

Community Consultation Processes in Human-Animal Conflict Management in Sri Lanka

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Review Article

Received: 07/04/2018

Accepted: 07/05/2018

Published: 14/05/2018

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Keywords: Wildlife, Agriculture, Population, Conservation, Forest

ABSTRACT

The prime objective of “Protected Areas” is to avoid or reduce human-animal conflict while conserving village lives, wild animals and forest resources. This is a huge task or challenge face by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC). It is heavier than the challenges face by Forest Department or the Irrigation Department. Making boundaries for elephants and other animals is not practical. “Human-Animals or Human-Elephants Co-existence” concept was brought to the sector to address this issue. This cannot be done only by Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) and community involvement and their actions/reactions are critical to address the issue in the long-run.

INTRODUCTION

The modern wildlife management of Sri Lanka goes back to late 19th century with the establishment of the Forest Department in 1885. In 1889 the then Conservator of Forests drew the government attention on killing of deer and sambur ^[1]. One of the first items of legislature dealing specifically with wildlife was enacted in 1891 entitled ‘An Ordinance to prevent the destruction of elephants, buffalo and other game’ ^[1]. The Game Protection Society of Ceylon (GPSC) was set up in 1894 to fight against commercial exploitation. The Fauna and Flora Ordinance No. 1 was enacted in 1909, which consolidated the existing laws pertaining to wildlife protection ^[2,3]. Then the ‘Protected Areas’ were set up to preserve and manage wildlife in the country. Protected area concept originated due to the human-animal conflict in the island. In Sri Lanka, main agricultural lands including reservoirs and paddy fields located in the dry zone. Unfortunately, most wild animals also live in forests in the dry zone. Wet zone is thickly populated and available forests are less due to lack of lands.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to study the current community consultation processes in wildlife management in Sri Lanka. Secondly, study will focus on possibilities and requirements for the institutional strengthening especially in the community consultation fields.

Methodology Used

The case study methodology has been used to obtain information from DWC, Forest Department and communities. Focus Group Discussions with officers in different levels, brainstorming sessions and workshops with communities were also conducted in different districts. Transects and seasonal charts were developed to study the animal movements in different localities. In addition, secondary information were also collected through reports and records from government and private sector sources.

Human-Animal Conflict in the Country

The human-animal and human-elephant conflict is in a critical situation in Sri Lanka. The country population is continuously increasing. Reduction of animal population is also not happening due to religious and cultural influences. On the other hand forest cover in the country is also reducing rapidly (**Table 1**). Both human and animals are the victims of this conflict. Most damages to human and crops are done by elephants, crocodiles, monkeys and peacocks. But the critical conflict prevails between human and elephants. The total elephant population of the country is around 6,500. But only 427,078 hectares are available for animals in all wildlife sanctuaries. Some of them are heavily degraded and lagoons and arid zones are also located within sanctuaries ^[4]. This

forest area is sufficient to accommodate only 4,000 elephants and this is the main reason for human-elephant conflict. Every year nearly 231 elephants and 56 human die due to this conflict ^[5].

Table 1. Damages by animals ^[6].

Type of animal	Damages	Ranking of Damages	
		killings	Properties and Crops
Elephant	Killing of human Crops (paddy, coconut, Banana and other)	First place	First Place
Monkey	Injuring human Crops (coconut, Banana and other crops in home gardens)	Third place	Second place
Giant Squirrel	Crops (coconut, Banana and other crops in home gardens)	Non	Third place
Crocodile	Killing human and animals	Second place	Non
Porcupine	Crops (coconut, Banana and other crops in home gardens)	Non	Second P\place
Peacock	Paddy, crops (coconut, Banana and other crops in home gardens)	Non	Third place
Wild pig	Crops (coconut, Banana and other crops in home gardens)	Non	Third place

Community Involvement in Wildlife Management

The Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) has launched new programs to promote community consultation in wildlife management through its outreach programs. The current wildlife policy mainly focuses on “Conservation of Wildlife Heritage for Present and Future Generation”. The mission of the DWC is to “conserve wildlife and nature by the sustainable utilization of men, material and land through participatory management, research, education, law enforcement and ensure the maintenance of biodiversity and forest cover as exist today” ^[5]. The Department also launched a number of programs to convert poaches as wildlife conservators. This program launched in Gal Oya (in the south-west) and a number of positive results were the outcome of this initiation. In addition, field officers are being trained in the National Wildlife Training Centre (NWTC) which was upgraded recently with modern curriculums ^[6]. DWC is working with a number of public and private institutions to promote community consultation process in the sector. Community forestry concept is effective in improving forest cover while managing human, animal habitats with community involvement ^[7]. Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS), The Wilderness and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Nature Conservation Society (NCS) and The Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS) are the key active agencies among them. These agencies guide both DWC and communities to minimize conflicts between human and animals through reducing community pressure on forest and forest resources.

However, the DWC has to do more work to achieve active community involvement in wildlife resource management and human-animal co-existence. The above societies and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) could work as intermediary agencies to promote community consultation and involvement. Vigorous and effective programs are necessary to go beyond education, training and awareness. The main criticism for DWC is that they work mainly on animals and focus on human is rather less ^[4]. Emerging community leaders will lead to improved community consultation and engagement. Advocacy programs are also essential but working with communities at the grassroots level should be strengthened ^[8]. Conflict between DWC goals and community attitudes is common in any country. At the same time poverty of adjacent communities and activities by culprits mainly challenge the department’s objectives. This is a huge challenge face by DWC ^[6].

Strengths and Challenges in Community Consultation Processes

Strengths

- Legal authority is given to DWC by parliamentary acts and regulations to work on their vision and mission.
- Sri Lanka has named as a biodiversity hot spot in the world with top seven wild animals and DWC has empowered for conservation of such resources.
- Committed and multi-skilled field staff to carry out duties.
- Positive links with tourism sector.
- Establish and maintain sanctuaries as animal habitats with the government financial support.
- Training facilities available for officials in all levels at NWTC.
- Support from societies and private agencies. The DWC has a good rapport with private sector partners.
- Follow up on current world trends on wildlife management and conservation.

Challenges

There are so many barriers and challenges for effective community consultation in the wildlife sector. Among them following

are the key issues to focus to improve community consultation.

- The wildlife field is vast and need a new focus or look for conservation of diverse resources with community involvement.
- Reduction of forest cover adversely affected on animals' habitat. This is one of the reasons for conflict between animals and communities.
- Diminishing wildlife resources due to biodiversity issues and climate changes.
- Lack of food and water for animals within sanctuaries.
- Negative community attitudes towards DWC and its' officers due to animal damages on their crops.
- Community demands for wild meat (venison, wild boar etc.). (People request wild meat while staying in game parks).
- Imbalanced media approaches and community reactions to attack wildlife officers.
- On the other hand, increasing of some animals (elephants, leopards, deer, monkeys, wild pigs and birds like peacocks etc.) due to religious and cultural influences. Some countries maintain their wild life resources by controlling animal population. But this is not possible in Sri Lanka.
- Increasing population within the same extent of land and (human) encroaching animal habitats by damaging their natural habitats.
- Threats from invasive alien species to local biodiversity.
- Poaches around sanctuaries kill and damage animals including rare animals.
- Negative political influence on natural resources and wild life.
- Insufficient training for field officers (quality and quantity wise) on community consultation.
- Lack of training and exposure (both local and foreign) for field officers.
- Myths in collection of animals and their body parts like Ivory and skin.
- Strong and fresh regulations are necessary to combat international wildlife trade.
- The traditional village life with harmony of wildlife is rapidly diminishing due to natural and human actions ^[5].

Assessment of needs for capacity building and institutional strengthening

- The current laws and regulations need to be amended for effective participatory wildlife conservation and management.
- Training and exposure (both local and foreign) are essential to improve knowledge, attitudes and skills of field officers.
- Participatory development methodology should be compulsory for field officers initially at the recruitment level, and then the promotions and increments levels.
- Accordingly, revision of Scheme of Recruitment (SOR) and examination syllabuses is necessary.
- Early actions are necessary to improve community engagement and hand over the maintenance of new systems and facilities to community organizations.
- Identify community leaders and include them as conservation leaders and provide required training and graduate them as village resource groups and sustainable development managers.
- Strong laws and regulations to stop or reduce poaching in sanctuaries.
- Special training, exposure and educational programs are necessary for field officers on microfinance (MF), microenterprises (MEs) and Livelihood Development of rural communities. This will provide required skills and confidence to manage and facilitates services by MF and ME agencies.
- Field officers knowledge and skills should be improved to develop micro projects to improve economic conditions of communities.
- Develop linkages with banks and financial institutions to promote alternative livelihood opportunities.
- Develop marketing linkages to have markets with better prices for agricultural products.
- Proper and systematic transfer procedure to be adopted by the Department without disturbing the on-going field activities.
- Allocations for community consultation and community projects should be increased.
- More opportunities and funds are required for research and innovative programs to address key issues in the sector.

- Develop videos and documentaries on wildlife success stories and educational programs.
- Develop a CBO network to strengthen community involvement and their rights and responsibilities.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this study have been classified for following three categories based on the nature and time requirement.

Recommendations for early actions

Skills development programs are necessary for the Department to improve the capacities of officials on effective participatory development. On-the-job training, Training of Trainer (TOT) programs, exposure visits to neighboring countries (like India, Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand etc.) are recommended to acquire modern technical know-how and study successful efforts taken to control human-elephant conflict in Kenya and other countries^[9]. Required financial allocations should be made to conduct training and exposure visits recognized at the need assessment towards active community engagement in rural development.

Department of Wildlife Conservation adopts different participatory conservation methods and approaches suit to the location. Some field officers had training on PRA under a leading training institution. The recent survey indicated that nearly 90% respondents express their willingness to engage in participatory wildlife habitat developments^[5]. It is suggested to develop videos and documentaries on wildlife success stories and educational programs to encourage community engagement. The current 'Sobadhara' TV programs could be used to promote community involvement in wildlife management. The current requirement is to conduct advance training for field level officials and community leaders in participatory conservation methods. It was noted that local knowledge and expertise on wildlife management should be absorbed in to new programs. Lessons learned from other countries also could be tested and practice in the field (e.g. Bamboo collection control system, Bee keeping, Cactus planting etc.).

Recommendations for medium-term actions

Community development efforts aim to address causes or symptoms of poverty and livelihood issues. Community development is a new area for the DWC. The mandate of the Department was based mainly on the protection theory. Now the Department should work with new trends in participatory development programs and they need outside support for this purpose (PCR - PAMWCP), 2015. It is recommended to hire or appoint suitable consultants to guide them in community consultation, participatory wildlife management and livelihood development. The best action is to recruit permanent officers to work and handle issues in relevant fields (e.g. Community development, livelihood improvements and Gender etc.).

Recruitment of field officers to 'Outreach' unit of the department is not a success story as they lost nearly 150 well-trained motivators due to a wrong decision taken by the management^[5]. It is also suggested to reconsider recruiting field level motivators as there is a shortage of field officers to promote participatory wildlife management.

Rural development itself is a capacity building process and it promotes field officers and rural communities to clever use of rural resources. Capacity building creates ability to work together to achieve rural development goals. A sound economic base at community level is the essential tool to continue capacity building process. This need could be addressed by sound microfinance and microenterprise programs especially formulated for rural poor -including gender related poverty^[9]. However, microfinance and microenterprise development is rather new area for wild life extension officers. A strong training and skills development package (TOT) is essential to enhance the capacity of field officers to guide outside service providers on microfinance and microenterprise development with forest communities. Working with leading NGOs, government financial institutions and banks is the practical option to carry out microfinance and microenterprise activities while acquiring skills with field level experience.

The need of community level organisations is high in any rural development program. Small groups or self-help groups are the vehicle to promote and continue with small savings, entrepreneurship and then up to the microfinance and microenterprise levels. At the next stage, developing networks with all small groups and CBOs are necessary to strengthen the communication and relationship among communities^[9]. The strong community networks could be used to disseminate information quickly among different communities in different locations. The department should allocate required funds and other resources to establish sound economic development systems and community networks.

Recommendations for long term actions

Participatory approaches in wildlife should be further strengthened in DWC to address the current issues and conflicts in the sector. The initial requirement is to amend existing laws and regulations in both forestry and wild life sectors^[9]. There is a long delay in approving new regulations at the legal institutions and actions to be taken to speed up legal amendment process. DWC has to develop a participatory wildlife conservation and management strategy. New regulations are also necessary to combat international wildlife trade as well.

The ownership of the development program leads to the sustainability of community organisations. The department also should have a clear policy of sharing responsibilities and duties of wildlife management with communities^[9]. DWC has to handover the stick to communities to manage wildlife resource in selected areas even on a pilot basis. Implementation of this concept may

be difficult with wildlife and forestry conservation requirements. In that case 'User Rights' and 'User Responsibilities' should be clearly earmarked to avoid any confusion on responsibilities and work boundaries ^[10-12].

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