

## Socioeconomic status and dependency of peripheral communities on Kanneliya MAB reserve

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A questionnaire based survey was carried out in two villages surrounding Kanneliya proposed MAB reserve to understand socioeconomic status and dependency of people on forest and other land use practices. Two villages were purposely selected to represent area adjacent to forest (Panangala North; PN) and away from forest (Weerapana West; WW). Twenty percent of families selected randomly from each village to represent the Community Based Organization (CBO) members and non-members were interviewed. In addition, direct observations, informal and formal discussions with relevant authorities were also made. Results of the study revealed that the average family size in PN (5.5) is higher than WW (4.5) whereas dependency ratio is very high at WW (51%) compared to PN (29%). Over 50% of population in both villages had secondary education. The major occupation of both villages is farming, where the main cash crop is tea (over 90%). All households sampled have access to paddy land and homegardens. The average land extent cultivated and the average family income is higher (over 45% had more than 3 ac land and Rs. 15,974) in WW compared to PN (only 15% had more than 3 ac land and Rs.9,160). In both villages, over 50% of family income is derived from cultivation of tea.

Dependency of community on forest and their products is higher in PN (over 90%) whereas it is low at WW (about 45%) may be due to distance from forest. Majority of people in both areas is aware about conservation of forests. At present, deforestation is mainly due to encroachment of land for tea cultivation and forest degradation is mainly due to illegal felling of timber. CBOs are well established within peripheral communities and play a dominant role in conducting awareness programs and providing financial and logistic support to promote non-forest based employment within communities. Majority of people living around Kanneliya forest is having their own homegardens. Over 65% of homegardens are in well-matured category and provide many benefits. However, the significant difference in homegardens in this area is the lack of timber trees. Kanneliya forest has been designated as a forest reserve. Thus, extraction of timber and non-timber forest products is prohibited. Further, timber mills cannot be established close to the reserve, creating severe difficulties in obtaining timber for even local constructions. Implications of these findings on conservation and management of Kanneliya forest are also discussed.

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