

A preliminary assessment of social impacts from the conversion of *chena* and fallow lands into woodlots for local communities in Anuradhapura district

An understanding of the dependency of rural communities on the protected forest reserves and degraded forest lands is crucial for the successful implementation of conservation and reforestation projects because rural communities are affected by the restricted uses of such lands. However, little attention has been paid to understand social impacts for local communities from the conversion of degraded forestlands into woodlots in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. This paper makes a preliminary social impact assessment form reforestation for rural communities in the Anurudhapura district.

Field research was conducted in 10 sample villages and data collection techniques included focus group discussions, interviews and a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 40 households. The results suggest that 30% to 80% households do *chena* cultivation. The high degree of economic dependency of low income groups on *chena* and forest lands was found. Some were against the use of active *chena* and fallow lands for any reforestation activities in future because Private Reforestation Programme may create conflicts with the villagers and some may use the natural forests for *chena* and human settlement.

The study shows the need for the identification of suitable lands for reforestation to minimize social impact for the local people. A detailed study of land use pattern in consultation with the present users of *chena* lands is suggested. Also, in future reforestation projects preference should be given to those who do *chena* and live in close proximity to the protected forest reserves. Further research on the dependence of local communities on active *chena* and fallow lands is also suggested.