

## **Public Perception on Uma Oya Multipurpose Project: A Sociological Study**

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Uma Oya multipurpose water project is one of the biggest water projects in Sri Lanka which was expected to fulfill the water and development requirements in Hambantota district. Socio-environmental vulnerabilities and risks occurred while constructing underwater tunnels and dams of the project and the public movement named “People’s front against Uma Oya multi destructive water project” was established conjointly to address these issues. The major aim of the study was to analyse the Socio-economic and Political factors which influenced the public movement and to identify the exact nature of the movement in Sri Lankan context. The study was conducted in Heel Oya-Egodagama GN division in Bandarawela which was the highly affected area of the project. Out of 408 households, 40 households were selected by using purposive sampling technique and structured questionnaires and deep interviews were used on the basis of social, political and economic factors to collect secondary data methodically. The results revealed that the common incident of arising public protest against the project was challenging the livelihood eco-systems based on water resources of the area. Due to the water project, 51 household wells and ‘Heel Oya’ which was the main water stream of the area dried up and many farmers were reluctant to engage in their day to day farming activities due to lack of sufficient water and they were thinking to move for new livelihood activities. The demand for lands of the area were dramatically decreased and several water related cultural activities were challenged and some social issues such as water conflicts, marriage issues and migration for several towns can be highly seen due to the project. The commitment of grass root level leftist politicians and religious leaders and their political patronage has become the key factor to create common resistance towards the water project. The public movement against Uma Oya Multipurpose water project is a recent past experience of the context of Sri Lankan environmental movements which can be placed under the theme of livelihood environmentalism.

**Key words:** *Uma Oya, Public movement, Water project, Livelihood, Environmentalism*