



Environment Development Strategies and Action Plans

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Many activities, both planned and unplanned, affecting natural resources and the environment have run counter to the rationale of sustained development. The underlying cause is the cost of environmental protection and resource management measures in the face of scarcity of financial resources. Environmental monitoring and pollution prevention measures adopted by the industrialized countries are often prohibitively expensive. Exacerbating the problem is the absence of skilled manpower to evaluate, assess and modify pollution control measures to make them more appropriate to our needs, or to adopt cost-effective, innovative approaches.

The result has been a pursuit of development for short term gain, ignoring environmental and sustainable resource management aspects. Continuing on such a

course of action will result in, among other things, loss of top soil, one of our most important natural resources; siltation of reservoirs; pollution of soil, water and air, causing serious health hazards; aggravation of floods, landslides and droughts; introduction of human and animal diseases; depletion of indigenous genetic resources; and so on. All these effects strike at the very root of sustainable economic development. No longer can environmental protection be considered a luxury. It is becoming increasingly clear that the opportunity costs of ignoring environmental protection and rational resource utilization are far higher than the investments such action would require. A purposeful programme is therefore to address the issues of environmental protection and natural resource management.

The broad objectives of environmental and natural resource management may be set out as follows:

- * Protecting, managing and enhancing the quality of the environment.
- * Conserving and rationally managing the country's natural resources in order to obtain the optimum therefrom for the present and future generations.

In accordance with these broad objectives, the plan of action in the next few years will focus on the following strategies:—

- Capability building for resource management; environment impact assessment; waste treatment; assessment and control of pollution of air, soil and water; setting up of standards
- Taking effective measures for controlling deforestation, controlling soil erosion in cultivated land, rehabilitating degraded land, developing agro-forestry and silvi-pastoral systems for improving the productivity of non-irrigated land settlements
- Controlling water pollution arising from the use of agrochemicals, discharge of sewage, and discharge of industrial effluents.

- Controlling environmental degradation in coastal areas, mainly in relation to coral mining, and pollution.
- Reviewing quarantine regulations and implementation, and taking remedial action, where necessary.
- Upgrading environmental education and enhancing public awareness on environmental issues

Action Plan

The Action Plan for the next five years will focus on the key areas relating to environmental and natural resources management. Environment, by its very nature, is affected by developments in many different sectors, and action for the sustained management of the environment will have to emanate from the sectoral institutions. Into their economic development plans, these institutions will have to incorporate activities to address environmental concerns where appropriate. The CEA can only play a coordinating, supportive, and regulatory role in activities aimed at sustained management of natural resources and the environment.

The major activities proposed for the next years are set out below :—

Strengthening Capability

One of the most serious constraints as regards environmental and natural resources management is the lack of trained manpower in the country. This problem will be addressed as a matter of top priority in the next five year period. The training of manpower will not be confined to the CEA but will also cover a wide range of institutions: Forest Department, Department of Wild Life Conservation, NARA NARESA, Department of Coast Conservation, etc. areas: resource management techniques, pollution control technology, natural resources management policies, environment specific project preparation/appraisal, natural resources information, environmental impact assessment, etc.

Besides training, other infrastructural support services will be built up for improving the overall national capability in the area of natural resources and environmental management. The specific areas to be addressed are listed below:—

- Training
- Laboratory accreditation
- Drawing up EIA guidelines
- Setting up of standards
- Building up a natural resources information base.

Forests and Land

Forests and land are two of the country's most important natural resources and these have been over-exploited and mismanaged in the past. Radical changes are necessary in regard to matching forest and agricultural activities with the requirements of sustainable management. Neglecting to take action now will result in serious adverse effects on many sectors of the economy.

Action is proposed in the following areas:—

- Declaration of a National Policy
- Strengthening the forestry sector particularly in research and extension
- Preparation and implementation of integrated plans for management of forests/wild life
- Felling of all natural forests to be preceded by assessment of impact on bio-diversity and environment, and felling to be permitted, only if no adverse impacts are expected
- reservation of natural forests in the dry zone in accordance with the need to provide ecological security
- Development of agro-forestry and silvi-pastoral systems for non-irrigated settlements in the dry zone
- Recommendation of soil conservation activities in accordance with the provisions of the Soil Conservation Act.

Pollution of Soil, Water and Air

Pollution of soil, water and air, though not widely prevalent at present, could build up into a major problem with continuing industrialization, urbanization and

agricultural development. The following programme of action is proposed:—

- All major new projects to be subjected to EIA, and approval to be withheld if impact is adverse
- All major industries (eg paper, cement, etc.) to pursue a vigorous drive to reduce pollution. Each major industry to appoint one of its senior staff to be responsible for environmental matters, including occupational hazards
- Action to be taken in terms of the National Environmental Act, Section 23, for the prevention of pollution from small and medium industries
- Controlling excessive use of agro-chemicals in the agriculture and plantation sectors
- Controlling pollution by motor vehicles by amending the Motor Traffic Act and establishing the necessary infra-structure for enforcing the law.

Coastal and Aquatic Resources Management

Sustainability of coastal resources and the environment is of considerable importance to several sectors of the economy, notably, fisheries and tourism. The following programme is proposed:—

- Control measures for preventing coral mining and sand mining (including finding alternative employment for displaced persons)
- Controlling sewage discharge and pollution of beaches
- Regular monitoring of existing aquaculture projects in relation to possible environmental degradation
- Assess the impact of current levels of exploitation of ornamental fish in freshwater and brackishwater bodies.

Urban Pollution

Particularly in the larger cities, the problem of pollution can reach acute levels, unless effective action is taken to control it. The following programme is proposed:—

- Controlling pollution caused by vehicle emissions
- Improper sewage disposal, especially in urban shanties

– indiscriminate use of loudspeakers; and so on.

Quarantine

The following activities are proposed:—

– Review quarantine regulations and implementation measures; revise regulations and strengthen implementation procedures, where necessary.

Environmental Education, Public Awareness

The following activities are proposed:—

– Improving curricula and the standard of environmental education in schools
– enhancing public awareness on the importance of preserving the environment and conserving natural resources.

1. EIA Training

This will cover (a) postgraduate courses of one year's duration (to be carried out by an University) on EIA, aiming to train 150 persons over a 3-year period; and (b) short courses covering the following areas (to cater to specific needs): sector specific EIA (eg. forestry, wild life). EIA for provincial administration, compilation of base-line environmental information, policy and fiscal aspects, and sensitizing personnel in non-government organizations and the media.

2. Preparation of EIA General Guidelines and Sector – Specific Guidelines

These guidelines will assist project proponents and also help state officers in decision making.

3. Developments of Standards for Effluents and Emissions, and for Streams

These are urgently needed for supporting the environmental licensing scheme.

4. Preparation of a Licensing Manual

This Manual will set out the technical procedures to be followed for implementing the licensing scheme.

5. Feasibility Study for the Establishment of a Waste Treatment Facility Suitable for Small and Medium Scale Industries

There are a large number of small and medium scale industries in the country, and

most of them are located in the districts of Colombo and Gampaha. At present, the effluents are discharged untreated into the environment. A central waste treatment facility for a group of small/medium industries seems to be the most viable option for dealing with the waste problem, since each entrepreneur will not be able to act independently.

6. Assessment of Needs for Pollution Control Technologies in Large Industries

This study will be a prelude to the implementation of pollution measures in large industries. Only a few of which at present carry out any pollution control measures.

7. Training in Compliance Procedures and Measures for Pollution Control

This project will aim at producing a cadre of officers competent in analytical and control methodology in relation to monitoring pollution.

8. Upgrading Monitoring and Testing Facilities

The aim of this project is to upgrade the capability of laboratories for environmental monitoring. A laboratory accreditation scheme will be put into operation.

9. Formulation of a Financial Incentive Scheme for Industries to Install Pollution Control Equipment

This will be done in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and other relevant institutions.

10. Development of Mathematical Computer Models for Air and Water Quality Impact Prediction and Assessment

This project will aim at providing the tools for ensuring precise and reliable impact prediction in the preparation of EIA reports.

11. Conservation of Wetlands

This project aims at consolidating the legislative and institutional structures, and setting in place a viable implementation mechanism for controlling the management of wetlands, both in the coast and inland areas.