

F-31: Crown land encroachment and related environmental problems in Monaragala district

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The population in Monaragala district has increased 3 fold during the past 3 decades. Sixty percent of the families are Samurdhi recipients. Due to poverty and lack of education and alternate employment opportunities, people are over-exploiting the available natural resources, mainly land resources for their survival. The main objective of the present study was to investigate the crown land encroachment and related problems.

The basic field research consisted of gathering information from local people, surveying, mapping, photographing, observing socio-economic condition etc. Discussions were held with key stakeholders and grass-root level officers. Detailed survey was conducted using stratified random samples of 30 from each Divisional Secretary (DS) division.

Total of 14,728 ha of land has already been encroached by people. Encroachment problem is severe in DS division of Madulla, Siyambanaduwa, Badalkumbura, Tanamalwila, Wellawaya and Malagama. Average of 55% of the encroached lands are used for agriculture, mainly for sugarcane cultivation due to the recent development of sugar industry in the district. Average of 42% of the encroachers have built houses on encroached lands. There are about 4425 landless families in the district. Lack of lands for second and third generations of settlers presses them to encroach crown lands for agriculture and housing. Unclear land titles of encroached lands discourage farmers to invest on soil and water conservation in such lands. This has led to series of environmental problems such as flood hazards, sedimentation of water bodies and reduced base flow in the down stream. Low agricultural productivity in the encroached lands due to topsoil erosion, presses encroachers to encroach more virgin lands.