

FARMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLITICAL INTERVENTION ON THE HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA

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Human-elephant conflict (HEC) stands as a major challenge in Sri Lanka. It creates severe socio-economic and environmental problems along with an unsustainable development process. HEC usually starts with the invasion of elephant habitats by humans and it leads to crop raiding, household damage, injuries and deaths from both sides. Farmers in dry zones are heavily affected by this crisis although there are multiple actions to mitigate the scenario. Being victims of both farmers and elephants, it is difficult to implement a win-win situation. Therefore, many mitigation plans put forward became fruitless. HEC is an unsolved crisis related to the livelihood of farmers in the dry zone and can be considered a major trump election card for politicians over the past several years. Even though they promised to implement effective solutions, still identified as an unsolved problem. Therefore, it has led to the breakdown of trust between the farmers and politicians. This study aimed to achieve several objectives including identifying farmers' attitudes to the effectiveness of the political intervention on HEC, understanding the intensity of wild elephant behavior over the past decade and evaluating farmers' opinions on their future investment in the agro field under the HEC. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach while primary data was gathered through interviews. Twenty face-to-face interviews and two focused group discussions were conducted and gathered data was analysed using the content analysis technique. The sample is selected using a purposive sampling technique and the selected areas of this study are Kirimatiyawa and Tharanagollawa in the Madawachchiya divisional secretariat in Anuradhapura. The data reveals that the majority of respondents criticize politicians for neglecting their promises on HEC after gaining power. Data shows that politicians' solutions play a white elephant role each time to win the election. It is noteworthy to find out that there wasn't a single elephant in the 1980s in these areas. The elephant population has increased gradually with farmers' invasion of the forest for agricultural purposes and the establishment of elephant detention center in Horowpothana. Farmers are gradually abandoning their farmlands due to escalating elephant encroachment. As a result of that considerable number of farmers have migrated to other areas for occupations. The study emphasizes the urgent need for the implementation of a permanent solution for HEC in dry zone which helps to enhance both victims living conditions despite politicians arbitrary agendas. Also, it emphasizes the needs for the implementation fundamental reforms on wild elephant conservation and government should launch programs to revive farmers' interest in agriculture.

Keywords: Dry Zone, Human-elephant conflict, Mitigation plans, Political intervention, Unsustainable development

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