

ETHNOFORESTRY PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND LIVELIHOOD SECURITY

A. WICKRAMASINGHE

Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya

Ethnoforestry includes a wide range of traditional knowledge-based forestry practices and resource management innovations of the local communities. Most of the practices are ingrained into the livelihood systems and continued over generations by the people themselves. They are specific to the geographical contexts and the ecosystems under consideration. The research study on ethnoforestry practices presented in this paper was conducted in 2001/2002, in 3 geographical areas; Narampanawa, Labunuruwa and Waleboda. The primary objective was to examine the strength of the local knowledge invested in forestry, the livelihood context associated with forestry practices and also look at the incentives for the continued involvement of the people in forest resource management, and development.

The typology of situations covered in this study varies, due to the variations in the ecological and associated social contexts. Narampanawa represents a strong forest-based culture replicated by people by ingtergrating traditional knowledge and forestry practices into the non-forest lands for their livelihood security. The study conducted in Labunoruwa deals with the linkage between the resources of the evergreen forests of the dry zone and the people living in the periphery of the insular forest of Labunoruwa. The Waleboda study focuses on the linkage between people and the wet evergreen forest of the Adam's Peak Wilderness.

Comparative analysis has contextualized the strength of local practices. People's own experience and experiments have strengthened forestry practices replicated through intergenerational connections. The outputs of medicinal, food and fuel wood uses are the bridge-stones connecting livelihood with forest resources. Materials for home-based enterprises and for other uses are gathered using traditional knowledge. The phenological cycle of the forest, species distribution, ecosystem diversity and the multiple uses of species are known to people. The food habits and medicinal practices together with the lifestyle and concern over healthy living in a forest environment are strong in all communities.

The findings of this study reveal that the traditional knowledge-based forestry practices are inseparable from the social and livelihood systems. The evidence reveals that their motives are intricately associated with the needs for Non-timber Forest Products, culture, and traditional knowledge and for service functions of forests. The study recommends the strengthening of ethnoforestry research for integrating traditional knowledge and livelihood interests, and people's partnership in forest resource management by assuring their rights to resources.