

**Socio-Economic and the Environmental Impacts of Developing a
Hydropower Plant in Kithulgala Adventure Tour Site
(with special reference to adventure activity operators)**

M.P.M.V.R Samaranayaka*, A.K.A Damunupola and P.H.T Kumara

Department of Public Administration, Uva Wellassa University, Badulla, Sri Lanka

Kithulgala is considered as a premier adventure tourism destination in Sri Lanka due to the White Water Rafting Industry. There are 30 adventure activity operators along the Kelani river who run by typical lifestyle entrepreneurs dedicating considerable time, talent and capital resources to develop the rafting industry. Moreover, 1500 families indirectly gets benefits through job opportunities and the spin-off industries. It is estimated that the tourism industry in Kithulgala generate US \$17.5 million per annum directly for the local economy. However, development of the hydropower plant in Kelani River threatens to destroy the rapids and it negatively effects on rafting. There is hardly any attention given to conduct empirical studies on adventure activity operators in Kithulgala based on the power plant. The qualitative research was conducted through structured interviews, using 15 adventure activity operators in Kithulgala area. Data was collected through convenient sampling by recording the personal interviews, to assess the current situation, economic, social and environmental impacts and to assess their perspective regarding the implementation of the power plant. Thematic analysis method adopted to analyze the transcribed qualitative data. The findings of this study indicates that, the building of the power plant has led to reduce the water level, destroy the rapids of the river, lose the main source of income generation of rafting operators and the villagers, displace the population, damage the houses, environmental pollution and to degenerate the Kithulgala tourist destination. The study suggests, the government should pay more attention on releasing water during the day time, or construct mini hydropower plant below the existing darn that generates 10-12 MW, open up a new track which has 3-4 natural rapids to protect the Kithulgala adventure tourism destination.

Keywords: Adventure tourism, Hydropower plant, Lifestyle entrepreneur, White water rafting