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Review Paper Sustainable Development Goals on Energy and Environ

ment: Key Issues in Sri Lanka

Abstract The purpose of this study is to investigate the key

energy and environmental issues that Sri Lanka is to address under sustainable development agenda of the United Nations. This study reviewed relevant recent studies and reports published by government and non-governmental sources and documents the issues emerging and being highlighted in relation to relevant Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations; namely Goal 07- access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, Goal 13- combating climate change and its impacts, and Goal 15- protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Keywords: Sustainable Development, Climate Change,

Sri Lanka, Environment, Energy. Introduction Building upon the outcome of the Millennium Development

Goals (MDG), the member countries of the United Nations have launched a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that are envisaged to be attained by 2030. Humanity, according to Brundtland Report (1987), is able to achieve sustainability in developments thereby meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations

to meet their own needs. The new development agenda is hence interwoven with sustainability principles and commands honest deliberations of humanity to make its developments sustainable across generations. United Nations has thus resolved and adopted 17 Sustainable

Development Goals with 169 targets which cross cut five Ps; that is, People, Planet,

Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. These goals seek to provide clear guidelines and targets for member

countries for meeting the environmental challenges of the world at large. SDGs were adopted

at an historic UN General Assembly Meeting in September 2015 by 193 member states of U

nited Nations including Sri Lanka and they came into effect on 1st January 2016. Effective initiatives for the attainment

ment of these goals in a country will require at least the awareness and recognition of the key issues underlying those goals. Thus, the purpose of this paper is an attempt to survey the key issues that Sri Lanka is encountering in selected SDGs. This paper has focused on three SDGs that are connected to energy and environment, namely Goal 07- access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, Goal 13- combating climate change and its impacts, and Goal 15- protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. This study reviewed relevant recent studies and reports published by government

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issues in relation to selected SDGs

on energy and environment.

17 SDGs were an outcome of the United Nations Conference

on Sustainable Development - or Rio+20 - took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20

-22 June 2012.

Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern

Energy for All
Ensuring access to affordable electricity, reliable

and sustainable electricity by 2030 requires intensifying investment in clean energy sources and

adoption of cost-effective technologies and effective regulations of electricity consumption and

energy waste. Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy is fundamental

for growth and sustainability of environment and economy. Sri Lanka encounters certain

main issues in relation to the achievement of this goal. They may include

inter alia

persistently growing demand for energy, larger dependency on thermal power sources than renewable

and modern energy sources, larger cost of imported fossil fuel and foreign currency outflow,

increased/ unaffordable electricity tariff which consequently lead to increased cost of living and p

roduction, unreliable energy and some issues non access to electricity. Overdependence on fossil

fuels for generating energy in Sri Lanka has much bearing on climate change. According to Withan

aarachchi

et al

. (2014), it is the thermal oil which is the highest contributor for the nation's e

lectricity generation which source higher emission rate of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs). Thermal p

ower sources which comprise of oil and coal account for 54% of the total installed capacit

y of Sri Lanka. This increased dependency on thermal power sources causes huge cost of imported

fossil fuel and foreign currency outflow. According to Sri Lanka Energy Sector Development Pl

an for a Knowledge-Based Economy 2015 – 2025, the average annual total bill of impor

ted fossil fuel is 25% of import expenditure of Sri Lanka, and it is nearly 50% of total export inc

ome. Therefore the power and energy sector taxes significantly the country's balance of trade

and exchange rates. n Affordability is another issue to be remedied under

this caption. Affordable energy implies that energy is to be provided at an affordable and reaso

nable cost to the users. Larger dependency of Sri Lanka on thermal power sources than renewable a

nd modern energy sources is the primary issue in provision of energy at an affordable cost.

As of 2010, Sri Lanka has the most expensive electricity tariff for residential and agricultural consumer categories in South Asia, followed by Pakistan (Jameel 2010). Jameel (2010) further claims that Sri Lanka is handling the shortage by generating and selling very expensive electricity to its consumers. This expensive electricity tariff may be mainly attributed to the over reliance of fossil fuels for energy generation in Sri Lanka and thus this issue warrants attention under this Goal.

Further, according to Sri Lanka Energy Sector Development Plan for a Knowledge-Based Economy 2015 – 2025 published by Ministry of Power and Energy, the total annual electricity demand in Sri Lanka is about 10,500 GWh. Domestic sector and industries consume respectively 38% and 39% of the total electricity demanded. Commercial sector demands nearly 20% of the total electricity usage. It is also reported that the overall annual demand for electricity is anticipated to increase by around 4-6 %. This persistently growing demand for energy while unparalleled interventions/ investments in supply side is going to be an issue in ensuring access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy for all categories of energy users in Sri Lanka. It is estimated that the need for electricity will be doubled by 2020 compared with 2010 figure, more precisely 5,430 MW by 2020 (RAM Report-Sri Lankan Power sector, 2012). Meanwhile, power cuts occur frequently in Sri Lanka and it hinders the reliability and quality of services. The reliability issue primarily arises because of technological constraints. Issues in reliability of electricity will damage the economic sector in particular and foreign direct investments.

According to World Bank statistics as at 2012, the

Sri Lanka has given access to electricity to its 88.7% of the total population. However, it is reported in Sri Lanka Energy Sector Development Plan for a Knowledge-Based Economy 2015 – 2025, that Sri Lanka has already achieved a grid connectivity of 98%, which is commendable by South Asian standards. Yet, another 2% of population needs electrification. In Sri Lanka Energy Sector Development Plan for a Knowledge-Based Economy 2015 – 2025 Major Challenges in the Energy Sector of Sri Lanka, the following challenges have been identified to be overcome in the energy sector in Sri Lanka. These challenges are also seen relevant in meeting the targets of this sustainable development Goal-07.

Energy wastage and losses

Unsustainable consumption patterns

Large investment need for infrastructure development in the power & energy sector

Traditional institutional setup not geared to meet emerging energy sector challenges

Lack of local capacity development, research and technology

100% dependency on imported oil for the transport s

ector ·

High cost of electricity ·

Increasing demand trends across all sub-sectors. Combating Climate Change and Its Impacts Sri Lanka is a tropical island and is regraded to b

e highly sensitive to climate change impacts. Climate change is a multidimensional phenomenon the

impact of which, in Sri Lanka, ranges from the natural environment to agriculture, touris

m, society, and health (Baba, 2010). According to a recent study documented by the UNDP,

it is observed that inundation caused by nraising level of sea is a progressive phenomenon in

Sri Lanka. Its impact is relatively significantly observed in the districts of Puttalam

, Jaffna and Hambbantota. Another significant issues caused by climate change

is the turnout of such extreme weather events as high intensity and erratic rainfall and c

onsequential flash floods and landslides. Extreme weather on its other extreme causes extende

d dry periods and resultant water scarcity. It is commonly observed that extreme weather events pr

imarily caused by changing climate have become common phenomenon these days in Sri Lanka. S

anjeewani and Manawadu (2014) state that severe rainfall extreme events are one of the

frequent weather hazards in Sri Lanka causing massive damages to many sectors and its effect is c

oncentrated in the Southern and Eastern nquarter of the country while severe rainfall extrem

e also significantly affects Western province including Colombo, Ratmalana. They, on the other ha

nd, claim that dry extremes occur in other dry zonal regions through its impact is becoming less. According to Ministry of Environment (2011), predicts the wet zone is expected to become wetter and the dry zone drier with climate change as it expects that Southwest Monsoon will increase by 48% by 2050 affecting the southern part of the country, while the Northeast Monsoon of northern region is estimated to decrease by 27-29%. Though agriculture is inherently dependent on weather and thus remain highly sensitive to climate change, it is unavoidably one of the prominent economic sector in Sri Lanka and records its significant contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) and employment of large and rural population every year. De Costa (2010) argues that in addition to the long-term shifts in rainfall and temperature regimes, extreme climatic events such as droughts and episodes of high temperature can cause substantial damage to both rice and tea crops thereby seriously impacting on the national food security, foreign exchange earnings and causing substantial socio-economic damage to the large number of families that are dependent on these two crops. Further, the Sector Vulnerability Profile devised under National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy recognized five core issues relating to climate change. First, vector-borne diseases specifically dengue fever are expected to increase as it is sensitive to humidity and temperature. Second, leptospirosis and other rodent-borne diseases correspond with the two yearly monsoons in Sri Lanka. Third category of issues are such food and water-borne diseases as dysentery, viral hepatitis and typhoid. These are influenced by the

floods, landslides and droughts associated with climate change. Fourth, a number of other disorders, such as heart related illnesses, respiratory and cardiovascular disorders, and mental health issues, may be exacerbated by the changing environment. Finally, climate change is expected to affect nutrition through changes in food production and food security. Any adverse changes in already volatile weather patterns are likely to impact adversely on the socio-economic activities in the country. Other issues include acidic oceans, bleaching and dying off of coral reefs and losses to fisheries. Strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters is one of the targets to combat climate change and its impacts. Some of the major challenges that stand between the achievements of this target are insufficient climate adaptation research, lacking modern technological availability and application thereof and inadequate financial appropriations for the effective implementation of adaptive agenda sustainably. It is reported that in some sectors that are sensitive to climate change e.g. health sector, even the causal relationship between climate change and health impacts in Sri Lanka is not clearly understood (WHO, 2015). Though there are projects and initiatives to the effect of integrating climate considerations into national policies, strategies and planning, one of the

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that the process gets weaker, distorted or discontinued when

political regime changes. Though there are some state institutions. e.g. Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy, Climate Change Secretariat Sri Lanka housed in the Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy, Centre for Climate Change Studies (CCCS), The Centre for Climate

Climate Change Studies (CCCS) housed in the Department of Meteorology, Epidemiology Unit housed in the Ministry of Health and some other relevant ministries, there is no effective overarching institutional agency that is enabled through an enabling legislation so that it can work across different sectors on a holistic and comprehensive fashion and incorporate environment and other sustainable development perspectives into national policy and development.

It is however noted that present government is working towards the establishment of a sustainable development council through the enactment of Sustainable Development Act (which is currently as a bill).

Protect, Restore and Promote Sustainable Use of Ter

restrial Ecosystems, Sustainably Manage Forests, Combat Desertification, and Halt and

Reverse Land Degradation and Halt Biodiversity Loss According to the official webpage designated for sustainable development goal2, Goal 15 focuses specifically on managing forests sustainably, halting and reversing land and natural habitat degradation and combating against desertification and biodiversity loss. Sri Lanka encounters certain issues below discussed that should be addressed in the realization of this Sustainable Development Goal-15.

Though the rate of deforestation has declined as compared to passed assessment, the issues still remain significant. Pethiyagoda (2010) strongly claims that the area covered by forest in Sri Lanka is speedily diminishing and it is even less than 20 % as compared to the forest cover during the pre-colonial period. Though historically

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1840s, the latest ass

essment

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represe

nts 29.7 % of the land area (NAP, 2015).

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Encroachment of forests, high demand for forests fo

r development activities and spread of invasive plant species and frequent fires are the p

revalent threats/ issues challenging conservation

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of the forest cover of the country

(NA

P, 2015). n nThough, according to National Report on Desertifica

tion/

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Land Degradation in Sri Lanka (2000),

nno part of Sri Lanka is currently comes under deser

tification zone as it does not fall within the nrange of ratios for desertification as specified in

United Nations Convention to Combat nDesertification, it is however likely that desertif

ication

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may emerge as a problem in the Dry Zone
nin the near future in Si Lanka considering the mont

hly variations in evapotranspiration, frequent ndroughts

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experienced, anticipated climatic changes

and the accelerated land degradation that

is ntaking place due to human activities . n nLand degradation is generally understood as the dec

line of productive capacity of land nntemporarily or permanently through natural phenomen

a or through human interference.



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t life-threatening problems affecting the future environment and economic development in Sri

Lanka. According to



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), heavy



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yields

; marginalization of agricultural land; salinization; landslides and deforestation and fore

st degradation are the important manifestations of land degradation issue in Sri Lan

ka.

Sri Lanka is one of the countries commonly recogniz

ed as a destination for biodiversity and rich species. Land degradation however severely threaten

s



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nresulted in loss of bio diversity. According to Nat

ional Action Plan for (NAP) for Combating Land Degradation 2015-2024 in Sri Lanka, loss of bi

o diversity is primarily attributed to such factors as deforestation, pollution, indiscriminate

use of agrochemicals, soil erosion, frequent floods & droughts.

rrrrr

Though Sri Lanka is inherited with abundant water r

esources, climate changes and land and water degradation activities have created frequent

and regular water shortages severely impacting lives on the earth and lives under water.

It also seriously impacts



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on development activities in the country.



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Ministry of Environment

and Renewable Energy

in its National Action Plan for (NAP) for Combating Land Degradation 2015-

2024 in Sri Lanka recognize that this nsituations provoked by quality deterioration and de

gradation



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of watersheds due to mismanagement of lands. It also claims that both su

rface and ground water has been subjected to this fate.

This issue of water degradation is an ur

gent issue to be remedies under this Sustainable Development Goal in order to prevent acute water sh

ortages and to



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meet the future water demands by all sectors.

In relation to achievement of many of the target se

t to achieve this sustainable development goal, Sri Lanka would have to overcome many challenges. O

ne of the very important challenge is persisting growth of population and population dens

ity and their causal effect on land demand and consequential and degradation activities. Natio

nal Action Plan for (NAP) for Combating nLand Degradation recognizes the fact that in Sri La

nka



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the wet zone districts show very high densities while dry zone districts show lower densi

ties where Colombo and Gampaha districts experience the highest densities followed by Kaluta

ra,



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Galle, Matara, Kandy and Matale districts.



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Haphazard garbage disposal and impediment to
Draina

ge are said to be grievous concerns in this regard. Though the incidence of poverty is gradually
declin

ing in Sri Lanka, its impact on land and water degradation is not to be ignored in certain distric

ts that are having relatively high incidence of poverty. Land and water degradation especially of r

ural area are primarily attributable to land and water based livelihoods of people living in pov

erty. Wildlife crimes are another significant nchallenge to overcome for the successful
attainment

of many targets under this Goal. Reduction of degradation of natural habitats, halting the los

s of biodiversity and protection and extinction of threatened species would not be possible if the
wil

dlife crimes persist and are not controlled. Climate Change is a crosscutting issue that underli

e many target under this goal. High intensity rains and subsequent floods cause severe soil erosi

on, siltation of water bodies, wetlands & agricultural lands, water logging in low-lying area

s



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and loss of biodiversity. Frequent droughts may deplete water resources in drought prone areas leading to loss of vegetation.

Therefore, it is a challenging fact targets set under this Goals can

not be effectively met in isolation and require a broader integration with climate issues as well. La

cking public awareness is another challenge to overcome. n n

Discussion and Conclusion The target to provide access to affordable, reliabl

e, sustainable and modern energy for all has numerous economic and social implications. The achi

evement of this goal would ensure that 100% of Sri Lanka population will have access to af

fordable, reliable and modern energy services. A shift from conventional energy sources

to modern and renewable sources of energy will stop environmental degradation caused while ge

nerating power and energy. Aching a substantial share of renewable energy in the Sri La

nka energy mix, would considerably decline the emission rate of GHGs and will control and prev

ent the depletion of Ozone layer. These developments will impact on reduction/elimination o

f dangerous climate change related hazards. nAs this goal aims to double the global rate of impr

ovement in energy efficiency by 2030, it will reduce energy waste and thus the energy demand will

decline. This will also reduce emission rate of GHGs to the environment and will curtail the imp

act of climate change. Further, the attainment of the sustainable developm

ent goal on combating climate change would positively impact on the reduction of various dange

rous consequences of climate change. The Carbon emission can be minimized and controlled. Pu

blic investment and expenditures would be made in harmonization of climate considerations. Th

e attainment of this goal would ensure that the government would plan and implement its long te

rm public investment and the recurrent expenditures in a way that support to the agenda of

combatting the climate change. The adaptive capacity of the country would be enhanced. The country would be able to manage the risk associated in the climate change at a minimum level.

The attainment of this goal will increase the awareness level of public about the hazards relating to climate change thereby enabling the public to act spontaneously in a way that is friendly to the environment. Unless people individually and collectively act spontaneously, the achievement of many targets under this goal cannot be met sustainably. Achievement of this goal will minimize environmental degradation activities and the related damages such activities cause to the sustainability of environment which include restoration and maintenance of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable management of forests, controlling desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, halting biodiversity loss, reversing climate change and economic and social unsustainability.

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