

**Development and Management of Eco Lodges by Adjoining Communities of
Wasgamuwa Park – Pilot Project
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Introduction:

The Wasgamuwa Protected Area, comprising of 37,063 ha, is located in the central eastern region of Sri Lanka. In the early 1970's it was declared as a strict nature reserve and under the Mahaweli Development Project it was re-declared as a National Park in 1984.

The park is bordered along the eastern, western and northern perimeters by the Mahaweli River, Kalu Ganga and Amban Ganga respectively. Whilst the southeastern side comprises of intermediate zone vegetation the remainder of park includes dry zone vegetation. Due to the seasonal flooding of the rivers, seasonal wetlands are found along the eastern margin. The park is well known as a migratory corridor for elephants as it connects with three other parks. Although the park does not attract many tourists at present, it has the potential to increase visitation due to the many elephants, bear, deer and many endemic bird species that could be spotted. Due to lack of accommodation facilities and weak road network this park has not gained much popularity as compared to the parks in the South of Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges faced by the Department of Wildlife and Conservation the agency mandated with managing the reserve is the threat to the park by adjoining communities who depend on it for their livelihood. There are over 40 villages along the boundary of the park. These villagers who depend on contract labour and agriculture for existence are considered as the poorest of the poor and are vulnerable to regular elephant attacks.

During a participatory rural appraisal exercise conducted with a few villages, the community requested assistance to get involved in tourism related activities.

Therefore, under this **pilot project it is proposed to develop alternative livelihoods for one village** adjoining the park through involvement of the community in providing rustic eco lodges for tourists. Whilst this will encourage increased visitation of the park it will also help generate other tourism related small industries and thereby uplift the economy of the community and reduce their dependence on the park.

Goal:

The overarching goal is to provide alternative income opportunities to local communities in order to reduce their dependence on the park and also increase visitation to the park.

Benefits:

~~☞~~ Reduce the community's dependence on park for livelihood activities

- ☞ Reduce over visitation in other parks through popularizing Wasgamuwa (Most visitors frequent the Yala National Park to observe similar flora and fauna)
- ☞ Improve visitor facilities, by empowering adjoining communities to provide such facilities
- ☞ To provide tourists with a unique cultural experience
- ☞ To promote other small businesses (local handicrafts, souvenirs) among the community
- ☞ Development of entrepreneurship and business management skills among the community
- ☞ Increased revenue generation to the DWC – resulting in improved services and better management practices

Barriers:

- ☞ Competition with other private sector entrepreneurs
- ☞ Land availability
- ☞ Acquisition of land
- ☞ Objection from religious leaders on impacts on cultural and aesthetic resources
- ☞ Conflict with adjoining communities
- ☞ Objections from NGO's

Activities	Indicators of Success	Resources Needed
Convince the DWC management – submit a concept paper	☞ Concept paper approved	4 man hours
Select a Village to work with (discussion with Divisional Secretaries, community leaders, DWC and other government agencies)	Consent of relevant stake holders and administrative heads	Outputs of ongoing community profiles to help determine the village to work with Venue for meetings with respective personnel in their localities
Seek funding (approach the Lions, Rotarians and any other source)	☞ Funding sources secured	☞ 10 man hours to meet with agencies to present proposal ☞venue for meetings ☞transport
Consultation with community to obtain their views ~form a corporative society ~develop plan	☞ No of meetings held ☞ No. of participants ☞ Formation of corporative society	☞ Venue within the village to conduct meetings ☞ Funds (to provide food and beverages to the participants, coordination, and documentation expenses)

Activities	Indicators of Success	Resources Needed
Conduct discussions with religious leaders and NGO's in and around the area	/// Endorsement of proposals	/// Venue for meetings /// Funds for coordinating, documenting etc.,
Identify land (discussion with relevant ministries, land, agriculture, forestry and divisional secretaries)	/// Acquisition of land (with proper title deeds)	/// Personnel to meet with relevant officials /// Transportation
Registration of Cooperative	/// Article of registration including the constitution	/// Lawyers /// Personnel to work with communities /// Resources required for documentation etc.,
Selection of architects for preparation of designs (the method of selection will depend on funding agencies requirement, either competitive bidding or direct hire)	/// Community involvement /// Approval of designs by relevant authorities	/// funds /// design architects
Coordinate with service providing agencies	/// approval by Ceylon Electricity Board, National Water Supply and Drainage board, Central Environmental Authority, Ministry of Lands)	/// funds for obtaining services /// no. of copies of plans /// personnel to discuss plans with relevant authorities
Construction of lodges – using local community to provide labour	/// buildings completed /// no. of locals employed	/// funds /// personnel to supervise construction activities
Skill development programmes for community	/// no. of vocations introduced /// no. of trained individuals	/// DWC to organize the training with the involvement of the hotel school, official language dept., wildlife training center, /// funds

Activities	Indicators of Success	Resources Needed
DWC to play lead role in marketing facilities through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> /// print and electronic media /// include in protected area handbook /// include in website /// including in Ceylon tourist boards and other tour operators propaganda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> /// increased visitation /// reduced pressure by adjoining communities on PA /// no. of persons employed directly and indirectly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> /// IT to develop web site /// Funds for advertisement /// Personnel to coordinate and take a lead role in this activity

Key stakeholders

- ~~///~~ Community (including religious leaders and NGOs)
- ~~///~~ DWC
- ~~///~~ Related Ministries (Land, Forestry, Agriculture, tourism)
- ~~///~~ Tourists
- ~~///~~ financiers

Positively Impacted

- ~~///~~ Community in the pilot village
- ~~///~~ Visitors
- ~~///~~ Department of Wildlife and Conservation (increased income and less pressure on parks by adjoining communities)
- ~~///~~ Travel agents
- ~~///~~ Government of Sri Lanka

Negatively Impacted

- ~~///~~ Existing hoteliers and lodge owners
- ~~///~~ Existing village money lenders, pawning agents
- ~~///~~ DWC – due to over visitation and increased workload