ejustice
පරිසර යුක්තිය

Justice for All

CEJ Friends of the Earth Sri Lanka

QUARTERLY BULLETIN BY CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE | JUNE 2019 | VOL 1 | ISSUE 2

Kelanitissa Power Station over Colombo Traffic

IN THIS ISSUE

2 Editorial- Right to Environmental Information

4 ADB safeguard violations in the Upper Elahara Canal Project

5 The Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact Land Grant to Sri Lanka

#WorldEnvironmentDay2019

Beat Air Pollution

HOW SAFE IS AIR WE BREATH IN SRI LANKA?

Theme for the World Environment Day 2018 was "Beat Plastic Pollution". Now we are moving to another theme in 2019 which is "Beat Air Pollution". Its not a bad idea to remind people that we are in multiple environmental crisis.

Global heating due to burning of fossil fuel such as coal and gasoline is yet an unbeatable task. The climate catastrophe is already rioting against the human population but all life forms are in a real mess due to this man made crisis.

Meanwhile indoor pollution is equally dangerous to human population expecially for the poor.

According to the United Nations, approximately 7 million people worldwide die prematurely each year from air pollution, with about 4 million of these deaths occurring in Asia-Pacific. Air pollution costs the global economy $5 trillion every year in welfare costs. Further, ground-level ozone pollution is expected to reduce staple crop yields by 26 per cent by 2030.

World Health Organisation (WHO) claims that 92% of the people in the World do not breathe clean air and around 8 million deaths annually can be attributed to air pollution with 4.3 million deaths from indoor air pollution and 3.7 million deaths from outdoor air pollution. WHO recognizes that air pollution is a critical risk factor for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), causing an estimated one-quarter (24%) of all adult deaths from heart disease, 25% from stroke, 43% from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and 29% from lung cancer.

In Sri Lanka, over 45% of the admissions of children to hospitals are due to air pollution. It has also been estimated that 7,792 people died from air pollution-related disease and the rate is increasing each year. The top illness caused by air pollution is Ischemic heart disease.

Outdoor Air Pollution

In 2010, Evaluation and Research Unit, National Institute of Health Sciences, Ministry of Health, Kalutara, Sri Lanka concluded that "air pollution may be considered a neglected public health problem in Sri Lanka. (Y L Nandasena et. al, 2010) The Central Environmental Authority (CEA) has

ejustice
පරිසර යුක්තිය

JUNE 2019 | VOL 1 | ISSUE 2

Editorial Team

Hemantha Withanage
Dilena Pathragoda
Ranjan Karunanyake
Indika Rajapaksha
Janaka Withanage
Madushani Sendanayake
Waruni Bamunusinghe

Website: www.ejustice.lk

Centre for Environmental Justice is a public interest environmental organisation established in 2004. CEJ promotes good governance, environmental justice and environmental democracy. CEJ engage environmental litigation and environmental advocacy though law and science. CEJ also works on chemical governance, Forests governance, climate change, international environmental negotiations, single use plastics,genetically modified foods and supports community environmental struggles. CEJ is a registered organisation under the Companies act of 2007.

Vision: "Justice for all"

Mission: Protect equal environmental rights and empower communities to enhance environmental sustainability, mediate environmental conflict and advocate for environmental law enforcement and policy measures.

Centre for Environmental Justice
20A ,Kuruppu Road
Colombo 08, Sri Lanka
Tel: +94112683282
email: info@ejustice.lk
website: www.ejustice.lk

EDITORIAL

Right to environmental information

Every citizen makes dozens of decisions every day on many things related to their life, families, communities and perhaps much broader. Right to information is fundamental in such decision making. In this 21st century such information should have readily available in different formats. In fact there are plenty of information available and unfortunately they are not relevant or not from trusted sources. Compare to the western world southern people have very little information relevant to most of their critical decisions.

Environmental Information is one of the critical set of information required for daily decisions. The information on the quality of basic needs such as air, water, sanitation, food are very important for everyone but not readily available. Further, information and data on soil, land, natural resources, weather, climate are very much lacking in Sri Lanka. We also lack health related information.

Development decisions which includes whether infrastructure projects have positive or negative impacts are another set of environmental information. We also need environmental information such as biodiversity. Most of these information is not publicly available. Either such information is not gathered or they may not be available in public disclosure formats.

Sri Lanka's Right to information(RTI) Act, No 12 of 2016 is a new law brought in line with the information disclosure. RTI Act comes into effect by bringing with it a promise of open government, citizens' active participation in governance, and accountability to the people of the country. This law has been largely used for getting information on education, Public administration, health, finance and development matters. There is not much requests related to the environmental information.

Centre for Environmental Justice has been trying to obtain some environmental information and development related decisions such as EIA approvals, Environmental Protection Licence in Sri Lanka since this law has been effective.

It was very positive to obtain EIA approvals from the CEA. We have received EIA approvals on Yan Oya, Moragahakanda, Uma Oya, etc.

However, Ministry of Megapolis refused to release the Agreement signed between Sri Lanka and the Chinese government on the Colombo Port City Development project. They cited that the Chinese government did not gave authority to divulge the agreement. Meanwhile, Ministry of Health also failed to provide information on number of Genetically modified foods that have been registered or available in the country.

Environmental Impact Assessment process is the only mandatory procedure to provide environmental information for decision making. However, this has become a badly managed process in Sri Lanka. EIAs have lost its credibility as a truthful report compared to the beginning of the process in 1993. One of the major impediment was lack of baseline data across the country. Similarly EPL process has also lost its credibility as an effective regulatory tool as well as a tool for generating sufficient environmental information for decision making.

People still lack interest to obtain environmental information although the necessary regulations are available. On the other hand environmental agencies lack necessary information to make this environmental decisions and to build an informed society. The right to environmental information wil continue to be a challenge unless the concerned citizens get engage in the right manner.

Editorial team

data upto 2012, however, National Building Research Organisation (NBRO) measure the ambient air quality at Colombo, Gampaha, Horana, Kaluthara, Rathnapura, Kandy, Kurunegala and Anuradhapura areas since 2012 with the support of the Vehicle Emission Testing (VET)Trust Fund of the Registrar of Motor Vehicles. Although there are some criticisms, VET programme is responsible for cleaning urban air in Sri Lanka.

When lawyer and environmental activist Lalanath De Silva filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court stating that the Minister of Environmental Affairs had not taken steps to control the air pollution in Colombo and that he and his family were deprived of the basic right to breathe clean air, the Supreme Court ordered that the Minister bring in these regulations to effect by June 2000. Although the regulations were gazetted, it was not effective until 2008 due to the delay by corrupt politicians.

However, increased of number of vehicles on the streets, traffic congestions, increased construction sites in the urban centres, removal of trees and public green areas have negatively contributed the air quality of cities in Sri Lanka. Many government vehicles and public busses still do not follow the emission regulations. According to statistics compiled by Prof. Amal Kumarage of the Moratuwa University (2017), on an average, 300,000 vehicles enter the Colombo city daily. There are 7.24 million vehicles in Sri Lanka out of which 4.04 million are motorcycles with 1.14 million three wheelers and 600,000 vehicles are registered every year. The lack of a proper high quality public transport system has resulted in over 50% of the working population to use private vehicles to commute to work. Average speed for vehicles in Colombo was 22 km/hour in 2012 while it is now 17 km/hour. Vehicles travelling in traffic jams produce more fine particles in the form of soot which adversely affects our health.(Prof O.A. Illeperuma, The Island 2018)

Diesel as a Carcinogen

After three decades of epidemiologic research, diesel exhaust was classified as a carcinogen in humans by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in 2012 based on evidence of its carcinogenicity to the lung. It is also a known fact that low quality Diesel has high sulphur levels. The current air pollution level around Sri Lanka has an annual average of 22 µg/m3 of PM2.5 particles which is 2.2 times the WHO safe level. Currently The main source of ambient air pollution in Sri Lanka is vehicular emissions, which in Colombo contributes to over 60% of total emissions.

Indoor Air Pollution

Indoor air pollution is caused by congested houses, cooking with fire woods and even with the use of chemicals indoors, kerosene lamps, burning mosquito coils and incense sticks etc. About 4.3 million people worldwide annually die from such indoor air pollution. Some indoor pollutants such as chemicals, mosquito coils and Incense sticks release carcinogenic chemicals. While fossil based electricity generation releases Green house gases lack of electricity at houses also result indoor air pollution either by burning fire woods for cooking or burning kerosene lamps.

Climate Crisis

Climate crisis itself is a result of unabated air pollution. Study from the Duke University claims that as many as 153 million deaths linked to air pollution worldwide this century could be prevented if governments speed up timetables for reducing fossil fuel emissions to keep below 1.5 C temperature increase.

Lack of Public Awareness

The public awareness is lagging on the danger of air pollution. People continue to pollute air at all levels and also die due to this lack of awareness.

World Environment Day 2019 is an another moment to call governments, industries, communities, and individuals to come together to explore renewable energy and green technologies, and improve air quality in cities and regions across the world. (END)

ADB Safeguard violations of the UPPER ELAHARA CANAL PROJECT

Hemantha Withanage (B.Sc)

Asian Development Bank agrees that the ADB funded Mahaweli Water Security Investment Program which involves Upper Elahera Canal Project (UECP) had violated its Safeguard policy 2009. However, ADB has yet to accept that this project also has issues on the basis of conflict of interest.

The UECP comprises two components. The first component is the construction of the Kalu Ganga-Moragahakanda Transfer Canal (including two tunnels) that will transfer water between the Kalu Ganga and Moragahakanda reservoirs. The second component is the construction of the Upper Elahera Canal that connects the Moragahakanda reservoir to the existing reservoirs Huruluwewa, Manankattiya, Eruwewa and Mahakanadarawa (including in total 28 km of tunnels).

In late 2018 the project was involved in clearing the access road to the tunnel entrance. Construction of 1.7 km access road inside Beligama forest which is part of the Knuckles conservation forest was already identified component at the EIA and

ADB decision making stage. However the construction company Sinohydro Corporation Ltd involves clearing another 1 km through the conserved forest without prior approval of the Forest Department and the Central Environmental Authority. This is undoubtedly an environmental safeguards violations of the ADB.

Although the environmental impact have been identified for the initial 1.7 km section, the construction company did not follow the conditions set during the project approval. The company has dump debris and soil to the river side without respecting the environmental safeguards. Therefore, the Sinohydro Corporation Ltd., has violated the Fauna and Flora Protection ordinance, Forest Ordinance No 16 of 1907 (amended) and the National Environmental Act No 47 of 1980(amended).

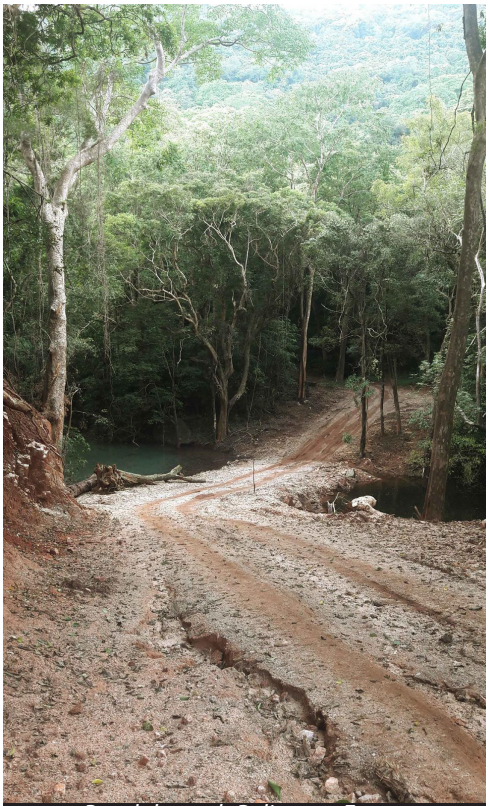
ADB Safeguard policy statement -June 2009 state that;

"In areas of natural habitat, the project will not significantly convert or degrade such habitat, unless the following conditions are met: (i) No alternatives are available. (ii) A comprehensive analysis demonstrates that the overall benefits from the project will substantially outweigh the project costs, including environmental costs. (iii) Any conversion or degradation is appropriately mitigated."(Section 26)

When the project involves activities in a critical habitat, the borrower/ client will retain qualified and experienced external experts to assist in conducting the assessment.(Section 29)

According to the Policy

"In circumstances where some project activities are located within a legally protected area, in addition to the requirement specified in para. 28, the borrower/client will meet the following requirements: (i) Act in a manner consistent with defined protected area management plans.



Road through Beligama Forest
Source: Jayantha Wijesinghe

(ii) Consult protected area sponsors and managers, local communities, and other key stakeholders on the proposed project. (iii) Implement additional programs, as appropriate, to promote and enhance the conservation aims of the protected area."(Section 30)

The Safeguard policy statement -June 2009 state "Where unanticipated environmental impacts become apparent during project implementation, the borrower/ client will update the environmental assessment and EMP or prepare a new environmental assessment and EMP to assess the potential impacts, evaluate the alternatives, and outline mitigation measures and resources to address those impacts".(section 23)

Conflict of Interest

Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment has a conflict of interest over this project. The Project implementing agency Mahaweli Water Security Investment Programme and the two regulatory authorities i.e. Forest Department and the Central Environmental Authority also comes under the same Ministry.

The Secretary to the Ministry Mahaweli Development and Environment oversight all the agencies and therefore the project governance is not done in a proper manner.

The Secretary initially requested the Synohydro corporations to plant 300 trees to compensate the destruction however, IUCN was requested to develop a report. This happens only when environmentalist Mr. Jayantha Wijesinghe and CEJ start raising this issue in the local media and with the ADB.

The Forest Department or the CEA did not act against the violation due to the conflict of interest. Such obstruction of justice and interference in the duties of agencies tasked with detecting, investigating, and prosecuting illicit behaviour which has identified as a possible corrupt practices in the ADB Anticorruption Policy should not have happen in this case.

Ideally the project should have been implemented by a different agency without creating this conflict of interest. Still it is the role of the Asian Development Bank to ensure proper governance and remove barriers.

Although the ADB expect civil society to act as watchdogs, this experience shows that it is not practical for civil society to monitor when some projects are complicated and people don't have access to projects sites. On the other hand there is no civil society representation to the Project steering committee and the transparency of such project activities are doubtful.

Some contractors are not trained to follow safeguards. The problems also exists when the contractors don't understand the requirements specially due to the language barrier.

The ADB funded projects now should have inhouse safeguard officers. It is unfortunate that they did not stop the damage. Therefore its the duty of the CEA and the Forest Department to take legal action.(END)

THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION COMPACT LAND GRANT TO SRI LANKA:

Challenge of the hour is Innovative Green Planning

Prof. Nimal Gunathilake

It was recently reported that the Board of Directors of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) of USA has approved a five-year, $480 million Compact grant to the Government of Sri Lanka on 25th April 2019. This is aimed at reducing poverty through economic growth in Sri Lanka (Sunday Observer, 28 April 2019). The MCC Sri Lanka Compact is expected to be signed in the near future, pending congressional notification, according to a MCC press release.

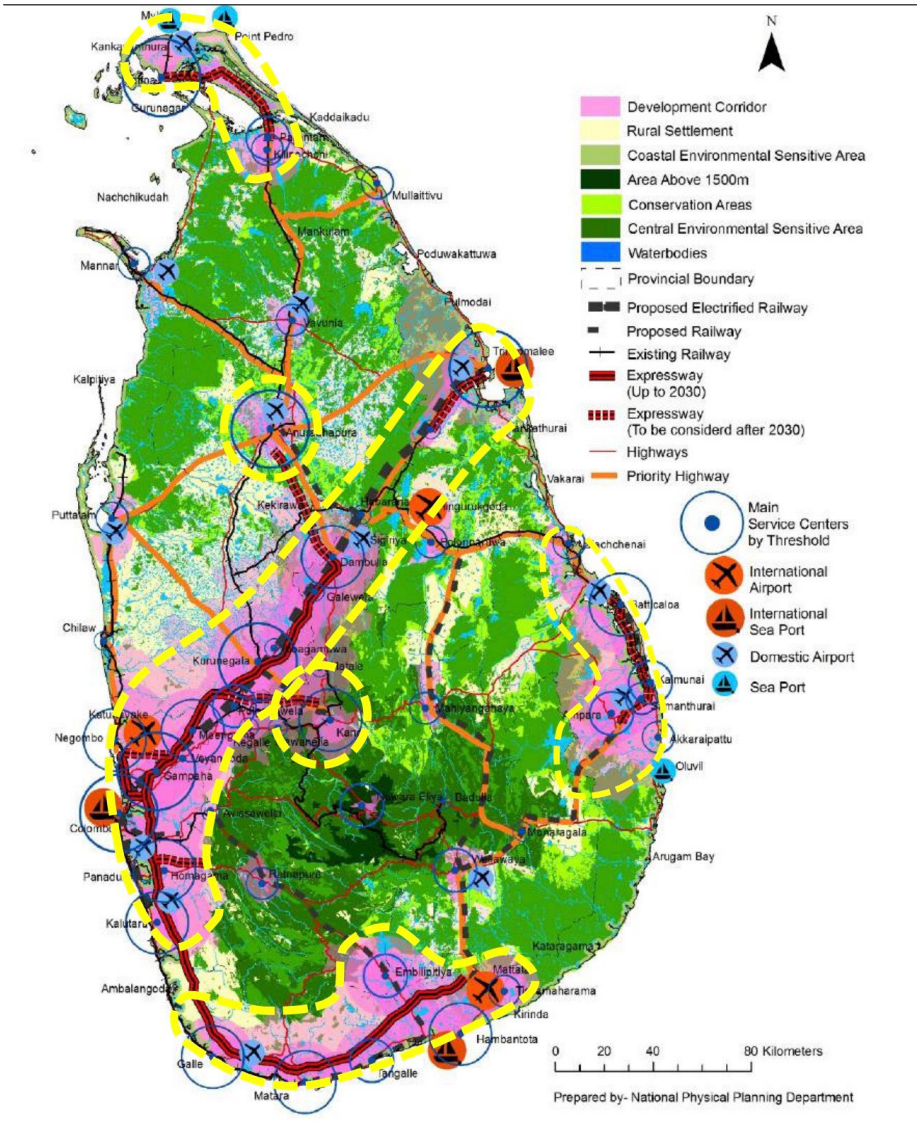
In order to provide the background information on the development of this grant process to the readers of this article, I have depended heavily on the following MCC Sri Lanka website *(https://www.mcc.gov/where-we-work/program/sri-lanka-compact)* and the US Embassy press releases available on the web *(https://lk.usembassy.gov/millennium-challenge-corporation-official-visits-sri-lanka-to-continue-progress-on-compact-development/, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_19A/Apr26_1556286277CH.php)* etc.

The MCC is a U.S. Government corporation chaired by the secretary of state and acclaimed to be an innovative foreign assistance agency of the United States Government, established in 2004 that has already signed similar Compacts with 29 countries around the world. The US Congress funds the Millennium Challenge Account and MCC administers its resources.

The Compact to be signed with Sri Lanka shortly, seeks to assist the Sri Lanka Government in addressing two of the country's binding constraints to economic growth: (1) inadequate transport logistics infrastructure and planning; and (2) lack of access to land for a) agriculture, b) the services sector, and c) industrial investors.

Consequently, the Compact for Sri Lanka has come up with two projects for funding: i) a Transport Project and ii) a Land Project. These projects have been formulated after completing a series of feasibility studies that were needed to develop a high-quality, evidence-based and sustainable program on 'constraints – to - growth analysis' and preparing a 'country scorecard' assessing the annual performance of 20 parameters in three policy categories: i) Ruling Justly, ii) Investing in People (including natural resource protection receiving high marks for Sri Lanka), and iii) Encouraging Economic Freedom. These studies were carried out by the Sri Lanka Government with MCC's assistance since December 2016 and completed in September 20, 2017 in order to identify the most binding constraints that prevent private-sector led growth in Sri Lanka.

The Transport Project aims to (i) increase the relative efficiency and capacity of the road network and bus system in the Colombo Metropolitan Region and to (ii) reduce the cost of transporting passengers and goods between the central region of the country and ports and markets in the rest of the country. This transport component of the proposed Compact would improve road networks and the bus system in the Colombo Metropolitan Region, and improve road connectivity between



	Activity	Cost
1	Parcel Fabric Map and State Land Inventory Activity	$23.4
2	Deeds Registry Improvement Activity	$11.4
3	Land Valuation System Improvement Activity	$ 6.5
4	Land Grants Registration and Deed Conversion Activity	$19.3
5	Land Policy and Legal Governance Improvement Activity	$ 6.7
	Subtotal	**$ 67.3**

the central region and ports and markets in the Western Province. The Compact would upgrade more than 300 kilometers of urban and interprovincial roads.

The Land Project:

Under the Land Project, which is the main focus of this article, the Compact is expected to improve land administration, and strengthen land rights and tenure security. The goal of the Land Project is said to be to increase the availability of information on private land and underutilized state lands or all land in Sri Lanka to which the Government is lawfully entitled or which may be disposed of by the Government ("State Lands") in order to increase land market activity (A Land Bank). The Land Project would then be increasing tenure security and tradability of land for smallholders, women, and firms through policy and legal reforms.
One of the key binding constraints to economic growth identified with respect to land availability is apparently the difficulty of the private sector in accessing state-owned land for commercial purposes. As such, the goal of the Land Project is to increase the availability of information on private land and underutilized state lands or all land in Sri Lanka to which the Government is lawfully entitled or which may be disposed of by the Government ('State Lands') in order to increase land market activity.

The Land Project would expect to increase tenure security and tradability of land for smallholders, women, and firms through policy and legal reforms. Improvement of land administration processes is expected to be done in 08 districts, improving the land valuation system, upgrading 10 land registries and preparing what is known as 'Parcel Fabric Maps of all state and private land' to facilitate the activities of the Survey Department.

The Compact budget allocation given for the Land Project in the following document *(http://www.colombopage.com/archive_19A/Apr26_1556286277CH.php)* is summarized in the table above.

In addition to the above details, I was unable to find further information on each of the activities for which funds have been allocated as given in the Compact budget allocation.

National Physical Plan 2018-2050

Parallel to this MCC project, a revised National Physical Planning Policy for Sri Lanka and the plan 2018-2050 has been prepared by the National Physical Planning Department (NPPD) under the Megapolis and Western Development Ministry in consultation with various stakeholders, over a period of one and half years. It aims to promote and regulate the integrated planning of economic, social, physical and environmental aspects of land and territorial waters of Sri Lanka.

The National Physical Plan prepared for 2011-2030, which was gazetted in 2011 is now considered as outdated, apparently because several key national and international developments have taken place since then. The new plan for 2018-2050 has been approved by the National Physical Planning Council (NPPA) and the National Economic Council (NEC) of Sri Lanka and is expected to be gazetted shortly (Daily News: Thursday, February 28, 2019).

The new plan for 2018-2050 has proposed to develop Colombo-Trincomalee as the main economic corridor along with three other sub-corridors, while Anuradhapura and Kandy are also to be developed separately as metropolitan areas.
The key component of the plan is the proposed Colombo-Trincomalee economic corridor, which consists of one-third of the country's population. This corridor encompasses the Colombo Megapolis and the Metro Regions of Negombo, Kurunegala, Dambulla and Trincomalee.

According to the proposed NPP 2018-2050, the future development initiatives in the corridor, such as industrial estates, cultural development zones, tourism zones, urban service centers will be concentrated in the above mentioned six major population centers (metro regions) in the corridor. The main purpose of infrastructure development is apparently to attract foreign and local investments to these areas, for individual developments. More details on this plan are expected to be made available in the near future through a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank.

From information available in the public domain so far on the two proposed development projects referred to above, it is likely that the six metro regions (viz. Colombo Megapolis and the Metro Regions of Gampaha, Negombo, Kurunegala, Dambulla and Trincomalee) identified by the National Physical Plan 2018-2050 would overlap, at least partially, with the eight districts identified by the MCC grant for improvement of land administration in them, initially over a period of five years.

Environmental and socio-cultural concerns

The preparation of a new National Physical Plan prioritizing the development of the proposed economic corridor from Colombo to Trincomalee, and succeeding in securing an outright grant to economically develop eight districts associated with this corridor is much appreciated. Additionally, in these early stages of planning, one has to consider weather adequate provisions have been made in the proposed projects as land related socio-cultural and environmental safeguards.

Some of the proposed areas of economic development selected for these projects are replete with proven examples of most sustainable agro-ecological heritage systems such as the cascade systems which have gone in to disuse due to a number of factors. However, it is indeed heartening to see that they are re-emerging as agro-ecological systems that are ideally suited for a densely populated small country like Sri Lanka. After all, much of Sri Lanka's agro-based economy is driven by small-holders (e.g. tea, rubber,

coconut, spices, vegetables and rice paddy). It is also encouraging and reassuring that these Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS of FAO) are being revived at present in some districts like Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura.

From the limited information available in the public domain as yet on this MCC Land Compact, it appears to be a mega-project of the scale of the Mahaweli Development Project of the 1970s. This being so, we earnestly hope that a sound and comprehensive strategic environmental impact assessment (SEA) as well as a robust socio-cultural impact assessment under land use planning process would be carried out during this early planning stage and be made available to public in advance. These assessments could benefit from a plethora of lessons learnt on social, cultural, environmental, and economic and health issues emerging from the Mahaweli Development Project which is now nearing 50 years since its inception with the construction of the Polgolla barrage and its associated infrastructure development projects.

On the environmental front, many lessons can be learnt from the implementation of the environmental impact assessment carried out by the USAID contracted TAMS team especially on human-animal conflicts in the face of human settlements and agro-industrial development under the Mahaweli Development Program. Likewise, the more recent development projects like the Moraghakanda-Kaluganga multi-purpose development project also could shed more light on the corrective measures already taken in mitigating the above issues.

Land Valuation System Improvement Activity

One of the major activities proposed under the MCC Land Grant is the land valuation system improvement (land value is the value of a piece of property including both the value of the land itself as well as any improvements that have been made to it) is a very important issue that comes up repeatedly alongside the socio-environmental impact assessments in land-use planning under various development projects.

At this point in time, it may be premature to address this issue without access to the context-specific details of the concept and the action plans with respect to this proposed land grant activity. Yet, it may still be worthwhile to look at the valuation of lands in a holistic manner including the all-important ecological services they render which are still being given the lowest priority in land-use planning in Sri Lanka.

This is because no economic value has been tagged to most of the ecological services such as regulation of climate, flash floods, soil erosion, provisioning of clean water, pollination services etc. nor have they been addressed adequately in the current Environmental Impact Assessment processes in Sri Lanka. I have addressed the issues pertaining to the valuation of ecosystem services with specific reference to forestry sector and national planning in Sri Lanka on several occasions *(file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/6255-22141-2-PB.pdf; file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/7937-27898-2-PB.pdf;)*.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP 2016-2022) for Sri Lanka too, has highlighted this lacuna. One of the key recommendation of NBSAP-Sri Lanka based on the framework of 'Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) for capturing ecosystems service values' is to mainstream economic valuation of ecosystem services and biodiversity in to national planning, implementation and decision-making by integrating biodiversity and ecosystems service values to national accounting systems – **Green Accounting.**

The NBSAP (2016-2022) further states that appropriate guidelines need to be developed in order to incorporate Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Values into regional/ national/ local level planning and plan implementation.

This is to be in compliance with the Aichi Biodiversity Target 2 which says '*By 2020, at the latest, biodiversity values have been integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes and are being incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.*'

Valuation of ecosystem services and biodiversity of different landscapes has been one of the most critical areas of study needed particularly at a time when large-scale economic development programs are being formulated in a piece-meal approach particularly in the Northern, North-Central, Eastern and North-western regions of Sri Lanka.

An inclusive assessment of the land value i.e. both the value of the land itself as well as any improvements (or the lack of it, leaving as wildlife corridors or watershed restoration areas, for example) that has been made to it with respect to ecosystem services need to be made before deciding on land conversion for large-scale agricultural or industrial development in these areas.

Some of the districts in which the MCC and the National Plan Corridor project ear-marked for development are located in areas where the Mahaweli Development Project influence had been in existence for well over several decades. Therefore, taking a stock of the current situation with respect to environmental, socio-cultural and economic parameters would be helpful as an initial bench mark for management of any avoidable risks. While socio-economic data and their analyses reports may be available over the years, inclusive environmental economic assessments of areas with competing interests, in my opinion, are woefully lacking in the whole of Sri Lanka.

However, there are excellent examples of this kind from our immediate neighbor, India which we could take a cue from. An economic valuation of tiger reserves and snow leopards in India: a value+ study conducted by the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal has shown that the Tiger reserves in India not only support more than half of the global tiger population and are cornerstones of biodiversity conservation, they also provide a wide range of economic, social and cultural benefits in the form of ecosystem services. *(www:iifm.ac.in./cesm/; https://conservewildcats.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/WildCats/papers/NTCA_Report2015.pdf; file:///D:/Ecosystem%20Services%20&%20their%20valuation/2019/Economic%20value%20of%20land%20-%20%20MCC/Economic-valuation-guidelines%20-%20Verma%20et%20al.pdf)*.

The Indian scientists looked at six tiger reserves and estimated that conserving them was equivalent of keeping a secure capital of USD 230 billion which they call 'stock benefits' of these tiger reserves. Through economic valuation of ecosystem services from six tiger reserves in India, these scientists demonstrated that enhanced investment in these tiger reserves is economically rational.

In a similar manner, the habitats of the flagship species of Sri Lanka – the elephant, established in the Mahaweli Development area based on a USAID-TAMS study in the 1980s, could be evaluated for their ecosystem services, as a component of the Land Valuation System Improvement Activity of the MCC project on lands.

Some sections of the proposed economic corridor seem to cross the paths of the ecological corridors established for facilitating elephant migration during the USAID-funded environmental component of the Mahaweli Project. Ignorance of such ecological values would influence the well-intended public policies in a negative way. It would also affect the decisions made on investments and funding allocation that may affect protection status of these keystone species with serious implications on human wellbeing. We are already experiencing increasing levels of human-elephant and other human-animal conflicts in these areas.

The MCC grant is said to be an innovative foreign assistance catalyst to promote an environment that supports equity and freedom for the Sri Lankan people. Concurrently, the Government of Sri Lanka maintains its commitment to democratic institutions, pursues sound economic policies, and invests in the welfare and health of its people. The operating model of the MCC grant reflects five principles two of which directly relevant to this article are given below:

- Sustainable prosperity and development require good governance, strong anti-corruption measures, sound economic policies, investments in health and education, and attention to issues such as gender equality and environmental protection,
- Recipient countries need to take ownership of the design and implementation of development programs to increase their chances of success.

My random thoughts on this MCC Land Project are given in good faith, as we in the recipient countries eventually need to take the ownership of the design and implementation of development programs to increase their chances of success.

In that context, perhaps a broader public dialogue on different aspects (socio-cultural, environmental, health and economic) of this land project, once the details of each component are made more widely available to the public, would be most appropriate. It would, no doubt, help in further refining the design and implementation of this program and thereby enhance its chances of success which is the main objective of this article.

After all, the need and the 'challenge' of the hour is **'innovative green planning'.** (END)

The author of this article is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Peradeniya and was a Charles Bullard Fellow in Forestry Research at Harvard University, USA. He could be contacted at savnimg@gmail.com.

World Environment Day 2019

Air pollution is a preventable problem. Actions to reduce air pollutants can have an almost immediate effect on air quality. Together, we can #BeatAirPollution

Beat Air Pollution | WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY | UN environment

#WorldEnvironmentDay

Source: UN Environment

Beat Air Pollution

People around the world take collective actions on June 5 every year to celebrate World Environment Day. "Air pollution", the theme for World Environment Day 2019, is a call to action to combat one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time. Chosen by this year's host, China, the theme of World Environment Day 2019 invites us all to consider how we can make changes in our everyday lives to reduce the amount of air pollution we produce, and thwart its contribution to global warming and its effects on our own health.

Centre for Environmental Justice appeal to all Sri Lankan Citizens to act together and reduce own air pollution footprint.