

# **SRI LANKA ENVIRONMENT OUT LOOK**

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**Ministry of  
Environment & Natural Resources**

**United Nations Environment Programme**

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(UNEP-RRC.AP)  
Outreach Building, Asian Institute of Technology  
P.O. Box 4, Klong Luang, Pathumthani 12120  
Thailand

**Coordinated by**

**MENR Staff**

1. S. A. G. L. Subasinghe, EMO
2. D. M. J. K. Disanayake, EMO
3. C. K. S. Weerasekara, PA

**UNEP Staff**

1. Anna Maria Stabrawa, DEWA Regional Coordinator, UNEP ROAP
2. Jinhua Zhang, UNEP ROAP
3. Purna Chandra Lall Rajbhandari, UNEP RRC.AP
4. Subrato Sinha, UNEP ROAP

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Hansi Graphics & Advertising  
Tel: 0777-261931  
E-mail: hansigraphics@sltnet.lk

## Message of the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Sri Lanka



The Sri Lankan vision of sustainable development is an advanced, prosperous, equitable, peaceful, and healthy nation. Steps are being taken to work towards a people friendly and open economic system, which is based on democratic and pluralistic institutions, able to protect our unique values and heritage and built on respect for freedom and human rights. This will require the balanced and integrated consideration of the three key dimensions of sustainable development i.e. Economic, Social and Environmental. Therefore, all three dimensions are being treated with equal importance and priority. This Ministry believes in working towards the ultimate objective of sustainable development, through a step by step process that makes ongoing development activities more sustainable, while addressing immediate

priorities such as environmental degradation.

It is a common understanding now that environment conservation is an integral part of the development process and any breakdown in the environmental stability would have serious implications to the stability of long-term development in the country. This new thinking has brought about a need for finding avenues to tackle the subject of integrating environment in development programs so that it could contribute towards sustainable development in the long-run. As a result, a National Sustainable Development Strategy has been developed under the direct supervision and leadership of His Excellency the President, with inputs from all government agencies, the private sector, NGOs and the civil society.

In this context, it is accepted that sound environmental management through a rational decision making is a very important necessity in achieving sustainable development goals. Since environment cuts through almost all the development sectors, we all have to accept the fact that sound environment management cannot be materialized by this Ministry alone but by the joint effort by all sectors. Therefore, achieving sustainability through best practices, better decision making and sound environment management and care is the responsibility of all sectors. In order to undertake this responsibility, there should be an updated information base consisting of improved and precise data on environmental conditions, trends and their significance, status of ecosystems, the effects of human activities and the implications on human health and social and economic wellbeing.

Currently, in Sri Lanka, data pertaining to the environment has been collected in parts by various institutions. Although monitoring of environmental conditions has been done on certain environmental parameters, it has neither been regular nor continuous. The few institutions which had been collecting environmental data have done so for the purpose of assessment of environmental conditions that are of interest to the particular institution. They have not been addressed at national and regional level. Thus I believe Sri Lanka Environment Outlook (SLEO) 2009 fills this vacuum.

I am pleased to note the combination of both technical and financial support that the Ministry has received from the UNEP in preparing Sri Lanka Environmental Outlook 2009 (SLEO 2009). I take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the contribution the experts of this country have made in the process of preparation of SLEO 2009. I hope SLEO 2009 will provide an opportunity for the reader to comprehensively understand the state of the environment of Sri Lanka, and help environmental policy makers in developing policies, strategies, plans, projects and programs for the sustainable development of natural resources in Sri Lanka.

**Patali Champika Ranawake**  
**Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources**  
**Sri Lanka**

## **Message of the Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources**

Periodic analysis and assessment of the status of environment (SoE) at national, regional and global levels have been recognized as of paramount importance. This has been emphasized in Agenda 21, which emerged from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) followed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002 in Johannesburg. The Government of Sri Lanka through the Ministry of Environment has prepared its first SoE report in 2001 highlighting the priority environmental issues. As the SoE of a country refers to the prevailing conditions of biophysical and socio economic conditions, timely review of such a document is crucial in terms of decision making.

Decision makers need reliable data on key environmental issues such as water pollution, loss of biodiversity, erosion of land and other key indicators. Availability of and easy access to environmental information is the key to the success in environmental management and its sustainability. The Sri Lanka Environment Outlook 2009 (SLEO 2009) can play an important role in fulfilling this requirement by generating planned actions and necessary investments required for implementation.

Sri Lanka seeks to achieve rapid economic development. In doing so, it is of vital importance that we ensure our natural resources that enrich environment and provide the base for economic development are not destroyed. The view that environmental protection is the responsibility of a single institution or a group of institutions is no longer valid. We have to accept that sound environmental management and environmental care is the responsibility of all sectors.

Having recognized the developments in the environment and economic development sectors in the country over the last 5-7 years, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources took initiatives in producing an updated State of Environment report in the form of Sri Lanka Environmental Outlook (SLEO) 2009 compatible with Global Environment Outlook.

The responsibility of preparation of the Sri Lanka Environmental Outlook report lies with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry initiated this task in consultation with all the related stakeholders and institutions.

I hope this report will be one of the best references available on the country's state of the environment.

**M A R D Jayathilake**  
**Secretary**  
**Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources**

## Foreword



One of the ways that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) fulfils its mandate to keep the state of the global environment under review is through the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) assessment process. With global, regional, sub-regional, national and city-level assessments, the GEO process provides scientifically credible and timely information for environmental policy development and management. The process is participatory and consultative, and features capacity building at its core, in line with the Bali Strategic Plan for

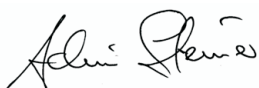
Technology Support and Capacity Building, an agreed intergovernmental framework to strengthen capacity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition on a wide range of environmental issues.

The Sri Lanka: Environment Outlook 2009 is one of the outputs of UNEP's capacity building programme working in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. The report has been prepared through a consultative process with inputs from many national and local agencies and experts. This report has analysed the six priority environmental sectors stated in the National Environmental Policy using the Driving force-Pressure-State-Impact- Response (DPSIR) analytical framework. This has further identified and reviewed five key priority environmental concerns and mitigation responses. These concerns includes: urbanization; management of solid waste; conservation of biodiversity; degradation of land, freshwater and marine resources; abatement of air pollution and energy conservation.

The report finds that uncontrolled development activities, with unplanned expansion of the urban landscape, and the consequent pressure on natural resources, have created a suite of significant challenges. The coastal zone has been significantly degraded over the last few decades due to sand mining as well as recent phenomena such as the Tsunami of December 2004. Energy, transport and industry are the sectors that have extensively contributed to the degradation of both physical and living environment. The biological, ecological and socio – physical systems that support life are being stretched to their limits of resilience, and may even reach the point of no return if timely interventions are not taken. This report notes that Sri Lanka does have many of the appropriate institutional frameworks and regulatory instruments. However, there is a need for strong political will to support law enforcement processes. The report also provides recommendations against each of the six priority sectors identified in the National Environment Policy.

I would like to congratulate the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Sri Lanka for their continuous efforts to improve the management and conservation of the natural environment.

We hope the report will provide environmental authorities and stakeholders in Sri Lanka with the necessary information to form a sound basis for policy making and effectively implement the environmental regulations to address the environmental challenges of now and those emerging including climate change.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Achim Steiner'.

**Achim Steiner**

United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director  
United Nations Environment Programme

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## Acknowledgements

UNEP and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources would like to thank the many individuals and institutions who have contributed to the preparation of Sri Lanka Environment Outlook (SLEO) - 2009. They included individuals in Government Departments, Intergovernmental Organizations, Academics Institutions, and Voluntary Organizations.

## Executive Summary

Sri Lanka's landscape, vegetation and climate, and its people, had once blended to form an island of incredible beauty and serenity, and the country was called *Serendip (or Serendib)*. Sri Lanka's economy registered a growth of 6.6 % in real terms during the first half of 2008 in comparison to 6.3 % recorded during the first half of 2007. The economic growth during the first half of 2008 was broad based with significant contributions from all key sectors.

Varied climatic conditions and topography of Sri Lanka has given rise to the unique biological diversity of the country. Biodiversity, which means diversity of the life forms and the variety of systems in which life exists, is defined at three levels, namely, species diversity, genetic diversity and ecosystem diversity. It is significant that more than 35% of the flora is endemic to the country, while more than 65% of those found in the wet zone are endemic. Standing out among the fauna are 59 endemic species of land/fresh water crabs, while more than 50% of land snails, amphibians, and reptiles are endemic. The majority of the endemic species are found in the wet zone. Sri Lanka, along with the Western Ghats of India has been classed as one of the 35 “Biodiversity Hotspots”. Sri Lanka recognizes the uniqueness of its biological diversity, but also expects urgent action for reversal of the current deteriorating trend.

Much of this has changed over the past few centuries, particularly in the past few decades. It is the people that have brought about these changes. Sri Lanka's population, now reaching 20 million, places the island among the most densely populated countries in the world, and a good proportion of the population live in poverty. This is the most potent underlying factor that has brought about the changes in Sri Lanka's environment, threatening to undermine the nation's natural resource base. The nation's effort to advance its pace of development, while maintaining the essential freedom of the people to make choices, has had adverse impacts on the four primary natural resources namely, the land, water, atmosphere and living resources, and on the living environment.

While recognizing the necessity of socio-economic development in addressing the underlying causes of environmental degradation, there has been, in recent years, a growing realization that uninhibited development, while it may yield immediate benefits, will undermine the development process. Optimizing development, and therefore maintaining its sustainability, will only be possible by safeguarding the environment through protecting nature and its life support systems.

Legal, policy, and institutional interventions aimed at addressing environmental issues have been made since the 1980s. The National Environmental Action Plans (NEAP) have been in place since 1992, and various measures aimed at controlling environmental degradation have been adopted in the different sectors. These actions, however, fell far short of what is required for ensuring that the development process remains sustainable and that environmental integrity is maintained. This underscored the need for a National Policy on the Environment; a policy that will bind all organisations and individuals who use environmental resources or otherwise have an impact on the resources to exercise due care to avoid environmental degradation. This policy, in its implementation, will pave the way for sustainable development.

Therefore, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources prepared the **National Environmental Policy and Strategies** and it came along with the latest in the series of NEAP named “**Caring for the Environment 2003 – 2007 (CFE-I) - Path to Sustainable Development**”. The National Environmental Policy, made it clear that all organizations and

individuals who use environmental resources or whose activities have an impact on the environment to exercise environmental care and sound environmental management.

At the preparatory stage of the CFE – I, Forest Cover Depletion, Hazard Waste Disposal, Land Degradation, Uncontrolled Sand Mining, Air Pollution and Climate Change, Loss of Biodiversity, Pollution of Inland Waters, Pollution of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and Unsustainable Utilization of Natural Resources have been identified as the main problems in the Environment and Natural Resources sector of the island. In addition to the CFE-I and the National Environmental Policy around 80 laws and regulatory measures can be found for the protection of the Environment. Sri Lanka seems to be well on track in achieving the targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the Goal 1 on Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger

The Sri Lanka environment Outlook - 2009 (SLEO - 2009) was prepared by the Ministry of Environment and natural Resources (MENR) of Sri Lanka through a consultative process involving experts from many national and local agencies. This exercise used the Driving force-Pressure-State-Impact Response (DPSIR) analytical framework to analyze the six priority sectors stated in the NEP. The MENR worked in close partnership with capacity building programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in realizing this activity. The SLO is presented in four (04) parts and relevant appendices. The Part I of the document deal with the socio-economic backdrop of Sri Lanka, progress in achieving the MDGs, and the regulatory, institutional and policy measures in place with respect to thje sustainable environmental management of the country.

**Part II** of this document looks into understand the environmental concerns and the current trends to facilitate effective planning for sustainable development. This section reviews the physical, social, demographic and economic trends in the country in response to the development policies and strategies implemented by the state. It also discusses the social, physical, and demographic impacts on the environment. In this section, facts such as Rural-Urban Dynamics, Storm Water Drainage deficiencies, and Waste Generation and Disposal were considered. The following **Development Sectors** whose environmental impacts are largely similar have been identified and the trends and status of those sectors and their sub sectors are discussed in detail (in sections 2.2 to 2.7).

1. Forestry and Wildlife Conservation
2. Agriculture, Plantations, Land Development and Mining
3. Fisheries and Coastal and Marine Area Management
4. Industry and Tourism
5. Energy and Transport
6. Health, Sanitation and Urban Development

The section 2.8 elaborates the Institutional and Legal Framework for Environmental Management in Sri Lanka and discloses the availability of a large number of laws and regulations and a multitude of Institutions and agencies at different levels of authority that are directly or indirectly related to environmental management. The section 2.9 discusses the status and the role of Non Governmental Organizations in the field of Management and Conservation of the environment.

**Part III** of the document emphasizes on the key priority Environmental Concerns and mitigation responses. It identifies different key impact areas such as Urbanization, Management of Solid Waste, Conservation of Biodiversity, Degradation of Land, Fresh water, and Marine Resources, Abatement of Air and Noise Pollution, Energy Conservation, Mitigation of Natural and Man Made Hazards, and the respective institutions, policies, strategies, investments and action plans available for sound environment management.

Conclusions and Recommendations appear in **Part IV** of the document states that an increase in the pressure on Natural Resources of the country and a progressive decline in the health of the environment can be seen almost in all the sectors despite of all environmental management and conservation safeguards in place.

As the Special Concern, the SLEO – 2009 recommends to update the National Environment Policy to address the complex issues in the field of Environment and Natural Resources. It also comes up with sector-wide general recommendations to address the environmental issues in the broad sense and recommendations specific to each development sector.

Therefore, the SLEO – 2009 provides a strong basis for the development of better Environment related Policies, Strategies and Action Plans. Furthermore, it would strengthen the above initiatives and assist the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources in its pivotal role of integrating environmental concerns with the country's development goals. Finally, it will facilitate rational decision making for sound Environment Management and conservation and thereby achieving sustainable development.