

PRESENT STATUS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SCALE ORNAMENTAL FISH PRODUCTION IN ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT

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The *Anuradhapura* district, with its favorable environmental conditions, holds immense potential for ornamental fish farming, supporting the cultivation of various fish species for domestic and international markets. Despite this potential, the sector remains underdeveloped and struggles to meet the rising demand. This study aims to assess the current status, opportunities, and challenges of small and medium-scale ornamental fish production in the district and identify pathways for sustainable growth. A survey was conducted with 133 ornamental fish producers registered with government authorities, using purposive and proportionate random sampling methods across nine Divisional Secretariat divisions in the district. Additionally, key personal interviews were conducted to gather detailed primary insights. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The findings revealed that 53% of registered producers had abandoned fish farming by the time of the survey. The major reasons cited were poor market conditions (92%) and unviable prices (85%). Among the active producers, the majority were male (79%) and belonged to the middle-aged demographic (36–49 years). The majority of producers are male due to the physical work involved in ornamental fish farming. Most operated on a small scale (48%), with their knowledge (2.86 out of 3) and skills (2.74 out of 3) deemed satisfactory. However, critical gaps in business management and market knowledge posed major barriers to long-term sustainability and profitability. Producers remain optimistic, with many expressing a willingness to expand their operations in the coming years. Producers face major challenges, especially with markets, affecting 98%. These include low prices, limited access, high costs (90%), poor government support (77%), and financial struggles (73%). This study highlighted the untapped potential of ornamental fish farming in *Anuradhapura* district. Targeted measures such as financial aid, improved market access, and skill-building initiatives are essential to empower producers and enhance the sector's sustainability and profitability.

Keywords: Small-scale fish producers, Market constraints, Sustainability