

**Synopsis of the presentation “As I see it” by Sarath Fernando,
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“A Dream That Will Come True”

1. The biggest challenge for us, in my view, is to ensure that no one goes hungry. There is no reason why anyone in Sri Lanka or anyone anywhere in the world should suffer hunger. Essential requirements such as water (Pure drinking water), fresh breathing air, health and education should be ensured for all, for all human beings and all other living beings. All human beings should have the right to live in dignity. The right to develop and express one’s creative abilities and potential and the right to decide are essential aspects of human dignity.
2. As ordinary people who do not yet have power to decide and carryout things the way we think best, what we can do without any hindrance is to ‘Dream’. Those who suffer the above conditions need to create their own dream. What we can do and should do is to assist them in creating their own dream and to give legitimacy to their dream.
3. With long years of work and study, in Sri Lanka and in association with world movements of such people, I know that this dream is now being created. I am convinced that this dream will come true. I know that this dream is being created by the poor in Sri Lanka and it is being created throughout the world.
4. What I will try to do today is to share with you the basic elements, contents of this dream and to discuss with you why we need to share in this dream and to join in the process of making this dream a reality here and now.
5. Before I come to sharing this dream, which in fact, is also a very practical program of action, I would like to tell you that all other approaches that have been adopted by the rulers and the big financial powers, so far have failed, and all proposals, plans and strategies that are proposed for the future are destined to fail.

Due to lack of time, I will not try to go into detailed facts and figures. I leave them for discussion. But my basic premises for rejection of all strategies attempted in the recent decades are the following.

- i. Dependence on foreign or local capital looking for greater profit will never ensure the essential requirements of all people. Its agenda can only destroy and enslave a big majority of the people and will destroy nature finally ending up in destruction of all. There may have been a time when the process of capital accumulation and the reinvestment of such capital for further profit contributed towards human society developing the ability to meet some of the needs. This is not the case any more if one makes an overall assessment.
- ii. The biggest potential that we have in solving hunger, poverty, sickness and all other essential problems is the tremendous creative potential of millions of people who are now treated as were instruments or raw materials for profit accumulation by a few. Such millions are consciously prevented from utilizing their creative potential.

This Process of utilizing total creative human potential should begin and proceed in the direction of “re-building the regenerative capacity” of the earth, of nature and nature’s resources. What we should oppose is exploitation of humans and of nature.

There is already recognition that the present rates and the systems of extraction and exploitation cannot last long. Therefore, there is now a lot of concern and attention given to ‘conservation’ and ‘sustainability’ but, this often is about slowing down a fundamentally destructive approach. It’s about sustaining a basically irrational system for a little longer. What we need is not mere conservation and sustainability, but re-creation of the re-generative capacity.

- iii. We have to do this, beginning with the restoration of the re-generative capacity of our soil, the earth, land and nature.
- iv. Often most proposals for restoring the nature’s ability to regenerate itself is quickly dismissed as proposals to “go back in history” but in my view these proposals are for moving forward.

In order to make my view clearer and simple to understand, I will begin with the example of a simple, natural home garden.

My little home garden, about 10 purchases has more than 20 varieties of big and small, fruits and vegetables, leaf vegetables, yams and a few medicinal plants. My family has no knowledge of farming. We do not spend a single cent on it. We do not add any chemical fertilizer, pesticides. We do not use irrigation or external labour. So, there is no cost. But this gives us a considerable share of food and nutrition. I live in a “Watte” with about 100 families having plots of land of similar size. If all these families do the same we will have an abundance of fruits and vegetables. The overall productivity would be very high.

This can be done at practically no cost by almost all households, in all villages in Sri Lanka, under all ecological conditions. This can also be done

in most urban areas, in a different way. Most of the plantation land has now become depleted and eroded. Regeneration of land in the hill country is essential for regeneration of the entire eco-system. Plantation workers who have earned most of our health for more than one and a half centuries have a right to food and nutrition, health, housing, education and dignity. The only way to achieve this is by recognizing their right to land and their right to access to resources, to be used in the manner that would permit them to be human, to be “masters of their lives”.

Health- Today’s health system, the system of treatment of illness is totally meaningless and irrelevant to a majority of people since the cost of medicine, of doctors’ charges and Hospital charges are totally beyond their reach. We should have rejected this system and health policy long ago. If we adopt the approach proposed above we would solve most of our major health problems, almost at no cost. The major diseases and illnesses today are due to poor food and nutrition, unhealthy poisoned food and poisoned water. We would solve these problems and problems caused by mosquitoes, due to loss of natural control.

Water- This approach would give us pure drinking water at no cost, throughout the country, there would be more water retained in our soils and our wells, reservoirs, lakes and springs. If water is not prices all humans, animals and trees will have better access to water. Providing for the needs of the urban population would be much easier.

Employeement and Livelihoods- all approaches adopted so far to solve un-employeement during the last 3 decades have failed. The only claimed achievement in garment sector is now beginning to fail. We are now told that we have to provide cheaper labour, under more exploitative, enslaving conditions in order to retain such industries. The rural people are being pushed to leave their land and migrate to urban areas as cheap labour and to make land available for export agriculture by investors. Thus, we end up in logic saying that to reduce poverty, through growth “trickling down” we have to create more poverty and keep them poor.

The highest potential we have for creating fruitful livelihoods is through the transformation of our land, the earth and its ecological richness. Rebuilding the re-generative capacity of our soil and natural resources.

Similar transformation has been proved to be possible and effective in the way we grow our paddy in rice farming.

Youth Potential- 4.5 million children begin their schooling. Only 250,000 sit for their A/L exams. About 75,000 qualities to enter universities but universities take only 10,000 – 12,000 every year. Thus nearby 60,000 intelligent, hardworking youth are simply rejected to nowhere every year. With a very minimal training (Just one or two months) they can be equipped to work with their village communities. In beginning this process, this can go along with a process of higher education in the same field of ecological agriculture. Through such a process, these young

“Change agents” can be given a decent living allowance out of the added productivity that they help in creating and easily with savings he make in other aspects such as health etc.