

Establishment of the first protected area system for wild rice relatives in Sri Lanka: Best practices, tools and lessons learnt

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Wild Rice Relatives have shown significant importance among more than 400 Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) found in Sri Lanka due to its potential of improving the cultivated rice varieties and other associated economic values. The legally designated Environment Protection Area for Wild Rice Relatives in North Western Province of Sri Lanka marks the new step of mainstreaming conservation and protection of CWR into nationally designated protected area system. In situ conservation of CWR has not yet been integrated systematically to the national Protected Area (PA) System of Sri Lanka that focuses on conservation of wild flora and fauna and their habitats. As such, CWRs will be considered unless otherwise located in the PA system. However, given the value of importance designation of PAs for CWRs was highly significant and timely important.

This paper discusses important steps, best practices and lessons learnt, experienced during the gazetting process of the first protection area for wild rice relatives in Sri Lanka. The process comprised of stakeholder consultations, participatory approaches, public private partnerships, eco-geographic surveys, biodiversity assessments, probability mapping, climate modeling, and valuation of CWR genetic resources, choice experiments, institutional-legal-policy reforms and management plans.

Keywords: climate modeling, crop wild relatives, economic valuation, food security, protected areas, protected area governance