

EFFECT OF CULTIVATION PRACTICES ADOPTED IN VICTORIA,
RANDENIGALA AND RANTAMBE SANCTURY ON ENVIRONMENT

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The catchment area surrounding Victoria, Randenigala and Rantambe (VRR) reservoirs was declared as a sanctuary under the Mahaweli Environmental Conservation Programme in 1987. This sanctuary covers a land area about 46,000 ha.

A study was conducted to identify various cultivation practices adopted in the sanctuary, which may have an impact on the environment. This study was confined to four randomly selected Gramasevaka Divisions viz Colaniyagama, Pannala, Serupitiya and Keerthibandarapura.

Majority of cultivated land area in the sanctuary is used for vegetable cultivation (28%), home garden (27%) and tobacco cultivation (24%). Paddy and chena cultivation is done in 12% and 9% of the land area respectively.

Soil erosion was found to be the most important environmental problem in the sanctuary. In this regard, tobacco cultivation has contributed to a greater degree followed by chena cultivation. Most of the lands are above 60% slope and weed control is mainly practised using mammoties. Almost all the farmers use inorganic fertilizers except for home gardens and chena cultivation, but organic manures are hardly used. Further, more than 60% of the farmers do not adopt any form of soil conservation practices and only less than 3% of farmers take adequate measures. It was also observed that chena cultivation had a significant effect on wild life habitat too. The other environment hazard was extremely high use of fungicides and pesticides, particularly in tobacco and vegetable cultivation.

Therefore, it is extremely important to adopt improved farming systems such as agroforestry, alley cropping and organic and integrated farming to preserve the environment in VRR sanctuary from high degree of soil erosion and pollution.