CAN ENVIRONMENT OR DEVELOPMENT STAND-ALONE? AN ANALYSIS OF THE PATH TO INTEGRATE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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The struggle to overcome the accelerating socio-economic and political problems in Sri Lanka seems to be even more difficult in the face of increasingly apparent environmental constraints. There is a growing belief that most development activities are hindered or terminated due to environmental reasons. Often, the environmental authorities are blamed for such obstructions. The 1992 'Earth Summit' succeeded in altering the conscience of the world towards environmentally sustainable development with the message that without better environmental stewardship, development will be undermined, and without accelerated development in poor countries, environmental policies will fail. However, many conceptual and technical questions in achieving sustainable development still remain unanswered. A critical question for policy makers thus is whether the environmental aspects of socio-economic development can be alleviated by modifying existing approaches, or a complete new strategy is required.

This paper discusses the ideologies distributed along the spectrum of 'neo-Malthusian' pessimists (those who believed that it is very likely that human industrial civilization will collapse under the weight of growing consumption of resources, growing human population and increased environmental pollution) at one end, and the 'cornucopians' or the technological optimists on the other end. The paper attempts to merge these ideologies and seek for a more holistic approach to accelerate economic growth while addressing environmental challenges, and also to propose institutional mechanisms to integrate environmental concerns in the development policies and long term planning.

To address the aforementioned issues the Ministry of Forestry and Environment has introduced several measures including Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Committees on Environmental policy and Management (CEPOM) and Committee on Integrating Environment and Development Policy (CIEDP). However, the EIA process has its own weaknesses and is being heavily criticized by investors as well as environmentalists. CEPOM and CIEDP Structures were proposed to reduce the conflict between development and environment. However, this mechanism is still in its infancy. The paper provides a vigorous review on the existing mechanisms available for integrating environment and development towards sustainable development objectives. It also attempts to introduce possible policy initiatives to improve the existing situation.