

## Educating people about the threats to the Maduganga ecosystem



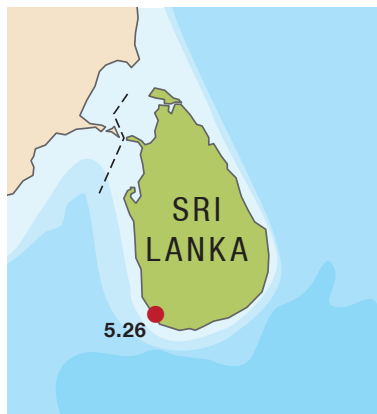
Students test samples, Maduganga, Sri Lanka © LUSSS

environment. So it is crucial that information on the wetland's values and importance is highlighted in schools and villages.

This project sought to give the communities in Maduganga a basic environmental education to help them understand the need to protect the mangroves around the islands in the estuary. It hoped to kindle interest and involvement in conserving the estuary's mangroves by showing how the livelihood and well-being of the community depend on them.

### Target beneficiaries

Schoolchildren from Ambalangoda and Balapitiya, as well as community members from Galmanduwa, Pathegama and Maduwa islands in the Maduganga estuary.



#### LOCATION

Maduganga, Sri Lanka

#### PRIORITY POWS

- Civil Society Engagement

#### DURATION

One year

#### MFF GRANT AMOUNT

US\$4,320

### Objectives

The main objective of this project was to inform local people of the threats to the Maduganga ecosystem, and the need for collective action to conserve it as a valuable resource, through a specially devised education programme. The project also aimed to transfer knowledge and skills to schools and the community, and to develop a resource centre for environmental studies at the Sarvodaya Multi-Purpose Community Centre (MPCC).

### Background

The mangroves around the Maduganga wetland are under serious threat from the activities of nearby communities. Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya (or just Sarvodaya), one of the largest NGOs in Sri Lanka, works closely with Maduganga communities. Sarvodaya has observed that communities around the wetland are either indifferent or unaware of the adverse changes in the Maduganga ecosystem. They also noted that communities lack the ability to identify, measure, and keep track of changes in the

### Outputs

- ▶ Delivery of environmental education programmes for young people and community members.
- ▶ Production and distribution of leaflets.
- ▶ Monitoring data on changes in selected parameters of the wetland ecosystem.
- ▶ Replanting of Galmanduwa island and its mainland approach with mangroves.
- ▶ Equipping of a laboratory and museum at Sarvodaya MPCC.
- ▶ The establishment of a library at Sarvodaya MPCC.

### Accomplishments and challenges

Through this project, the community learned about the importance of mangroves and gained a better understanding of why they need to be protected. On the ground, Galmanduwa island was replanted with man-

groves and Sarvodaya MPCC furnished with a well-equipped laboratory, museum and library.

### **Challenges**

Multiple difficulties were faced in achieving these goals. First, changing the attitudes of community members and persuading them to give priority to the environment is difficult when people are poor and depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. The communities bordering the Maduganga wetland do not appreciate that the changes in the ecosystem, some of which they recognise themselves, arise largely from their own lifestyles and occupations. The paid rehabilitation and reconstruction work after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami also has led people to expect payment for any work they do for the common good.

### **Contributions to cross-cutting themes**

#### **Communications**

As part of the effort to communicate with the communities on the value of the local eco-

system and the importance of conserving it, posters were displayed publicly and leaflets were disseminated.

#### **Gender equality**

Both men and women were educated and informed about the values of the ecosystem at Maduganga.

#### **Lessons learned**

One important lesson is that persistence leads to success. Sarvodaya persisted in its efforts to educate and encourage the communities, ultimately persuading them to carry out mangrove planting.

For the local schoolchildren, the project designed laboratory work based on their GCE (General Certificate of Education) syllabuses. This not only supported the students' examination studies but also contributed to the monitoring of environmental changes.

In sum, the project demonstrated that the community can and should be empowered to conserve and protect its local environment.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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