

## **EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AND POTENTIAL TO INTRODUCE AGRO-TOURISM IN *PALUGASWEWA* TANK CASCADE SYSTEM**

**G.W.G.V.M. Dayarathna<sup>1</sup>, S.P. Dissanayake<sup>1</sup>, G.A.S. Ginigaddara<sup>1</sup>, and K.K. Kakulandara<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Agricultural Systems, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.*

<sup>2</sup>*Janathakshan (GTE) Limited, Lionel Edirisinghe Mawatha, Colombo 05, Sri Lanka.*

The process of attracting visitors and travellers to agricultural areas is known as Agro-tourism. It also can be recognized as a strategy that can enhance rural agricultural livelihoods. Sri Lanka as an agricultural country has many potentials to promote Agro-tourism aiming sustainable rural agricultural development. The Cascaded Tank Village System (CTVS) is a connected series of tanks organized within a meso-catchment of the dry zone landscape. This is mainly used for storing, conveying, and utilising water from an ephemeral rivulet. There are high biodiversity, agricultural lands and scenic beauty around the CTVS. Hence, there is a huge opportunity to involve in Agro-tourism activities in these areas. However, occupants in CTVS seem having lesser awareness and interest in Agro-tourism in it. Thus, the objective of this research was to explore the potential and perception of local community to develop sustainable Agro-tourism plan in *Palugaswewa* CTVS which was recently nominated as a world heritage. Simple random sampling method was used to select 234 respondents. Collected data through field survey, focus group discussions and key personnel interviews were analysed by SAS and Minitab. Logistic regression results revealed that, gender [Odds Ratio (OR)=2.849], primary occupation (OR=3.284), engaging in tourism activity (OR=6.333), awareness about upcoming Agro-tourism plan in *Palugaswewa* (OR=8.106) are significantly ( $p<0.05$ ) affecting the participation for Agro-tourism by the villagers. The factor analysis revealed that social, social welfare, environmental and land associated factors are significantly ( $p<0.1$ ) affecting for community perception on Agro-tourism. According to the thematic analysis, CTVS itself, wild animal tours, nearby *Habarana* and *Ritigala* tourism hotspots, traditional agricultural practices, available ancient ruins in the area and infrastructure facilities are some potentials and possible ventures for Agro-tourism in the area. Therefore, there is a potential for introducing a sustainable Agro-tourism strategy in *Palugaswewa* cascade in Sri Lanka.

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