

## **Sustainable ecotourism development: A case study in Oliyagankele forest reserve and Lenabatuwa reservoir in Kamburupitiya**

### **Extended Abstract**

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#### **Background**

Ecotourism is the “responsible travel to natural destinations that protects the environment and develops the well-being of local community” (Tisdell 2003). Natural resources, tropical climate, cultural and bio diversity have made ecotourism as a new trend of Sri Lanka. Economy of Matara district is mainly influenced by agriculture, fishing and tourism (Gamage et al. 2004).

#### **Objectives**

Though the potential of ecotourism is high in Sri Lanka, its actual level was not achieved. The objective of this research was to analyze the potential of sustainable ecotourism development in Oliyagankele forest reserve and Lenabatuwa reservoir in Kamburupitiya.

#### **Methodology**

Oliyagankele is a tropical rain forest which is located between Akuressa and Kamburupitiya in Matara district. Eighty local residents and 70 visitors were selected for the field survey through convenience sampling method. Questionnaires were prepared in English and then translated into Sinhala. Chi-square test, Wilcoxon signed rank test and multiple linear regression were used for the inferential analysis.

#### **Results**

There are number of endemic, rare and threatened species with 35 bird species, 220 plant species and 29 fish species including endangered species Rasbora Wilpita. Nearly 88 % of the local community have positive attitude towards sustainable ecotourism development. Their income has

significant association with the attitudes towards sustainable ecotourism ( $\chi^2 = 8.969$ ,  $DF = 3$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.030$ ). Nearly 63 % of the local community is willing to participate in the sustainable ecotourism development. The study found that the ages ( $\chi^2 = 9.565$ ,  $DF = 4$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.048$ ), level of education ( $\chi^2 = 6.839$ ,  $DF = 2$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.033$ ) and level of income ( $\chi^2 = 12.000$ ,  $DF = 4$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.017$ ) significantly affect their participation. Negative attitudes were received towards cultural modification, waste accumulation and resource depletion. Community has said that they need a proper waste management (38.75 %), proper pipeline water system (17.5 %) and proper awareness about sustainable ecotourism practices and its impacts (22.5 %).

It was noted that age and education are significant with visitors' willingness to pay ( $WTP = 1.376 + 1.611 \text{ age} - 1.105 \text{ education}$ ). Rain forest environment was highest (45.7 %), followed by reservoir (37.1 %) in the visit motivations of visitors. Insufficient guides and map facilities (24.5 %), insufficient catering facilities (18.4 %), waste accumulation (16.3 %), accommodation facilities (14.3 %), insufficient medical centers (12.2 %), improper transportation (12.2 %) and climate (2 %) were their dislikes. Further, there is a significant potential for satisfactory level of visitors during their visit ( $Z = -6.634$ ,  $P = 0.0000$ ).

#### **Conclusion**

There is a very high ecotourism potential in the area in the community perspective include rain forest connected with Lenabatuwa reservoir, diverse species and endemic flora and fauna. Community has positive attitudes towards ecotourism activities. Majority is willing to participate in the ecotourism establishments. Almost half have said that rain forest environment was the motivation of their visit and there is a significant potential for satisfaction of visitors. However, insufficient guides, insufficient catering shops and improper waste disposal in the forest are some of the major challenges.

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