



The Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society and the Community Development Centre are to receive the prestigious Equator Prize 2008, awarded by the United Nations Development Programme, for their outstanding contribution to community based initiatives. The two Sri Lankan organisations will now be ranked among the 25 most successful community based endeavours worldwide, bringing much fame to our motherland as well

By Nimashi Amaleeta

Two Sri Lankan non-governmental organisations are to receive the prestigious Equator Prize 2008 awarded by the United Nations Development Programme for their outstanding contribution to community based initiatives. The Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) and the Community Development Centre (CDC) have been chosen by the UNDP's Equator Initiative's Technical Advisory Committee as two of the 25 outstanding winners of the Equator Prize 2008.

The Equator Prize is an international award that honours community based projects that represent outstanding efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Accordingly, the two Sri Lankan organisations will now be considered as two among the 25 most successful community based endeavours worldwide, bringing much fame to our motherland.

In their award notification the UNDP states, "The level of competition for the prize was extremely high and the depth of nominations received was truly impressive. Among this year's remarkable entries, you provided us with a strong demonstration of the inventiveness of community based work currently being undertaken in the tropics, often against tremendous odds. By receiving an Equator Prize, you now join an increasingly influential avant-garde of 78 previous Equator Prize winners that stand at the forefront of translating local action into global sustainable development." According to Eileen de Ravin, the Head of the Equator Initiative of the UNDP, the award winners will now become an essential part of a core global network of Equator Prize winners whose work will be enhanced and promoted by the UNDP's Equator Initiative.

Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society

The Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society receives the award for their outstanding and pioneering contributions to the conservation of elephants and mitigation of human-elephant conflict through the active participation of village communities. The SLWCS works closely with the Department of Wildlife Conservation, the Mahaweli Authority and many other government bodies. The Society is renowned for its efforts to mitigate human-elephant conflicts, particularly in villages bordering the



Wasgomuwa



They do Lanka proud!



Kegalle

Wasgomuwa and Lahugala National Parks. The Society empowers village communities, and proceeds under the slogan "Saving Elephants by Helping People."

The SLWCS states that receiving an Equator Prize reflects the tremendous support the Society has received from organisations such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Elephant Foundation, Born Free Foundation and several other organisations over the years. The Society also appreciates the support of the many foreign volunteers who have supported the work of the Society through its paying volunteer programme. All these organisations share a similar vision as the Society, which is to develop a new paradigm for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation, and for them it has been a great experience working with them all. The Society has received felicitations from the First Secretary of the Canadian High Commission and the Asian Elephant Con-

servation Fund Programme officer of the US Fish and Wildlife Service for being selected to receive an Equator Prize.

Community Development Centre

The Community Development Centre receives the award for its outstanding contribution to the conservation of biodiversity of indigenous roots and tubers and its popularisation, through active participation. The Community Development Centre mainly works in rural areas of Kegalle.

The Community Development Centre states that receiving the award is an honour for them for they have proved to the world that, no matter how small and inconspicuous an organisation can be, it can still revolutionise and mesmerise the world, as far as their intentions are genuine. The Centre works with some of the most destitute and uneducated farmer families in Kegalle and has now come to the fore empowering women and youth, organising communities into well structured bodies and generating livelihoods.

The Community Development Centre is also thankful for the many local organisations that had, and continue to be part and parcel throughout the course.

Precedence

This, however, is not the first time Sri Lanka won the Equator Prize of the United Nations Programme. Prior to this, the Sri Lankan Organisation Committee for People's Rights was awarded the Equator Prize 2004 for their outstanding contribution to the conservation and diversification of rush and reed plants through active public participation.

Ravi Corea, the founder President and CEO of the SLWCS and Dhama-yanthi Godamulla, the founder President and Chairman of the Community Development Centre will receive the award in Barcelona, Spain on behalf of their organisations at an award ceremony that is to be held during the IUCN World Conservation Congress taking place in Barcelona, Spain from October 6-10th. This is the first time in Lankan history that two organisations are to be awarded simultaneously.

Hats off to them, they have made Lanka proud!



Yams to the rescue

Food security is a much hyped about topic at present. It is widely discussed, globally as well as locally.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), food security will be achieved only when "all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Food security has three main components in it; availability of food, access to food and utilisation of food.

There is an interesting little project running in Aranayaka of Kegalle, which is significantly contributing to establishing food security within the region. The project itself is concerned about the conservation of biodiversity through the popularisation of indigenous roots and tubers (popularly known as yams). It commenced in 2001, but as it progressed and when all the talk about food security started flowing into mainstream discussions, the project discovered that it too contributed significantly towards achieving food security within the nation. Now therefore, apart from the primary goal of conserving and popularising indigenous yams, the project secondarily attempts to establish itself as a role model of establishing food security.

So far, the project has discovered over 60 varieties of indigenous yams in the region. These varieties are grown in home-gardens of villagers. The produce of yams is available all year around and is mainly consumed locally. The produce is also exchanged or traded within the district at local fares while the surplus is exported to other regions of the country as well. The community therefore has ample access to food all the year around.

Yams have long been in use as a staple food item. Apart from this, enthusiastic housewives have diversified into other areas, making a variety of food items designed on traditional recipes. These include cakes and bread made of yam flour as well as many other sweetmeats and short eats. Generally, the yams are of high nutritional value. They are also known to harbour medicinal properties, which are presently under investigation.

In essence, the project has greatly contributed to establish food security within the region, by endowing food availability, enabling food access and promoting food utilisation.

The project, titled Biodiversity Conservation of Indigenous Roots and Tubers, is executed in the Aranayaka Divisional Secretary Division of Kegalle District. It received grants from the United Nations Development Programme under the Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF/SGP) and is implemented through the Community Development Centre (CDC).

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Dodol



Murukku



Weli Thalapa

