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**THE POLICY INTERVENTIONS AND THE TRENDS IN  
FOREST UTILIZATION BY LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN  
"SINHARAJA"**

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## ABSTRACT

Over centuries, tropical rain forests have been utilized by inhabitants at peripheral areas of forests for subsistence. Presently, it is noted that peripheral areas of tropical rain forests in the world are alarmingly populated. Since overutilization of forest resources may easily induce forest degradation, the gradual swell of population in forest peripheries has threatened the survival of tropical rain forests.

The *Sinharaja* forest comes under the category of "Tropical Rain Forests" and it was declared a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Reserve in 1989. It spreads over 11,187 hectares within an elevation range of 150-1150 above sea land and its length from east to west is around 21 km, and its width from North to South is about 3.7 km. The *Sinharaja* forest spans three administrative districts namely, *Rathnapura*, *Galle*, and *Matara*. There are more than 27 villages in the southern periphery of the forest. The study was carried out in five selected peripheral villages of *Sinharaja* namely; *Kosmulla*, *Thambalagama*, *Madugata*, *Warukandeniya* and *Kolonhotuwa*.

The study focuses on both spatial and temporal aspects of forest resource utilization, policy interventions in forest management, and its impact on forest resource utilization by the peripheral communities of *Sinharaja*.

The research methodology involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary data was collected from questionnaire surveys, participatory methods, and case studies, while secondary data was collected from published and non-published documents, related internet sources, and maps. To identify the trends in forest resource utilization, four variable factors i.e. spatial factor - distance from the forest to the settlements of villagers, time factor - age of villagers and social factors - educational and income level of villagers in the study area were used.

The study reveals that there is a co-relation between these variables and forest resource utilization. For example, the degree of forest resource utilization was observed decreasing in relation to increase in variable factors, except for time factor. It was also found that young generation is less interested in forest resource utilization than middle-aged group. The economic boom resulted by tea cultivation has decreased the intensity of forest resource utilization. The policy interventions aimed at forest management and conservation seem less effective. The study concludes that development of life standards of villagers and effective forest management can both be achieved by sustainable forest resource utilization through practical and well-organized Community Based Forest Management.