STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN SRI LANKA: AN ANALYSIS OF POLICY AND LEGAL OPTIONS

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Abstract

One of the negative consequences of unplanned but rapid urbanization in Sri Lanka is urban air pollution. Data indicates that the deterioration of air quality is directly due the increase in demand for energy, particularly transport, industrial, and residential sectors. The condition is compounded by a plethora of economic and planning policies that are at the root of the problem, such as the use of low quality fuels, incoherent traffic management policies that exacerbate traffic congestion, poor land use planning, and the use of reconditioned vehicles and engines with poor efficiency in combustion. This makes it difficult to develop air quality management policies and laws.

However, Sri Lanka has taken a number of measures since 1992 to improve the urban air quality including Clean Air 2000 Action Plan, urban air quality management policy, ambient air quality standards, emission standards for in-use and new vehicles, the standards for fuel quality and vehicle importation and banning of leaded petrol. A large number of legislations have also been introduced. The attempts to control the importation of two stroke vehicles and the introduction of vehicle emission testing program have failed due to their strong link with socio-economic and political elements. The Air Resource Management Centre (AirMAC) which was established as a partnership initiative with all stakeholders has also began to face some difficulties. This indicates that the traditional short term policy and legal instruments are not effective for air quality management.

The concept of Strategic Environment Management (SEM) has been introduced to address complex environmental problems in developed countries. This paper investigated the concept of SEM and compared it with traditional approaches to air quality management in Sri Lanka. The existing policies and legal instruments were analysed in the SEM framework in order to investigate the applicability of SEM to Sri Lanka. The study concludes that the strategic approaches to air quality management are more effective than traditional approaches even though the impacts of SEM could be slow. The paper recommends that combination of strategic approaches including technical strategies, vehicle technologies, fuel technologies, systemic strategies, behavioural strategies and a range of tactical approaches will be appropriate for Sri Lankan air quality management. These strategic approaches should be supported by appropriate policy, economics and legal instruments.