

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS TOWARD NATURAL COASTAL RESOURCES OF A BUDDHIST AND A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

The National Mangrove Committee (NATMANCOM) of Sri Lanka established in 1986 and coordinated by the Natural Resources Energy and Science Authority (NARESA) of Sri Lanka commenced an integrated research programme on mangrove ecosystems in 1986. The major objective of this research programme was bringing together investigators from a wide range of research fields to constitute a multidisciplinary team that could conduct investigations into areas relevant to mangrove ecosystem management (Liyanage, 1987). A question that repeatedly arose during preliminary discussions was whether the investigators had correctly identified the problems on which research had to be done. The relevance of this question emerges when it is recognized that the team members were not economically dependent upon mangrove ecosystems. They were all urbanized, highly trained scientists and sociologists whose perceptions of mangrove and mangrove associated ecosystems were based upon a mixture of theoretical concepts, research interest, availability of research funds and prospects of career advancement among other interests. Conversely some members of coastal communities, mainly the estuarine Fisherfolk were economically dependent upon the goods and services provided by mangroves for their daily existence. Therefore their perceptions could be divergent. Nevertheless, the prevailing system of information acquisition and management planning in Sri Lanka enables researchers whose perceptions were moulded by a set of priorities that were not associated with mangrove ecosystem use, to influence the lives and livelihood of estuarine Fisherfolk who for centuries had exploited mangrove ecosystems in a traditional manner. At the outset it is necessary to define perception and mangroves as used in this report.

Perception is a complicated process through which a person receives and processes information from the surroundings (Russel, 1960). As a form of sensory reflection, it includes detection of the object in a field of view, discernment of its separate features, identification of its meaningful content corresponding to the purpose