

Eco-Tourism for Sustainable Development: Case study in Knuckles Mountain Forest in Sri Lanka

T. W. M. T. W. Bandara

Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya

twmtilak@pdn.ac.lk

Eco-tourism has become an important economic activity and it provides opportunities for visitors to experience powerful manifestations of nature, culture and to learn about the importance of biodiversity conservation. Ecological-based tourism could benefit the community and environment in a sustainable and community-friendly manner. Knuckles mountain range, which is blended with natural and cultural resources, is considered as an attractive ecotourism destination place in Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study were to identify existing eco-tourism activities in the region and introduce the eco-tourism for the sustainability of the Knuckles forest and the peripheral community. Data was collected using a field survey, participatory rural appraisal and informal meetings with stakeholders and publish materials. Field survey was conducted within two village clusters namely Meemure and Reveston. Five villagers were selected from one cluster and 10 households were selected from each village.

Research findings show that the lack of awareness and lack of availability of proper information are the most common causes for the less tourist arrival to this area. The majority of the visitors are local tourists who come in small groups. These visitors expect improvement of infrastructure and strengthening of the institutional capacity to enable the environment of local people to interpret the ecological and social heritage. Based on the findings of the study the most important issues that should be taken into consideration in promoting tourism in Knuckles are: strengthening the institutional capacities of relevant stakeholders, developments of infrastructure in the area, publicize Knuckles range in the media, encourage villagers to participate in eco-tourism activities. This alternative benefit will help to the peripheral community to sustain their livelihoods, forest resource management and help social, economic and environment sustainability in the Knuckles area.

Key words: *Eco-tourism and sustainable development, Community development, Sustainable forest management*