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Social capital improvement for protected area management: A study with regarded to Hurulu International Biosphere Reserve.

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Abstract

Recent years, there was a rapid growth of interest in the term *social capital* in biodiversity conservation as well as protected area management. Hence, this study was conducted to examine existing social networks, to find out how social capital contributes to alleviate poverty and to identify the issues related to social capital improvement related to peripheral communities in “Hurulu” forest in Sri Lanka.

The study was carried out in *Habarana* GN division in *Polonnaruwa* district during May to October in 2011. One hundred and fourteen households were selected by using simple random sampling technique. Descriptive statistics as well as developed indices such as poverty and social capital were used to analysis the data. Out of 16 functioning societies, seven were active and prominent. Functions of these societies were loans providing, act as an intermediate, provide materials and trainings, help to funeral occasions, protect the “Hurulu” forest reserve, and maintaining community places. *Maranadara* and Buddhist societies were the most important and strong networks in this area. Some rural societies were not function well.

The poverty index for *Habarana* GN division was 24.79. Most of organizations were recorded high social capital index, indicating about high potential of poverty alleviation. Based on the findings, social capital is correlated with age and health of the members. The obstacles such as lack of awareness about the importance of the rural societies, weak governance system, and bureaucratic nature were identified for development of social capital. Increasing social capital is caused to reduce external pressure on protected area as well as increasing local people involvement in conservation management.

Key words: Social capital, Hurulu, biosphere reserve, poverty, index, protected area.