

**PEOPLES PARTICIPATION  
IN FOREST RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT:  
A CASE STUDY IN POLPITHIGAMA, KURUNEGALA**

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This paper illustrates the results of a study carried out by the Forest Department aimed at re-establishment of vegetation covers on state owned barren lands as well as under-developed private land through people's participation. The study area was at Polpithigama, in Kurunegala District situated adjacent to Pallekele Forest Reserve (11,000 hectare) in Kurunegala and Anuradhapura Districts. The settlers of Polpithigama are second and third generation families migrated from neighbouring villages within last 2-3 decades. Eighty seven percent of villages were subsistence farmers. The majority belongs to under privileged state of the society. Except the Funeral Aid Society, there were no other social organisations.

The management interventions of the Extension unit of the divisional forest office in Kurunegala included formation of farmers organisations, block planting, homestead development and nursery establishment.

Block planting, homestead development and nursery management were major activities carried out under this trial. Out of 127 farmers 76 participated in this programme and 38 hectare of land was planted with *Acacia oriculiformis*. Sixty one (61%) percent of blocks were successfully intercropped with vegetables, pulses and other short term crops. Total seedling requirement (150,000) was provided by the village nursery maintained by farmer society. Land clearing, soil preparation, planting and other all activities were carried out by the participation of the farmers and their families. Maintenance and protection were done by farmers. It was observed that the average income of farmer has increased by 37% during the first year and by 22% and 17% during second and third years respectively. Sixty eight percent of the farmers had developed their homesteads very satisfactorily. The observations have revealed that, vegetation cover and soil fertility has improved and soil erosion is under control. Micro-climate of the area also has changed desirably.

According to the estimates, Forest Department's contribution to the programme was Rs. 294,000.00. Participants contribution was Rs.716,782.00 which included establishment and maintenance costs for 3 years. Therefore this study clearly disclosed that if the proper extension programmes were conducted and farmers were motivated, it is possible to seek active participation of farmers for development of forest resources.