HUMAN DIMENSION OF A PARTICIPATORY FOREST RESTORATION PROJECT: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND SUCCESS

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Participatory forest management could be a successful tool for restoring fragmented forest landscapes in the tropics. Intimate contact between local communities with protected areas is recognized as an important driver for sustainable forest management. Aim of this study was to evaluate the relationships between socio-economic and demographic status of a local community with prospective forest management options for establishing *Endane* biodiversity corridor, *Kahawatta*, Sri Lanka. A total number of 102 households stratified into three categories: estate workers, households within the corridor, and villagers near the corridor were evaluated using semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to outline the collected data in each stratum separately and as whole community. Households within the corridor were taken to test several hypotheses as they are the direct beneficiaries of this project. A floristics survey showed that these homegardens are similar in species richness but different in the composition against nearby regenerating forest remnants. Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine the associations between socio-economic and demographic attributes of respondents within the corridor. Results indicated that people who highly depend on forest-based products ($p=0.030$, $CI=95\%$), and those with high education ($p=0.002$, $CI=95\%$) have high knowledge on ecosystem services, as expected. However, use of homegardens was not affected by knowledge on ecosystem services ($p=0.450$, $CI=95\%$). Surprisingly, high dependency on forest-based products was associated neither with the levels of income ($p=0.59$, $CI=95\%$), nor homegarden use ($p=0.52$, $CI=95\%$). Big household size was associated with low use of homegardens ($p=0.046$, $CI=95\%$). Willingness to engage in additional income generation activities was not affected by homegarden use ($p=0.45$, $CI=95\%$). Our findings expand the baselines for implementing a socio-economically feasible participatory restoration project linking *Iharakanda* proposed forest reserve with the *Sinharaja* forest complex.

Keywords: Ecosystem services, *Endane* biodiversity corridor, Forest restoration, Participatory forest management, Tropical homegardens