



What we want to do next

 Sarath Fernando

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What do we want to do next in our lives? We have worked hard to achieve some of our dreams and we have worked them out with careful planning. It has been possible since we worked with NGOs and farmers' organizations and it was particularly easy when the NGOs were led by us. We have clear ideas about what should happen next. We must decide what our roles should be now, towards full filling our dreams.

We are very clear that agriculture should change from external input dependent chemical farming to ecological / regenerative agriculture. From monocultures to diversified Farming. This is with a much wider perspective of assisting in the recovery of nature's ability of regeneration. This is a priority essential for life to continue. To do this it is essential that millions of people have to be mobilized. The world powers and agribusiness companies are not genuinely concerned about this; they are more concerned about making and accumulating bigger profits. So, they will exploit nature and humans more aggressively and more destructively, disregarding the danger of the whole world getting destroyed.

It is necessary for the rest of the world to get together and push the world in the right direction. The hungry people have to find food, the thirsty have to find water to drink, The sick want to be healed, those who need shelter have to find suitable shelter, the naked have to have clothing and so on. These people can play a role in the bigger changes only if the needy can find solutions to their immediate needs. Ecological agriculture is a way that provides solutions to such immediate needs while serving the bigger goals. People and countries with less capital can do this since it utilizes what nature gives free of charge, while helping nature to regenerate itself.

What can we do to help this process? It is to instill this dream in as many people as possible, not only to dream about it but also to implement it. People must understand the advantages of this change; they must understand the methods of doing it. For this it is necessary to have as many successful demonstrations as possible. What we can do as individuals is limited, so we must influence as many organizations as possible to undertake this task. It is also possible and necessary to influence government to undertake it. There are things that can be done in any of our villages and towns; there are things that need to be done in tea and coconut plantations. Certain laws and regulations have to be changed such as land ownership laws. Private ownership of land is a big obstacle. Large owners of private land are not interested in ecological farming. It is best done by small holders. So, it is necessary to divide these large land holdings and plantations into smaller plots and given to landless farmers in the respective areas for ecological farming.

In tea estates land should be given to plantation worker families and hill country villagers with guidance and assistance to do ecological agriculture. In Coconut plantations small plots can grow other crops such as mangos, Banana, Pine apples, Jack fruit, gliricidia and pepper, vegetables too can be grown. It is possible to give such land on a lease basis or sharecropping basis. In paddy we have to utilize indigenous seeds that do not require chemical inputs.

It is necessary to have the right understanding of who should own land and how land should be utilized. There is a nice little story about this.

When Siddhartha was a little prince he saw a nice swan falling from the sky. He ran towards it and found that the swan had been hit with an arrow and was bleeding. He pulled out the arrow threw some water on it and was nursing the swan. Prince Devadatta came running and said that the swan was his because he had shot the arrow. Siddhartha answered saying that the bird did not belong to Devadatta since he was trying to kill it, but Siddhartha was trying to save his life, so it belonged him and not to Devadatta.

The lesson here is that land should belong to those who try to save land and make it regenerative and not to those who kill land and its ability for regeneration. Therefore all land should be put in charge of people who try to revive life of land and revive its regenerative capacity. Land should belong to such people.

Mahathma Gandhi in his "Salt Satyagraha" violated the prohibition that the British had imposed against Indians producing salt using their own sea water. He said the law was unjust and he was going to disobey this unjust law. He marched a long distance, reached the coast and made salt. Lot of Indians followed him and broke the law. When large numbers of people started doing this the law became ineffective.

So, it is quite reasonable to break the existing unjust laws regarding private ownership of land and utilize land for the benefit of all people, make it regenerative. People in the tea plantations must occupy plantation land and do regenerative agriculture. People in areas of coconut plantations should acquire small plots of plantation land and transform them into ecological agriculture. In the North and East people living there, the small farmers, have a right to own the land whether they are Tamils, Muslims or Sinhala and do regenerative agriculture on such land. Similarly farmers in Uva have a right to use land in that area and do ecological agriculture, not allowing land to be used for large Sugarcane plantations or maize farming as monocrops. One condition should be that they use the land regeneratively. They will not have the right to use agrochemicals and kill earth worms, microbes and insects and there by destroy natural fertility of the soil, allow erosion, they must not burn straw and other organic matter. All organic matter should be recycled. Diversification is a necessity. In the villages an effort should be made to bring forest

back in to villages. In the water reservoirs the catchment areas have to be protected as reservations. In the sea there should be sustainable fishing and the beaches should be available to the coastal people for their livelihoods. Land in the coastal region should be given to fisher people for their living.

On the whole all land in the country should be regeneratively used with bio diversity, conservation and recycling as basic principles in land use.

Thus Sri Lanka can be made a dream land with regenerative agriculture applied in the whole country. Marketing should be organized through producer cooperatives dealing with consumer cooperatives in direct marketing. Industries should be assistance in this process and should not be obstacles, reducing food miles by consumer needs being met as locally as possible. Exploitation by middlemen should be prevented to the maximum possible.

These are things that can be done easily with people exercising their democratic political power. Planning must be done by the people themselves. Families do the planning in their home gardens and extend their plans to the community level, then to the Pradeshya Sabha levels and then to the district and provincial levels. Such plans should be presented for the policy promises of candidates contesting elections at each of these levels, promises should be obtained from the candidates and mechanisms should be established to make them answerable on their promises.

Our task I feel should be to advocate these proposals, consent should be obtained from civil society organizations to undertake these proposals and to propagate them. And we will have to give confidence to people that these can be done and will bring benefits to them. We have to accompany people when they begin to do what we advocate.

 **Sarath Fernando**
15 August 2014