

Sri Lanka Water Partnership (SLWP)- Wetlands Activity.

2016 World Wetland Day (WWD) National Celebrations were held on a grand scale organized by the Central Environment Authority (CEA) and the Ministry of Environment on 2nd February. The 2016 programme was significant in that it was held under the patronage of H.E. the President for the first time. The public event and celebrations were at a wetland in Chilaw in the North Western Province.



SLWP Country Coordinator in conversation with HE The President

SLWP was invited to collaborate with the CEA for the first time in this year's national celebrations as a partner. In recognition of its contribution the Country Coordinator was invited on stage with H.E. other ministers, deputy ministers and Chairman CEA during the awards ceremony to prize winners of the national schools and open art competition held earlier nationwide. Usually NGO are not recognized as an integral part of such national events and this acknowledgement of SLWP contribution to wetland conservation and its continuing work on urban wetlands is extremely significant.



Item by school children at World Wetland Day Celebrations

SLWP principle of "see no enemies " has enabled it to mobilize and bring to common platforms the varied stakeholder interests to enable resolution of issues arising. Using evidence based advocacy for decision making provided by partner universities, the role of SLWP as an honest broker is widely accepted by all our partners and collaborators. Varied stakeholder interests many conflicting and or competing across many levels such as local communities and civic groups, CBO/NGO, local agency staff, local authorities and politicians, nation level agencies and regulators, policy makers and politicians call for dedicated efforts and untiring follow up. The involvement of universities in practically all our interventions has provided the required legitimacy for acceptance of most of our recommendations and have enabled common positions on difficult issues to be developed.

In recognition of SLWP work in urban wetlands the Chamber of Commerce Sri Lanka acting on behalf of Sampath Bank is funding a pilot study on the Bolgoda ecosystem by SLWP to be carried out in 2016. A reconnaissance survey for site identification has already been done in December 2015. External funding would enable SLWP partnered by the University of Colombo (UoC) to carry out a critical mass of activities in this wetland, the largest in the Western Province.



Some finalists at WWD art competition – Bolgoda Wetland

SLWP interest in intervening in wetlands especially urban wetlands arose as consequence of a workshop that was organized sometime back by SLWP on City Floods, where the function of wetlands as a sink for storm water in mitigating flood impacts came to the fore during discussions.

Our Mission

"Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management in Sri Lanka"

The first intervention was in 2012 when SLWP with assistance from the University of Moratuwa (UoM) arranged stakeholder meetings on the Kollonnawa wetland in the Western Province following a wetland mapping exercise and some school activities in the same year. The complex socio political issues related to Kollonnawa did not encourage further headway at the local level. A decision maker consultation was also organized by SLWP and the (UoM) with the main regulator the Sri Lanka Land Reclamation and Development Corporation (SLRDC), Central Environment Authority (CEA) and Urban Development Authority (UDA) in September 2009 and though the six main stakeholders agreed to formulate a common policy approach the results were minimal due to competing priorities within the agencies.



Stakeholder meeting – Bolgoda Wetlands CoC Programme

In 2013 interest in Bolgoda wetland complex resulted in a resurgence of the programme with an initial activity with the Divisional Secretariat and related staff. This was followed in 2014 by an interactive seminar on the Bolgoda wetland complex in June at the Kesbawa Urban Council with active support of both the Council and University of Colombo (UoC). This programme was supported by the CEA and resource persons from the University of Ruhuna (UoR) and also University of Queensland. This provided for a stakeholder platform to be established to improve networking and strengthen relationships for future action.. A follow up workshop in July involving a greater outreach of associated interests culminating in formation of wetland protection societies was reinforced by a consolidation programme in October 2014. An expert consultation was held later in December at the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) in December with participation of CEA, SLRDC, UDA ,UoM and UoCto strengthen the local institutional arrangements and develop a policy brief.

A further Interactive Seminar for Youth was also held at the Department of Community Water Supply to plan for intervention on the immediate threats to the wetland complex and how youth groups can intervene.



Wetlands schools activity – Thalawathugoda Eco Park

Activities on wetlands continued in 2015 too. A joint activity was carried out by SLWP, IWMI, SLRDC, UoC and UoR at the Wetland Eco Park Thalawathugoda to mark World Wetland Day on 2nd February. A follow up school based awareness raising programme on 6th February on the importance of conserving wetland held for students of Colombo Schools at the Thalawathugoda Wetland park of the SLRDC as part of WWD commemoration activity. This event was covered widely in local TV and newspapers.



Tree planting activity on World Wetlands Day 2015

With climate change bringing more sharply felt impacts to communities; the role of wetlands is recognized to have crucial importance in climate change adaptation and water conservation. A National Wetland Policy was declared in 2004 and the Sri Lankan government has been active in wetland management. Currently Sri Lanka has six wetlands as Ramsar Sites (Bundala, Anawilundawa, Madu Ganga, Kumana, Wilpattu, and Vankalai) of a total of 64 named wetlands in Sri Lanka. World Wetland Day (WWD) activities have also been organized annually, and all related stakeholders are being encouraged to become more involved in wetland conservation.

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