

Linking sustainable tourism to urban and rural forest conservation: Case studies of Ritigala and Badagamuwa forests

M.M.T.D. Kasthuri¹ and S.P. Fernando²

Abstract

Sri Lanka has enormous opportunity for forest-based sustainable tourism industry. Most developing countries aiming to pursue tourism, as a development strategy, need fast and efficient implication of a forest-based tourism approach to achieve the desired growth potentials. The aim of this research was to assess the potential or generating income from forest based tourism and to propose guidelines to improve sustained participation of communities for forest-based eco-tourism in Sri Lankan forest context. Two forest areas Ritigala Strict Nature Reserve and Badagamuwa Urban Forest were selected for the study to represent rural and urban areas respectively. The study focused on, qualitative questionnaires and interviews conducted with the Forest Department and Department of Wild Life Conservation. Ritigala strict nature reserve is located near to Anuradhapura in the Dry zone of Sri Lanka. Applied three mechanism as sustainable agro forestry, enhances biological diversity in order to build buffer zones for existing nature reserve and revenue from tourism and recreation such as, adding Park Entry Fees, Recreation License Fees, and Fees for Green Safaris for newly build forest buffer zones. These sustainable tourism approaches directly improve social and economic status of selected areas. The Badagamuwa urban forest is located in Kurunegala bordering Dambulla- Kurunegala highway. Here applied two approaches as, urban forest management and the concept of ecosystem services to protect natural and human security. Ecosystem services such as air quality and carbon sequestration are used to illustrate issues associated with assessing the urban resilience of these services. Throughout the study, directly apply selected conservation financing mechanisms as based on the suitability and applied values of those mechanisms to the selected rural and urban forest areas. Nonetheless, the results reveals that, well-managed conservation based, linking sustainable tourism industry obviously enhance not only the ecosystem services, provided by forests and would also provide good business mechanism to increase economic and social improvement of rural and urban community in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Agro forestry, Community development, Conservation finance, Ecosystem services, Urban resilience*

¹ *Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies, BMICH, Colombo 07. Corresponding author's email: thilini@bcis.edu.lk*

² *Yan Oya Reservoir Project, Irrigation Department, Wahalkada, Kebithigollewa*