

DEGRADATION OF COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Rural villagers, whose main livelihood activity is agriculture, depend heavily on open access common property resources for their survival. Village tanks, irrigation canals, rural road network, forest area and grazing lands etc. are some of the common property resources available in rural communities. However, population growth, irrigation expansion and clearance of forests for various purposes have resulted in unsustainable exploitation of common property resources. This study attempted to identify factors contributing to deterioration of common property resources in rural communities and focused on the villagers' present level of contribution to maintain common property resources and factors that have contributed to this behavior of villagers. A field survey was conducted with a random sample of 135 villagers selected from nine villages in Anuradhapura district. Study employed descriptive analytical tools in data analysis. Results indicated that, villagers' level of understanding about their responsibilities in maintaining common property resources is more than 80% and they are interested to contribute to maintain common property resources. Though, their dedication is suppressed due to their poor economic condition (especially labourers), their unfavorable attitudes and non existence of any point because such activities are done by contractors. However, 57% of respondents are not satisfied with the quality of maintenance work done by the contractors. At present, villagers do coordinate development activities through the Farmers' Organization and the effectiveness of such activities depend on the capacity of the office bearers of the organization. Endowing responsibility of selected contracts for the villagers while shaping their attitudes in a favorable manner is mandatory to promote villagers' participation in managing these resources. Such motives would reduce the rural poverty on one hand and maintain the common property resources effectively by the villagers themselves on the other hand.

Key words: Common property resources, Villagers