



National Research Priorities in Forestry 2017-2021

National Committee on Forestry

Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy
Ministry of Agriculture

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2018 - 2022

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Message from the Chairman

Increasing forest coverage and reforesting all the catchment areas to conserve water have been given high priority by policy makers in Sri Lanka for decades. However, with heavy demand for timber and other non- timber forest products, attaining those goals would be a great challenge to the nation where, still the existing stock of plantation forests does not adequately meet the national timber and fuel wood demands of the country. Furthermore, conservation of forests and reforestation of degraded land has become an urgent need for the sustainable development of agriculture. Therefore, an innovative research and development agenda has become imperative component in the national economic development policy.

Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy was established by the parliament Act, No. 47 of 1987 on 22 December, 1987 as the apex body of the National Agricultural System (NARS) which consists of Agricultural Research institutes and Faculties of Agriculture, Fisheries and Veterinary Sciences in Sri Lanka. Since then the Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy has been actively involved in facilitating agricultural research in the National Agricultural Research System through better coordination.

The National Committee on Forestry of the Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy, as a national level policy making body addresses the issues faced by the Forestry sector. This research priorities document lays down a pathway how research agencies may achieve the sustainable development challenges, fulfill the nations' timber demand and provide sound biological and environmental benefits with conservation philosophy.

Dr. S. D. G. Jayawardena

Chairman

Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy (SLCARP)

10 April 2018

Message from the Secretary

National Committee on Organic Agriculture and Forestry of the Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy which was first appointed in 2011 was divided in 2015 as two separate National Committees on Organic Agriculture and Forestry. To prepare this research priority document, the National Committee on Forestry conducted a Stakeholder Consultation Workshop on 18 November 2016 at the Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy. Furthermore, the draft document was circulated among the Forestry sector related experts in Sri Lanka for comments. It welcomed reviews, comments and suggestions by environmentalists, academics and foresters in various institutes. The Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy strongly believes that this effort will be utilized by researchers of Sri Lanka who are engaged in the forestry related research endeavors. To achieve the targets strengthening of the research and development in relation to the national priorities identified in this sector is vital.

The Sri Lanka Council for Agricultural Research Policy gratefully acknowledges the contribution of Prof. Hemanthi Ranasingha and all members of the National Committee on Forestry in understanding the leadership to prepare this valuable document. There were many other scientists and stakeholders who participated in our forums and meetings and contributed their knowledge and experiences to this national document.

Our sincere thanks goes to all the private sector plantation companies, line agencies, Forest Department, Department of Wildlife Conservation and Ministry of Agriculture for various assistances and contributions in preparing this research priorities document.

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Background and Rationale

Current Status of Forests and Forestry in Sri Lanka

The total land areas of the country including internal water bodies amounts to 65,610 km² and the latest forest cover estimates done in 2010 depict dense natural forest cover as 29.7% or 2 million ha which includes forests, wildlife reserves and catchment. The forest cover includes dense forest (21.9%), open and sparse forests (6.5%), mangrove forests (0.2%), Savanna forests (1.9%). Table 01 shows the forest cover by type.

Table 01 : Forest Cover by type of forests

Forest Type	Description	Extent (ha)	Percentage
Dry Monsoon Forest	Below 1000m elevation rainfall below 1900 mm	1,121,392	17.1
Moist monsoon forest	Below 1000m elevation rainfall between 1900 – 2500 mm	117,885	1.8
Lowland rain forest	Below 1000m elevation rainfall greater than 2500 mm	123,302	1.9
Sub montane forest	Between 1000 – 1500 m Elevation	28,513	0.4
Montane forest	Above 1500 m elevation	44,758	0.7
Riverine dry forest	Associated with river banks in dry and intermediate zones	2425	
Mangrove forest	Mangrove located in coastal areas	15,670	0.2
Savannah forests	Grasslands with scattered trees	68,044	1
Open and sparse forest		429,484	6.5
Total		1,951,473	29.7

Source: Forest Department, 2010

Natural forests in the country are not harvested for timber. The timber is supplied from forest plantations, homegardens and other non forest tree resources.

Forest Plantations

Forest plantation establishment in the country commenced in 1870s and is continuing for nearly 150 years and the total extent of the plantations occupies more than 1% of the total land use in the country. The total area under productive forest plantations is around 79,941,000 ha. to date. The extent of forest plantations by species is shown in Table 02.

Table 02: Extent of forest plantations by species

Species	Extent (ha)	Area (%)
<i>Tectona grandis</i> (Teak)	26,333	32.9
<i>Eucalyptus sp.</i>	22,268	27.9
<i>Pinus sp.</i>	9,954	12.5
<i>Swietenia</i> sp. (Mahogany)	5,505	6.9
<i>Khaya senegalensis</i>	1,765	2.2
Others	14,116	17.6
Total	79,941	100.0

Source: Forest Department (2009)

Other Tree Resources

In addition to the forest plantations managed by the Forest Department (FD), home gardens, and rubber, tea and coconut plantations of the plantation sector provide timber and other wood products to meet the national demand in significant quantities. The present status of these wood sources and the possible contribution towards the next decade is discussed below.

Forest Plantations of the Regional Plantation Companies (ie. tea, rubber and coconut plantations)

As per the records of the Ministry of Plantation Industries and the NFIFAP (2017) twenty-three Regional Plantation Companies (RPCs) currently manage approximately 9,000 ha of forest plantations in order to supply fuelwood and timber for both private and industrial use.

Forest Plantations by Private Sector Forestry Companies

Few companies in the private sector are engaged in establishing forest plantations for profit. Species of high commercial value are selected for this purpose such as Mahogany, Teak, Sandalwood etc. The total planted area in this category is around 3389.63 ha.

Home gardens

These gardens are a traditional perennial system of cropping that uses a wide range of economically valuable trees including fruit, medicinal, spice and timber species. Home gardens in the Dry Zone are low in density with respect to trees. Home gardens in the Up Country zone (Kandy, Matale and Kurunegala Districts) are known as 'Kandyan Home Gardens' due to their rich diversity of tree species and the very dense structure. The average size and the species composition of home gardens vary according to factors such as agro-ecological region and the population density of the locality. Kandyan home gardens are typically established on sloping lands of small holdings, varying in size from 0.4 ha to 2 ha with an average of 1 ha. The area under homegardens in Sri Lanka has been increased by about 1% (8,000 ha) annually since 1980 to 1992 (FSMP, 1995). There were about 1.42 million homegardens in Sri Lanka in 2002 with a holding size below 40 perches (approximately 0.1 ha; DCS, 2002). The total number of homegardens has also continued to grow at a rate of 1.6% annually. The size of homegarden area can vary considerably from 0.05 ha to several hectares (over 2.5 ha) (Pushpakumara et al., 2010). The Table 03 shows the statistics on land area, population density, forest cover and homegarden cover in the administrative districts in the country.

Table 03: Statistics on land area, population density, forest cover and homegarden cover in the administrative districts in the country

District	Area (sq km)	Population density (per sq km)	Forest cover (%)	Homegarden cover (%)*	Tree canopy cover (%)
Ampara	4,318	143	37.5	4.1	41.6
Anuradhapura	7,034	111	35.0	8.0	43.0
Badulla	2,803	294	19.0	17.7	36.7
Batticaloa	2,686	204	21.0	4.2	25.2
Colombo	656	3,631	2.8	13.1	15.9
Galle	1,635	629	13.0	22.1	35.1
Gampaha	1,386	1,523	0.3	25.2	25.5
Hambantota	2,579	210	20.5	15.1	35.6
Jaffna/					
Kilinochchi	2,218	337	1.1	26.5	27.6
Kalutara	1,588	688	13.0	20.1	33.1
Kandy	1,906	704	17.0	30.4	47.4
Kegalle	1,693	468	9.5	23.2	32.7
Kurunegala	4,813	311	5.0	15.1	20.1
Mannar	1,985	50	60.0	2.4	62.4
Matale	1,993	233	40.5	11.7	52.2
Matara	1,282	620	16.0	36.2	52.2
Moneragala	5,545	75	40.5	9.9	50.4
Mullativ	2,517	56	60.0	6.6	66.6
Nuwara Eliya	1,720	423	24.5	5.3	29.8
Polonnaruwa	3,224	117	38.0	10.6	48.6
Puttalam	3,013	245	25.0	21.5	46.5
Rathnapura	3,255	325	20.0	15.8	35.8
Trincomalee	2,631	147	48.0	7.2	55.2
Vavuniya	1,967	74	51.0	10.1	61.1
Sri Lanka	65,610	314	23.5	13.1	40.8

Note: Tree canopy cover is defined by adding only the areas of forest and homegarden covers.
Sources: IUCN and MENR (2007) and *FSMP (1995).

Forest Administration and Regulatory Environment

Forests in the country are being administered by two agencies i.e. Forest Department and Department of Wildlife Conservation. The National Heritage Wilderness Areas, Conservation Forests, Forest Reserves and Other State Forests comes under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department while National Parks, Strict Nature Reserves, Nature Reserves, Jungle Corridors and Sanctuaries comes under the Department of Wildlife Conservation. The National Forest Policy (1995) emphasize on three areas;

- To conserve forests for posterity with particular regard to biodiversity, soils, water, and historical, cultural, religious, and aesthetic values;
- To increase the tree cover and productivity of forests to meet the needs of present and future generations for forest products and services;
- To enhance the contribution of forestry to the welfare of the rural population, and

strengthen the national economy, with special attention paid to equity in economic development.

Trends in Forest Resources

The current trends in forestry are a result of many global and local concerns and expectations including the sustainable development goals of the United Nations especially in its Goal 15 spells out the need to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. The Government of Sri Lanka has declared its expectation to increase the forest cover from 29% at present to 32% by year 2020. In order to achieve this several strategies had been adopted including establishment of new forests on degraded forest lands, underutilized private lands and marginal tea lands using restoration and reforestation, sustainable management of non-forest ecosystems especially scrubs, villus and pasture lands by resorting to conservation, establishment of urban forests and conservation and sustainable management of existing forests.

Natural forests: A complete halt to the depletion of forest cover may not be possible as depletion is caused by many complex factors. However, due to many protective and other managerial measures, deforestation would take place at a slower rate. The loss could be compensated by increasing the cover of man-made forests as appropriate.

Forest plantations: Forest plantations will continue to produce high quality wood compared to other sources outside the forests. By 2020, the contribution of the forest plantations of the FD to the island's requirement for wood and wood products may rise from the present level due to more intensive management and the expansion of the annual cutting areas. Possibility may also exist on the participation of private entrepreneurs for timber harvesting by competitive bidding, but this would depend on the prevailing government policies. It is anticipated that the forest plantations will have a more regular age-class structure and a slightly different species composition. The forest nurseries would be run on improved nursery techniques to produce better seedlings. Tree growers of the private sector would also contribute to the production of wood and wood products in a significant capacity. In this respect, the role of home gardens as a supplier of logs to small-scale saw mills especially in rural areas would be quite significant. However, the import of high quality construction timber from Southeast Asian countries would continue.

Wood and Wood Products

The demand for wood and wood products will rise steadily during the next decade as a result of development activities. The Forest Sector Master Plan (FSMP) has estimated by referring to current trends that the demand for sawn wood would rise from 688,000 m³ in 2005 to 885,000 m³ in 2020. The demand for plywood and other wood-based panels would rise from 49,000 m³ in 2005 to 82,000 m³ in 2020. As a consequence of the 2004 tsunami a large quantity of sawn wood had to be imported for reconstruction and other development work. The country will need large quantities of industrial timber in the future, especially for planned development programmes for the North and Eastern Provinces and the extension of the railroad network, and these requirements may have to be imported. Inadequate foreign currency reserves may cause increased harvesting of forest plantations and other tree resources

Wood as Fuel

Due to the emphasis placed on the use of renewable energy in the national energy mix, there would be a greater demand for biofuel as dendro thermal energy.

Among the negative trends, when the development activities which ideally needs to be ecofriendly and non-detrimental proves to be otherwise will pose a threat to the existence of forests which are considered as non-value adding in pure economic terms. However, access to education and the level of awareness among the stakeholders on the importance of forests as providers of ecosystem services will ensure their existence. Most of the forestry projects in the future will be implemented with donor assistance and some loan covenants could result in significant impacts. Regional and sub- regional integration for relevant sectors could also contribute to this phenomenon.

Overall, forestry in 2020 will be characterized by more stakeholder participation in both productive and protective spheres. The importance of forests and forestry will be felt more by society, due to their pivotal role in maintaining environmental safeguards, aesthetic and recreational significance. In spite of these factors, a fair balance between the protective and productive capacity of forests should be maintained, as wood and wood products will remain an eternal requirement (Forest Department, 2009).

Research Priorities in the Forestry Sector

In the above backdrop, it is imperative to identify the research needs and prioritization, have a repository of work hitherto carried out and their impacts and developing strategies and action plans to execute them at national levels. The National Committee on Forestry in the Council for Agricultural Research Policy has taken the initiative to conduct this task to assist the forestry sector. The Committee used stakeholder consultations to gather necessary information and formulate the priority research needs which may be used by the national funding bodies as a guideline for fund disbursement. The major thematic areas thus identified were as follows;

- Wood Products Trade, Energy and Forests Certification
- Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forests, Forest Restoration and Valuation
- Agro Forestry and Non-wood Forest Products
- Climate Change and Forestry
- Ecotourism, Livelihood and Gender

Thematic Area 01: Wood Products, Trade, Energy and Forest Certification

Issues:

- Poor matching of species, end uses and localities in wood products.
- Poor productivity of timber plantations.
- Lack of knowledge and emphasis on product and process certification for value addition.
- Lack of access to advanced technology for optimum utilization of wood products.
- Poor knowledge on the wood processing technologies and value addition.
- Poor knowledge on forestry related trading both local and international.
- Poor advancement of the dendro thermal energy projects.
- Weak control of demand and supply of fuelwood, timber and wood products.

Research Strategies

1. Identification and establishment of underutilized forest tree species to match the required end uses including timber.
2. Identify forest species with high economic returns.
3. Explore the potential of indigenous forest tree species as an alternative to introduced/exotic species.
4. Identify factors that limit forest recovery after logging.
5. Identify integrated approaches for land productivity improvement.
6. Use carbon benefits/certification etc. as a tool to encourage communities/private sector in forest planting/conservation.
7. Using life cycle analysis (both cradle to grave and cradle to gate) make the production process more efficient and sustainable.
8. Prepare standards, principles and criteria for forest certification.
9. Identify economic, environmental and social impacts of forest certification.
10. Continuation of the forest tree improvement programs to raise the quality of industrial timber in a shorter period of time for higher biomass and increased carbon sequestration.

Thematic Area 02: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forests, Forest Restoration and Valuation

Issues:

- Degradation of biodiversity and ecosystem services due to increased pressure on natural environment due to unsustainable development programs.
- Habitat loss and forest degradation due to spread of aggressive fire.
- Unawareness of the real value of ecosystems and their service.
- Loss of biodiversity in non-designated areas due to lack of data and information.
- Loss of biodiversity of indigenous species due to invasions.
- Lack of proper knowledge of forest restoration and remediation.
- Policy gaps and improper implementation of regulatory instruments causing degradation of ecosystems.
- Study on the distribution, impact and management of invasive species.

Research Strategies

1. Identification of appropriate restoration methods with suitable species combinations for degraded forest sites.
2. Prepare restoration plans for high priority areas using appropriate species.
3. Assessment of the ecosystem services from forests including disaster risk reduction, watershed conservation, supply of the quality and quantity of water, water regulation, habitats for fauna and flora etc.
4. Comprehensive interdisciplinary studies on ecosystem valuations.
5. Develop methods and protocols for assessing biodiversity and ecosystem services using international best practices.
6. Assess the biodiversity and ecosystem values of representative forest systems in the country.
7. Design and pilot a payment for ecosystem service mechanisms for forest ecosystem services.
8. Identify the impact of pollinators on forest regeneration.
9. Identify the impact of invasive species on native biodiversity, design early detection and control methods and identify suitable strategies for alternative utilization technology of invasive species.
10. Develop methodologies for sustainable forest management.

11. Find solutions for forest and wildlife health.
12. Assess the forest reproduction and restoration.
13. Increasing the productivity of natural forests using natural methodologies.
14. Population and genetic studies on important faunal species.
15. Habitat management for wildlife and behavioral and migratory patterns of fauna.
16. Assessment of conservation status of existing and potential protected areas.
17. Studies on biological control agents.
18. Carrying capacities and visitor impacts on protected areas.
19. Assessment of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of neighboring communities on the sustenance of protected areas.
20. Impact of the legislation and law enforcement on sustainable management of forests.
21. Studies on the human elephant conflict.

Thematic Area 03: Agroforestry and Non Wood Forest Products

Issues

- Lack of an understanding of the tree and agricultural species compatibility – the optimal species matching for positive advantage including with coconuts and other plantation crops. Further the optimal designs for procuring maximal benefits also needs investigation.
- Socio economic issues in promoting and sustenance of agroforestry systems with special reference to homegardens.
- Poor market channels for Non Wood Forest Produce trade.
- Lack of processing and storage technology at cottage levels.
- Lack of recognition of agroforestry and non-wood forest products.
- Lack of agroforestry models for use for different agro climatic regions.

Research Strategies

1. Policy analysis on the conservation and sustainable promotion of homegardens.
2. Conduct resource inventories on homegardens with a view to arrive at the value of ecosystem services and value of them.
3. Improve/enhance the productivity of homegardens by introducing appropriate species in appropriate designs.
4. Prepare appropriate models of agroforestry systems/tree crop mixtures for different agro ecological zones to maximize productivity and ecosystems services.
5. Promote agroforestry in ecotourism ventures.
6. Develop value added products from NWFP by resorting to preprocessing treatments, improved and attractive packaging and longer storage life.
7. Empower the local groups in managing the non-timber forest product resources.
8. Revise, strengthen and harmonise government policies toward the sustainable management of non-timber forest products.
9. Encourage the inclusion of non-timber forest products species for ecological restoration in upland and other areas.
10. Provide appropriate technologies on the propagation, harvest, post-harvest methods and sustainable management of non-timber forest product resources.
11. Asses the land use pattern of agroforestry system.

Thematic Area 04: Climate Change and Forestry

Issues

- Lack of awareness on the impact of climate change on forests
- Dearth of local information on the adaptation and mitigation of climate change on forests including emission levels, level of adaptation, carbon sequestration levels in different forest ecosystems etc.

Research Strategies

1. Devise standardized methodologies for forest inventory, calculation of emission levels from forest ecosystems and estimating carbon sequestration of forest ecosystems.
2. Calculate carbon sequestration rates in different forest ecosystems.
3. Evaluate the adaptation levels of forest ecosystems to climate change impacts.
4. Calculate the GHG emission levels in forest ecosystems.
5. Identify the Eco DRR aspects in relation to forests and climate change.
6. Assess the socio economic perspectives of climate change on forest ecosystems.
7. Evaluate climate change impacts on forest ecosystems (fire, invasions etc).
8. Study climate change adaptation strategies related to forestry development.
9. Assessment of non-carbon benefits of forests.

Thematic Area 05: Ecotourism, Livelihood and Gender

Issues

- Dearth in the adoption of efficient management practices in ecotourism to reach the potential development of the sector
- Ecotourism ventures are not cost effective for local tourists to enjoy
- Dearth of adopting efficient management practices for harvesting forest products for livelihood development
- Gender disparity in forest management

Research Strategies

1. Empower local groups to manage ecotourism ventures effectively including development, marketing and implementation of the tasks
2. Improve the livelihoods of people dependent on forest products by developing value added products using preprocessing treatments, improved and attractive packaging and longer storage life
3. Conduct research on women's participation in forestry sector activities

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List of Participants at the National Stakeholder Workshop on Forestry Research Priorities

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Dr. Gerry Jayawardena	Chairman	SLCARP
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Other Stakeholders sent Comments and Suggestions via Email

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