

The 2021-2030 Sri Lanka Forestry Sector Master Plan:

Now being develop in a transparent manner

At present, only a small area of about 20% is left for us as natural forest cover, out of the tree cover that protects the country and gives life to it. Furthermore, the demand for land in Sri Lanka – one of the countries with the highest population density in the world – has been increasing exponentially through the years. In this background, the 'Forestry Sector Master Plan' that was in operation up to 2020 with the objective of preserving forest resources, needs to be superseded by a more dynamic master plan.

It is within this context that the Ecosystem Conservation and Management Project (ESCAMP) is supporting the Forest Department to develop a new master plan for the forestry sector. Therefore, the Forest Department made arrangements to

major stakeholders with the objective of meeting human necessities while conserving nature. About 4-5 million unemployed rural people are living in (or in close proximity to) the forests of Sri Lanka. This master plan aims to get them to contribute to forest conservation by providing ways for them to work more closely with forests.

Several new factors that were not experienced when formulating plans 25 years ago, such as irregularities in weather patterns and climate change related issues; Sri Lanka's commitment to various international conventions; decreasing forest cover and increasing forest degradation; nature-based tourism; and soon have come to the fore as factors bonded with forests at present. For this reason, several forest-friendly innovations designed to achieve the new objectives have been included

the government of that time rectified those errors and reintroduced it as the Forestry Sector Master Plan in the year 1995. A National Forest Policy was also formulated with the aim of achieving 3 major objectives, namely:

- 1) Conservation of forests for biodiversity, soil, water, and historical, religious and cultural values.
- 2) Enhancing tree cover to fulfill the timber needs of Sri Lanka,
- 3) Increasing the contribution of the forestry sector to the national economy for the welfare of the rural population.

The 1995-2020 Forestry Sector Master Plan was based on achieving those three objectives. Therefore, that Forestry Sector Master Plan was compiled as a book including a large amount of data such as recognised methodologies for environmental conservation, conserving watersheds, forestry studies and research. All affairs of the Forest Department were based on that document, but now it is out of date. This new Forestry Sector Master Plan will consider all lapses and loopholes that existed in the former master plan.

Therefore, among major plans for forest conservation, attention will be paid to areas such as re-planting deteriorated forests, refurbishment, nature-based or environmental tourism industry, protecting water sheds, controlling erosion, agricultural forest cultivation, urban forestry, social forestry, rehabilitation of mangroves, entrepreneurship, adding intermediate checks and balances to supply chains, forest science research, communications and capacity building, and forest inventory, as well as mapping and supervision of forests and forest cover.

"We are expecting information acquired through a questionnaire from parties relevant to forest conservation and other outside parties, on the lapses and omissions of the former Forestry Sector Master Plan, lessons to be learnt from those lapses and omissions, limits of forest administration from that date to the present, problems of activations and, last but not the least, the priorities proposed for the 2021-2030 Forestry Sector Master Plan," states Conservator General of Forests Dr KMA Bandara, referring to the transparent process that is being adhered to when developing the FSMP. He goes on to mention that, "A very important factor in this task is obtaining the ideas and participation of Resource Managers of the Forest Department, other relevant government institutions, area communities, non-governmental organisations, intellectuals, industry and private

sector, philanthropists and all other stakeholders. So, we have invited all the above-mentioned parties to join us in making the National Forestry Sector Master Plan dynamic and relevant to the forestry sector. Our aim is to ensure the participation of the general public together with all parties involved, representing all aspects concerned, with transparency."

At the event, the World Bank's Country Manager for Maldives and Sri Lanka Ms Chiyo Kanda described a new global approach for development that allows an opportunity to support Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development (GRID). It tackles poverty and inequality which have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 while addressing the longer-term challenge of Climate Change. She said that "The World Bank understands the important role of forests in supporting the rural poor and Sri Lanka's economy, and fully supports development of this new strategy. It will include new paradigms in managing Sri Lanka's forests and better conserving and restoring forest landscapes, which will enhance human well-being and serve the needs of the economy."

Speaking on the need to develop a dynamic plan to overcome ground-level forestry sector challenges, State Secretary Mr. Palitha Fernando stated, "There's a need to find ways to support forest-dependent communities in such a way that they become good stewards of surrounding forests. While community-centric forest management is proving to be effective in many parts of the world, this concept has now become entrenched in Sri Lanka also. I am glad that these issues would be addressed by the new Forestry Sector Master Plan."

"More than in the past, this time we expect to give more attention to generating temporary and permanent employment opportunities for communities in villages adjoining forests, and obtain their support in maintaining those. So, the communities that represent those villages can also contribute their ideas," concludes the former Conservator General of Forests Mr Anura Sathurusinghe, who is now spearheading ESCAMP.

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Secretary of the Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Conservation
Mr. Somarathne Vidanapathirana

initiate the '2021-2030 Forestry Sector Master Plan' development process last Thursday through a national event supported by the World Bank's ESCAMP project.

Speaking at this high-level forum on the significance of the '2021-2030 Forestry Sector Master Plan' in bringing about change in the forestry sector, Secretary of the Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Conservation Mr. Somarathne Vidanapathirana stated, "The Forestry Sector Master Plan's aim is to identify the strategic direction that should be taken and facilitate the implementation of existing and new national forest policies, institutional, and investment programs in the forestry sector of Sri Lanka while considering current trends and scenarios."

The new 20-21-2030 Sri Lanka Forestry Sector Master Plan will be developed with the contribution of all

in the 2021-2030 Forestry Sector Master Plan, says ESCAMP's Project Director Mr Anura Sathurusinghe. He goes on to state that, "The Forestry Sector Master Plan, introduced to our country in the year 1986 for the first time, was prepared by a foreign company. It was almost completely based on utilising forests for the objective of deriving timber products. The plan was therefore disliked by not only environmentalists and environmental scientists, but also by the general public."

In that plan – which was prepared without stakeholder consultation in a non-transparent manner – there were no steps described or methodologies introduced for forest conservation, other than ways for extracting timber. In such a background, because of the escalating resistance, authorities had to stop implementing that plan. However,



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