



702/F

Community based eco-tourism at Rekawa, southern Sri Lanka: Perceptions of foreign tourists and the community

K P G L Sandaruwan, M De Zoysa, and D N Koralagama

Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Matara

Community Based Eco-tourism (CBET) ventures are managed and operated by the community in the peripheral areas of a nature based recreation area. In these ventures, local people engage in planning and management decisions and are entitled to profits. Rekawa, located in southern Sri Lanka is an area with abundant natural resources that provide the basis for the livelihood of peripheral communities. These communities are in persistent poverty that is likely to cause more thrust on the use of fragile ecosystems that would make it unsustainable. Developing Rekawa as a CBET zone could be considered a potential approach to ensure conservation of natural resources, while uplifting the living standards of the community. This research examined strengths and barriers for potential implementation of CBET at Rekawa, through perceptions of the community and tourists.

Data were collected using a structured survey schedule from a sample of community members. Ten respondents each from the community groups; marine fishermen, lagoon fishermen, farmers, turtle net protectors, and women were selected randomly, while ten respondents each from village leaders and hoteliers / tour guides were selected purposively. Sixty foreign tourists who visited in Rekawa area were purposively selected and interviewed using a separate structured survey schedule.

Rekawa Lagoon and beaches, livelihood activities attractive to tourists, and turtle conservation project are identified as strengths while low knowledge, training and capital, poor infrastructure, and absence of specific promotional programs are identified as barriers. 87% tourists like CBET activities. 75% of tourists consider Rekawa as an area that has a potential to be developed into a CBET zone. On the other hand, 65% of the villagers are willing to engage in tourist services. Even though 60% of the hoteliers are against promoting CBET they all agree on eco-tourism., 80% of community members are supportive of CBET but only 60% of community leaders do so.

It can be concluded that Rekawa area has the potential to be developed as a CBET zone through the supply capital, knowledge, training for community, developing coordination between tourists and the community, implementing a marketing plan to promote the services among tourists and establishing an institute to control standards of the service.