

### **SESSION III: ECOSYSTEMS AND ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT**

## **PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY CENTERED APPROACH EXPERIENCE OF DUNUVILAPITIYA AND RATHTOTAYAYA VILLAGES IN WASGOMUWA NATIONAL PARK**

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Wasgomuwa National Park was initially declared as a Strict Nature Reserve in 1938, and became a National Park with the commencement of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program in 1984. It possesses rich diversity of fauna and flora.

The average poverty level of the communities who are living close to Wasgomuwa National Park is generally much higher than that of the national average. Lack of employment opportunities, land tenure insecurity, low prices for agricultural and farm produce etc. have also contributed for the depressed rural economy and poverty, which is directly linked with the dependency on park resources, causing rapid depletion of resource base. Therefore activities such as encroachments, cattle grazing, poaching, gemming, illicit tree felling is common. Human-elephant confrontations are also severe near the southern boundary of the park. Dunuwilapitiya and Rathtotayaya villages being located in this area are constantly subjected to elephant attacks.

Community Outreach concept which promotes proactive involvement of buffer zone communities in protected area management was used to address the issues of the communities in Dunuwilapitiya & Rathtotayaya villages. By using this community centered participatory approach, village action plans/micro-plans for the two villages were formulated. Two new community based organizations (CBOs) were established as a result of the institutional analysis.

Provision has been made under the Protected Area Conservation Fund to finance environment friendly livelihood improvement initiatives and projects focused on the reduction of dependency of park resources that are originating through the micro-planning process. Community managed grassland of 70ha is presently being developed by the villagers of Dunuwilapitiya while an irrigation canal rehabilitation project was also launched by the same

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community recently. The Rathtotayaya community is implementing an electric fencing project as a measure to reduce human-elephant conflict. A community based social monitoring system has also been introduced for monitoring progress of related activities.

With the introduction of the participatory development approach and the community empowerment process, improved interaction between the park management and the community is evident while the dependency on park resources is in the process of being reduced.