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**AN ASSESSMENT ON THE STATUS OF NATURAL RESOURCES
EXPLOITATION BY THE BUFFER ZONE
COMMUNITIES OF VRR SANCTUARY**

**A PROJECT REPORT PRESENTED
BY**

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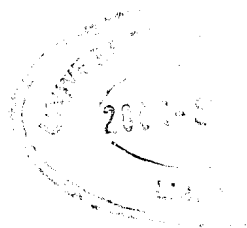
ABSTRACT

At present, most isolated protected areas (PA's) face conflicts with surrounding buffer zone communities, due to issues pertaining to natural resource exploitation

Victoria, Randenigala, Rantambe (VRR) sanctuary, covering an area of 42,078 ha, is the largest sanctuary in the island, declared as a protected area (PA) in 1987. It was established to protect the catchment of three major hydroelectric reservoirs viz. Victoria, Randenigala, Rantambe constructed under the accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme and also to conserve the bio-diversity of the Intermediate zone.

The overall objective of this survey was to assess the present status of natural resources exploitation by the buffer zone communities of Victoria, Randenigala, Rantambe (VRR) sanctuary. The survey was carried out during the period of January 2001 to December 2001 (1 year). The data collected during the above study period was supplemented with information gathered during the period that I worked as warden of the Victoria, Randenigala, Rantambe (VRR) sanctuary (January 2000 – December 2002).

There are several management constraints associated with the VRR, owing to inadequate understanding of the level of natural resource exploitation in this area. Therefore, it is intended that this survey would enable to gather relevant information on the status of natural resource exploitation by the buffer zone communities. Prior to the declaration of VRR as a PA, this area was mainly inherited by rural farmer communities, including chena cultivators. When the government decided to declare VRR as a PA, led to several socio economic issues. It was resulted in the evacuation and resettlement of communities who previously inhabited this area. Most of these communities were dependant on natural resources of this PA, for their livelihoods. Many communities around VRR had to change their traditional livelihood and adopt new lifestyles, such as fishing, sand mining, rock crushing etc.



Forest resources need to be managed in a sustainable manner, ensuring their availability for the future. However, it is evident that unsustainable natural resource exploitation is threatening the biodiversity of VRR sanctuary. Present wildlife managers are forced to think about the sustainable development as a process by which the needs the present communities are met in ways that will not deplete natural resource for future generations. To conserve biodiversity, some ethnic estrangement with the past is necessary, and this certainly requires education. Since buffer zone community depends largely on the realization of the market, the proper development of local markets should be paid due attention by local government as well as the DWLC .VRR.Strategies have been included to highlight the importance of inter-agency co-ordination in eco-development. Alternative income generation programmes are required for those persons who are dependent on illegal activities in or around the PA.. The captivating scenery in the PA is a significant value for the tourists. Proper tourism management will prevent hap-hazardous development of tourist activities and their impact on natural attributes and values. The involvement of local communities in biodiversity conservation is Collaborative management & Co-management of natural resources