ADVERSE SAND MINING PRACTICES AFFECTING FLOODPLAIN SUSTAINABILITY

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Since enactment of the regulation to exploit sand on floodplains using mechanised equipment, the adverse impact on the environment over a period of almost a decade, is unsurpassed to any of the recent environmental debacles. The gradual deterioration of the floodplain physiography begins to bear its malice fruits, converting once fertile farmlands into wastelands and deepening groundwater table to a depth which freshwater from shallow dug-wells become a non-existing commodity. Ad-hoc mega sand-pits on the floodplains, under the pretext of "inland sand operations" have become the most adverse type of sand extraction with colossal damage to the environment.

Both legal and illegal sand mining operations on sensitive floodplains via excavating mega-pits triggering deepening of base level of river beds pose a great threat to the entire eco-system of the floodplains. From past experience and witnessing the devastating environmental consequences caused by the use of heavy machinery for sand exploitation of Ma-Oya and Walawe Ganga floodplains, the necessity to take stern actions against floodplain exploitation cannot be overemphasized.

Unfortunately, the ongoing sand mining operations within Kirindi Oya basin reveals the lessons were not learned yet, though the destroyed floodplains remain beyond any recovery posing an environment and health risk to the indigenous people in the vicinity of floodplains. Due to lucrative income that generates via inland sand mining, the remaining floodplains are at great risk if appropriate regulatory measures are not taken against inland sand mining and mining practices that deepens the riverbeds drastically.

Virgin areas of the River Mahaweli, particularly Floodplain Sanctuary of Somawathiya and Kantalai irrigation scheme have been identified as the next focus for extensive sand mining which will produce dire consequences if allowed to exploit with existing practices.

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