

State of the Environment



Sri Lanka



2001



NORAD
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NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR
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Sri Lanka : State of the Environment 2001



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UTVIKLINGSHJELP
NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 formulated an action plan, Agenda 21, a multifaceted process to address the full range of development and environmental issues involving participation of governments, international organizations and major groups in the quest for sustainable development

The publication of the Global Environmental Outlook series, GEO-1, followed by GEO-2000, the Millennium Report on the Environment, involved a participatory assessment process to review the state of the world's environment and to chart a new process for global environmental policy. The diversity and magnitude of environmental problems are outlined, with a call for more complete and precise analyses of the poorly understood linkages between human actions and environmental outcomes. Although the number of policy responses is growing, low priority continues to be afforded to the environment in national and regional planning. GEO-2000 stressed the need for the development of more comprehensive and long-term mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the effects of environmental policies on environmental quality; and for more integrated policy making and action-based programmes to serve the needs of the people.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is mandated to produce a Global State of the Environment Report in 2002 (GEO-3) for the 2002 Earth Summit i.e., Rio + 10, and this global assessment will be enriched by producing State of Environment (SoE) reports at the national, subregional and regional levels. In 1998, the UNEP Regional Resource Centre for Asia-Pacific (UNEP RRC.AP) collaborated with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to carry out a process on Strengthening National Capabilities on Environment Assessment and Monitoring towards the Preparation of the Global State of the Environment Report 2002, thus linking national to regional and global initiatives.

This National State of the Environment (SoE) Report of Sri Lanka is the one of seven national reports from the above process, focusing on two Asia-Pacific subregions, namely South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and the Greater Mekong (Laos and Vietnam) Subregions. The Ministry of Forestry and Environment (MoFE) of Sri Lanka, which is the national implementing agency, has played a very crucial role in carrying out this participatory assessment process in soliciting input from various government sectoral agencies. Around 20 agencies and 157 individuals were involved in the process. With the substantive support from the Development, Environment and Management Associates (DEMA), the designated collaborating center by the MoFE, and regular feedback from the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), this assessment exercise has been successful and instrumental in providing significant input to the ongoing South Asia SoE preparation. It aims at providing guidelines for environmental action planning, policy setting and resource allocation for the coming decades, based on a sound analysis of the state of, and trends in, the nation's environment.

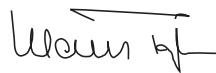
Five priority key issues for the state of environment report of Sri Lanka have been identified in consultation with the Ministry of Forestry and Environment of Sri Lanka as per UNEP guidelines, and analyzed following the "pressure-state-impact- response" (PSIR) analytical framework. The same process has been followed by the other six countries, leading to the identification of their key environmental issues. These can then be addressed subsequently through action-based programmes in the next phase of the planning process.

The five key environmental issues identified for Sri Lanka are (1) land degradation by soil erosion, (2) waste disposal, (3) pollution of inland waters, (4) loss of biodiversity, and (5) depletion of coastal resources. The exploitation of natural forest for timber, coffee and tea plantation, agriculture and settlement has caused extensive soil erosion in the hill country, which not only reduces the productivity of the soil but also causes reservoirs siltation, downstream flooding and damage to the road and drainage system. The increasing urban and industrial expansion, extraction of wood and non-wood products, mining, and removal of wild animals for commercial use from the natural forest have adversely affected the biodiversity at species and genetic level leading to ecosystem degradation. Coral mining, use of inappropriate fishing method, pollution of the southern and southwestern coast from oil spills and discharges of ship waste and reduced water quality have severe impact on the coastal resources like mangrove forest, and coral reef and marine habitat. Urban wastewater from

domestic and industrial origin, excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, release of untreated industrial effluents have caused serious pollution of surface and groundwater. Also, large-scale sand mining in major rivers has caused intrusion of sea water impacting on their water quality. The volume of waste generated from the urban center, its safe disposal methods, and availability of sites for disposal are also the key issues in the country. The current practices of waste disposal and handling have serious impacts on land, water resources, air quality, and after all, the human health.

This SoE assessment for Sri Lanka provides a sound basis for the development of action plans, the next stage of the planning process, as we enter the new millenium. The report aims to provide concrete guidance for action planning, policy setting and resource allocation for the coming decades to improve the state of the environment of Sri Lanka and the welfare of her people.

UNEP will continue to provide leadership in the region for the preparation of environmental assessment reports at national, subregional, and regional level and the capacity building necessary to support these assessment activities.



Klaus Töpfer
Under-Secretary General, United Nations and
Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme
September 2001

Minister of Forestry & Environment, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has been endowed with ample natural resources to enrich and sustain the lives of its people. These resources favored the agricultural existence to which the early settlers were accustomed. Prudent forms of land utilization were developed and handed down from one generation to the next until they become a natural way of life of the people. These practices ensure sufficient production to meet the needs of each generation whilst preserving the resources for future generations.

The growing needs of Sri Lanka's rising population are often being met by exploiting the country's natural resources with increasing severity, an approach which needs proper attention and correction. Unless the present careless and selfish use of resources is halted and policy makers and conservationists become partners in reviving the kind of sustainable development which was indigenous to Sri Lanka many centuries ago, results will be irreversible and disastrous.

Successive governments since independence have addressed themselves to these problems and far-reaching legislation has already paved the way for corrective action. Several environmental policies and Acts have been developed during the last decades in order to provide healthful surroundings, achieve a balance between population and resources and to use the environment without degrading it. Among the more important are, National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), Abatement Strategy, Forestry Sector Master Plan, Biodiversity Conservation In Sri Lanka A Framework for Action, Wetland Conservation Plan, Clean Air 2000 and Climate Change (activities) Action Plan.

However, evidence indicates that plans and programmes already implemented have met with limited success. The development without conservation of resources can neither sustain development nor improve the quality of life. Improved policies and management decisions which foster sustainable development, necessarily should be based on reliable data / information. Information made available to the planners and decision makers need to be timely and relevant.

It is understood that the ultimate goal of SoE reporting is to develop and update an environmental information database consisting of improved and precise data on environmental conditions, trends and their significance, status of ecosystems, the effect of human activities and the implications of human health and social economic well being. In Sri Lanka data pertaining to the environment, have been collected in parts, by various institutions, in the past. Although monitoring of the environmental conditions has been done for certain environmental parameters, it has neither been regular nor continuous. The few institutions which had been collecting environmental data have done so for purposes of assessment of environmental conditions that are of interest to the particular institution. They have not been addressed on a national or regional level. Thus, this report endeavors to fulfil the above requirement.

This SoE Report highlights five key environmental issues in Sri Lanka viz: Land Degradation by Soil Erosion, Waste Disposal, Water Pollution, Loss of Biodiversity, and Depletion of Coastal Resources. It also addressed other less crucial issues, which needs to be addresses at latter stages. In this regard the SoE Reporting can be considered as an effective tool that will assist or enhance the Implementation of NEAP. It can also be effective in providing guidance to the donor community on the areas and concerns that need to be supported.

I am pleased to notice the close collaboration, both technical and financial assistance from the UNEP Environmental Assessment Programme, and SACEP in preparing this Report which will serve as a valuable source to the planners, policy makers, and decision-makers to develop plans and formulate policies for the sustainable development of natural resources in Sri Lanka.



Mahinda Wijesekara
Minister of Forestry and Environment

Secretary, Ministry of Forestry & Environment, Sri Lanka

There has been a growing recognition in recent years of the importance of periodic analysis and assessment of the State of Environment (SoE) at national, regional and global levels. This has been emphasized in Agenda 21, which emerged from the United Nations Conference on Environmental Development (UNCED), held in 1992. Sri Lanka has been endowed with ample natural resources to enrich and sustain the lives of its people. However, the sharp increase in population and the rising demands for higher living standards have placed our natural resources at risk.

It is now well understood that sustainable development cannot be achieved without integrating environmental considerations into the development process. It is, therefore, globally realized that there should be growing awareness in the understanding of the erosion of natural ecosystem, as well as degradation of human ecosystem, their causes and consequences.

The major environmental conditions and trends that will most likely constrain long-term sustainable welfare and growth in Sri Lanka are deforestation, land and water degradation, loss of biological resources, contamination of ground water, and pollution of urban environment. Within these issues all worthy needs cannot be addressed with equal effort. Practical priorities require immediate focus on correcting environmental conditions most likely to cause grave damage to the people at present and also in the future. Preventive and corrective environmental management measures or actions can enhance national wealth and the human environment.

The development of an appropriate framework for effective environmental management requires a clear understanding of the current state of the environment. The State of the Environment of a country refers to the prevailing conditions from two perspectives; i.e. biophysical and socio-economic conditions. It also provides an overview on the outcomes of responses such as policy initiatives, legislative reforms, and changes in public behavior. The Chapter 40 of Agenda 21 on "Information for Decision Making" underlines the importance of an improved availability of information on all aspects of environment and development in decision making towards sustainable development. In addition, it also emphasizes the need for "improved collection as well as presentation of data and information".

Decision-makers need reliable data on key environmental issues such as water pollution, loss of bio-diversity, erosion of land, and other key indicators. Without adequate and accessible information, there may be irreparable damage done to the natural eco cum social system and their sustainability. The SoE report can play an important role in fulfilling this requirement in generating certain planned action and the necessary investments required for implementation. It should also provide policy makers a basis for institutional re-orientation and a new approach in environmental management.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all these who contributed towards this exercise by providing the necessary data and also by providing comments on the various sections of the report. I very much appreciate the inputs of the Resource Persons who reviewed each chapter of the draft report in detail, which enhanced the quality of the report.

I hope this exercise would be an important effort to create awareness and a common goal towards sustainable development.



N Pathmanathan
Secretary
Ministry of Forestry and Environment

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SEAMCAP Project Facilitator

Raghunathan Rajamani

SEAMCAP Project Team

UNEP RRC.AP

Surendra Shrestha
Choudhury Rudra Charan Mohanty
May Ann Mamicpic-Bernardo
Mylvakanam Iyngararasan
Purna Chandra Lall Rajbhandari

SACEP

Ananda Raj Joshi
Pradyumna Kumar Kotta

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