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Keynote Address

COMMUNITY-BASED FOREST MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA: APPROACHING A GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

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Community-based forest management in Sri Lanka encompasses community-owned forests and agro-forests as well as government-owned forests managed by communities. Communities also manage forest-based enterprises, which are community-scale economic activities based on wood and non-wood commercial forest products and provision of ecosystem services. The ideal characteristics of a green economy, low carbon, resource-efficient and socially inclusive, are embodied in community-managed forests. This study reviews the literature and analyzes the community-based forest management approach for the green economy of Sri Lanka in terms of: contribution to the green economy and environment; issues and challenges; and strategies to promote the contribution.

Community-based-forest-management contributions to the green economy and environment include: a foundation for grassroots democracy; support for environmental justice; granted lands as acts of social justice; social stability of rural communities; employment generation and livelihood development with community-based forest enterprises and out-grower schemes purchasing the forest products and paying market prices; creation of markets for ecosystem services and payments for these services; sustainable production practices combined with broad distribution of benefits, and production of timber and wood products. Environmental contributions include biodiversity conservation and adaptation to climatic shifts and erratic climate events. Community-based forest management protects and restores forest ecosystems while creating green employment.

The issues and challenges are recognized as: engagement of communities to defend their rights and manage forests collectively; protection of forest ecosystems for cultural survival and social well-being; changes in the forest resource base; lack of secure tenure or access rights to forest resources; weak community governance; discriminatory market policies and poor market links.

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Among strategies to promote the contribution are: incorporation of ethical criteria and bio-cultural heritage in forest management; greater land tenure security; change in the political and economic environment to restore governability to local communities; multi-functional rather than monoculture forests for community-managed forest ecosystems; technological advances towards a green bio-economy within the community-based forest enterprises; creation of an enabling business environment through direct subsidization; commercialization of forest-based enterprises while acknowledging the potential of the local community; removal of regulatory barriers and support of community rights to manage forest-based enterprises; and transformation of communities into key partners of forest-based industrial development.

Key words: *Community-based forest management, Green economy, Forest-based enterprises, Ecosystem services*