

Climate change mitigation and forests of Sri Lanka

(By Thomas Enters)

Forests cover approximately 9.4 percent of the Earth's surface, 30 percent of the total land area. Forests help regulate the world's climate and weather, are home to nearly 90 percent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity and their resources directly support the livelihoods of 90 percent of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty. Roughly 13 million hectares of forest are converted to other land uses each year and with this deforestation and degradation, high volumes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are released.

This places the sector second only to the energy industry for carbon output, accounting for approximately 12 percent of global carbon emissions. The main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are the expansion of agricultural land to feed increasing numbers of people and animals, legal and illegal logging, infrastructure development, and the world's need for energy, i.e. space for producing agro-industrial crops like oil palm or sugar.

If deforestation and degradation of forests can be reduced, and possibly reversed via conservation, better forest management, and carbon stock enhancement (through e.g. forest restorations and afforestation), it will be possible to reverse the loss of biodiversity, significantly reduce carbon emissions, and improve the livelihoods of the people who live and depend on forests. This is precisely what REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) aims to achieve.

REDD (frequently also referred to as REDD+) comprises five activities that developing countries are encouraged to implement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to mitigate climate change. These activities include reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation as well as the conserving, enhancing and sustainably managing forest carbon stocks. In return for the successful implementation of these activities, developing countries will receive positive incentives from developed countries.

The REDD Concept:

The concept of REDD was introduced during the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP 11), held in 2005. It was further elaborated, expanded and officially adopted during COP13 in Bali, Indonesia in 2007. The Bali Action Plan encouraged Parties "to explore a range of actions, identify options and undertake efforts, including demonstration activities, to address the drivers of deforestation relevant to their national circumstances, with a view to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and thus enhancing forest carbon stocks due to sustainable management of forests." COP16 decided that REDD will be implemented in phases beginning with the development of national strategies or action plans, policies and measures, and capacity-building (Phase 1, also called the REDD Readiness Phase), followed by the implementation of

national policies and measures and national strategies or action plans that could involve further capacity-building, technology development and transfer and results-based demonstration activities (Phase 2), and evolving into results-based actions that should be fully measured, reported and verified (Phase 3).

Many developing countries are currently getting ready for REDD. Their efforts are supported by numerous bilateral and multilateral initiatives. One such initiative is the UN-REDD Programme, the United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries. The Programme was launched in 2008 and builds on the convening role and technical expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The UN-REDD Programme supports nationally-led REDD processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities, in the development and implementation of REDD strategies in more than 50 countries, spanning Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean..

The UN-REDD Programme in Sri Lanka:

The UN-REDD Programme has been supporting Sri Lanka for more than one year in getting ready for REDD. Implementing partners are the Forest Department and the Climate Change Secretariat of the Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy and the Department of Wildlife Conservation. The partners including FAO, UNDP and UNEP are convinced of the benefits REDD can bring to Sri Lanka, its rich biodiversity, its economy and its people. However, in many countries, representatives of government agencies, the private sector and non-government organizations have expressed concerns. They foresee serious consequences for many forest users (e.g. local communities and indigenous peoples, logging concessionaires and/or the wood processing industries). Under REDD, they argue non-timber forest product collection would have to stop, logging operations would cease and land-use change would become history. In addition, some people believe that economic and infrastructure development would be frozen in time, as industrial countries would pressure developing countries to focus almost exclusively on reducing emissions through mitigation in the forestry sector.

This would happen under “STEDD”, which was coined in response to some of the concerns. STEDD stands for “Stopping Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation”. It has rooted itself in the minds of many people, although it does not exist. It is very clear that “stopping” and “reducing” are two very different concepts. This becomes apparent when you think about trimming some of the fat that has accumulated in your body over the years. To get your weight down, would you decide to stop eating or rather to reduce the amount of food – and drinks – you consume, often unnecessarily? The latter, we suspect. You would probably also consider changing your lifestyle. In fact, stopping to eat would ultimately produce a disastrous result. So would STEDD.

In the forestry and land-based sectors, the requested or required changes are very similar to the lifestyle change, referred to above. Under STEDD any activity with potentially negative consequences to carbon stocks would have to cease. Under REDD, on the other hand, developing countries and their stakeholders would mitigate the impacts they have on forest ecosystems and would go about enhancing carbon stocks. For logging concessionaires this would mean improving their operations by, for example, applying reduced impact logging. Plantations of industrial crops would be established on land not currently covered by forests. Forest-dependent people would be able to continue to cut timber to build their houses or canoes, and collect non-timber forest products, including firewood. To ensure that the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are addressed and respected, that relevant stakeholders are fully and effectively engaged in REDD development and implementation, and that natural forests are not converted into carbon farms, COP16 passed a set of safeguards that are expected to be supported and promoted by developed and developing countries alike.

As the potential impacts of REDD on local people is a critical issue, the UN-REDD Programme in Sri Lanka has established a Platform for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), as one of its first activities. The CSO Platform gives these organizations a means to develop and deliver focused and coordinated inputs to forest policy and decision-making processes at the national level.

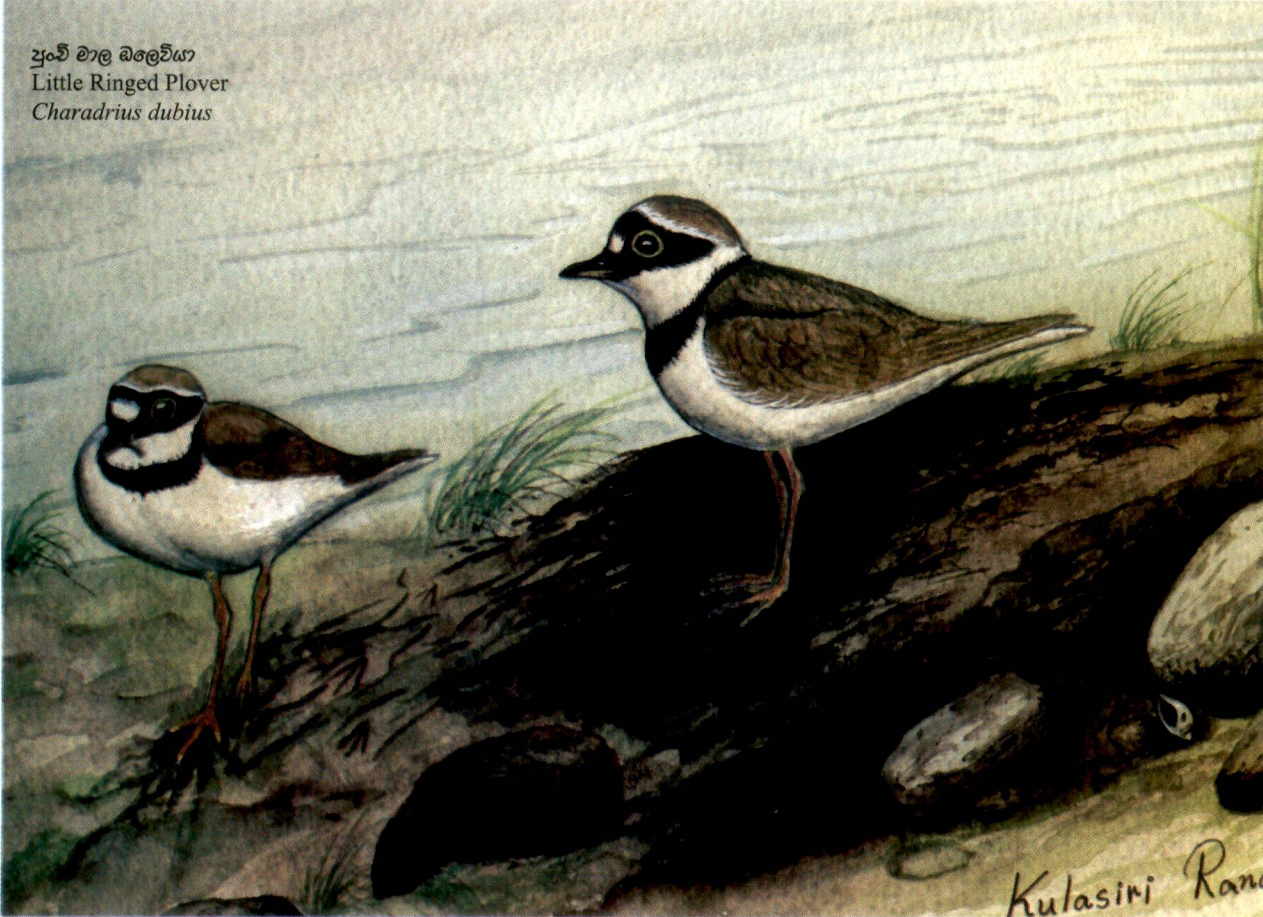
Also, the UN-REDD Programme in Sri Lanka has established the Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Forum, which will enable the 'Veddha' community to discuss their concerns, share their knowledge and play an active role in the protection of forests. Indigenous people such as the 'Veddha' community retain a wealth of knowledge and wisdom on the important products and services that these unique ecosystems provide. It is therefore very important to integrate indigenous peoples in REDD processes.

If you continue to be concerned or just interested in REDD, the UN-REDD Programme in Sri Lanka or the CSO Platform and IP Forum, please contact the Sri Lanka UN-REDD Programme. 419/1, Pannipitiya Road, Pelawatta, Battaramulla (Tel: 011-278-7532, 011-278-6077, Fax: 011-278-6255, web: www.un-redd.org)

(The writer is the UN-REDD Regional Coordinator for United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific)



කළු හිස් කොවුල්කෘච්ඡනා
Black-Headed Cuckooshrike
Coracina melanoptera



පුංචි මාලු බිලෙඩියා
Little Ringed Plover
Charadrius dubius

Kulasiri Rana