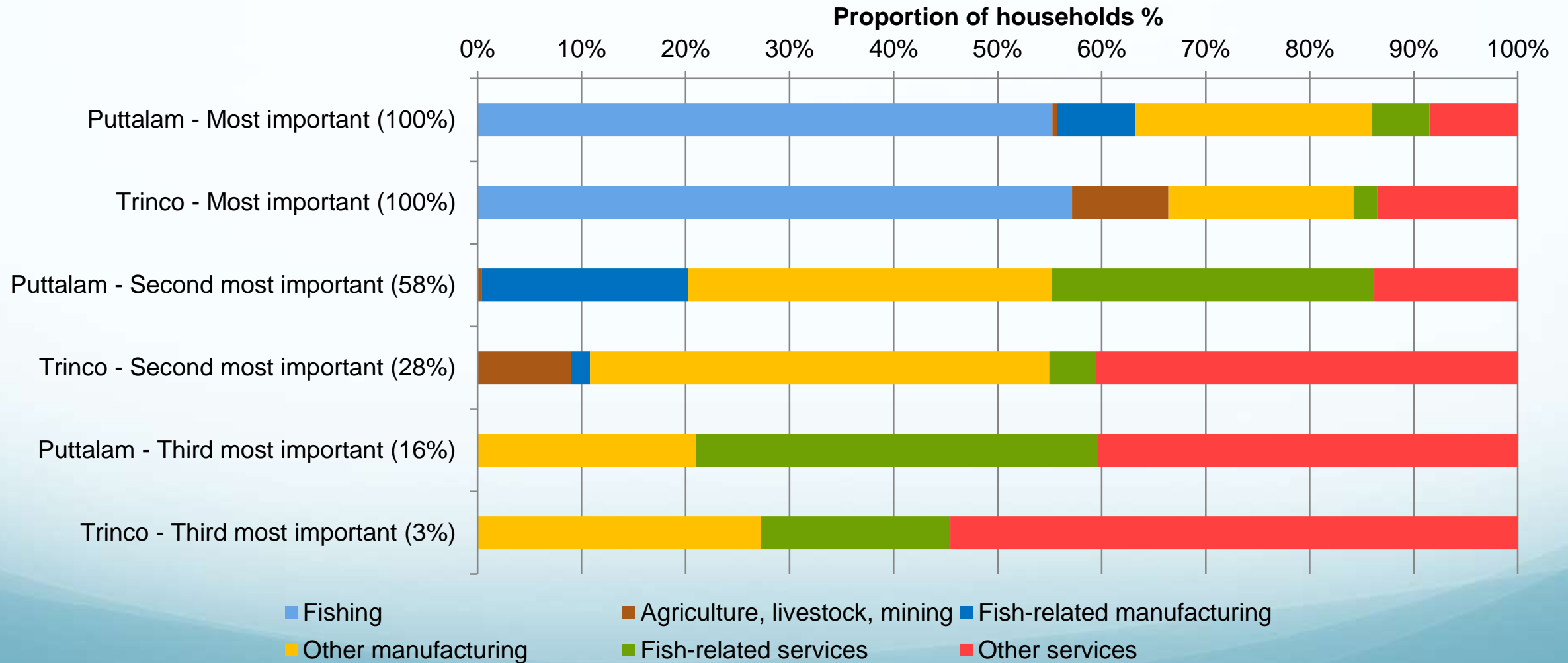
Wellbeing as *“A state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one’s goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life”* (McGregor 2008: 1)

Social Relations Approach where development goals should increase human well being and focus on the *“connectedness of men and women through their social relationships, as well as the ways in which these affect them differently, as separate groups”* (Kabeer 1999)

Three dimensions of Social Wellbeing:

1. The material (economic and ecological, practical welfare and standards of living)
2. The relational (social and institutional – relations of love, care networks of support, obligations, social political and cultural identities, relations with state and formal structures which shape scope for personal action and influence in the community)
3. The subjective (notions of self, individual and shared hopes, fears, aspirations, expressed levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, trust or confidence among others)

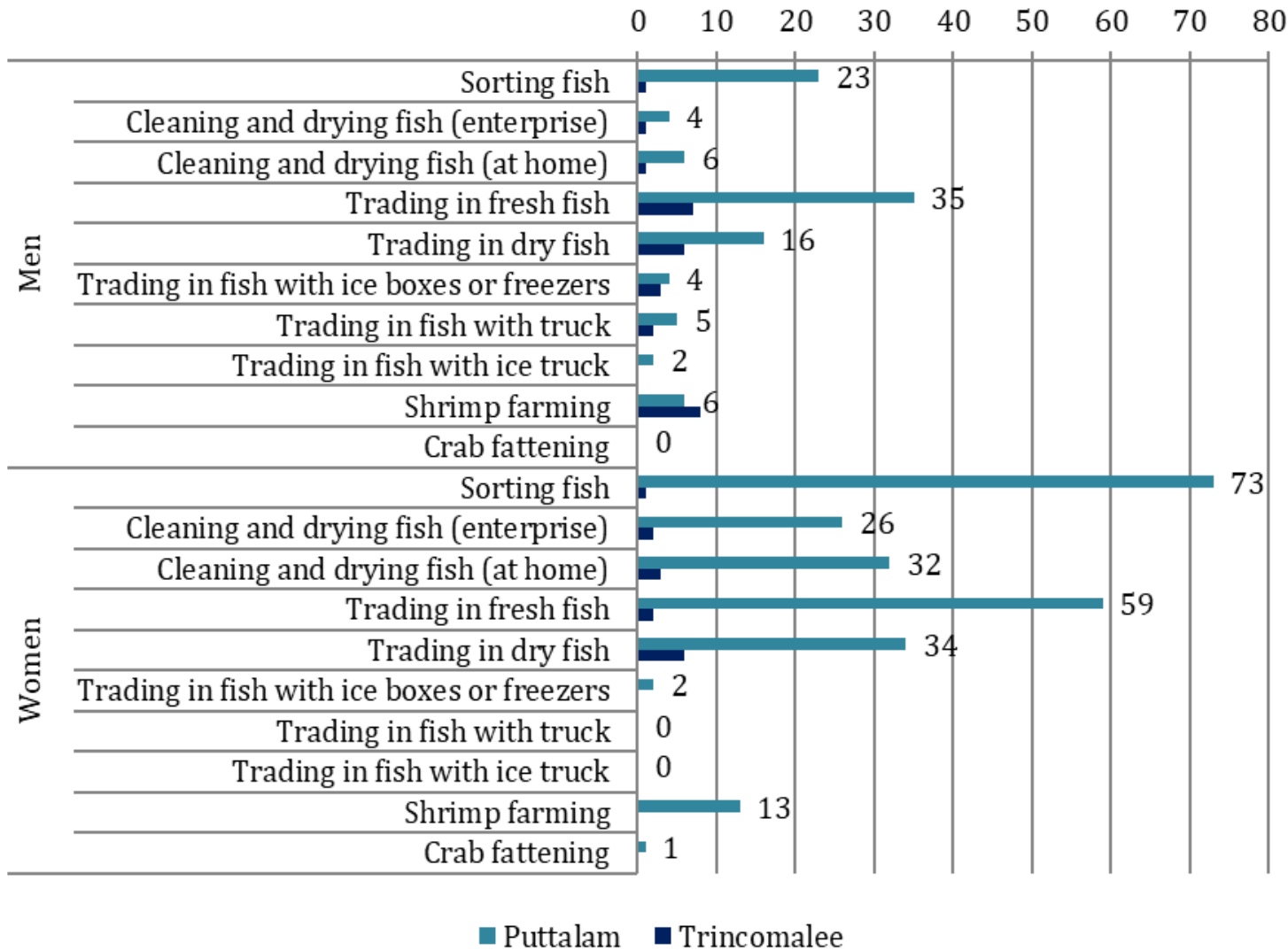
# Most important source of household income in study villages





# Gendered livelihood activities in study villages

Employment in fishing-related manufacturing and services

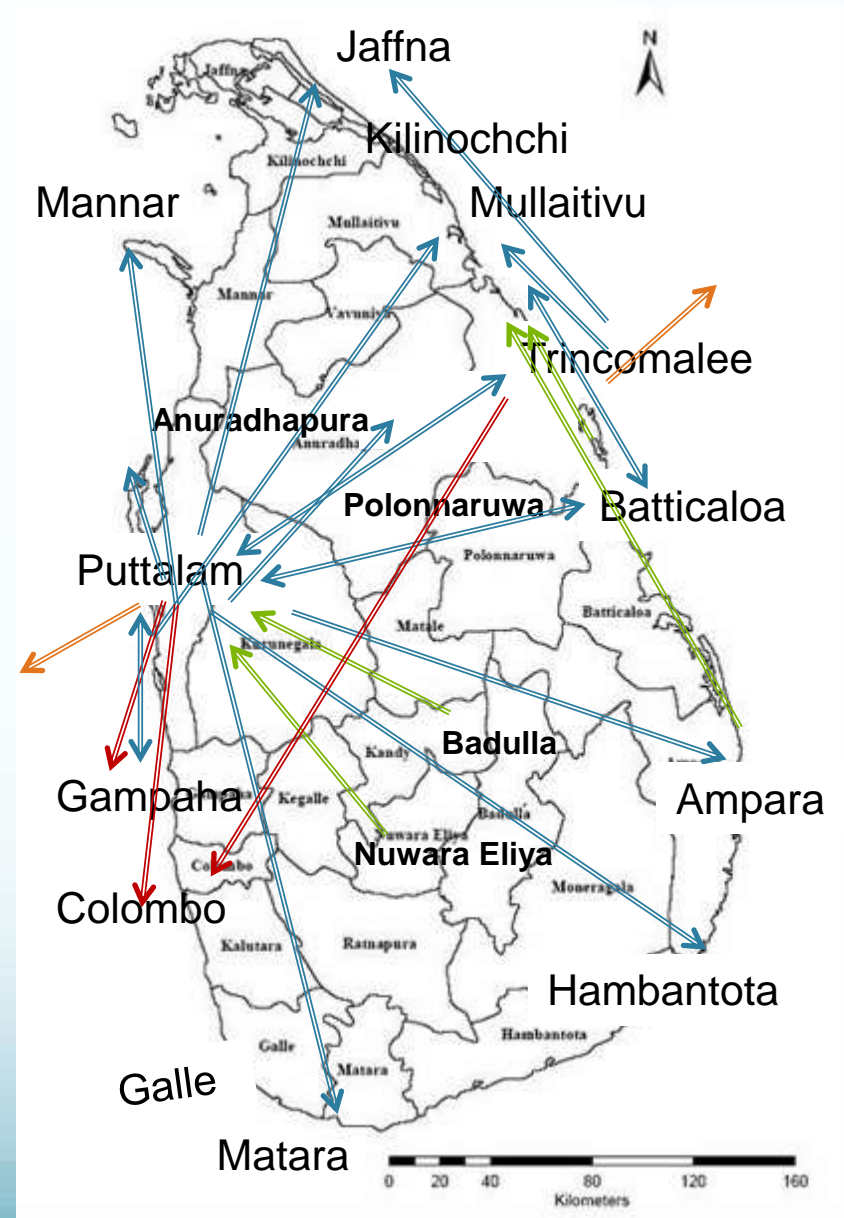
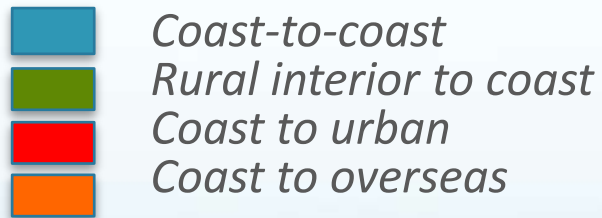


- Where this village is concerned, only men go fishing. Women do not go. **Husbands do not like women to fish.** They think that it is their role to earn for their wives. If we start doing that work, people will start talking and commenting. **From the time that we were born, women haven't been fishing.** (Tamil Hindu women's FGD, Cattiur, Puttalam district)
- We don't engage in fishing. **We support the men** to remove the fish from nets, sort and stack into baskets. We also take them tea to the beach when they arrive by boat. (Catholic Sinhala women's FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam district)
- According to our Islamic laws, we don't go fishing.** We pray and stay in the house. We cook what our husbands bring home. (Muslim women's FGD, Selippur, Trincomalee district)

# Migration patterns in study villages

- Coast-to-coast (internal fishing)
- Rural interior to coast (internal fishing and agriculture)
- Coast to urban (internal non-fishing)
- Coast to overseas (external non-fishing)

Key:



# Internal out-migrants (for fisheries) in fishing HHs

GN Division	Men		Women		Migrant HHs		All Fishing HHs	
	#	As % of fishing HHs	#	As % of fishing HHs	#	As % of fishing HHs	#	%
<b>WEST COAST (Puttalam district)</b>								
Kadalpalli	145	76.3	71	37.4	146	76.8	190	100
Cattiyur	113	72.4	16	10.3	115	73.7	156	100
<b>EAST COAST (Trincomalee district)</b>								
Uppukadal	23	19.0	0	0	23	19.0	121	100
Selippur	6	4.2	0	0	6	4.2	142	100
<b>ALL</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100</b>

*Based on data from HH Survey 2017*

# Reasons for seasonal out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Material – environmental</b>	<p><i>During the warakang (off-season) we cannot fish in our sea. <b>The sea is so harsh.</b> We cannot earn much due to the poor catches. The <b>estuary is so dangerous.</b> So we are afraid to engage in fishing here. (Wife of fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i><b>Migration is to protect our life.</b> It is a risk for us to fish here [during warakang]. We have to work, protect our family, as well as our life. We would prefer to stay here and not face difficulties there. <b>We will stop migrating if they can stop the monsoon wind from blowing here.</b> (Male FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>
<b>Material – economic</b>	<p><i>But, we need to do our job. We need to eat and meet our expenses. If we borrowed money from a seetu (rotating credit association) <b>we need to pay it back.</b> So we need to migrate. In the sea in Selippur we catch more fish. The prices do not fluctuate from time to time as they do here. <b>We can get a fixed price throughout the day.</b> (Wife of fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i>There is no benefit in a job that involves hardship. What to do? Because there is no other livelihood, I take a little money and migrate. <b>I won't earn the profit that I do if I stay at home. So I migrate.</b> From my earnings, I have to alleviate hunger, <b>see to our children's education expenses and the electricity bill.</b> (Male fisher, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</i></p>

# Reasons for seasonal out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Material – ecological</b>	<p><i>Now we rarely harvest big fish on this coast – paarai, soorai, vembal, arakula and species such as prawns and cuttle fish.</i></p> <p><i>Before the tsunami we had good catches. The tsunami didn't affect this area, but there are no fish. (Women's FGD Cattiur, Pattalam)</i></p>	<p><i>There is the piyamessa (flying fish), which migrates [along the northeast coast]. Following the piyamessa are tuna and thora (Spanish mackerel), which feed on it. We had knowledge about these migrating schools of fish for a long time. They are only there for three months, from April to July. So that is why we try to get there before April. We have to go 40 km out to sea here to catch these fish. But there the sea is deeper already by 10 km, so we reach these fish faster. We call it the <b>pirimi muhuda (male sea)</b> over there in the east <b>because it is powerful (balasampath)</b>. <b>Many of the fish breeding grounds are there. Tuna for example, hatch on the east coast, and migrate north before coming to our west coast here.</b> (Men's FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>
<b>Subjective</b>	<p><i>We don't feel like returning when we go there. It is beautiful there. There are all sorts of trees and fruit. We can taste, palu, veera. I prefer to stay there rather than here. We have a nice beach there. <b>Despite the hot sun we feel free and relaxed.</b> There are beautiful sand dunes. (Wife of Fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	

# Factors enabling seasonal out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Relational</b>	Linkages with traders, boat and beach seine owners who act as sponsors on the east/northeast coast	
	Supportive networks in community -kin, friends, fisheries societies, socialization of children	
	Knowledge of language of host communities	
	<p><i>We have been migrating for over twenty five years now... <b>The host community villagers buy karawala</b> (dry fish) from us. We can sell karawala to anyone while there but the fish we catch must only be sold to the trader who sponsors us to migrate. He advances us about one lakh to prepare for migration. It is not enough to meet all the costs. To meet the other costs we get about five lakhs on loan... But the fishermen there do not like outsiders coming in to fish in that sea... The ‘mudalali’ who we work for intervenes and resolves if issues come up. <b>The mudalali (fish trader) is a Muslim from that area.</b> If needed it is he who even resolves an issue by bringing them up even at the level of the police. (Women’s FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i>Those who migrate from this <b>village stay together in wadi.</b> And when we migrate we do so in batches so that <b>several lorries leave the village together.</b> Our people have already started to get organized to migrate now... <b>We get a letter from our (fisheries) association and another letter from the Grama Niladhari prior to migration. Then it is easier to solve any conflict or administrative problems that might come up.</b> (Men’s FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p> <p><i>From the time our kids were 5-6 months old we brought them with us when we migrated here. <b>They grew up eating the sand of Selippur.</b> From the time they entered school we left them behind with their grandmother [my mother] but they used to come here for the school holidays. (Male fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam district)</i></p>

# Factors enabling seasonal out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Material</b>	Access to suitable migratory locations ( road connectivity, water, sanitation, space for wadi and quality of beach)	
	Recreation space to practice religion	
	<p><i>Traders help us to get rations, food items, meat on Sundays and any other expenses such as cost for fuel. Trader also build a small shrine for us to worship our Saint and deducted 1000 rupees from each boat to meet the cost for wood (Wife of Fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i>When we migrate even in Nayaru, we have a St Antony's 'suruwama'. We do Nuwaan celebration there also. (Men's FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>

# Factors disabling seasonal out- migration

	Women	Men
<b>Relational</b>	Concern about care and schooling of children	
	Restrictions by host communities, host-migrant relations and conflict over the use of illegal gear and methods	
<b>Material</b>	Inability of migrant husbands to manage earnings	
	Alternative sources of regular income from business, state employment or remittances from family members overseas	
	<p><b><i>Women don't migrate during the off-season here because they have to look after the children and see to their schooling. If the children are older, we can go North and to Trinco. If you have daughters, it is a problem.</i></b> (Women's FGD, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</p> <p><i>Normally we migrate in March and stay until July-August in Selippur. Up to now, I would take my child (now 3 years old) with me. But from next year onward I would not be migrating, I need to take care of my child, her schooling. <b>Mothers nowadays don't leave their children behind and migrate.</b></i> (Wife of migrant fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</p>	<p><i>Life in a wadi in the North is a life of freedom, particularly in the Saalai, Pokkanai areas. There were no problems in those days. The people there were farmers and no one did fishing. <b>After the war the army has made them engage in the fishing trade so now we don't have access.</b></i> (Male migrant fisher, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</p> <p><b><i>There are conflicts.</i></b> It all depends on the boat owner we work for. <b><i>In Mullaitivu, the people don't know to fish with a thundil [hook and line]. So, when we fish with the thundil, the locals complain and tell us not to come.</i></b> (Male migrant fisher, Uppukadal, Trincomalee)</p>



# Gendered Benefits of Seasonal Out Migration

Benefits	Women	Men
<b>Material</b>	Higher earnings than in home villages – around twice as much- better, higher-value catches	
	<p>Ability to pay off debts and redeem pawned jewellery</p> <p>Ability to pay for expenses for temple/church festivals</p>	
	<p><i>We can get a good harvest and a good income at the migrating site. We can catch big fish species there.</i> (Wife of fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</p>	
	<p><i>We can settle loans and live happily. We can actually manage our expenses at home. We have to have at least LKR 50,000 for the kovil [temple] festival, which takes place in August every year. We can earn that money by migrating here [migratory site]. We call that kovil festival ‘salli thiruvila’ (money festival). This festival goes on for 10 days. We wear new clothes and relatives visit home. Therefore it is very expensive.</i> (Male fisher, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</p>	
	<p><i>We also do dried fish processing at the site of the wadi. The host community villagers buy dried fish from us. We can sell dried fish to anyone while we are there but the [fresh] fish we catch must only be sold to the trader who sponsors us to migrate.</i> (Fish processor and wife of fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</p>	

# Gendered Benefits of Seasonal Out-Migration

	Women	Men
<b>Relational:</b>	Camaraderie among fellow migrants living in close quarters	
		<i>In some ways, it is enjoyable there [migratory site]. Someone will fetch water, someone will cut the onions, someone will cook.</i> (Men's FGD, Uppukadal, Trincomalee)
<b>Subjective:</b>	Experiencing different surroundings than their home villages	
	<i>We talk with them (the host villagers). They bring us 'gaslabu' (papaya) and in return we give them fish. They visit us in the wadi and keep us company by chatting.</i> (Women's FGD, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)	<i>It is fun in the wadi. We bathe, play cards (our only entertainment), drink plain tea and go to sleep. We can't go anywhere. We have a radio, but no television. There is no electricity in the wadi.</i> (Male fish labourer, Cattiyur, Puttalam)

# Gendered Costs of Seasonal Out-Migration

	Women	Men
<b>Material</b>	<p>Expected earnings not realised due to bad fishing season                      Incurrence of debts to traders and boat owners                      Loss of fishing assets due to host migrant conflicts</p>	
<b>Subjective:</b>	<p>Vulnerability/ security of women to potential harassment</p>	
	<p><i>My husband brings a co-worker who also lives in our wadi. I cook for him too. These workers complain that their share is not enough or they ask for money. Sometimes there is a fight, which gets physical. They scold me in indecent language. So the co-workers we bring along are not always good. Some are good, some are not good. I am hesitant because I am a woman. The co-worker is there all the time whether my husband is there or not. So I feel awkward. It is difficult but I have to manage. If my husband is not at home, I sleep in another wadi with the other women. If there is no one in the next wadi, then I stay awake all night. (Wife of fisher, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i>It is a very difficult life out there. We take our wives to the wadi there and leave the children here. Wives help us by cooking for us in the wadiya. But we do not take our wives to the kadal (sea). We are scared of the security of the women because we don't know what will happen until we reach the shore. (Men's FGD, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</i></p>

# Gendered Costs of Seasonal Out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Relational</b>	<p>Separation from Spouse /children</p> <p>Neglect of Children's education</p>	
	<p><i>I have never migrated myself. I liked that my husband went there to the North for two seasons because we were able to build our house with the money he earned there. Now I don't want him to migrate any more because we have two children here and he needs to be here. When he is over there, I am lonely and every day I am thinking about when he would be coming back home. <b>There is nobody here for me. I think about him going so far away.</b> I have told my husband that with our house now completed we have enough. Don't go anywhere. We are fine here as we are. (Female fish trader and wife of lagoon fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i><b>We keep our son at my mother in-law's house in Mullaitivu for schooling. Mother [in-law] migrated to Mullaitivu during war-time. We get to work only if we migrate here [Selippur]but we lose our son's love. You lose one thing to gain something else.</b> We have been waiting for his school holidays. If he has holidays we go and pick him and bring him here. (Male migrant fisher, Cattiyur, Puttalam)</i></p>
<b>Subjective</b>	<p>Nostalgia for home</p>	
		<p><i>We are happier here in Cattiyur. When we migrate, we take only two shirts and two trousers with us. We are most happy here in Cattiyur because it's our village and our families are here. If we had jobs here, we would not need to migrate during the off-season. We lose the happiness we have here when we go there. <b>Our lives are spent six months in a jungle and six months at home. Sometimes, when we are there, we start thinking, 'what sort of a life is this? Why did we get caught into coming to such a place?' We feel fed up.</b> (Men's FGD,</i></p>

# Gendered Costs of Seasonal Out-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Subjective:</b>	<p>Difficult living conditions in migratory <i>wadi</i>            Difficult working conditions in the migratory camps and deterioration of health conditions particularly for beach seine workers</p>	
	<p><i>We cannot live comfortably when there. During mid day it is very hot in the wadi we are almost burning. Especially during the easter month. And we do more work there as we don't idle. We cook, make dried fish, help load nets, disentangle and sort fish. So life in the wadi [migratory camp] is hard. We have a good house here and comforts so imagine having to leave this and live in a wadi. We have to collect water daily and keep it stored. (Wife of migrant fisher, Kadalpalli, Puttalam)</i></p>	<p><i>It is like living in hell. The moment you close your eyes, the next day dawns [it is time to get up]). We can't do as we like because we are working for someone else. Sometimes, we don't have time to cook. You have to migrate with a mudalali. If not, you have to go alone and look for work there. The mudalali gives us an advance when recruiting us. Therefore, we are slaves. We are stuck for six to seven months. We can only come home for the festival. (Male beach seine worker, Uppukadal, Trincomalee)</i></p>
		<p><i>When I used to migrate as a labourer, there was no benefit because I worked for a salary. Work was hard. I started developing a severe back pain because of the harshness of the work we do. Pulling boats, pulling heavy nets and carrying heavy nets, being severely tossed against waves, all have taken a toll on my back. When I used to own boats and migrated, the income was lucrative. Our best migration location is Pottuvil because the harvest is bountiful. (Male commission agent, Kadalapalli, Puttalam district)</i></p>

# Host villages: Benefits of seasonal in-migration

	Women	Men
In - Migration	<p>No benefits to the majority of host villagers from migrant fishers from west coast</p> <p>Increased profits to few traders in the host village who sponsored migrant fishers</p> <p>Labour of agricultural migrant workers from east coast useful for cultivation of fields and gardens</p>	
Out- Migration	Increased Income	

# Host villages: Costs of seasonal in-migration

	Women	Men
<b>Material</b>	<p>Pollution of drinking water well by migrants</p>	<p>Depletion of fish resource, lack of catch and income for local fishers</p> <p>Use of illegal gear (nets with small mesh sizes) and methods (dynamite, lights) by migrants and destruction of fish resources</p> <p>Lack of docking space for local boats (Support to migrants from police to secure spaces for boats)</p> <p>Pollution of the beach by migrant fishers/HHs</p>
<b>Relational</b>		<p>Conflicts between local and migrant fishers over access to fish and damage/loss of fishing gear</p> <p>Spread of prostitution and disease by migrants</p> <p>Conflicts between local and migrant youth (flirting with girls)</p>

# Conclusions

- Both men and women emphasized material and relational wellbeing factors as reasons for migration
- Migrant men emphasized the ecological aspects more than women as a reason for migration
- Both migrant and host communities emphasized relational factors for enabling and disabling migration
- Migrant communities perceived a combination of material, relational and subjective benefits and costs while host communities perceived mostly material and relational costs
- Host communities indicated ecological aspects as a cost of migration
- Women indicated more subjective costs of migration than men

## Challenge for Policy and Governance

- There is a need for policy makers and governance bodies to take into consideration the conflict in discourses between the “right to our own local resources” by host communities and the “right to a tradition of migration” by migrant communities, supported by the “sea is for all” policy pursued by the government
- Cannot provide simplistic recommendations due to complexities in differences between men and women, as well as differences in perceptions between migrant and host communities
  - Issues of entitlement and fairness in access to the fisheries resource



Thank you

