

# KANDAKADUWA BANANA PLANTATION PROJECT



## Location

District: Polonnaruwa

DS Division: Welikanda

Grama Niladhari Division: Kandakaduwa

## Introduction

15,100 acres of villu ecosystems and forestland along Mahaweli River and Kandakaduwa Canal have been seized by The Army and used for agricultural projects and transferred to private companies for agricultural projects, usurping power. This area is comprised of villu ecosystems in the floodplains of Mahaweli River and Kandakaduwa Canal and dry mixed evergreen forests.

Around 5,000 acres of the land seized in this manner belong to Somawathiya National Park while the rest of the area is undeveloped forestland belonging to Kandakaduwa Farm which is owned by National Livestock Development Board (NLDB.)

This whole area is a major habitat and foraging grounds of the Elephant. Beru grass, which is a staple of their diet, is abundant in the villu ecosystems in the floodplains of Mahaweli River and Kandakaduwa Canal. The population of elephants recorded from this area is locally known as 'Vil Aliya'.

Initially, around 3,500 acres of forestland has been completely cleared off (Fig. 5.0 a & b) and agricultural activities have been carried out (Fig. 5.0 c & d) by the Army using LTTE detainees.

Next, 11,600 acres have been transferred to Letsgrow (Pvt) Ltd. through a Memorandum of Understanding. The multinational company 'Dole Food Company Incorporated' funded the project implemented by 'Letsgrow (Pvt) Ltd. It had been proposed to establish a banana plantation, a livestock farm and an agro-tourism project. More than 700 local residents and heavy machinery were employed to clear about 5,000 acres of the 11,600 acres of forest land that had been transferred. Upon continuous protests of the environmental activists revealing the illicit nature of the activities carried out, Dole Food Company Inc. had retracted from the partnership with Let's Grow (Pvt) Ltd. Further, Dole had cleared off the plantation and evacuated the land belonging to the National Park leaving it in the custody of the Army.

However the land is still under the control of the Army and entrance to the forest has been prohibited to officers of any government institution including The Department of Wildlife Conservation and National Livestock Development Board which are the

custodians of these lands as well as any other intermediary.

## **Harmful Effects of the Project**

The villu ecosystems in the floodplains of Mahaweli River and Kandakaduwa Canal and the nearby forests which are inhabited by elephants have been destroyed for the agriculture project. Loss of habitat and foraging grounds causes the elephants to enter the villages and croplands. A severe Human-Elephant Conflict has been generated in the areas of Mutuwella, Kandakaduwa, Thrikonamadu, Sinhapura, Sooriyawewa, Magul pokuna, Senapura, Alinchipathaana, Karapola, Mutugala and Kudapokuna villages of Welikanda DS Division. Local community has been displaced leading to many socioeconomic problems due to attacks by the elephants on their settlements and croplands.

The destruction of thousands of forestland has led to the displacement of many wild animals have been forced to move into farms and villages. Moreover, numerous organisms have been destroyed due to habitat loss. Crop-raids by elephants and other animals might lead villagers to give up their agricultural activities and seek other forms of employment. Consequently, the displaced villagers face many socioeconomic problems and it also affects to the production of food in the country.

Substantial destruction of forestland leads to localized changes in weather and climate disposing the local community to problems in availability of drinking and irrigation water.

Somawathiya National Park has been declared by Gazette Notification bearing No. 417/5 dated 02.09.1986 providing protection to an area of 21,054 hectares and had been expanded by a further 16,589 hectares by the Gazette Notification bearing No. 453/30 of 09.05.1987 under the provisions of Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance. Hence the National Park spans a total area of 37,645 hectares which has been declared as a biodiversity repository for the animal populations that had been displaced due to Mahaweli Project. Objectives behind this declaration have been countered by clearance of the forest.

## **Laws Violated**

Sections 05 and 06 of the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance as finally amended by Act No. 22 of 2009 has been violated by clearing forests of the National Park, establishing agricultural lands, transferring ownership of the land and supporting implementation of developmental projects.

According to section 9A of Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance as amended last by Amendment Act bearing no. 22 of 2009, for any developmental project carried out within one mile from the boundary of a National Park, it is compulsory to obtain prior written approval from the Director General of Department of Wildlife Conservation subject to the EIA process as stipulated in The National Environmental Act bearing No. 47 of 1980 and its amendments. Above agricultural projects have been carried out violating this legal provision.

According to Gazette Notification bearing No. 772/22 of 24th June 1993, published under the provisions of the National Environmental Act no. 47 of 1980 and its amendments, if any forest land exceeding one acre in area is cleared for development, prior written Environmental Recommendation should be obtained subject to EIA process. Clearing of forest lands and agricultural activities have been carried on violating these legal provisions.

The NLDB and Department of Wildlife bear the authority over the lands that have been exploited. Access to the lands has been prohibited to officials of these institutions obstructing their official duty.


Access to the land has been also prohibited to Officials of any government institution, any other stakeholder or intermediary by the Army violating the Fundamental Human Rights and obstructing enforcement of the Civil Law of the country.





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