

# World Environment Day 2009



**Sarath Fernando**

## **World Environment Day – 2009**

On October 5, the world celebrates the Environment Day. It intends to bring special attention of the world to the issues of environment. It is one among many other days when special issues are brought to special attention. Similar special days are allocated to other issues such as peace, human rights, poverty, earth, water, food, children, women and many other issues of importance.

However, when we look at the situation that prevails in the world today and the future, the issue of environment needs to obtain much bigger attention and priority than it obtains on a special day of the year. What happens today is an attempt to get people to be concerned about the need to think of environmental “conservation” and of “sustainability” in the present ways they do things. However, it is now necessary to think of the issue of environment in a much more radical and in a much more comprehensive manner, if human life and all other life forms are to survive. Right thinking and a right approach to environment has the potential to solutions to many other crying problems of the world. The nature has now begun to challenge human society to think seriously about the fact that life will not and can not survive unless we allow nature to continue provide the means of survival.

Since humankind has continuously utilized nature and its resources with very little concern about the necessity to allow nature and its resources to regenerate themselves, with very little understanding that when we exploit nature and its resources there is the possibility of our destroying the ability

of nature to recover and restore its ability to regenerate itself. The economic systems and approaches that have developed makes it very difficult or almost impossible to set up systems that would help nature and ecology to recover and restore their abilities to regenerate.

The very survival of nature and all forms of life depends on this ability of nature to recover and restore its ability to regenerate itself. Nature's ability to regenerate itself has been destroyed over the history of "human development" since "development" has been thought of as the capacity of human beings to exploit nature's resources and improvement has been thought of as the improvement of this exploitative skills. This may have served a useful purpose at the early stages of human development when humankind as a whole lacked the capacity to produce the essential needs for comfortable living. Thus improving these abilities was seen as essential progress. However, the mechanisms that were devised such as trade for profit making and profit accumulation has brought in many distortions when improvement of productive abilities, exploitation of nature, its resources and of human labour and creativity was done more for profit making and profit accumulation rather than for meeting essential needs of humankind and other life forms became dominant. When private profit making and profit accumulation became the dominant motivation of production, trade and promotion of consumption it lead to competition and intensified exploitation of resources and control over nature's resources.

This competitive process of private profit making and profit accumulation resulted in the formation of political systems,

political power and systems of state that were seen as necessary for such a process. The process of expansion of trade was governed by these needs of profit making and profit accumulation based on competition rather than on collaboration and cooperation.

The World today has begun to experience serious crisis situations in relation to the economic and financial systems, international trade systems and mechanisms, ecological and environmental sustainability. The world is also facing crisis situations in relation to hunger and poverty and it is been proved that the world is repeatedly failing to find effective solutions to any of these problems.

If we look at each of these problems or the combination of these problems in their interrelatedness and the methods and mechanisms attempted to solve these, it becomes visible that the reasons for failure are largely due to the fact that those who take responsibility to find solutions are the very creators of the problems and they try to find solutions without changing the causes that lead to the problems. This can be easily seen if we look at the dialogue and negotiations that have taken place in relation to the world crises of environment and development, on world trade, on global warming and climate change, the world financial crisis, the crisis of high global food prices and also on human rights and peace, and also on issues such as water etc.

Therefore, it is necessary not only to look at how these situations of crisis, including the environmental crisis could be solved, but also to look at who can find genuine

solutions. While it is necessary to think of ways in which environment and nature could be saved it is also necessary to think of the agents who are interested and are capable of formulating genuine strategies for this recovery.

Excessive exploitation of nature and its resources and also the exploitation of human abilities for greater profit making and accumulation can not go hand in hand. Excessive consumption is a need for expansion of market and not a need for human survival. Regeneration of nature and recovery of nature's ability to regenerate itself is a necessity for survival of those who can not buy their requirements since they have to depend much on what nature could give them free of financial cost.

Ecological agriculture or regenerative agriculture by small farmers has begun to prove that it has much bigger potential to overcome hunger and poverty. This approach on a wider scale could be a much more effective way of reducing the ecological and environmental disasters because it helps nature to restore itself. More soil fertility conserved and enhanced through ecological agriculture is an effective way of reducing and overcoming the need to use expensive and destructive external chemical inputs. Improvement of top soil will also improve the ability of soil to retain more water and has the possibility of reducing drought losses and improving water availability with no chemical pollution. Agro forestry in hill country and in sloping land will reduce not only drought losses but also reduce tendency for floods and soil erosion. Food produced using such ecological methods will be much healthier and will reduce the growing trends of ill health and diseases caused by chemical

contamination of food, water, soil and air. Diversification of agriculture rather than the promotion of commercial monoculture farming has the possibility of giving more nutrition and diversity of food and also reduce the spread of crop diseases by reestablishing natural methods of pest control.

The same principles of ecological agriculture could be applied in the fishing industry too. small scale ecological fishing can be a very effective way of protecting and enhancing the potential fishing resources and of providing and protecting livelihoods of the small scale beach based fisher people as well as those who are engaged in inland fisheries. This is a much better way of meeting the livelihood needs of the fisher people as well as the food and nutritional needs of the poorer sections of society compared to the promotion of commercial fishing and prawn farming that has been attempted in Sri Lanka during the last few decades. These have proved to be much more environmentally destructive compared to the natural small scale fishing livelihoods.

Similar thinking in relation to the hill country agriculture is very necessary and timely looking at the ecological implications of commercial plantations and also the pathetic conditions of low wages and lack of proper livelihoods to about a million plantation workers. Transformation of the steep hilly areas into forests is an urgent ecological need and a need to face the growing dangers of floods, erosion and earth slips. If we look at the importance and urgency of improving the water catchments in the hill country and the need to provide proper citizenship to the plantation people

with possibility of land ownership and need for land conservation it would be very beneficial to think of giving these people some decent level of land ownership with responsibilities and guidance in adopting regenerative agriculture as their livelihood.

Our investigations have shown that there is about 25 % of the land in plantation areas that are left uncultivated, largely due to their lack of fertility and there are almost 40 % of plantation youth, men and women with some education up to ordinary level and advanced level who are unemployed. These have to be seen as potential for promotion of ecological agriculture and for providing the plantation people with some degree of decent citizenship with a sense of ownership. This will give them the possibility of improving their livelihoods, housing, access to education and health etc

On the whole the world has to think of a radical transformation of the way we look at nature and environment with a radically different understanding of the way we think of our survival as human beings. Methods of production, trade and consumption had to be designed in a way that would help the world to allow the recovery of regenerative ability of nature, which is to go beyond mere conservation or sustainability. In this transformation those who are threatened with survival due to financial ability to survive in the market can play a major role in designing a way of counting of a process of enhancing nature's ability to regenerate its resources. They must claim their right to be the planners and designers of the future world and world systems since they are capable of working out a strategy of

restoring a world that survive and allow survival of life. With this understanding they must launch out on a struggle for their right to set the agenda for the worl to over come hunger and poverty and also ecological and environmental sustainability and survival. This will also have the potential to design better ways of exchange ( rather than profit motivated trade ). This strategy will also lay the foundations for better relationships among human beings as well as between humans and nature. The tremendous wisdom of ancient thinkers such as the Buddha, other religious leaders, Mahathma Gandhi and the ancient wisdom in natural systems of health, and agriculture. knowledge of natural medicines and plants etc. could be recovered and restored because they have been evolved in a world where greed did not dominate.

Sri Lanka has tremendous potential in working out such a model due to its many advantages in ecology, and in ecological agriculture, bio diversity and also the richness of ancient wisdom that could guide science, technology and the entire system of development or rather of comfortable survival.

**Movement for National Land & Agricultural Reform.**

1151/58 A, 4<sup>th</sup> Lane, Kotte Road, Rajagiriya.

Tel : 011 2 865534

Fax : 011 4 407663

E – mail : [monlar@sltnet.lk](mailto:monlar@sltnet.lk)

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