Sugar Plantation at Pelwattha

By G. Kulasinghe

The environmental impact of growing sugar cane at Pelwattha has been overlooked by the concern for the wild elephants destroying crops and rice paddies. Although both crops are from the same region of Sri Lanka, there has been long-term damage to the soil due to overpopulation and hence less new harvests. This has received attention as a background issue, but the devastation that preceded sugar plantation would have been catastrophic to the environment.

Conservation under sugar cultivation

When the proposed sugar plantation at Pelwattha was evaluated in 1992, it was realized that the same crop could be grown with less impact on the environment. The proposal was then passed by the government and the project received environmental approval.

Cane yield in rain-fed cultivation

In rain-fed sugar cultivation, the cane yield is very dependent on the weather pattern. The project proposal of RSC estimated a yield of 25 tons per hectare, but the cultivators complained that the yield is as low as 30 tons per hectare. The proposed yield may be possible in the first year of cultivation, but a steady decline in cane yield is expected with no expansion. The project proposal did not provide any conservation measures to overcome this.

Sugar yield in rainfed cultivation

The maximum yield of sugar is achieved when the cane yield is high. In rainfed cultivation, the cane yield is less, and the sugar yield is also lower. The project proposal of RSC did not provide any conservation measures to increase the sugar yield.

The Pelwattha Sugar Corporation promises to increase the sugar yield in the future, but the project proposal did not provide any conservation measures to increase the sugar yield.

Alternative sugar cane cultivation

Alternative forms of sugar cane cultivation could be seen in the Moneragala district, which has a very low sugar yield. The project proposal of RSC did not provide any conservation measures to increase the sugar yield in the future.

Sugar production at Pelwattha

The project proposal of RSC did not provide any conservation measures to increase the sugar yield in the future.