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Title: Public-Private Partnerships in Forestry Management in Sri Lanka: Emergence, Influence and Legitimacy

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are considered as “win-win” solutions to both government and market failures, improving the sustainable forest management. PPPs in forestry sector in Sri Lanka are seen as filling a regulatory gap resulting from the attempt of gradual withdrawal of government from the management of forest resources. My study is based on a review literature and documents, complemented with observations and interviews with participants and stakeholders of forestry projects, and discuss the PPPs in terms of emergence, influence and legitimacy. The national forest policy emphasized the great need for sustainable management of forest resources with the involvement of local communities. Afforestation, conservation and protection are the main forestry operations and pronounced components of the emerged community-public partnerships. The national forest policy strengthened the partnerships in terms of donor–recipient and public–private with local people, rural communities and other stakeholders. Establishment of timber and fuel-wood plantations, and agro-forestry woodlots have been implemented through these partnerships. The Eco-tourism Development Strategy has been given special emphasis, through partnerships between the government agencies, private sector and communities. Under a special reforestation scheme, private sector involves in forestry as a business through sustainable agro-forestry. These programs have identified risk mitigation as an integral part of the public–community partnership planning process. The partnership for establishment of timber and fuel-wood plantations and agro-forestry woodlots are based on private interests. Investments of private sector in forest management are committed to enhance inflow of foreign exchange earnings through the export of value added forest products. The Forest Ordinance has empowered Forest Department which is responsible for the management, protection and the development of forest resources. PPPs are far less frequent in rule-setting and implementation of timber and fuel-wood plantations and agro-forestry woodlots. Communities are not adequately recognized as stakeholders by the government agencies and as a partner in privately-run ecotourism businesses. Public perception toward private-sector engagement in management of forest resources is raising serious concerns about conflict of interest. Although the forest policies are in line with commitments promoting public-private partnerships in managing forest resources, the government needs serious efforts to engage with sustainable development.