

# ICWA LETTERS

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young professionals to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. An exempt operating foundation endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

## TRUSTEES

Joseph Battat  
Carol Beaulieu  
Mary Beausoleil  
Richard Dudman  
Peter Geithner  
Gary Hartshorn  
Kitty Hempstone  
Will Knowland  
Samuel Levy  
Mildred Marcy  
Peter Bird Martin  
Joel Millman  
Edmund H. Sutton  
Steven Maly  
Warren Unna

## HONORARY TRUSTEES

A. Doak Barnett  
David Elliot  
Lawrence M. Gould  
David Hapgood  
Pat M. Holt  
Edwin S. Munger  
Richard H. Nolte  
Albert Ravenholt  
Phillips Talbot

The Institute of Current World Affairs  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

CMC-16 1995  
SOUTH ASIA

## Passwords: Breaking Into Colombo's Nature Conservation Circuit

BY CYNTHIA CARON

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka

September 1995

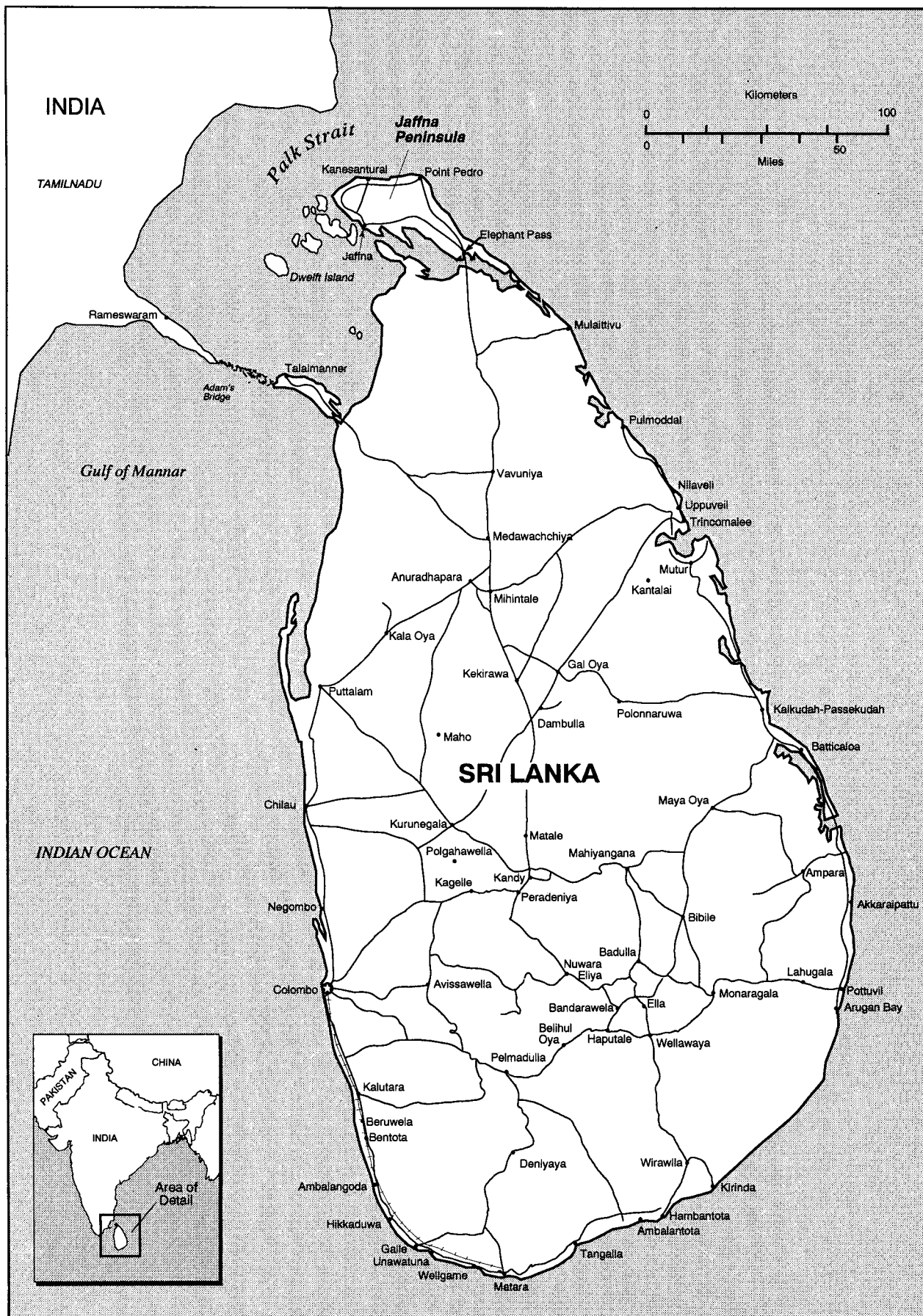
For several weeks I have sat in certain air-conditioned offices discussing, with primarily middle-aged males, the current status of Sri Lanka's nature conservation efforts. These oases of humid Colombo are the control centers of the various international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that fund and implement nature-conservation projects throughout the island. The conservation-oriented NGOs are concentrated in two principal areas: Havelock Town in central Colombo, a straight-shot from my apartment on the 138 bus route, and Battalamulla, a western-Colombo suburb that also happens to be the location of Parliament.

After pleasant introductions, explaining the Institute and the purpose of my research in Sri Lanka, and performing the business-card exchange ritual, we are ready to discuss the issue that prompted our meeting; "What approach is your organization taking toward natural resource conservation?" Sometimes the answer is straightforward, other times convoluted. Whichever direction taken, the answer boils down to the following message, using only the most appropriate terms, "Our projects aim to conserve biodiversity and natural resources through community participation and sustainable economic development." The only word missing in this sentence is incentive. Incentives are essential to induce community members to participate in the sustainable management of biological diversity. Or at least it is considered an essential element in the current conceptual framework.

After leaving approximately half a dozen meetings at which the same message was imparted, I contemplated these words that we casually and confidently threw around. What exactly do these terms mean? Do they accurately convey the message we want them to? What exactly is the conservation of biodiversity through community participation anyway?

Every meeting disappointed. Every organization's mission is so strikingly similar that I think that this might be only mid-1990's development-funding-generating rhetoric. According to Michael Wells (1995) international donor agencies are fascinated with biodiversity conservation and sustainable economic development. Since millions of dollars are at stake, conservation organizations have no other option than to be hooked. One of the largest donors for biodiversity projects is the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that is administered by the World Bank, United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Environment Program. Between

*Cynthia Caron is a John Miller Musser Fellow of the Institute studying forest conservation in South Asia.*



1991 and 1994 the GEF committed U.S.\$300 million to biodiversity projects in more than 50 developing countries. The GEF considers only proposals that outline the participation of local communities (*ibid*).

This requirement is essential. A review of the outcomes of both rural development and conservation projects over the past 20 years clearly demonstrates that without community interest, involvement and training, projects are destined to fail once the funding period is finished and the technical experts pack up and go home. A much more basic problem is embedded in the requirement: If the organization claims to have an "innovative biodiversity conservation implementation strategy" only to attract funding, it may fail to improve the country-wide situation within which all of these conservation projects are operating.

Two individuals confirmed my suspicion. While one program officer confided that there is no information exchange between various Colombo-based conservation organizations, she did not seem overly concerned. "Yes, we could all be implementing identical projects and implementing them all incorrectly." However, all the program officers with whom I spoke assured me that *their* projects had subtle differences over every other project so that theirs would ultimately achieve success. A high-ranking government official in the Irrigation Management Division, who recently joined "public service" after a position with an international conservation-oriented NGO "where I made my money," explained with hesitation, "I have a much bigger budget now than I did before, but I often wonder how much of it is to do work and how much to keep people employed."

In this milieu of competition, pride and embellishment, I have to weed out the potentially meaningful conservation projects from the not-so-promising ones. My tourist visa, which has already been renewed once, is going to expire again soon. The Controller of Immigration will not endorse a visa extension to an "independent research fellow," but he will grant an extension to an "independently-funded research fellow" who is conducting research with an NGO or government department and presents him with a packet of visa recommendation letters typed on official letterhead. Once this process is completed I remain independently-funded but in the eyes of the Controller I am no longer independent. This is precisely the point. I cannot be traveling about, asking questions and pursuing leads unsupervised.

The International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) has agreed to sponsor my visa extension. This organization implements a project called SCOR, Shared Control of Natural Resources, in two watersheds located in distinctly different zones of the island. One site is in the island's southwest in the "wet zone." The second site is in the dry zone's north central province. I have chosen to spend some time at the wet zone project. The project's location is on the

southern side of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve where I conducted research for six months in 1992. All the terms defined and discussed below fall within the SCOR and the Sri Lankan government's natural resource management agenda. Until I leave Sri Lanka next year I will be studying the application of these concepts in the field. In the end I hope to share with you whether or how much these terms are grounded in reality.

## Biological diversity (Biodiversity)

According to the Convention on Biological Diversity drafted in Rio de Janeiro at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, biodiversity or biological diversity "means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems." Biologists, ecologists and geneticists collected and analyzed floristic and faunal data to demonstrate threats to the non-human members of the global community; how the demise of one species could affect other organisms and ultimately human life as we know it, and to lobby for measures to stop the destruction of our biologically-diverse resources. Yet even after decades of painstaking field research with consequent analysis and internationally-recognized definition, the work of environmentalists and conservationists is still at its infancy. Government officials may be familiar with the term biodiversity, and recognize its global and national importance, but that does not necessarily mean that they create and implement policies or make decisions to protect their biodiversity instead of damming a river, constructing a transnational highway or establishing a pulpwood plantation. Their actions can be blamed on weak economics. Biodiversity remains undervalued when compared to alternative land uses.

The loss of genetic and species diversity due to environmental destruction is a catastrophe that will take millions of years to correct, writes Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson. We must tackle the phenomena of geological time one generation at a time. The stakes are high. Wilson claims we may be losing one species per hour. The species could be unknown to modern science and one that contains an alkaloid for a life-saving drug, a disease-resistant agricultural strain or a ecologically-sound pesticide.

I take for granted that everybody is familiar with what biodiversity is, even if the term translates differently into their native language. I have found this to be a fair assumption. What cannot be taken for granted is that everybody values biodiversity or values its complex of assets equally. Biodiversity has ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values. Politicians, academics, development experts and naturalists continue

to engage themselves in arguments about biodiversity's importance and its definition, during which lovers of semantics debate each aspect of this multifaceted term, hoping to reach a higher level of thinking and a more refined approach to it.

What happens when we shift the context of this discussion from the classroom into Central Park, a tropical rain forest, a parking lot or an alpine meadow? What are biodiversity indicators? Once we have determined that one area is more diverse than another and worthy of additional protection, what conservation process do we follow? The Sri Lankan Government recently formulated a strategy for the preparation of a biodiversity action plan (BAP). The broad goal for the BAP is "to conserve Sri Lanka's biodiversity, in particular the indigenous biological resources in the natural, modified and cultivated systems, while fostering the use of such resources in a sustainable manner." In an island about the size of Ireland (65,610 km<sup>2</sup>), there are arid desert-like regions, mountains that receive an occasional frost, and tropical rainforests. Sri Lanka is considered to be the most diverse country in South Asia, on a per-unit basis, with an equally diverse and important number of endemic species. The island-nation is recognized for its historically strong conservation ethic; it boasts of creating one of *the*, if not the world's first nature conservancies in the 3rd century B.C.

One of the plan's specific objectives is "to enhance public awareness on biodiversity and encourage public participation in the conservation of biodiversity." Do not worry. This sounds very vague to me, too. Biodiversity conservation is an experiment. But there is one thing to remember about experiments — no financial donor is going to continue to invest money in a failure. For the moment, biodiversity conservation is donor-driven.

**Community:** "1a: a body of individuals organized into a unit or manifesting, usually with awareness, some unifying trait. b: the people living in a particular place or region and usually linked by common interests ... 3a: common or joint ownership, experience, tenure or pertinence: commonness, sharing, participation ... c: shared activity: social intercourse: social activity marked by a feeling of unity but also individual participation completely willing and not forced or coerced and without loss in individuality."

In their introduction to *Natural Resources for the 21st Century*, R. Neil Sampson and Fred Deneke write, "...we must build many more bridges between professional disciplines, agencies and institutions. The boundaries built to protect 'turf' impose heavy penalties on society, because they deprive the ultimate users — private land owners and public decision makers — of the full range of integrated and holistic resource information that they need." For a group of experts/professionals in community development, I find it ironic that there is no sense of community

among them. I am interested in comparing the approaches that different Sri Lankan organizations are taking toward biodiversity conservation. Why do I feel as though I am spying if I become a conduit for information? Organizations emphasize the need for information exchange, but rarely exchange it.

"Sorry, I'm late," my former Yale classmate, now Additional Conservator of Forests, Dayananda, says as he opens the door to his office for me one afternoon. "I've been at an inter-departmental meeting discussing the role of the NGO in forest conservation and management since 9:00 a.m." From the file folder he carries, he slips out an overhead of a three-circled Venn diagram. Acronyms and ovals. Linking the CBO oval to the FD (Forest Department) oval is the NGO oval. A simple, straightforward diagram, once I ask Dayananda what CBO stands for.

CBO. The term means "community-based organization" and represents the new decentralized approach to forest management that the Sri Lankan Forest Department hopes to implement in the coming year. A basic tenet of community-based forest management is that local communities have a greater stake in wise utilization of the resource base than non-place-based groups such as timber companies and state governments. Community-based organizations will be natural-resource user groups responsible for assisting the conservation of Sri Lanka's forests, mangroves, watersheds, irrigation channels, and nature reserves — the stuff of which biodiversity is made. I have only heard the terms CBO and CBRM (community-based resource management) in Sri Lanka. In India the CBO often is referred to as the VFPMC, Village Forest Protection Management Committee. In Sri Lanka, farmers' societies, death-donation societies, forest-product-utilization farmer's organizations all find shelter under the CBO umbrella. It is the job of the NGO to serve as liaison and to coordinate activities between the CBO and the government department under its jurisdiction. For biodiversity conservation, this means the Forest Department and occasionally the Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Members of a CBO all live within the same village or in adjacent villages. Their common interest is to manage the forest resources and to serve as land sustainably that supply their daily needs for fuelwood and fodder, regulate water flow and are the foundations for their cash-crop enterprises. During informal discussions and formal meetings with NGO and FD representatives, the CBO leaders and their membership must present themselves as a unified group defined by shared objectives.

At a recent conference on the sustainable forest management of South Asian forests, two well-known World Bank-employed Asian environmentalists stressed the need for the formation of "groups of forest people." State governments should give these groups, equivalent to CBOs, sections of productive

forest to manage and to protect, said the environmentalist. What is most intriguing about the Banerjee and Mishra (1995) approach is that they call for the government to relinquish control over *productive* forests rather than over *unproductive* and degraded forest lands. Traditionally the latter approach is taken in participatory forestry. Rural communities are allowed and encouraged to reforest degraded lands that in a monetary sense are "useless" to the government. Correspondingly it takes longer for the participants in such reforestation programs to reap the benefits of their efforts. Shifting the emphasis to productive forests provides almost immediate benefits to community members, but at the cost of government revenue and employment opportunities. Banerjee and Mishra suggest that after groups are formed, the members' skills in forestry and financial management must be developed along with the drafting of a group-government benefit-sharing agreement. Later when we discuss the concept of participation, we shall see the importance of developing community skill and knowledge to enhance the level of local participation.

To build a community we must use the proper materials for its infrastructure. Many social scientists debate whether or not this infrastructure is physical or spiritual. Critics of ideal or goal-based communities claim that communities "without residential concentration" are artificial constructs because they lack a geographical definition (Etzioni, 1993). An interpretation based on space limits a community to a conglomeration of huts, ignoring the people who live inside. It is the social bond, the sense of commitment to a common goal, that binds a resource-user group together, not the proximity of their latrines to one another.

Geography does have its importance. Community-based organizations and forest-user groups, while having a spatial dimension (restricted to a particular national park or watershed), are formed more by their sense of purpose. This sense of purpose forms the community framework. Common features that have made similar economic ventures, known as self-help groups, successful in India are homogeneity, voluntary membership, full participation with direct representation, small size, and an apolitical orientation, in terms of party politics (Fernandez, 1987).

Many of the resource-user groups that the IIM-SCOR (with which I am affiliated) project is forming in the Upper Nilawa Watershed share many of these characteristics. Groups range in size from as few as 12 up toward 100. They are homogeneous, based on their occupation or function: kitul palm tappers, pine resin tappers, flower and vegetable growers. They are fully voluntary. There is no political dimension in terms of party affiliation. Yet through the decentralization process, members are represented at the higher levels by chosen spokespersons.

One objective of community-based forest manage-

ment is to strengthen already existing local organizations rather than create new ones. This is in an effort to establish rural institutions that will conserve natural resources into the future. Blair and Olpadwala (1988) define an institution as "any human activity that is repeated systematically over time." Once the institution is established or strengthened with the help of an NGO, development experts hope that the community will sustain itself and, with time, expand to encompass new geographical areas, address new problems and include more members.

**Conservation:** "1a: deliberate, planned, or thoughtful preserving, guarding or protecting; a keeping in a safe or entire state ... 2a: planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction or neglect; b: the wise utilization of a natural product especially by a manufacturer so as to prevent waste and insure future use of resources that have been depleted."

The Sinhala word for conservation is *sangrakshanaya*. Its root is the word *rakshitaya*, which means "reserve." *Sang* is a prefix for "good." During one of my Sinhala lessons, without even being asked, my tutor logically proceeded through our lesson and deconstructed the local meaning of conservation for me, "It literally translates to something like propagation protection."

Thus the Sinhala definition parallels Webster's: a process of deliberately managing a resource; protecting the resource enough so that it propagates itself into the future. The tricky part of implementing natural resource conservation projects arises from what is defined as exploitation, versus the definition of conservation, and setting levels appropriate for either term. Whether to satisfy donor agencies or the bias of a particular field officer, local people are asked to conserve resources in the interest of following behaviors or adopting innovations that the consulting team considers appropriate. Therefore *who* translates the definition and determines the levels of "wise use" as important as the definition itself.

Conservation and development: the oxymoron of rural development planning and protected area management. We hope to design a set of guidelines that both develops the village or regional economy while conserving the natural resource base. Through the implementation of well-conceived and environmentally sound activities, forest-based economies can profit with little negative effect on land and water resources. Examples of such activities include backyard butterfly ranching, which enhances wild stocks and sells its product on the international butterfly market, or promoting bee hives, which allow for the extraction of honey and beeswax without damaging the natural environment or killing the bees. Conservation and development projects are not only income-generation oriented. Planting community fuelwood lots for domestic consumption and the introduction of agricultural techniques to increase food production



shifts the demand for and exploitation of resources to an alternative "sustainably managed" pattern.

Development can also refer to improved services. One Sri Lankan conservationist dreams about the following type of project in a remote highland area of the island. In one particular mountain range the villagers lack proper roads, transport and electricity. The contour of the land combined with the extensive forest cover creates rushing streams that provide an excellent opportunity for a mini hydroelectric power generation scheme. With financial support from an international conservation NGO, a small hydro-powered generator is installed to provide electricity, initially, to approximately 50 families. Residents (project beneficiaries) of this cardamom-cultivating region, which is also a national wilderness area, provide the construction labor. To build confidence among the participants and to address the project's long-term success, the planner foresees scheduling an extension course on generator maintenance. Electricity is meant to provide an incentive to community members to keep the land under its natural forest cover. The forest acts as a sponge regulating the hydrological cycle. They understand that if they cut down the trees along the steep slopes, much of the water channeled into the streams will be lost.

It is still an unproven assumption, however, that increasing the incomes of and/or providing additional services to people living in and around forested areas will achieve the ultimate goal of natural resource/biodiversity conservation. A larger question looms: Can we expect a group of individuals to behave in the manner that we want them to without offering more than abstract notions and ringing words?

**Incentive:** "1: something that incites or has a tendency to incite to determination or action: something that constitutes a motive or spur. 2: incentive: 1a: serving to encourage, rouse or move to action: stimulative ... 2a: designed to enhance or improve production especially in industry."

In his book *Biophilia*, E.O. Wilson writes that the key to grasping the relationships between human beings and nature lies in a precise "understanding of motivation, the reasons why people care about one thing but not another ..." Why do some people feel compelled to maintain tree cover on steep erosion-prone slopes, while others chop down everything in sight and let their livestock graze on the remaining grass, or cultivate an export-oriented crop?

Economists often cite incentives as a major factor in both deforestation and nature conservation. Judging by the increases in deforestation despite an international campaign toward conservation, we might be led to believe that there are insufficient incentives to manage natural resources sustainably. Government policies are often blamed for their promotion of environmental degradation because of high interest

rates and taxes, because of lack of regulations, because of enforcement and inter-departmental coordination that leads to legal loopholes, and because of underpriced timber that does not adequately reflect the long-term cost of its extraction.

"The problem with working in rural areas is that the villagers automatically expect outsiders to give them something. This is the fault of the government; they always are giving subsidies on fertilizers or something else," argues a civil engineer who works on irrigation and sanitation projects.

Even though development experts have realized for years that projects built up around handouts cannot sustain themselves once this motivating factor has exhausted itself, incentives such as food stamps and subsidies are regularly included in Sri Lankan rural development and conservation projects. It is hard to disregard such tangible incentives. They are easy to identify, to explain and to distribute. Abstract incentives, even though future generations are often cited as a motivating factor in conservation, challenge the planners' craft. Including psychological factors in project planning and design is difficult especially when the planner comes from a different culture. Undeclared, planners continue to look for new incentives to persuade communities to participate in conservation activities. Incentives, for example, that will make a return on their investment once a five-year funded project is forced to pull out and move into a different province or even a different country.

New incentives promoted in Sri Lanka are somewhat abstract and are not easy to define. Project participants must be given control, decision-making power, and rights and responsibilities. Current forest management theory preaches that if resource users have control over and direct decision-making over resource use, they will then make concessions to sustain themselves and the next generation inheriting the land.

If conservation efforts succeed only when grounded in selfish reasoning — when there is a material gain for the project participants (Wilson, 1984: 131) — then forestry project planners must institutionalize a self-inducing incentive structure that evolves along with the scope and success of its project so future incentives are generated from within.

"Our project is different from most development projects in this area that give only money and expect people to build latrines or something," explained Sri Bharathie, retired Conservator of Forests, now a consultant to the IIMI-SCOR project with which I am affiliated. "The main incentive for participating in our project is education. We give demonstrations and through practical work educate resource-user group members on conservation techniques."

I suppose it is my job to remain skeptical. When I

survey resource-user group members next month I do not expect to be told that educational opportunities are one of the most popular explanations for joining a forest-user group. Increased tea yields, additional earnings from small income-generating projects, food stamps and personal status are the types of answers I expect. The participants' responses will reveal the true motivations behind their interest and their expectations. It will further demonstrate how closely the IIMI-SCOR field staff are in touch with the aspirations of their project participants and how close they are to achieving their objectives. Field staff members believe that the transfer of knowledge and technology are the most important benefits project participants receive. The real challenge is whether or not participants will continue to use this knowledge after the USAID money and external incentives have dried up. Will selling vegetables and flowers and providing marketing outlets be enough for farmers to continue protecting biodiversity through the year 2000?

**Participate:** "2a: to take part in something (as an enterprise or activity) usually in common with others."  
**Participation:** "2b: association with others in a relationship (as a partnership) or an enterprise usually on a formal basis with specific rights and obligations."

After a glance at the above definitions, the role of participation in environmental conservation seems lucid. People work together to maintain irrigation tanks and channels, plant trees on hillsides and degraded lands, bund erosion-prone areas or on a rotating basis stay awake for an entire night once a week to chase away wild animals from a ripening cereal crop. Individuals with a common geography or common occupation work together — it is easier than working alone and often times the only way to complete a task.

Like many of the previously discussed terms, defining participation is an awesome task. The Sri Lankan Forestry Planning Unit (FPU) is participating in a participatory controversy of its own. At the center of the debate is the Forestry Sector Master Plan (FSMP), a bulky document that ensures that Sri Lanka's forests will be standing at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The government heralds this document, two years in the planning, as a participatory exercise. The planning process did see great improvements. Academics and natural resource practitioners were invited to form steering committees that supervised the gathering and analysis of data and recommended long- and short-term management prescriptions for topics ranging from home gardens to forest plantation management to biodiversity, soil and water conservation. The Forest Department introduced the plan through two hearings: one for the public and another for academics. The 1986 master plan was criticized for being production-oriented and void of public participation. But has the FPU done enough this time around to make up for these shortcomings, especially when the document has neither a Sinhala nor Tamil version, the lan-

guages of the rural natural resource-dependent populations?

Not according to Hemantha Withanage, an environmental scientist and one of the three individuals representing NGOs on the national steering committee. "The exercise of rewriting the FSMP was not a participatory one. First of all, there were only three people on the steering committee representing the interests of all Sri Lankan NGOs. Towards the end one member dropped out and was not replaced. Second of all, farmers' societies and other locally-based organizations, the people who habitually use forest resources, were not consulted. How can the Forest Department claim that this was a participatory exercise when user groups, people who daily depend on the forest, were not represented at any of the meetings or made aware of the public hearings? When I requested time to take a draft of the plan to some villagers in Ratnapura district before the final revisions of June 1995, I was not given enough time to do so."

The swift manner in which the national committee finished drafting the document and submitted it to the Cabinet caused many persons concerned about the representation of forest users in the planning process to accuse the FPU of disregarding the merit of a participatory process. NGO members are worried that they cannot adequately perform their job of linking public and government interests. News that national steering committee representatives received from their field staffs alluded to the fact that very few rural communities even knew that the document was being updated. The representative for the March for Conservation, a Sri Lankan NGO well regarded for its role in preserving the Sinharaja Man and the Biosphere Reserve, expressed his concern in a letter to the FPU stating, "I fail to see the reason behind the final stage of this process being conducted in such haste when it is a matter of great national importance. I will be drastically failing in my duty, as an NGO within the Steering Committee if I do not caution and express my utmost reservations that the draft is being passed in this manner" (*Biosphere* Vol. 11, Nos. 1 & 2). The public hearings were regarded "as excuses" merely to portray to international donor agencies that the planning process was participatory. Furthermore, hesitations and recommendations expressed at the public hearings were never investigated, let alone incorporated into the final draft that was later passed by the Cabinet.

According to Banerjee and Mishra, (1995) a basic tenet of the participatory forest management paradigm is "that governments should relinquish the management and protection of productive forests to the local people, not as recipients of benevolence, but as equal partners in development." At all bureaucratic levels the Sri Lankan forester is now trained to think about people-centered or community-based forestry. Unfortunately people-centered forestry does not neatly tuck itself into the neatly-arranged piles of

top-down directives found on the desks of Forestry Department officials. If true participatory forestry has its way, forest beat and range officers will no longer be the sole protectors and policers of the forest. They will share and uphold these sacred duties, with of all people, rural villagers. The very notion of participation threatens the forester's identity and challenges what his/her role is as a forester. After a century of centralized decision-making it is no wonder that many forestry officials are asking themselves, "When do too many cooks spoil the soup?"

The definition of participation is continually changing, says another environmentalist. "We build on our mistakes and where we have gone wrong," remarks one program officer. "Take for instance our initial work at the Sinharaja Forest. We asked people what their primary problems were. They [said they] had difficulty acquiring the posts and poles that are needed to build shelters for funerals and other religious ceremonies. To solve the problem we provided them with metal sheds that they could rent for such functions. In those days, we considered this participation in conservation. We realized later that it is not."

A few years, ago asking villagers about their natural resource problems and infrastructure constraints was enough to constitute participation, or what is also referred to as "involving local people" in the planning process. Involving local people remains the foundation of participation but the responsibilities that local people must fulfill for a legitimate participatory strategy have expanded. On this checklist are long-term operations such as planning, project implementation, and problem-identification and -solving as well as routine financial management and day-to-day operations. Project beneficiaries are acquiring the responsibility of project monitoring and evaluation, often done by the independent consultant contracted for his/her emotional detachment from the project.

Referring again to the Forestry Sector Master Plan, how many people and what type of people must participate in the planning and review of the document to make participatory forestry a real exercise in participation? Will enough opinions ever be sought? Who are the "public" that contribute that most sought-after public opinion? If something goes dreadfully wrong in forest management in 2001 will the blame be traced back to the 1995 formulation committee and will the 1995 committee be charged with not making the planning process participatory enough?

One morning a friend traveling down High Level Road spotted me waiting for the bus and offered me a lift. As Dr. Singhakumara and I dodged reckless scooter drivers trying to overtake the ever-slow public buses in Colombo's high-rent neighborhood, Cinnamon Gardens, he briefly shared his views with me on participation. "I have yet to see any true participation in the field. In order to get people do anything, they must be offered something in return. How is that par-

ticipation?" This observation brings us back to the question I asked earlier about whether or not can we expect individuals to do something that we want them to do without offering them anything in return.

Later, through a silent exchange, we shared our feeling about the term "social catalyst." The term catalyst is no longer restricted to chemical reactions. Social catalysts or social mobilizers are often young persons, frequently well-educated students, who are hired by the field/extension offices of Colombo-based NGOs to stir up support and keep people motivated to undertake and maintain conservation work. While the social catalyst adds yet another rung to the vertical hierarchy of conservation planning, he or she is pivotal in the processes of decentralization and community-building. Social catalysts play an important role in the chain of command, helping communities tailor projects to their own needs, networking between community members and representing project beneficiaries at upper levels. The roles for these actors are expanding. In his book, *The Spirit of Community*, Amitai Etzioni writes that "community facilitators may be a modern necessity ... individuals who organize social activities in which interpersonal and social bonds can be initiated."

While Etzioni writes about and for contemporary American communities, many of his assumptions can apply to different regions and other contexts. He later comments that "it is sociologically naive to sit back and wait for new communities to spring up. It is often necessary, and there is nothing artificial or otherwise improper, in recruiting or training organizers and facilitators of we-ness." Internal catalysts may not always spring up. The necessity of an external social catalyst, as found in many Sri Lankan conservation projects, may be the result of historical experience. A review of community forestry projects in West Bengal, India, found that many of the prominent social actors were illiterate villagers and educated youth who directly approached the Forest Department without incentives provided by internationally-funded local NGOs. Poffenberger (1995) states that "with virtually no budget, relying on natural regeneration, over a million people have participated in the establishment of effective management for nearly one quarter million hectares of degraded *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) forests." Yet this "resurgence" of community response emerges from a shared history — for over 200 years these financially-impovertised communities have repeatedly organized to protect and to reclaim their natural resource base.

This does not suggest that concerned individuals do not reside in Sri Lankan villages nor that these same communities did not suffer under colonialism. In the Anninkanda mountain range of the southern province of Galle, a Buddhist monk is active in the reforestation and protection of the Dotalugala Reserve Forest which covers the range's highest peak. His efforts, combined with the participation of community members from



two adjacent villages, led to the formation of a community-based organization, Dotalugala Heritage. The SCOR project chose to strengthen and expand this CBO through the provision of funds and technical training. The response to the participation call, however, may be connected to the extent of environmental damage. In a Poffenberger example not only was the land devoid of trees, but entire rooting systems were missing. In the case of Dotalugala much of the forest was cleared for shifting cultivation and the expansion of tea smallholdings. During the 1960's several streams dried up, tragic for the village of Talapela-kanda at the foot of the reserve's southern slope. The water draining from this forest is its only source of water for domestic and cultivation purposes.

Until internal catalysts readily reveal themselves, the external social catalyst may play an indispensable role in "rallying the troops" toward environmental conservation. If this be the case then we must ask ourselves, "Why do we need budgets approaching one million US dollars a year to carry out a participatory conservation exercise?"

**Sustainability:** "3a: to cause to continue (as in existence or a certain state or in force or intensity); to keep up especially without interruption, diminution, or flagging. Sustained: maintained at length without interruption, weakening or losing in power or quality."

Human history, write Gadgil and Guha (1993), is a "patchwork of prudence and profligacy, of sustainable and exhaustive resource use (p.3)." When patterns of resource use diverge from a desired norm, how certain can anyone be that this deviation is more than a temporary period of profit maximization? Likewise how can anyone assess whether or not a divergence is a permanent shift in the resource's value and subsequent management? In the context of this discussion the continued existence of the natural resource base depends upon the community group's ability to sustain itself after the completion of the formal management exercise. Creating sustainable conservation projects means creating sustainable social institutions to implement them.

When the CBO is "left on its own," do conservationists just hope and pray that the members adhere to the imparted advice and utilize their training to continue the activities in the way the original planners desired? Mechanisms must be in place that deter over-harvesting and other modes of production that maximize short-term gains. How can governments be abso-

lutely sure that after transferring large tracts of productive forest to local people that the new managers will sustainably manage them? Direct communication, cooperation and trust are just as important as the concepts of thinning schedules and forest-product extraction levels. The partnership of community groups and the government is based on different perceptions and different needs especially when it comes to defining what constitutes a sustainable forestry practice.

Sustainability implies some level of restraint. Incentives and benefit-sharing are introduced to restrain forest-user groups from developing resources beyond a predetermined sustainable level. Thus incentives must sustain themselves over the long haul and might have to originate from within the group. If the only replacement for the above-mentioned power generator is an imported part that the beneficiaries cannot afford, does the disruption of power necessarily imply deforestation?

One of the SCOR project's intended goals in its pilot watershed areas is the formation of "two production companies for intensifying sustainable production with [competition]." This sentence is loaded with dark implications for resource conservation and sustainable economic development. Sustainability is one of those words that frequently is used with a disclaimer or a modifier postponing definition 'til later. Thus the task of defining and finding examples of sustainable natural resource practices is sure to take us well into the next century.

\*\*\*\*\*

These terms are not to be taken lightly. They provide the background of environmental conservation dialogue and action in Sri Lanka. They are not simply terms to employ carelessly if you want to be invited into an air-conditioned office for a cup of tea. Education and extension services institutionalize an "early-warning system" that can trigger a community response before the damage reaches severe heights and may be contributing factors to a CBO's sustainability. Whether or not members of forest-user groups define these as group benefits or incentives to conserve biodiversity remains to be known. Does the introduction of a social catalyst coincide with Webster's definition of community? If a community-based organization is formed entirely through the work of a catalyst does this imply that the participation of many individuals in the community was coerced? Do social catalysts take the "voluntary" out of "voluntary participation"? We shall see. □

## SOURCES

Banerjee, A. and H. Mishra. 1995. Transfer of Productive Forests to Local People: An Alternative Paradigm for Forest Management. In: D'Silva, E.H. and D. Kariyawasam. (eds.) *Emerging Issues in Forest Management for Sustainable Development in South Asia: Proceedings of a South Asia Seminar*. Manila: Asian Development Bank. pp. 85-90.

Blair, H.W. and P.D. Olpadwala. 1988. *Forestry in Development Planning: Lessons from the Rural Experience*. Boulder, CO.: Westview Press. 171 pp.

de S. Wijesinghe, L.C.A. et al. 1993. *Biological Conservation in Sri Lanka: A National Status Report*. IUCN Sri Lanka Country Office. 100 pp.

Etzioni, A. 1993. *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 267 pp.

Fernandez, A.P. 1987. NGOs in South Asia: People's Participation and Partnership. In: Gordon Drabek, A (ed.). *Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs*. *World Development*. Volume 15. New York and Oxford: Pergamon Press. pp. 39-49.

Gadgil, M. and R. Guha. 1993. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 245 pp.

Poffenberger, M. 1995. The Resurgence of Community Forestry Management in the Jungle Mahals of West Bengal. In: Arnold, D. and R. Guha. (eds.) *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 336-369.

Sampson, R.N. and D. Hair. 1990. *Natural Resources for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. American Forestry Association. Island Press: Washington, D.C. 333 pp.

Strategy for the Preparation of a Biodiversity Action Plan for Sri Lanka. 1994. Environment Department. Ministry of Transport, Highways, Environment and Women's Affairs. 88 pp.

Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged. 1986. Springfield, MA.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

Wells, M.P. 1995. *Biodiversity Conservation and Local Peoples' Development Aspirations: New Priorities for the 1990s*. Overseas Development Institute. Rural Development Forestry Network Paper 18a. 24 pp.

Wilson, E.O. 1984. *Biophilia*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press. 157 pp.

## Current Fellows & Their Activities

**Hisham Ahmed.** Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

**Adam Albion.** A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Cynthia Caron.** With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

**William F. Foote.** Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

**Sharon Griffin.** A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-*

*Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

**Pramila Jayapal.** Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

**Cheng Li.** An Assistant Professor of Government at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY, Cheng Li is studying the growth of technocracy and its impact on the economy of the southeastern coast of China. He began his academic life by earning a Medical Degree from Jing An Medical School in Shanghai, but then did graduate work in Asian Studies and Political Science in the United States, with an M.A. from Berkeley in 1987 and a Ph.D. from Princeton in 1992. [EAST ASIA]

**Teresa C. Yates.** A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]

Author: Institute of Current World Affairs  
Title: ICWA Letters - South Asia  
ISSN: 1083-4257  
Imprint: Institute of Current World Affairs  
Hanover, NH  
Material Type: Serial  
Language: English  
Frequency: Monthly  
Other Regions: East Asia; Mideast/North Africa;  
Europe/Russia; SubSaharan Africa;  
The Americas

Chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise, Institute Fellows are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodical assessment of international events and issues.

## ICWA LETTERS

ISSN 1083-4257

*ICWA Letters* are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755.

The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers with indexes by subscription.

<b>Executive Director</b>	Peter Bird Martin
<b>Program Administrator</b>	Gary L. Hansen
<b>Letters Coordinator</b>	Ellen Kozak

Phone: (603) 643-5548  
Fax: (603) 643-9599  
E-Mail: ICWA@valley.net

© 1995 Institute of Current World Affairs, The Crane-Rogers Foundation.

The information contained in this publication may not be reproduced without the writer's permission.

## The Institute of Current World Affairs

4 WEST WHELOCK STREET  
HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03755

**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Lebanon, NH 03766  
Permit 130