

Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR)

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The Director,
Land Use Policy Planning Division and National Project Director,
Sustainable Land Resource Management Project of the Ministry of Lands,
31, Pathiba Road,
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26.04.2002

Dear Sir,

Draft National Land Use Policy of the Ministry of Lands

As requested in your notification in Daily News of April 4, 2001 we are sending you herewith views and suggestions of the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) on the above draft policy. Considering the seriousness of the implications of this draft Policy, we strongly feel that this requires much more discussion and thinking with broader participation of stakeholders, particularly the organizations representing rural farmer communities, before it is made policy.

We will be very happy to have further discussion on this proposed policy and are able to facilitate this process of discussion and dialogue, not only among scholars and people's organizations but also with farmer groups.

We feel confident that you would give serious attention to the issues and proposals made in this presentation and allow us and other people's organizations opportunities for such participation.

Thanking you

Yours truly,

Sarath Fernando
Co-Secretary
MONLAR

Executive Summary

The priorities and the principles adopted in a National Land Use Policy should be consistent with the priority objectives such as “treating land as a fundamental resource necessary for the present and future generations to be utilized in a sustainable manner. Proposed privatization of land when taken together with other important Policy decisions of the Government (as in Budget 2002), recommended by the World Bank and IMF, such as creation of a “free land market” and encouraging (or “compelling through conditions”) small farmers to sell their land and exit agricultural livelihoods, do not seem to be compatible with the objectives of meeting human needs and of sustainability. This is particularly so since these people have a tremendous potential to restore sustainability and regenerative capacity of land and other natural resources.

It is necessary to understand the urgent need to revive the most basic and important character of land of having the “capacity of self regeneration”. This is of utmost importance in Sri Lanka, since it has a very low and decreasing per capita availability of land. The heavy emphasis given to the attraction of foreign investments with motives of short term profit is unlikely to assist in such an approach. The history of the role of such investments and the very serious destruction that has been caused by commercialization of land use should be given serious attention and an alternative approach should be adopted to reverse this historical damage.

The fact that the National Land Use Policy is proposed under an already designed project funded by UNDP is very questionable. The sequence should be the reverse. A vision on sustainable land use must give rise to a National Policy and any project for management of land resources should then be formulated based on such a policy. International Institutions such as UNDP, WB and IMF necessarily work within certain internationally designed trade policy frameworks such as WTO, GATT, and AoA, which are being challenged throughout the world for their impact on livelihoods and environment.

The paper suggests a radically different set of proposals for sustainable land use with the objective of remedying the damage that has already been done over the long period of colonial control over land and the subsequent period where destructive application of ecologically damaging agricultural technologies.

It also explains why such an approach would not be feasible under the present direction of land being increasingly converted and treated as a “commodity” controlled by the private sector. This implies that the State has an important role, not merely to promote and facilitate big private businesses, but to protect and strengthen a “people’s Sector” considering the fact that such a people’s sector has interests that are not necessarily compatible with those of big foreign and /or local businesses. Ecological farming experiences of such people and communities in the country and internationally are sighted as examples illustrating the overall thrust necessary in such an approach with “people” playing a key and leading role. “People” being the engine of sustainable land utilization as opposed to the prevalent concept of considering “private Sector as engine of development and growth”

Emphasis is also made of adopting a radically different approach to the land utilization policies and approaches in the plantation areas with positive contribution possible by plantation sector population and those in the hill country villages.

Utilization of youth as an active force for the needed transformation of land resources and its use is suggested as a viable approach to solving the massive problem of unemployment of youth, considering the tremendous failure that has been experienced during the last two decades of private sector led growth creating sufficient employment opportunities and of solving hunger ,poverty and other social problems

Views and Comments on Draft National Land Use Policy of the Ministry of Lands

From Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR)

An introduction of our organization, MONLAR

We the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) is a voluntary people's organization that works with a network of about 70 other people's organizations, across the country on issues related to development, land, agriculture and food security.

During our history of 11 years, we have tried to do serious studies and research on policy issues in this field and have engaged ourselves in extensive dialogue with the people, while maintaining a constant dialogue with the policy makers and planners in the country, particularly with the view of safeguarding the interest of the people, whose lives and livelihoods depend closely on the proper use of land and agriculture., both in the short term as well as in the long term.

As part of this study and dialogue we have submitted several memoranda to the policy makers at crucial moments of policy decisions, some of which are listed below,

1. In 1990 we made submissions to the Presidential Task Force on Land Distribution and Utilization headed by Mr. A.A.Wijethunga and we were invited to discuss our proposals in detail
 2. In 1995, we submitted a People's Memorandum with 150,000 signatures with 29 proposals related to Sustainable Agriculture and Policies regarding sustainable use of land. We were invited to a discussion on these proposals by President Chandrika Bandaranayake Kumarathunga with the Committee of experts appointed by the then Government to formulate a Policy Frame work Land and Agriculture. At this meeting it was stated that the Government would agree with most of the proposals made in the People's Memorandum.
 3. We were also invited by the Government on several subsequent occasions such as on issues related to paddy marketing in 1995, by the President and again on the same issue in August 2000 by the then Prime Minister, when farmers went on a hunger strike in Hingurakgoda asking for reasonable prices for their paddy
 4. We have also made our submissions on the Proposed National Water Resources Policy.
 5. We have had direct negotiations with the World Bank experts Mr. Robert Hunt and Mr. Douglas Lister, who formulated the Policy recommendations "Non Plantation Sector Policy Alternatives" (in March 1996) . These discussions and our submissions to the World Bank and the Government of Sri Lanka were particularly on the proposed policies in relation to land use, ownership and land market.
 6. We have also been engaged in introducing sustainable agriculture in many villages and we have been able to successfully apply methods of ecological farming both in paddy and in other food crops, such as vegetables, which have shown to be very useful ways of meeting the food requirements of the people, at very low cost and with very low external inputs.
- Therefore, we feel that there are very viable methods of ecological land use to meet the specific needs and problems that you have mentioned in your Draft National land use policy. We are also aware that some of these approaches in sustainable agriculture have been used in many other countries and by many other organizations in Sri Lanka.

Need for Compatibility of policies of sustainability with other economic policy priorities of the Government and the suggestions in the Draft Policy on Land Use

We would first of all like to express our appreciation of this initiative that has been taken by the Ministry of Lands to develop an appropriate National Policy on Land Use in Sri Lanka.

As you have very rightly stated (in the 1st reason for the necessity of a National Land Use Policy), “land is one of the most fundamental resources necessary for human beings” to survive. Therefore, if “land is held in trust for the people by the State for sustainable use by the present as well as the future generations” the state has to ensure that the policies adopted by it would not lead to violations of these most fundamental requirements on which the policies are formulated. How should the State ensure that the second fundamental policy of “State encouraging the private ownership of land “ would not lead to a serious violation of the first and the most basic fundamentals ?

We are raising this as a key issue, since there are very concrete proposals made in the recent budget proposals(March 2002) to expedite the implementation of the World Bank’s recommendations in “Non Plantation Sector Policy Alternatives” (March 1996) which proposes that the Government should intervene in creating “a free land market”.

It is very clearly stated that the rural small holders (nearly 1.8 million families, who are largely farmers producing domestic food such as rice) should be encouraged to sell their land and exit agriculture. The reason for this suggested process is very clear. It is stated that there should be a shift away from the present form of cultivating low value domestic food crops to high value crops (mainly export crops).

The present policy gives very high priority to inviting foreign investments for such export agriculture and the Budget 2002 also has many provisions to encourage foreign investors to buy land in the country. The 100% tax on non citizens buying land has been removed and also state land presently not used is made open to such buyers.

We all know very well those foreign investments that come for short term profit, also keep the freedom to make maximum profits in the shortest possible time and leave when the profits become relatively low. This form of commercial agriculture has been found to be the biggest obstacle to sustainable use of land. Today there is a worldwide concern and protest not only against such movement of ecologically destructive monocultures, shifting from country to country and from region to region.

We have also to be very cautious and alert about the tendency of foreign investment, particularly the types of agriculture and industry that are trying to move into weaker bargainers on environment, such as ours, merely to escape from the increasing restrictions on ecologically unsustainable and polluting types of land use.

During the last 24 years of intense effort to bring in foreign investors, Sri Lanka has been granting all possible concessions to foreign investors. In spite of the fact that export agriculture has been a high priority in the agendas of all Governments since 1977, there has not been any success, except in the case of sugar companies that have been invited at totally disadvantageous terms and conditions. The sugar plantations do not agree with most of the requirements of sustainability that are mentioned in the draft policy. Therefore there is a need for serious rethinking about the compatibility of the proposed conditions of sustainability and the expectations of putting land to its best uses etc. with the present policies of privatization of land, promotion of export agriculture and also the emphasis given to the attraction of foreign investment.

Therefore, this raises a very fundamental question as to the “right” and “wisdom” of the principle of land being held in trust for the people by the state, unless the state looks at its other policy priorities discussed above. It is right for the people to expect that a Government elected by them should hold land in trust for their benefit.

Legal Reforms

The other fundamental (No.6) is about “reviewing and modifying the present legal framework to meet the current needs”. This needs clarification and explanation, since much depends on how one understands and interprets current needs. There is a Project and a Proposal to overhaul the entire legal system (funded by the World Bank) to facilitate the private sector led economy. There is no assurance that a private sector led economy of the type that we have now and that we will have in the immediate future, will automatically look after the valid requirements mentioned in the draft policy for sustainable use and the best utilization of land for the present and future needs of the people,

A National Policy on Land Use should come before a Project for Land Resource Management

It is evident that there already exists a “Sustainable Land Resources Management Project” funded by UNDP. The present draft National Land Use Policy has been prepared under this project. What needs to be clarified is whether the project has already been formulated and decided up on before the national Policy is in place. Is this policy a mere instrument for overcoming possible obstacles and objections that may arise in the implementation of the UNDP funded project? One gets this impression when the formulation of the national policy is said to be part of the above project.

The more logical process would be to begin with a clear vision, goals and objectives on land use based on the historical experiences, present and future needs and priorities of the people of the country. As mentioned in the Policy draft scientific land use principles, the traditions and culture of the people of the country and the impact on environment should be given consideration in the formulation of a vision and a strategy. Formulation of a National Policy should be the next step and any project for “Sustainable Land Resource Management” “should then be based on the above.

Was the above project already formulated and approved for funding by the UNDP without such a clear vision and policy to guide it? Or was the project formulated to achieve some of the priorities and objectives that were already in the minds of the planners and the Policy draft to suit its requirements?

It is stated that the draft policy paper was prepared following consultations with academics, senior Government officials and experts in relevant disciplines etc. As it often happens in the case of most of the project and policy formulations in the recent decades the most important stake holders, particularly the large number of ordinary people, particularly the rural agricultural population whose lives and livelihoods depend on the use of land seem to have had very little participation in this process.

Simple publication of the final draft of a policy requesting for views and comments within a limited number of days is not an effective mechanism for effective participation of such stakeholders. It would only be an excuse to say that such people were allowed opportunities to participate.

Land use and National Policy on Land Use is far too important a subject to be decided in this manner.

Institutions such as UNDP and other international / multilateral institutions that matter in decisions regarding project funding and also most of the high level government officials and experts generally work within certain policy and strategy frame works that are already determined at international / global levels. In the recent times it has become very clear into the that such formulations do not look sufficiently into the specific backgrounds, historical, social, and cultural conditions and also the very specific requirements of people in specific countries. This situation has led to tremendous problems financial, human and social crisis situations in many countries. Even the World Bank and other multilateral institutions have admitted this. However, the same mistakes are being repeated and very little attention has been given to the need to develop effective mechanisms to obtain sufficient, well informed participation of most important stakeholders, particularly those are most effected.

In relation to issues such as land ownership, patterns of land use, agriculture and food security and the need to look in to the protection of lively hoods of millions of rural small farmers and the need to protect and have control over the use of natural resources there are tremendous problems that have began to emerge as the result of the present trends of Globalization, market liberalization, WTO Agreement etc.

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) under the WTO has been challenged by farmers movements throughout the third world as a mechanism that would destroy millions of people's livelihoods.

There are also other efforts at the Global level. Such as the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), to be introduced through the World Trade Organization which would allow access to land and other resources of any country by any foreign company and granting of same rights to any foreign investor as those enjoyed by the local citizens? Some of the provisions made in the Draft National Land Use Policy seem to be in the direction of such take over of land by big foreign companies.

It is therefore, very necessary and urgent to look seriously at the 'Safe Guards' to be adopted to protect the interest of the people of Sri Lanka in such trends and dangers. Most multilateral development agencies such as UNDP, WB, IMF and ADB do not question these Global Agreements in any way. In fact they have a clear policy of working within those Global frameworks. The academics and experts and high-level government officials utilized for project and policy formulations generally are those who accepted to work within those frameworks. The foreign and local private sector too accepts an encourages such trends for their own interests. Thus, it becomes extremely important to ensure that sufficient arrangements be made to protect the interest of the poor masses of people and specific need and interests of the people of the country.

There are very clear indications in the present Draft Policy that hint as certain tendencies to allow for such detrimental inclusions. For instance the sections such as

1. State encouraging private ownership of land (point 2 under fundamentals)
2. Reviewing and modification of legal framework to meet current needs (point 6 under fundamentals)

Policy objectives:

1. State as facilitator and manager than the role of an owner.
2. Effective legal reforms for a greater degree of efficiency in the use of land resources. (This needs to be taken together with the World Bank's Proposal of March 1996 and the provision in budget 2002 to grant land titles and to facilitate a free land market, which envisages a quickened process of small scale domestic food producer farmers selling away their land to more "financially efficient" high value (export) crop producers.
3. Enhancing the role of Private Sector in land resources development (which gives priority to quick profits rather than sustainability and local needs of food security)

4. The policy objectives, which states “being about a rational distribution of population and settlements in order to ensure orderly economic growth and balanced regional development” need to be carefully examined.

The World Bank recommendation and the Budget 2002 provision already mentioned a radical and extensive shift away from present form of paddy and domestic food production, particularly to achieve faster economic growth.

A policy objective 15 says, “Reduce the dependence on land as a means of providing employment opportunities”.

These proposals above, when taken together raises an extremely important question. The land use policies in Sri Lanka almost throughout its history have largely been with the consideration of providing livelihood and employment opportunities.

1. In ancient history the irrigation and agriculture development process under the ancient rulers were aimed at providing livelihoods, using methods of sustainable eco-irrigation
2. The tremendous development of small irrigation tanks and settlements by the people (Several thousands of small tanks in the dry zone villages were with livelihood needs.
3. The development of irrigated agricultural settlements under the British (since 1930) was to provide land to small farmers.
4. All Governments after independence continued this policy of developing irrigated agricultural settlements as a means of providing employment and livelihoods to people.
5. One of the main objectives of the recent Mahaweli Development Project was to create employment in agriculture.

In all these instances, particularly in the more recently developed irrigated settlement schemes specific measures were adopted to ensure that the settler farmers would continue to have their land, since it was their main livelihood. They were legally prevented from selling the land received from the government. This was one of the main forms of providing employment to the rural population and one of the main approaches in food security.

It is very clear that the objective of Policy no.2 of “granting freehold status (by removing restrictions) to land already alienated to people under the Land Development Ordinance and Land Grants Special Provisions Law” is to make a reversal in the above approach.

The World Bank and other experts who advocate this reversal may argue that this is only to facilitate a process of allowing small farmers / small land holders to “voluntarily exit” from agriculture and these small holdings that have now become too small and unprofitable to look for more viable and profitable employment and economic activities.

But the reality today is that these small farmers who are heavily indebted already and are not supported in any way by official government policies would be “compelled” to sell their land and move out of the last remaining livelihoods in agriculture, even if they do not find other alternatives.

The situation faced by most paddy farmers right now (at this moment of time) who are compelled to sell their harvest of Maha 2002 at prices ranging from Rs.8 to Rs.10/kg in most areas and Rs.11 in only a few areas, when their cost of production is Rs13/kg or more, is a clear illustration of this reality created by conscious policy pushed by the IMF/WB and accepted by the Government. This was the case ever since the Government accepted the policy of non-intervention in marketing of paddy and other agricultural products. The Paddy Marketing Board was in fact closed down since 1992 (in spite of the fact that the Bill for closing down the PMB was defeated in Parliament several years later). The Government has had to lie to the people that it was buying paddy at Rs.13.50 or Rs.15/Kg.

The assumption that promotion of the “Private Sector” and the Government “facilitation” of this massive land transfer away from rural farmers to “more effective private sector” would simply lead to “growth” that would automatically generate sufficient alternative employment and livelihood to people, either in industry or in export oriented commercial agriculture and agro-based industry is simply not true. It has not been proved to be correct during the last two decades in Sri Lanka. Most export oriented agriculture initiatives by companies such as cultivation of gherkin, melon, baby corn, etc have now been closed down. The only industry that had some growth during this period, namely export oriented garments is now facing a serious threat due to loss of export quotas when the Multi-fiber Agreement ceases to function within the next 2-3 years.

It is important to recognize the experiences in Sri Lanka of having had three violent uprisings (that killed 7-10 thousands in 1971, nearly 60,000 in 1988-90 and over 70,000 in the Northern war) which were mainly due to the inability to absorb millions of young people in rural areas in to meaningful livelihoods.

The expectation that “rapid growth” and export oriented industrialization and agriculture would solve these problems of unemployment and poverty has not succeeded in spite of all incentives, benefits and advantages granted to the private sector. The budget 2002 merely includes an “appeal to the private sector” to look into this serious social need and to look at the social aspects.

We would agree that these small farmers (who number around 1.8 million families) should be free to sell their land and move out, if and when they find other more attractive employment and livelihood opportunities. But what is extremely dangerous and unjust is to compel them to move out to “no where” or to destitution through creation of such conditions as envisaged in the present policies.

An Alternative Approach

The framework adopted in this policy formulation and in the entire strategy for “best possible use of land” and also in the strategy proposed for economic development makes only a simple distinction between “Private Sector” and the “State”.

Diminishing direct involvement and role of State, or suggesting that State should only play a facilitator / manager role simply assumes that it is the big profit motivated private businesses, including big foreign companies (Corporate Sector) that should be promoted.

We feel that it is essential to understand the distinction between the big local and foreign businesses and the majority of the ordinary people, the small producers, the rural small farmers, the poor in general.

Therefore, there is an essential task that the state should play in protecting the interests, the productive capacities of these people. This often has to be done against the interests of the big businesses.

In this assumption that the role of the state should be diminished or that the role of the state should be to promote the private sector, the need to protect the interests of millions of people, rural communities and the very positive and constructive role that these people could play has been totally neglected. The contradiction between the interests and roles of these two sectors, namely the private sector and the “People’s Sector” is so obvious. However, it is always omitted in all analysis and planning by the multilateral institutions such as WB/IMF and even UNDP.

This is a conscious omission in the present process of Globalization of market. However, this omission is extremely costly since it leads to a complete subjugation of the interests and the role of millions of ordinary people under the profit interests of big capital.

Sri Lanka is a very strong case that illustrates the tremendous role that could be played by the people, the communities, in the entire process of sustainable development and all other related areas such as sustainable use of land, food security, environment etc. Therefore, we would like to describe briefly an alternative approach to achieving the goal and concerns mentioned in the Policy Foundations, the fundamentals and in many of the policy objectives. This alternative approach is based on a framework that takes into consideration the distinct role of the “People’s Sector” as distinct from the “Private Sector” that is envisaged in this Policy Draft.

It also suggests that the State should play a different role if it intends to “hold land in its trust for the people”. State in this case has a strong role in protecting and enhancing the role of “people and communities” as opposed to promoting and facilitating the interests and role of big businesses.(the private sector). In the case of Sri Lanka this difference and contradiction is very clear since it is directly and clearly suggested that the state should play an active role in weakening the people’s sector, by creating a policy environment that would compel people to become landless, non producers of agriculture.

National Land Use Policy for Sri Lanka should be based on A Correct “Vision” on Land Resources

The Draft Policy begins by saying that “Land is one of man’s most fundamental resources” and therefore, “a land use policy should provide a framework for the best possible use of land”.. “It should provide a pattern of land use that will best meet the needs of the present generation while safeguarding resources for future generations as well”

In Sri Lanka, the draft says “5,527,300 ha of land available for use, had to provide the needs of 18.6 million people in 2001 which gave a per capita extent of land of 0.29 ha. This had declined from 1.35 ha in 1901. By 2030 with a projected population of 25 million, the per capita extent of land available would be reduced to 0.22ha.

Therefore, it is essential that the policies and plans for land use should be based on a correct definition and vision of what “Land” is and what “resources” mean. A programme for Land Resource management should be formulated on the basis of a vision that would provide us with ways of meeting the needs, “the most essential needs” of these millions of people with the very limited extent of land that is available.

The famous Indian scientist Dr. Vandana Shiva begins her Chapter on “Resources” in the book “Development Dictionary” by quoting the original meaning of the word “Resources” as follows,

“Resource’ originally implied life. Its root is the Latin verb, *surgere*, which evoked the image of a spring that continually rises from the ground. Like a spring, a ‘re-source’ rises again and again even if it has repeatedly been used and consumed. The concept thus highlighted nature’s power of ‘self regeneration’ and called attention to her prodigious creativity. Moreover, it implied an ancient idea about the relationship between humans and nature- that earth bestows gifts on humans who, in turn, are well advised to show diligence in order not to suffocate her generosity. In early modern times, ‘resource’ therefore suggested reciprocity along with regeneration.

With the advent of industrialism and colonialism, however, a conceptual break occurred. “Natural resource became those parts of nature which were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade. John Yeates in his *Natural History of Commerce* offered in 1870 the first definition of the new meaning: ‘In speaking of the natural resources of any country, we refer to the ore in the mine, the stone unquarried, the timber unfilled (etc). In this view, nature has been clearly stripped of her creative power; she has been turned into a container of raw materials waiting to be transformed into inputs for commodity production. Resources are now merely ‘any material or conditions existing in nature which may be capable of economic exploitation’. With the capacity of regeneration gone, the attitude of reciprocity has also lost its ground. It is now simply human inventiveness and industry which imparts value to nature.

Nature, whose real nature it is to rise again, was transformed by this originally Western world view into dead and manipulable matter. Its capacity to renew and grow had been denied. It had become dependent on people. The development of people was thus essential for the development of nature. This was particularly true for nature and the colonies. Before industrialism and colonialism, nature and society had evolved. Colonial policy , which ensured capital and raw material flows for the empire, aimed at ‘developing’ natural resources in a planned manner, to facilitate the generation of revenues and growth of capital.

At the beginning resources of nature were considered to be abundant and freely available and they were rapaciously exploited. They were not husbanded. In the second phase, once exploitation had created degradation and scarcity the “management” of “natural resources” became important in order to maintain continued supplies of raw material for commerce and industry. So, first, land was turned in to a resource, then forests, and water. Now with the onward march of technology, it is the turn of seeds to be converted into what are called ‘genetic resources’

A National Land Use Policy in Sri Lanka and a Policy for use of natural resources should be based on a “Vision” that takes into consideration this history in Sri Lanka, the present situation and also the present and future needs.

It is necessary to realize that the application of the distorted concept of resources described above, during the long history, since colonialism up to the present in Sri Lanka has resulted in the entire land resource base facing a threat of destruction. The present attitude, concepts, policies and plans regarding land use and ownership would make this situation much worse and would accelerate the process of destruction beyond recovery.

A quick glance at the prevalent land use pattern and the emphasis given to the further conversion of land resources as “raw material” for trade and industry for quick financial profits would result in further aggravation of the destruction of the “capacity for self regeneration”

Since the beginning of plantations in the hill country in 1830s the clearing of forests, loss of bio diversity, over a century of accelerated soil erosion, loss of natural biological activity caused by the use of chemical inputs etc have killed the regenerative capacity of the soil and of other biological resources. In the recent periods the cultivation of tobacco, potato, and vegetables using unlimited chemical inputs, fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides has added to this destruction. This damage to soil and water in the central hills where most of our water ways begin, has contributed to the pollution and losses to, both surface as well as underground water sources that flow across the country. Thus this destruction is taken across the country. Erosion accelerated by this process has lead to silting of water ways and reservoirs, contributing to regular droughts and floods.

Use of agrochemicals in paddy and all other crops since the introduction of “green revolution” in the 1960s has expanded this process of Destruction Island wide. On the whole agriculture today has become a process of destroying soil, land, natural resources, and bio diversity. The capacity for “self regeneration” in these natural resources, nature’s generosity, has been suffocated and killed.

Is sustainable use of resources a feasible option, today?

Questions can be raised as to the practical feasibility, in today’s conditions, of preventing or minimizing this impact on the regenerative capacity of nature, resulting from the use of resources for commodity production, profit making and trade. Is it not necessary to utilize such technology to feed the already large and increasing population? One may even argue that since we have relatively less land compared to the high population, use of such high external input agriculture and more intensive cultivation may be the only ways out.

This may also be the reason why the present Land Use Policy Draft has the Policy Objective 15, of “Reducing the dependence on land as a means of providing employment opportunities”

In a country such as Sri Lanka where there is a majority of poor people, there are several serious questions that arise in this relation. Agriculture using external inputs has become very expensive and beyond the reach of most small farmers. For faster economic growth, it has been proposed that land should get transferred to private businesses. Due to heavy indebtedness of these countries, this transfer of resources and production for export is being accelerated. These processes compel the rural poor to give up their small plots of land and the access they have to natural resources, which is their last means of survival. The rural poor who are pushed out of livelihoods are compelled to clear more and more forests and encroach on government reservations illegally. This too leads to an acceleration of the process of destruction of natural land resources.

Use of “higher” technologies with more external, chemical inputs appeared to give higher productivity in the beginning. However, it was a misconception to believe that the over all productivity could be made higher. In fact in the longer term the overall productivity that is given by an environment with diversity was higher and more stable. The fact that this change involved a process of pushing out the poorer people from production and access to resources, it did not lead to providing the needed food and other essentials to the poor.

Looking at these realities it is not difficult to understand the basic policies and the Vision that Sri Lanka should have in relation to the use of land resources.

It is an essential condition to ensure that people who have to depend on land for their livelihoods and survival should be able to protect their access to land. Another essential condition is to adopt

methods of agriculture and land use that ensures the protection and enhancement of the “self regenerative capacity”. These are the principles of “sustainable agriculture”, “conservation agriculture” and “ecological agriculture” that has attracted new attention through out the world today.

Some of the key principles of this approach to farming are as follows:

1. **Recycling of organic matter:** In the approach termed “permaculture”, meaning agriculture without depleting any of the natural resources, to enable agriculture permanently possible, one of the basic principles adopted is to replace all the organic matter that is extracted from the soil and the environment in farming. This is a principle that existed in the natural forests for thousands of years. This was also adapted to a great extent in the old methods of chena cultivation. Fertility of the soil was maintained in this manner until the use of chemical inputs came into practice. This is something that can be easily adopted even today in the case of home gardening and small scale farming and even in paddy farming on small plots by small farmers.
2. **Conservation.** Prevention of soil erosion, mulching, adopting methods of farming that are as close to the natural environment as possible. Selecting the crops and crop diversity to be as close to the natural conditions as possible. Protecting the top soil, the humus layer and to keep increasing the bio mass. These methods also increase water conservation and retention of water in the soil.
3. **Protecting and increasing bio diversity.** Using mixed cropping instead of mono-cropping and to be conscious of the need to keep bio diversity in the environment rich and undisturbed. Protecting and enhancing the contribution made by microorganisms to soil fertility. Allowing natural pest control and adopting natural pest management methods (Integrated Pest management). There is a tremendous wealth of knowledge that was available among the traditional farmers, about working in agreement with nature and natural cycles. Most traditional practices are based on this age old knowledge.
4. **Sustainable, low cost, low input methods in Paddy Farming:** Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Paddy farming has been applied with great success in Sri Lanka and in about 13 other Asian Countries. There is a programme of IPM promoted by FAO for several years which has been proved to reduce the cost of production by over Rs 3.000 per acre with a considerable increase (by about 25%). This is applicable in all areas, under all climatic conditions. Application of this requires only a simple training of farmers and no other cost. Thus it is quite possible to expand this application through out the country which would contribute to a tremendous saving of the cost of chemical inputs and a proven reduction of pest damage. If this is applied on 1 million acres of paddy, the net financial saving would be about $\text{Rs}3,000 \times 1 \text{ million} = \text{Rs}.3,000 \text{ million}$ per season. This alone could reduce the present crisis faced by the paddy farmers due to exorbitantly high cost of production and low returns.

It is really surprising to hear that a decision has now been taken to close down the IPM Training programme, through “Farmer Field Schools” (FFS) in Sri Lanka and the rest of Asia. These programmes that were conducted initially with FAO sponsorship has to be taken over by the Government. The Government seems to have decided not to allocate funds for this. These programmes were tremendously successful and provided a unique solution to the massive problems that were created in paddy farming particularly. It was a tremendous solution to the problems of un-sustainability in agriculture created by the “Green Revolution” type of chemical farming.

If the proposed project funded by UNDP is for “Sustainable Land Resource Management” why is it that the very small fund allocation for continuation of IPM work could not be set aside under that project ? This raises a very serious question about the real intentions of the UNDP funded project

There are also other low cost and eco friendly methods of paddy farming now introduced, giving much higher yields with much less water and less external inputs and no chemical pesticides. These systems are the SRI (System of Rice Intensification) and the “Nava Kekulama” which are both methods of paddy farming with less than half the quantity of water and much less seed paddy (these systems use about 4 Kg of seed paddy in stead of the presently used quantity of about 2 bushels – 44 Kg / acre. on an acre that is used in the present method.

Agro Forestry Considerable damage has already been caused due to large scale clearing of forests and land for Development projects such as the Accelerated Mahaweli Development. This has been done in almost all irrigated agricultural settlements over decades. Clearing of forest land for chena cultivation and the illegal felling of timber that is still taking place unrestricted , lack of ecological concern in planning of development projects, infra structure development such as large irrigation dams and super highways have all contributed to the destruction of the “regenerative capacity” of the soil and environment.

This damage to land is further aggravated by the type of chemical farming adopted in agriculture on such cleared areas. **Therefore, a common approach that should be adopted in land use in general, in developing human settlements and in agriculture is to combine agriculture with agro-forestry to the maximum extent possible.**

We have expanded villages, plantations and human settlements by cutting down forests. Now there is a need and a tremendous possibility of getting forests (or forestry) to expand into the villages, plantations and other human settlements, including some of the urban settlements using the concept of “agro-forestry” and “analogue forestry” with suitable adaptations. Agro forestry is to develop agriculture as closely as possible to the biological functioning and bio-diversity that is found in a natural forest. This includes not only planting trees but also utilizing soil in a manner that protects and enhances its biological (microbial) activity.

A “new Approach” in relation to the hill country plantations

It is not only the hill country areas that were damaged due to commercialization of land use. The large extents of rubber plantations in the lower elevations and coconut plantations in the plains did not help in the optimum utilization, conservation and sustainable use of land, when considered from the point of view of the needs of the people in the country. The planters and the big land owners were only interested in having a single crop that brought them incomes. They adopted methods that weakened the overall productivity of the land from a diversity of other crops in order to get the maximum possible yield from a single crop that they chose. Thus what we see in the tea, rubber, sugar cane and tobacco plantations and also in the large stretches of coconut plantations is wastage and under utilization of land.

The important question that arises in this case is land for whom? and for what purpose? Today the Tea plantations that cover a major part of the hill country are becoming economically weak and less productive. In addition to the reduction in soil fertility and yields the international market for tea and rubber is becoming weaker.

Although soil conservation in the plantations has been a very important and urgent issue, this does not happen since the private sector plantation companies, looking for short term profit does not want to invest in soil conservation and improvement, to the degree necessary, since the returns can be expected only in the long term. Soil degradation continues. Large population of plantation workers and other people in the hill country plantation areas are facing a serious danger of losing their livelihoods. They are fast losing their employment security. **The employers in the plantations too are pressing for reforms in labour legislation so that they could remove these workers as they wish without having the obligations that they have at the moment under the present labour laws, such as the “Termination of Employment Act “**

The common factor, behind all these is the question “Land for whom”? If we accept the fundamental principle that “Land is one of the most important resources for the present and future generations of people, to be used sustainably, in the best possible way”, it is these people, when they are equipped with a right “vision” and not the foreign or domestic private businesses, who are able to rebuild land resources.

As we have already explained sustainable, ecological farming that could bring back the “regenerative capacity” to land and other natural resources related to land is most effectively done on small plots, paying attention to the basic requirements of conservation, recycling of organic matter, bio diversity.

In order to initiate such an approach in the plantation areas, we would like to suggest that a beginning should be made at least in areas where land has become less fertile and less productive and are almost left out due to low productivity.

At least ,in these areas, to begin with, land ownership should be given to the plantation worker families and to the poor farmer families in hill country villages, with necessary facilities and assistance to start sustainable agriculture and agro-forestry so that these resources could be utilized by the poor for a more successful livelihood, to achieve greater food security and better living conditions in a manner that rehabilitates the regenerative capacity of the land.

Such land alienation to small farmers and the poor has not been very successful in the past. The reason for this is that none of these land alienation programmes included effective strategies to help the recipients to utilize this land effectively. The methods of farming were not sustainable. They were largely seen only as a way of meeting some of the political interests.

Socio-political reasons for an alternative approach to the plantation workers issues

-Issue of citizenship and land rights to the workers and land to landless poor in the plantation areas-

An alternative approach in the plantation land is also necessary for other very important socio- political reasons. The plantation economy was built using Indian workers for cheap labour that plantations required. They were used as ‘near slaves’. This was an “inhuman” strategy that was adopted by the British rulers for the need of their planters. Although Sri Lanka obtained political Independence in 1948, the plantation workers were kept in the same state of near-slavery in order to maintain the plantation economy. They did not receive the independence that the other Sri Lankans were considered to have received. They were not given citizenship for a long time even after independence. Even today what the plantation workers have received is not genuine citizenship. Although Plantation ownership was taken back from the British (in 1975) this was not a freedom obtained by the plantation workers. In the more recent process of re-privatization of the plantations these workers’ communities were again handed back to the private companies to be used as degraded, cheap labour. As the plantations become less and less profitable the private sector plantation owners are bound to transfer these losses to the workers making their life situations even more miserable.

The present policy of giving priority to the private sector in land use and granting land to private businesses as an incentive to attract foreign investment could only make the situation worse

We have now begun to understand that it is very unjust and unwise to adopt a racist or ethnically biased approach or a policy of social discrimination in relation to land. This limited awareness has resulted from massive bloodshed and loss of tens of thousands of lives and brutalization of society in the Southern insurrections and in the Northern war. We should not delay this understanding in relation to the plantation workers until another war erupts.

The present policy proposed in relation to land use has a similar plan and a vision of depriving the rural communities in the country as a whole of access to land. The socio- political implications of such a policy is truly terrifying.

These plantation workers have a right to be “dignified citizens of the country” looking at the massive contribution they have made to the economy and to the lives of all Sri Lankans, earning a lot of money for the needs of the people for more than 150 years , in addition to “profits” they earned for the planters.

One may even say that the British Government and the planters must pay compensation to the people of Sri Lanka for the damage they have caused and the profits taken away. It is also just to say that the workers who put their lives in to this work should also be duly compensated. They must have rights and opportunities to have land, decent houses of their own, opportunities for education and health and also to achieve social mobility etc. It is by granting these opportunities that they would begin to feel that they are equal citizens, with dignity. This will never happen as long as they are kept merely as cheap subservient labour. Therefore, restoring their dignity is closely linked to the process of restoring the ‘regenerative capacity’ of the land resources in the hill country plantation areas. This type of thinking should in fact apply to the entire plantation sector. But, at least a beginning should be made on the land that is already becoming useless, to big profit makers.

Thus, it is a long delayed necessity, to make a serious assessment of the needed transformation in the entire plantation sector which looks at the land resources and the natural resources in the hill country and its people, as an integral part of a holistic approach in economic, environmental, social and political development. In fact such a process of transformation could bring far better overall benefits in terms of reviving the entire economy and socio-political life in this sector. The historical destruction that was caused by the plantations, as described earlier, could possibly be reversed. It is also a necessity in terms of overall land resource management in the country in adopting a holistic, integrated approach

Issue of Employment and livelihoods

A Strategy of Creating New Employment and Livelihood Opportunities

Draft policy says that “dependence on land for employment should be minimized” This is a proposal that needs careful examination. In Sri Lanka where there is a large population with limited land this seems to be a sensible proposal, only if it is possible to create sufficient employment and livelihood opportunities that do not depend on land. Therefore, we have to see if we have plans and sufficient opportunities to create an abundance of employment outside the agricultural sector. It is true that in countries where there was rapid and extensive industrial development the agricultural population is very low. Even in these industrialized countries there is a serious problem of unemployment and industries are being rationalized to absorb less and less labour, workers are being retrenched creating a massive social problem

In Sri Lanka the only industrial employment created during the last two decades was in the export oriented garments sector, in spite of the fact that there was an all out effort to provide all the required incentives and concessions.

However, this was not at all a sufficient solution to the massive problem of unemployment. Even this sector is facing a serious threat in the near future with Garment exports losing the quotas allowed under the Multi-Fiber Agreement by the year 2005. About 400,000 workers employed in this industry have their employment threatened. This problem of the economy failing to provide meaningful alternatives to the rural youth who were pushed to find employment outside those dependent on land, has been the biggest cause of social and political unrest, leading to youth rebellion and war. Planned expulsion of rural population from land, as envisaged in this draft policy could have unimaginable consequences.

The seriousness of this situation can be seen when we look at following figures;

There are about 4 million children attending school in Sri Lanka today. Those reaching up to the G.C.E. ordinary level may be about 500,000. The number sitting for Advanced level is over 250,000 (261,033). Over 70,000 pass the A.L. Exam which is extremely competitive. Only one out of 9 such students who pass AL with qualifications to enter universities are admitted. Thus, over 60,000 very clever and intelligent students who qualify get stranded. The injustice, frustration of aspirations and anger thus generated has created a social volcano that erupts from time to time.

It is a big myth and deception by the politicians about giving them all computer training and absorbing them to employment as computer operators, technicians or scientists. The process of transformation that we have described in land and agriculture, while being a massive process of revitalizing resources and a tremendous means of increasing over all productivity, adding to food security and health, has also a tremendous potential in creating new employment opportunities. Such a process would require hundreds of thousands of activists and professionals who could guide the farmers and rural communities in developing sustainable agriculture, conservation etc.

The youth of the type described above could be given a brief training and utilized as professionals in providing guidance to the farming communities in this transformation of land and agriculture. It would not be necessary for the Government to spend on their salaries since the added productivity and the savings that could be made in low external input agriculture would enable the beneficiaries to pay these young trainers decent remuneration.

The potential such a process has in employment generation is much bigger than the potential any other approach has. The results that have been achieved in employment generation and the lack of stability that is already seen in the approaches adopted so far to get the 'private sector led growth' in industry etc. clearly says that we have to look for other approaches in employment generation.

Government will not have any additional expenditure on this approach to employment generation. Hundreds of millions have been spent on providing infrastructure and other facilities to foreign investors hoping that they would generate sufficient employment. But the results achieved so far are pathetic. The type of expenditure and the borrowings the government is planning to make in the future to build super highways, proposed new Economic Zones etc. to attract investors, to build employment opportunities are terrifying. If the Government keeps borrowing to build these infrastructures, this would add to the already frightening debt. Budget 2002 says that each individual in the country is indebted to the extent of Rs 77,500. The new Infra structure costs would probably add around another Rs. 50,000 to each family's debt. Further, there is a lot of uncertainty about success in this strategy that has failed for the last 24 years. They are unstable approaches too.

It has been proved the application of IPM in paddy saves about Rs.3, 000 on an acre with considerable yield increase. To train farmers in IPM using Farmers Field Schools (FFS) an instructor has to spend only one day a week with a group of 25 farmers over a season of about 4 months. Thus, 100 farmers could be trained by spending 4 days a week. If these 100 farmers save at Rs.3,000 per acre and agree to give the trainer just Rs.500 for the season's training out of his saving, a trainer could be paid Rs 500 x

100 = Rs 50,000 for the season. This comes to about Rs.10, 000 per month. Such young people need not remain at the level of simple farmer instructors. Such a programme could also include additional opportunities for such young trainers to develop their knowledge and skills as professionals or scholars in ecological agriculture. It can begin as an extensive programme of developing the right type of ecological agriculture extension service.

In a country where there is still 40% of the employment provided by agriculture there is certainly a need for such extension services , of course with a right ‘vision’ and orientation to meet the real needs of today and of the future.

Future world demands conservation and sustainability. There is a massive worldwide effort by the people to achieve this. It has become necessary to look for alternative ways to prevent the social and environmental destruction caused by Globalization. This is also essential for Sri Lanka. We need a vision and a strategy of building a future generation of youth with a vision, scientific understanding and practical involvement in sustainable development, conservation, eradication of hunger and poverty. Such approaches will not only help in sound utilization of land resources, but also would provide the youth with a dignified livelihoods and a very positive social vision.

Therefore, we would like to emphasize that land and the issue of land use should be looked up on as some thing much more than an incentive to attract investors. It should be looked upon as a means of creating a stable society of people living in harmony and with dignity with an assurance of the nature’s gifts sufficient for sustenance.

Additional Notes

1. There are other factors that illustrate the importance of utilizing home gardens as a useful approach in land use. In addition to enriching bio diversity, conservation and regenerative capacity of land resources the contribution home gardens make to the uses such as food, fruit, fodder medicinal products firewood, timber and services such as shade, ornamental purposes and other multiple uses is very high. At national scale they provide 46% of timber requirements, 25% of fuel wood requirements, and home gardens have increased the land cover in Kandy and Gampola Districts by 4.2 %. In the dry zone 144 plant species have been identified which are indigenous varieties and some are exotic varieties. In Kandian forest gardens 29 such species have been identified, high percentage of them is spices. These show the contribution home gardens could make to protection of bio diversity.
2. Similar approaches are needed in the chena land too. In the rain fed upland in the dry zone 2.1 million acres of land is used in chena cultivation. 250,000 families depend on this. In the rain fed uplands soil is unstable and is liable to degrade fast. Run off and silting is a serious problem and measures such as prevention of erosion due to land clearing in agriculture, needs to be adopted to prevent rapid silting of the irrigation tanks and reservoirs in these regions too.

3. Within the present land use pattern the average rate of soil erosion is 70 metric Ton / hectare / year, while the soil formation rate is only 9 metric Tons / ha /yr. In the tea growing areas in the hill country soil erosion rate is 40 T and in vegetable and tobacco growing areas it is 200 T / ha /yr. In the Mahaoya catchment area it varies between 393 to 900 T / ha / yr (Ref: Natural Resources of Sri Lanka , NARESA) much of this damage is caused by not treating land resources with concern for its regenerative capacity. In general the Mahaweli Reservoirs that have been planned for 200 years have got over 50% silted just within 12 years. This is because the accelerated process of building reservoirs as well as the approach adopted in the land in catchment areas have not looked at the need for conservation. It is therefore essential to give importance to conservation (This has been proposed in the Agriculture Department report to Presidential Task force on Land Alienation and utilization in 1990)

List of some applications of sustainable agriculture activities
with assistance and guidance by the Peasant Information Centre , Ibbagamuwa under MONLAR

2001 – Integrated Pest Management in Paddy

No.	Govi Jana Sawa center	Field village	Number of farmers	Acres cultivated
1.	Rambe	Palugolla	22	25
2.	Rambe	Hakwatunawa	26	18
3.	Rambe	Polpithigama	16	30
4.	Madahapola	Morohtta	22	33
5.	Ibbagamuwa	Elhenpitiya	25	27
6.	Kurunegala	Thithawella	30	20
7.	Wareyapola	Embawa	28	26
8.	Ganewathta	Bogahawela	16	37
9.	Diullegoda	Mekandewa	25	35
10.	Ibbagamuwa	Murutawa	17	28
11.	Maragollagama	Gamwelayaya	26	35

Agro-forestry

No.	Institution	Field village	Number of farmers	Acres cultivated
1.	Institute for Adoptive Research and rural Enterprise Development	Katharagama	25	15

IPM

No.	Institution	Field village	Number of farmers	Acres cultivated
1.	Institute for Adoptive Research and rural Enterprise Development	Wellawaya	25	30

Agro-forestry

No.	Institution	Field village	Number of farmers	Acres cultivated
1.	Sales Development Study Center	Butthala	50	25

2001 – Organic Home gardens

No.	Organization	Village	Number of farmers
1.	Women's Development Foundation , Kurunegala	Kurunegala A.G. Division *Rathgalla *Ogadapola *Madithiyawela *Kumbalpola *Henamulla Wariyapola A.G. Division *Panawa *Ambawa *Sumangala *Kahatagaswewa *Randeneya Ibbagamuwa A.G. Division Talangamuwa Bambaragala Dewagiriya Ussawa Hardawalpola	 26 22 15 18 20 21 23 18 22 25 20 19 24 16 27
2.	Polpithigama Organisation for Human Development, Polpithigama	*Uthuruwalla *Pallekele *Kumbukulawa	18 13 19
3.	Peasant Information Center Ibbagamuwa	Talahinha Kukurumahana Atalla Murutawa Moragasgoda Lihinivehera Moragolagama Dunupotha Omaragolla Kashinna Ranavirugama - Model village	21 20 10 5 5 25 50 22 17 10 40
4.	Movement of Mothers to Combat Malnutrition Ibbagamuwa	Kurunegala *Bogollayaya *Bodimulla *Nelumwewa *Paragolla *Thitawelgala *Waduressa Puthtalama	25 110 10 10 10 20

		*Sithampalan waththa	35
		*Kapilawathta	27
		*Puliyayangamuwa	25
		Kegalla	
		*Udapamunuwa	36
		*Dehiyathakandiya	56
		*Mahiyangnaya	80
		*Kaluthara	40
		*Welamitigawa	30

Note: This is only a very small example. Much more detail list could be provided.