

Identifying eco-tourism as an innovative mechanism of valuing the ecosystem services: A case study in Knuckles mountain range

R.M.K.S.R. Ranaweera¹

Abstract

Tourism is one of the fast growing industries in Sri Lanka attracting international revenues to the country and its' performance develops year by year. Mass tourism and eco-tourism are the two extremes of tourism. Mass tourists are leaving high environmental footprints at the destinations and eco tourists are the responsible travellers to natural and cultural areas that conserve the environment and sustain the wellbeing of local people. This paper identifies eco-tourism as a mechanism of valuing the ecosystem services- in the Knuckles mountain range, with the objectives being identifying the basic principles of eco-tourism, identifying the ecosystem services and valuation methods in the Knuckles area which can be paid for by eco tourists. Data were collected using field observations, and informal meetings with rural people, stakeholders and referring to the published materials. They were conducted within the natural forest area which was recently developed as a nature trail for eco tourists. According to the findings, Knuckles is in high demand for its' biodiversity and the aesthetic value by eco tourists. But the mechanism is not well coordinated and the perception of rural community on tourists is negative because, eco system, community and the tourists are separate and not together. Eco system valuation techniques can be used within the eco-tourism to sustain the existing ecosystem and the community livelihoods with the interconnection of all these extremes. Paying for ecosystem services is a financial mechanism which is applicable within this eco-tourism site to achieve economic and environmental sustainability. Within the system communities who provide services and eco tourists, paying for them are interconnected. Finally, tourists are satisfied and the community is benefitted and they are maintaining and conserving the environment within the business plan. This sustainability can be achieved with a proper planning of an eco-tourism site and promoting eco-tourism in the Knuckles with wider management of both parties, which directs tourists to get the maximum satisfaction and supporting the community to sustain their lives, while achieving a sustainable business and sound environmental management.

Keywords: *Community development, Eco-tourism, Responsible, Satisfaction, Sustainability*

¹ *Department of Environmental Management, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Corresponding author's email: 91srkithmini@gmail.com*