

ELICITING PREFERENCES AND MARGINAL WILLINGNESS-TO-PAY OF URBAN COMMUNITIES ADJACENT TO WILD RICE RELATIVES SITES IN SRI LANKA FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION

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The genetic resource of Crop Wild Relatives is sparsely distributed in various parts of the country, both rural and urban, and, not surprisingly; faces the negative externalities associated with rapid economic / infrastructure development in the urban areas. The specific objective of this study was to elicit preferences of urban communities adjacent to the geographical sites with scattered Wild Rice Relatives (WRR) population clusters; thereby, to aid in understanding the extent to which the urban stakeholders perceive on their “responsibility” for conservation and management of WRR. The WRR sites identified in Battaramulla area were selected. A Choice Experiment (CE) was carried out to collect data from urban dwellers (n=300). Each respondent was subjected to a *face-to-face* interview aided by a structured questionnaire to explore their choices on four specific attributes pertaining to conservation, including: (1) Responsibility; (2) Appropriate sites; (3) Best suited conservation vehicle, and (4) Monetary contribution. Multinomial Logistic Regression model was employed to estimate the respondents' Willingness-To-Pay (WTP) for conservation. The outcome of CE shows that the Marginal WTP of respondents was Rs 1.34 suggesting that, though they appreciate this valuable resource to some extent, it is not relatively high compared to the values reported through previous empirical studies in this area on WTP of rural adjacent communities and environmental managers in Sri Lanka, where the values ranged from Rs 10 to 80. The choices of respondents were such that the responsibility of conservation of sites should equally be shared by the government and private institutions. They were in favor of the mode of *ex-situ* conservation, given inevitable destruction resulting from rapid development activities that avert *in-situ* conservation. The importance of government intervention to make aware the public through alternative strategies such as eco parks was also highlighted.

Key words: Choice experiment, Conservation, Crop wild relatives, Stakeholder preferences, Wild rice