

Public Perception and Management Implications of Invasive Flora in Vavuniya District, Northern Sri Lanka

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Invasive alien species (IAS) due to their competitiveness is threatening the existence of native species in diverse ecosystems world over. The objective of this study is to determine distribution of invasive flora, assess the intensity of distribution, public perception and implications regarding the management of invasive flora in all Grama Niladari Divisions of Vavuniya district. Sampling sites were selected based on the intensity of IAS distribution. Semi structured questionnaire survey was conducted for the total of 120 respondents to measure the level of awareness and willingness towards the management of invasive flora. Based on reconnaissance Survey *Parthenium hysterophorus*, *Lantana camara*, *Muntingia calabura*, *Leucaena leucocephala*, *Typha angustifolia*, *Salvinia molesta*, *Panicum maximum* and *Eichhornia crassipes* were the most abundant invasive flora distributed over the study area. According to the questionnaire survey 69 % of respondents were recorded with the awareness of invasive flora and remaining respondents were without awareness on invasive flora. Though respondents were lacking with knowledge on ecological risks of invasive flora they make use of invasive flora for many ways (shade cattle feed, firewood, etc.). *Lantana camara* (72%) and *Parthenium hysterophorus* (46%) were frequently recorded as weeds closer to human settlements and in agricultural lands. *Eichhornia crassipes* (34%) interferes in fishing activities in inland water bodies whereas rest of invasive flora was without interference to their activities. Hence the research revealed that even though the study area had a considerable distribution of invasive flora, communities lacked awareness on the ecological impacts. Therefore it necessitates the community awareness programs on invasive flora and their ecological risks as the successful management initiative and thereby betterment of ecosystems health by enhancement of the abundance of native plant species diversity.

Keywords: Invasive alien species, Perception, Implications, Ecosystem health