

## **Project Orange Elephant: Promoting Sustainable Land use Practices to Alleviate Rural Poverty and Mitigate Human Elephant Conflicts**

**Ravi Corea<sup>1</sup>, Chandima Fernando<sup>2</sup>, Chinthaka Weerasinghe<sup>3</sup>, Ayodhya Amarajeewa<sup>4</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

Human-elephant conflicts (HEC) is one of the biggest environmental issues in Sri Lanka. HEC causes extensive crop and property damages and deaths of elephants and people. From 2004 – 2014: 2,105 elephants and 691 people were killed due to HEC. Elephants are killed whenever they interfere with agriculture. The damages by elephants to crops are estimated to be ~US\$10 million per annum. Due to ineffective landscape-level planning and land uses HEC continues to increase. HEC is almost entirely central to crop raiding. There are very few efforts to resolve the negative interaction of agriculture and elephants. To a certain extent the solutions to mitigate HEC have to be based on agriculture.

The Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) has for over 18 years been developing solutions to mitigate HEC through its internationally acclaimed Saving Elephants by Helping People (SEHP) program. The Project Orange Elephant (POE) was initiated in 2006. The aims of POE are to resolve HEC through sustainable land use practices that contribute to elephant conservation and poverty alleviation. Through field research and conducting feeding trials using captive elephants several crops were identified that could be compatible with elephants. For POE a variety of orange (*Citrus sinensis*) known as *Bibile Sweet* was found suitable to cultivate as a commercial crop and act as an elephant deterrent.

POE is successful at building tolerance and getting farmer's support for conservation of elephants. Other expected outcomes and benefits are:

- Secure alternative incomes for farmers
- Increased earnings and benefits from environmentally sustainable farming practices
- Decrease dependency from mono-cultivations.
- Tolerance for elephants
- Educate farmers to adapt sustainable alternative livelihoods and land use practices.

The challenge is finding funds. Most funding organizations do not consider agriculture-based measures as scientific solutions to mitigate HEC though ironically, agriculture contributes tremendously to the decline of elephants and their habitats.

Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society ([www.SLWCS.org](http://www.SLWCS.org))

Email: [ravi@slwcs.org](mailto:ravi@slwcs.org)