

## **VI.A.5. Economic Valuation of Ecotourism in Kalakadu Mundanthuri Tigar Reserve, Tamil Nadu**

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A network of bio-geographically representative network of Protected Areas with active participation of local communities is considered as the best form of in situ conservation of biodiversity. Being a mega- biodiversity country, India has already established more than 500 such areas covering 4.6 per cent of the total land area. The establishment and management of these areas resulted in a variety of issues.

Among various such issues, the people-park conflict is very significant in India. The local communities view Protected Areas as government imposed restrictions over their traditional practices and resource use. For them, the benefits of the park are intangible and this is mainly at the cost of their forgone tangible benefits from the area.

The effective management of PAs requires substantial direct costs, which is not affordable to many developing countries. Further, the non-implementation of various potential projects such as roads, dams, industrial units, etc. put tremendous pressure on the development needs of these poor income economies. Economic valuation of Protected Areas will help the policy makers to take unbiased decision on its management and sustainable utilisation. The recent multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) including Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) have fully recognised the sustainable utilisation of biodiversity. It is one of the top agenda of the on going discussion at the Inter-governmental Forum on Forests (IFF) of United Nations.

One potential benefit from Protected Areas is Ecotourism. It is a non-consumptive and non-marketed direct use of natural areas and is growing at 10-15 per cent per annum globally. Most of the ecotourism destinations are natural areas in tropical countries. In India, majority of PAs have not utilised the potential benefits from the emerging global ecotourism. In many areas, visits to these areas are local in nature and are mainly for pilgrimage or leisure. In this context, the proposed Ecotourism policy and guidelines of Govt, of India as a part of the Draft Tourism Policy is very significant. An attempt has been made in this paper to estimate the economic value of ecotourism benefits of Kalakadu Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR), Tamil Nadu by applying Contingent Valuation Method (CVM). CVM has been increasingly applied for the estimation of intangible benefits of natural areas.

KMTR is situated in the Ambasamudram and Nanguneri Taluks of Tirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu. The reserve lies between latitudes of 8 0 25 ' N and 80 53' N and longitudes of 770 10' E to 770 35' E. and forms a part in the southern Western Ghat ranges. The reserve comprises a total area of 817 sq.km of which 459 sq.km is earmarked as core zone. The reserve comprises of tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, dr> deciduous and wet temperate forests and grass lands at high and low altitudes. It is home for a variety of endemic and endangered species. Fourteen rivers and streams traverse this area and supports irrigations systems in Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts. Kalakadu and Mundanthurai were established as two wildlife sanctuaries in 1976 and 1977 respectively and later declared as a single tiger reserve in 1988. The park is owned and managed by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department. The average annual expenditure of the park for the last five years (1993-98) is estimated as Rs.10.43 Million.

The demographic pressures are very high from both inside and outside the park. A population of one lakh people in 25,000 families are reported to be lived in the identified 145 hamlets within the 25 km radius from the eastern boundary of the reserve. A large tea estate having an area of 34 sq.km is located inside the park. There are other small estates, colonies and tribal hamlets inside the boundary of the park.

The reserve has 7 dams and reservoirs which include Karaiyar, Servalar and Manimuttar.

The sacred places and temples in the reserve attracts lakhs of pilgrims every year. This include Banatheertham falls, Agastyar falls and temple, Nambikoil and Sorimuthyanar temple. Having unique biodiversity area of Western Ghats, the reserve provides innumerable recreational and educational facilities for the visitors.

Interviews have been conducted for visitors to the park during March-April 1999. The results indicate that 85 per cent of the visitors are willing to pay for the conservation benefits of the park.

Majority of the visitors chose their first priority as viewing wild animals, birds and plants followed by seeing dams and reservoirs. About 16 per cent of visitors choose pilgrimage as their first priority.

The average willingness to pay by a visitor for eco-tourism benefits is estimated as Rs.30.47 per annum. The visitors to the park are mainly from adjacent districts and states. The present value of ecotourism benefits for all visitors is estimated as Rs.64.7 million. About 95 per cent of the visitors to the park have multiple destination other than the sites within KMTR. The two major destinations near by KMTR are Kanyakumari and Kuttalam. The study reveals the fact that the Park authorities can make substantial economic benefits if appropriate steps are taken to develop ecotourism. Ecotourism development in the Park will help the socio-economic upliftment of the local communities who depend on the park for various consumptive uses.