

**RARE**

ECOTOURISM AS A COMMUNITY FOREST  
MANAGEMENT APPROACH;

: A CASE STUDY OF SINHARAJA

RAIN FOREST IN SRI LANKA

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### *Abstract*

Tourism industry has come one of the main development strategies of the developing countries. In the present context, Ecotourism is the most popular aspect of it. On the one hand, the basic concepts of the ecotourism generate direct economic benefits for local people, conserve environment and cause responsible travel on nature. On the other hand, it asks direct community participation to the process of policy making and implementing. In this study, a closer attention is paid to analyze potentials of ecotourism as a community based forest management approach for development with direct participation. Study area of the research is north-west entrance in *Sinharaja* rain forest. Sinharaja forest, World heritage is located at the south western region in wet zone. It covers an area of 11,187 ha. The forest lies at latitudes  $6^{\circ} 21' - 6^{\circ} 27' N$  and longitudes  $80^{\circ} 21' - 80^{\circ} 37' E$ . It has huge biodiversity value on which cultural diversity and identity on periphery villages are based. These human and environmental values have increased ecotourism attraction of the *Sinharaja*. *Kudawa, Pitakele, Ketalapaththala* and *Pethiyakanda* periphery villages are taken into consideration in this study. Questionnaire survey, interviews, target group discussions are used as primary data collection methods. Secondary data collection sources are research papers, traveler's records of the forest department and etc. Present tourism activities of the area have not properly realized even the basics of ecotourism and nor have generated enough income opportunities for local people. On the other hand, neither the People nor the policy makers have enough knowledge about ecotourism. Policy makers do not seem to be interested in people's ideas and vice versa. Thus, this gap causes poverty and suggests the need of community participatory policy making approach with direct link forest management and development. The research has introduced ecotourism model for *Sinharaja* to archive conservation and development goals in the context of sustainability. Finally it is obvious that ecotourism has a huge potential to uplift community development and conserve the forest.

*Key words: Ecotourism, Community Development, Community Participation, Policy Making, Sinharaja*