

## Government Policies to Address Environmental Concerns and to Promote Green Jobs in Sri Lanka

### 1. Introduction to Sri Lanka

**Sri Lanka**, officially **Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka** was known as **Ceylon** before 1972, is an island nation, tropical country in South Asia, located about 31 kilometers off the southern coast of India, popularly referred to as the *Pearl of the Indian Ocean*. It has a land area of 65,610 km<sup>2</sup>, population of 19,668,000. Literacy rate is 92%, per capita GDP is \$1,355 and the Human Development Index is 0.743.



### 2. Government's Concern about Environment

As far back as 19<sup>th</sup> century, the government of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), paid attention to environmental concerns as a British colony with serious consideration to conserve forests and protect wild life, as to maintain ecological balance.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the advice of the Conservator of Forests, two vast stretches of uninhabited land areas of 160 sq. miles and 256 sq. miles were proclaimed as Reserves under the Forest Ordinance. In 1937, Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance was introduced and suitable land areas were identified and declared as reserves. Forest department was provided with the necessary funds to survey and demarcate these areas and to meet the payment of the watchers engaged on protective work.

In 1948, Sri Lanka became independent and thereafter, the government introduced the National Environment Act No: 47 and established the Central Environment Authority (CEA) in August 1981. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (ME&NR) which was established in December 2001 has the overall responsibility in the affairs of the CEA with the objective of integrating environmental considerations in the development process of the country. The Act was amended in 1988 and 2000 to give wider regulatory powers to CEA. The objectives of CEA are:

- Protection, management and enhancement of the environment;
- Regulation, maintenance and control of the quality of environment; and
- Prevention, abatement and control of pollution.



Regulations made by the government to protect environment include the following areas:

- 2.1. Controlling discharge, deposit or emit waste into the environment which will cause pollution, or noise pollution - 08.01.1990 and 21.11.2000.
- 2.2. Testing and controlling vehicle emission - 03.11.1994, 23.06. 2000, 27.12.2002, and 30.06. 2003
- 2.3. Controlling ozone depleting substances and to ensure air quality - 25.10.1994, and 10.10. 2003.

- 2.4. Controlling noise - 21.05.1996
- 2.5. Controlling hazardous waste - 25.04.1996
- 2.6. Controlling exploration, excavation or mining for or extraction or removal of sand and gem by using any prohibited equipment within any water body or any island situated within that water body or the area lying between the river bank and the reservation limit. 14.05.2006.
- 2.7. Preventing clearing and development of land in the high gradient areas 30.06.2006.
- 2.8. Prohibiting (i) the manufacture of polythene or any polythene product of twenty (20) microns or below in thickness for in country use; and (ii) the sale or use of polythene or any polythene product which is twenty (20) microns or below in thickness. 30.09.2006.

### **3. Commitment of the President**

On 12 April 2008, H.E. the President of Sri Lanka addressing BOAO Forum Asia 2008 in China stated that,

*"I am glad to state that Sri Lanka's bio-diversity is part of the world's heritage. At present 13% of land is under biodiversity protection, compared to 8% in the 1950s. Our development efforts and strategies will not let that heritage be lost. They will ensure the protection of our oceanic resources, water, aquatic life, forestry and natural resources. We are implementing the "Haritha Piyasa" (Green Shelter) programme to reforest the hill country mountain slopes and protect watershed areas with species endemic to Sri Lanka. Steps have been taken to promote commercial forestry in view of the growing timber requirements of the nation. Waste management systems are being implemented both in rural and urban areas to produce fertilizer and solve the urban solid waste problem.*

*Increasing carbon dioxide emissions are of great concern, especially in urban and industrialized areas. Measures have already been taken to address the energy problem in the country with efforts to launch an energy efficient production system. Experiments are being conducted on renewable energy sources. Energy from, solar, wind-power, and mini-hydro projects is being encouraged. In protecting the atmosphere from air pollution, the government has formulated various programmes including vehicle emission reduction, quality improvement in gasoline, combined with tax policies on fuel and vehicles. As energy costs escalate, Sri Lanka has undertaken measures to address the energy problem with efforts to launch an energy efficient production system, as well as explore alternative energy sources."*

The above statement made by the head of the state at an international forum is a clear indication of the government's commitment to protect the environment.

#### **4. Historical Background and Green Activities in Sri Lanka**

Historically Sri Lankan economy has been based on agriculture, especially before the influence of European invasions. The agricultural practices and cultivating patterns were sustainable. The farmers used natural and eco-friendly methods to control pests and weeds without using any chemicals. Probably due to religious (Buddhist and Hindu) influence, people did not have very high expectations and they were contented and satisfied with what is available. They loved the environment and used resources to meet their minimum demands. Therefore, one could argue that all activities at that time were green and the environment was neither overexploited nor polluted.

The foreign invasions occurred after 16<sup>th</sup> century influenced the Sri Lankan culture, value systems and society. Consumption agriculture was transformed to commercial agriculture, farmers started utilizing chemicals, cleared the natural forests, and overexploited resources beyond bearable levels. Soil erosion, land slides, floods, and irregular weather patterns were consequences of such so-called rapid economic development activities. However, colonial masters as well as local leaders who were involved in governing the country paid serious attention to protect the environment and to achieve sustainable development. They introduced enactments and regulations as explained in paragraph 2 above to control the damages on the environment and to encourage environment friendly production systems.

In the recent past, during the last couple of decades along with other nations, Sri Lanka is trying to introduce green technologies, to promote green productivity, to encourage investments in green industries, and to propagate greening supply chains. Some of the examples are as follows:

**Agriculture Sector:** Organic farming is promoted. Indigenous traditional methods and natural materials for controlling pests and weeds are now utilized. Even in the commercial agriculture, such as tea industry, use of compost, minimum use of machines powered by fossil fuel, and introducing natural systems for controlling pests and weeds without chemicals are becoming popular, although yield is relatively less. Increased local and international demand is the main reason. Food items produced without using any chemicals fetch very high prices and farmers earn a better income even with a lesser yield.

**Industry Sector:** Along with the introduction of "Green Productivity" to Sri Lanka by the Asian Productivity Organization, both public and private sector industries and institutions showed a great interest to introduce environment protection technologies, since they also contributed to the enhancement of productivity leading to higher profitability. In addition, such green technologies strengthen marketing efforts. Introduction of international standards such as ISO 14000 and concepts such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) also encourage promotion of environment protection.

In the recent past, there is a trend for new industries to emerge on environment protection and mitigating negative effects on the environment. Some of such areas of activities are as follows:

- ❖ Renewable energy – wind mills, mini hydropower plants – government (Board of Investment) encourage investments through granting special concessions and facilities;
- ❖ Recycling of plastics – collection of scrap plastics and converting into useable form – factories for recycling as well as collection centers are being established and wide publicity is given with the intervention of the government;

- ❖ Solid waste management – making compost – few local government institutions have started as public private partnership projects – collected waste is sorted and use for recycling – compost produced is packed and sold for home gardening;
- ❖ Bio gas generation – National Engineering Research and Development Centre of Sri Lanka has developed new methods of producing bio-gas using garbage at various scales, for commercial operations as well as domestic purposes; and
- ❖ New packaging industries using biodegradable material extracted from plants.

**Service Sector:** Sri Lanka is a country famous for tourism. Most of the tourists now prefer to spend their vacation in a clean natural environment. Due to war situation prevailing in the country now, the industry is suffering due to inability to attract desired number of tourists resulting in greater internal competition. Thus, some leading hotels are introducing bio-gas plants, organic farming, water recycling, and minimize using metal and cement as to create a brand name towards environment protection.

## **5. Green Jobs**

In the green activities mentioned above, many green jobs have been created. No reliable and accurate information is available on the numbers, wages, working conditions of those who are employed in those activities. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether such jobs meets the standards of decent jobs. So far, a comprehensive research or survey has not been conducted to ascertain or at least estimate the numbers and service conditions as well as the trend. Conducting of such a research is a felt need of today.

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