Unregulated / Illicit River Sand Mining in Sri Lanka -
Impact of Awareness Campaign and Legal Recourse.

Experience from some interventions undertaken by the Sri Lanka Water Partnership.

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- Sri Lanka has 103 river basins varying from 9 Sq Km to 10,327 Sq Km.

- 35 Rivers, most close to urban/construction centres adversely impacted by sand mining.

- Post Tsunami construction boom from 2005 increased annual sand demand from 5M m³ to current 10M m³.

Sri Lanka Water Sector

Management of Water Resources

- 40 Agencies
- 51 Acts
- Confusion
- Duplication
- Inaction

Corruption
Impacts of RSM

• Lowered water table – Impacts on agriculture and drinking water supply.
• Collapse of river banks.
• Lowering of river bed and changes to flow regime.
• Damage to river related and road infrastructure.
• Disruption to social harmony and community cohesion. (Community divided-for/against RSM)
• Migration by poor due to loss of livelihood.
• Encourages corruption. Staff pressurized.
• Bio diversity/Ecosystems affected.
Some Impacts of RSM

Damage to banks and riverbed
Mechanized mining (Now banned)

Damage to bank, infrastructure and change of river course
Enforcement and Regulation of RSM

• Several legal enactments provide for control and management of river resources.
• Geological Survey and Mines Bureau functions as Regulator.
• Advantages: Integrated holistic approach to meet national needs, reduction of influence on local decision making.
• Disadvantages: Monopoly, Insufficient staff and oversight, outposted functionaries subject to political and other pressures.

*Klitgaard Equation: Corruption = Monopoly + Discretion - Accountability.*
Issues. (Problem)

- Multiplicity of laws and weakness in regulation results in poor and selective enforcement.
- Enforcement requires assistance of many institutions including mainly police.
- Institutions have own priorities.
- Regulation and enforcement staff subject to political and other pressures.

However

The Problem is invariably part of the Solution.
Approach by SLWP

• Awareness Campaign and Dialogues involving stakeholder agencies with focus on police as main enforcer.
• Community mobilization/Seek champions.
• Media as a Partner.(use media tours/Hot topics)
• Political roundtables.
• Link with other NGO/CBO for synergy.
• Legal redress- Support public interest litigation.
• Use Social Media (Blogs to highlight negative environment behavior)
Some Results.

- Enforcement coordinated and given priority.
- Public Interest litigation. (Supreme Court has banned RSM in two rivers)
- Better oversight by Regulator.
- Some decisions on clearances and regulation has now been devolved to local state administration.
- Area/Basin Communities organized to counter illicit RSM.
- Support of local religious leaders/champions.
- Mechanized mining in rivers now banned.
- Policy on sand for construction developed.
- Environment Police Units/Cells in all police stations.
Problems Remaining.

- Uses of river sand mainly outside basin, thus decisions within basin inadequate to control extraction.
- Decision making at political level sometimes overrides existing policy and regulatory framework. (Requirement of permits for transport of sand discontinued, resulting in resumption of some illegal operations).
- Banning of mining in some rivers only moves the problem to other rivers at distant (out of sight) locations, resulting severe damage to ecosystems.
- Severe damage by long haul transport to road infrastructure.
- Increase in cost of sand.
- Not much enthusiasm by politicians for sand alternatives.
Enforcement Staff and Police Training

Chief Minister at Central Province Police Training Programme 2011.

DG-GSMB (Regulator) at STF Training for 4 Districts in Western Province, 2011

STF Training Programme Southern / Eastern Province, 2012
Thank you.