

Environmental impacts due to river sand mining: A case study

Ranjana U. K. Piyadasa
Department of Geography

Sand is an essential element of construction and has direct and indirect impacts on a country's development processes. The sustainable use of sand resources is important to maintain natural ecosystems and support overall development. Sri Lanka's construction industry which contributes over 8% to the country's GDP requires over 7 million cubic meters of sand annually (expanded in the short term due to additional demands of post tsunami construction) which is obtained from the country's river beds, river banks or mined from previous riverbeds and sand dunes. Although until recently manual harvesting was the norm, increasing mechanized and often illegal river sand harvesting has caused a major loss of water security and ecosystem damage due to the lowering of water tables, bank erosion, land degradation and salinity intrusion, damage to infrastructure, and increased health hazards. The present research study was conducted to identify the behavior of environmental impacts due to river sand mining in the Nilwala river. Over-mining of the Nilwala River causes many problems like salinization of Matara drinking water due to the intrusion of sea water into the river, collapse of river banks, and loss of river land. The study was focused mainly on groundwater quality changes due to sand mining in the Nilwala river basin area. Wells dug in the right bank of the Nilwala river basin were selected to identify groundwater quality changes due to sand mining in the river. The GIS package Arc View was used to identify the water quality changes in the river and as well as in the flood plain area.

Fiscal Problems and the Need for the Enhancement of Indirect Taxation in Sri Lanka

Kopalapillai Amirthalingam
Department Economics

In the past three decades a number of developing countries have experienced major episodes of financial crises that were brought in by unsustainable fiscal deficits. As in the case of a number of other developing countries, the fiscal deficit in Sri Lanka too has been high for a long period. Though the fiscal deficit was at its peak at 23 per cent in 1980, it averaged 13 per cent during 1977-1991 and 9 per cent during 1992-2007. However, even a 9 per cent deficit could be a dangerous phenomenon as it could act as a catalyst to financial instability in the country. When government revenue is insufficient to offset its expenditure, the country is forced to depend on foreign and domestic sources to bridge the fiscal deficit. As a result, government's debt as a percentage of GDP increases. However, high level debt will increase the pressure on the government's ability to meet its other expenditure commitments. This is of particular concern when these commitments involve essential and development oriented expenditure. It also tends to reduce resource availability to the private sector in addition to increasing the interest rate in the domestic markets. This will increase the cost of borrowing by the private sector and thereby crowd

out private investment, adversely affecting the economic growth of the country. This situation necessitates comprehensive policy measures either to reduce expenditure or to increase the revenue base of the country so that the government need not depend overwhelmingly on debt. However, considering the security situation and the development needs of the country expenditure cut is harmful not only economically but also politically because it is impossible to the country to reduce the expenditure of any of the following four categories, viz, (1) general public services (defense, and public order and safety), (2) social services (education, health etc), (3) economic services (agriculture and irrigation, fisheries, energy and water supply, transport, communication *etc.*) and (4) Other (interest payments, pension, food stamp, free text books and mid day meal for school children). Therefore, taxation is relevant and essential since alternative ways of financing government expenditure such as money creation, mandating larger required reserves, domestic borrowing and foreign loans can have harmful macroeconomic repercussions. Nonetheless, the tax ratio in Sri Lanka is on the decline and remains well short of the standard rate for developing countries. It follows that there is a need to as well as room to increase the tax ratio in Sri Lanka. However, one can observe that direct taxes, as a percentage of GDP, have remained stable at an average of 2.5 per cent during 1977-2007 period and which raises the point that aforementioned decline in the tax ratio is strongly associated with the decline in indirect taxes. Therefore, increased indirect tax revenue can lead to improvements in the tax ratio. While this is an important fiscal outcome in the paper, we also underscore several other reasons why this is desirable.

Seeing the Village through the Trees: Representing the Village in Sri Lankan Fiction

David Stentiford
Department of English

Sri Lanka's postcolonial history is unique amongst South Asian countries in that Sri Lanka has not seen a major flight of people leaving rural villages to settle in urban centers. Today, 85% of the population lives outside of urban areas, and urbanization is occurring at the slow rate of .5% (CIA World Fact Book). I point to these numbers to underscore that Sri Lanka is seen today as a country that has kept its rural roots, so to speak. Moreover, I want suggest that with this view comes a host of cultural connotations about the rural. In this paper, I trace a trajectory of Sri Lankan Anglophone narratives that have imaginatively represented village life. My starting point is Leonard Woolf's novel *Village in the Jungle*, published in 1913. Next, published about a half century later in 1966, is Punyakante Wijenaik's *The Waiting Earth*. And, at the other end of my track is P.G. Punchihewa's novel *The Shattered Earth*, published first in Sinhala in 2000 and then rewritten and published in English in 2008. In this 95-year time span, I would like to posit that a specific kind of narrative is being retold. The brand of story goes something like this: Each of these three texts tells of peasant life in an agrarian community, seemingly far-removed from the reaches of big-city Colombo. Most importantly, each work is dark; all three narratives represent villages on the brink of disintegration. Each employs a landless male protagonist around whose life the plotline unfolds. Similarly, each