

TEA DIALOGUE

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Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure



PLANTATION HOUSING IN SRI LANKA: FROM
COLONIAL BARRACKS TO NATIONAL
RESPONSIBILITY

A SIP OF HISTORY: THE ENDURING LEGACY
OF DAMBATENNE ESTATE

THE PEOPLE ON PLANTATIONS

THE PLASTIC STRANGLING SRI LANKA'S
WATERWAYS

PRODUCT BRANDING AND MARKETING
ETHICS IN SRI LANKA

REVITALIZING SRI LANKAN PLANTATIONS:
BLENDING HERITAGE TOURISM WITH CROP
LEGACY.



NO 427/14

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TEA DIALOGUE

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Designed by
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Plantation Housing in Sri Lanka: From Colonial Barracks to National Responsibility

Situating plantation housing within the sweep of colonial history immediately frames it as a structural legacy rather than a mere technical problem. To deepen your article, you could trace the three major transitions in Sri Lanka's plantation housing story:

The Birth of Colonial Ceylon and the Plantation Economy

In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the winds of empire swept across the Indian Ocean. In 1796, amid the turbulence of the Napoleonic Wars, the British seized control of coastal Ceylon from the Dutch. What began as a strategic manoeuvre to secure trade routes soon evolved into a deeper ambition: the transformation of the island into a jewel of the British Empire.

By the mid-nineteenth century, coffee and later tea plantations spread across the hill country. To fuel this enterprise, thousands of Tamil labourers were brought from South India. Their homes were not built with permanence or dignity in mind. Instead, the infamous "line rooms" are long, narrow barracks with shared walls, no ventilation, and communal latrines that became the architecture of empire. Housing was not a right, but a tool of control.

Independence and the Persistence of Line Rooms

When Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the plantation economy remained intact, and so did its housing. For decades, successive governments launched ambitious housing programmes from the National Housing Act of 1954 to the Hundred Thousand Houses,.



L.R. PERERA

Programme of the late 1970s. Yet plantation workers were consistently left behind. Their homes remained tied to employment, their lives confined to then company-owned land.

The estate worker's dwelling was still a colonial barrack, even as the rest of the nation moved into modern housing schemes. The plantation community became a forgotten enclave, excluded from the mainstream narrative of development.

The Struggle for Dignity in the Modern Era

By the late twentieth century, reformers began to recognize that housing was not just shelter but a matter of dignity and rights. Cooperative societies attempted to give workers ownership of their homes. Donor-funded projects experimented with new designs. Yet progress was slow, fragmented, and often undermined by short-term fixes.

Even today, more than 200 years after the first line rooms were built, tens of thousands of families continue to live in them. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and lack of privacy remain daily realities. The plantation housing crisis is not a relic of history it is a living wound.

From Welfare to Responsibility

The turning point lies in reframing plantation housing as a national responsibility. It is not charity, nor welfare, but justice. Land tenure reform, integrated housing schemes, and gender-sensitive design are essential to break the cycle. Public-private partnerships must align under a coherent national framework, ensuring that plantation workers are not treated as second-class citizens but as equal stakeholders in Sri Lanka's future. The persistence of colonial inertia, policy neglect, and fragmented approaches explains why plantation workers still struggle to see light at the end of the tunnel. Housing reforms have rarely dismantled the foundations of dependency. Social hierarchies such as including hidden caste and occupational divisions would continue to shape access and equity. Plantation workers remain trapped in a cycle where housing is seen as welfare, not justice.

From Conquest to Cultivation

The story of 1796 to 1815 is thus not only about battles and treaties, but about the birth of a plantation economy, the reordering of society, and the embedding of colonial power that would echo through centuries. With power secured, the British turned their gaze to the fertile highlands. The cool climate and rich soil promised immense profits. In the 1820s, coffee plantations spread across the hills, transforming forests into neat rows of crops. For decades, coffee was king, fueling Britain's insatiable demand for the beverage.

But nature intervened. In the 1860s, a devastating coffee rust disease swept through the estates, destroying crops and bankrupting planters. Out of this crisis emerged a new opportunity: tea. Introduced by British planters, tea thrived where coffee had failed. By the late nineteenth century, Ceylon tea had become world-renowned,

its name synonymous with quality. Later, rubber joined the plantation portfolio, diversifying exports and strengthening the colony's economic backbone.

Shifts in Labour and Society

The transformation of Ceylon's agricultural landscape was not without unique adversities. As Dr. Tharoor notes in Ceylon Today, the abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1834 triggered a labour crisis, creating a burgeoning demand for workers across plantations and infrastructure projects. To meet this demand, the British turned to South India.

Predominantly Tamils from impoverished districts, these indentured labourers faced multi-faceted challenges that defined their arduous journey. Seeking to escape widespread poverty and famine in the nineteenth century, many travelled with their families to Ceylon in search of opportunity. Yet what awaited them was grueling labour under harsh conditions, meagre wages, and systemic marginalization.

The influx of Indian indentured labourers not only sustained the plantation economy but also reshaped the island's demographic and cultural fabric. Their struggles, sacrifices, and resilience became inseparable from the story of Ceylon's plantations a legacy that continues to influence Sri Lanka's social and economic landscape today.

The period between 1796 and 1815 marked the decisive transition of Ceylon from a contested island to a fully integrated colony of the British Empire. What began as a military conquest evolved into a profound transformation of land, labour, and society. Coffee, tea, and rubber plantations became the backbone of the colonial economy, while indentured labour from South India ensured its survival.

The echoes of this era remain visible: in the tea estates that still dominate the highlands, in the communities descended from indentured workers, and in the enduring debates over land, labour, and equity. Colonial Ceylon was not merely a chapter in imperial history but it was the crucible in which modern Sri Lanka's plantation economy and social complexities were forged. According to *Dr. Tharoor*, Ceylon Today explores the significant shift in Sri Lanka's agricultural landscape during the 1870s, driven by a fungal blight that devastated coffee plantations and led to the rise of tea estates. This transition required a larger workforce, resulting in the organized transfer of Indian Tamils to Sri Lanka.

Beyond the universal challenges of indentured labour, Tamils faced unique adversities. Colonial practices categorized them as foreigners, rendering them stateless under Sri Lanka's Citizenship Act of 1948. Women tea pluckers endured harsh conditions without access to basic facilities. The system of subcontractors even now known as *kanganies* functioned as recruiters and overseers, perpetuating exploitation through vague contracts. Plantation Tamils were also restricted from land ownership due to colonial laws.

The British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 (enforced in 1834) created a long-term labour shortage across British colonies. Slavery in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was a documented reality in the 18th–19th centuries, with evidence of forced migration to colonies like the Cape, Mauritius, and beyond. Although the numbers were smaller than in Africa or India, Ceylonese slaves were part of the Indian Ocean slave trade, and after abolition in 1844, coercive labour continued through bonded and indentured plantation systems.

Evidence of Slavery in Ceylon

Documented shipments:

- 1712: 36 slaves from Jaffna arrived at the Cape.
- 1719: 80 more from Jaffna.
- 1754: Another shipment followed

Proportions: In the early 18th century, Ceylonese slaves made up **2–3%** of the Cape's slave workforce; by 1715–1806, this rose to **4%**.

Evidence of Slavery in Ceylon https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/files/58155582/Forcing_the_archive

Origins within Ceylon: Records mention Bibile, Galle, Satrapatnam, and Jaffnapatnam as points of origin. https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/files/58155582/Forcing_the_archive

- Decline: By the late 18th century, fewer fleets from Sri Lanka reduced the proportion of slaves exported. https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/files/58155582/Forcing_the_archive.

Transition from Slavery to Bonded Labour

Dutch & British rule: Slavery existed under both regimes. The British began gradual abolition after taking control in 1796, culminating in **formal abolition in 1844**. Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka.

Persistence of servitude: Even after abolition, enslaved individuals often remained in conditions of dependency, with limited freedom of movement.

Archival traces: Legal cases and petitions reveal enslaved people asserting rights, resisting masters, and negotiating cultural practices (e.g., circumcision requests, child custody disputes). Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka. Nira Wickramasinghe.

Implications for Housing and Social Equity

These divisions reveal that housing is not merely a matter of shelter but a reflection of caste and occupational hierarchies. Even when new housing schemes are introduced, allocation often reproduces these divisions, keeping marginalized groups in peripheral, poorly serviced areas.

Why Addressing This Matters

- **Equity in Development:** Without tackling caste-linked segregation, housing interventions risk perpetuating inequality.
- **Social Cohesion:** Segregated housing weakens unity among workers, limiting collective bargaining and empowerment.
- **Human Dignity:** Housing is a marker of respect and belonging. Marginalized groups deserve equal recognition in estate development programmes.

In the context of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) tea plantations, line rooms refer to the basic, often cramped housing provided for plantation workers, typically in long, barrack style buildings. These rooms, usually around 10 by 12 feet, were designed to house entire families.



The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) has captured the essence of why plantation housing remains such a stubborn challenge in Sri Lanka. It is not merely about bricks and mortar, but about history, hierarchy, and human dignity. The “line rooms” barrack-style dwellings built under colonial rule, were never intended to foster community or equity. They were designed for control: cramped, uniform, and deliberately segregated.

The special privileges granted to the kangany (head recruiter), such as two line rooms and extra land, reinforced occupational hierarchies and caste-linked divisions that still echo today.

More than four decades after the introduction of Sri Lanka’s National Housing Policy, the estate sector continues to grapple with serious housing challenges. Plantation housing is not simply a matter of infrastructure; it is a question of equity, dignity, and national responsibility. For a sector that contributes significantly to the country’s economy, ensuring decent housing for its workers is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

Plantation Housing: Architecture of Bondage

Plantation housing in Sri Lanka was never neutral. It was an architecture of control, designed by colonial planters to enforce discipline, dependency, and hierarchy. The line rooms, long barrack-style dwellings, were not simply shelters, but instruments of bondage. Workers were denied basic sanitation facilities. Toilets were not provided inside line rooms, forcing families to use communal or open spaces. This was intentional: it kept costs low, reinforced the idea that workers were transient, and denied them dignity. By contrast, planters’ bungalows had modern sanitation, underscoring the stark divide between master and labourer.

Why Only a Small Window?

The tiny windows in line rooms were symbolic and functional. They limited ventilation and light, keeping interiors dark and oppressive. This darkness was not accidental, it reflected the colonial view that workers did not deserve comfort or privacy. The small window also made surveillance easier, as workers could not easily conceal activities inside.

The Morning Muster at 6AM

Workers were completed to report to morning muster, often before dawn, and commence work immediately after. This ritual was a mechanism of forced labour. It ensured punctuality, reinforced authority, and reminded workers daily of their subjugation. Muster was not just about work schedules, it was about discipline and control. The darkness inside line rooms was both physical and symbolic. With cramped dimensions (often 10 by 12 feet), poor ventilation, and minimal openings, families lived in perpetual gloom. This environment weakened health, eroded morale, and reinforced dependency. Darkness became a metaphor for the bondage imposed on generations of plantation workers.

Continuity of Captivity

- **European planters (150+ years):** Designed housing as a tool of bondage, with barracks for workers and bungalows for themselves.
- **Government of Sri Lanka (20 years):** Continued to treat housing as a welfare handout, not a right.
- **Regional Plantation Companies (34 years):** Commercialized estates, but housing remained a low priority, perpetuating colonial legacies, struggling to come out on their own without support.

Slavery in Ceylon

Though the British abolished slavery in 1833, they replaced it with “legalized bondage.” Workers were bound by contracts, debts, and housing tied to employment. The line system was slavery by another name a system of captive labour disguised as free employment. This has to be discussed further and Housing reforms cannot be understood without confronting this history. The line rooms were not a failure of design, but a deliberate architecture of control. They denied sanitation, light, privacy, and dignity because they were never meant to empower workers only to bind them.

To move forward, Sri Lanka must acknowledge that plantation housing is not just about infrastructure. It is about dismantling a system of bondage that has lasted for centuries.

To be continued ...

FROM TEA TO TREES: WHY SRI LANKA'S PLANTATION SECTOR MUST EMBRACE NATURE

Thilal Nanayakkara

For more than a century, Sri Lanka's plantation sector has shaped the country's landscapes, economy, and international identity. From the mist-covered tea estates of the central highlands to the rubber-growing regions of the wet zone, plantations have long been symbols of productivity and export success. Generations of Sri Lankans have depended on these landscapes for livelihoods, and the world has come to associate them with the country's heritage. Sri Lanka's plantations are also globally renowned for producing some of the world's finest tea. Yet these landscapes are also deeply interconnected with the country's ecological systems. Many estates lie close to internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots, including the rainforests of the south-western hills. Rivers that sustain agriculture and downstream communities often originate in plantation landscapes. Forest patches, riparian corridors, and shade trees within estates provide refuge for wildlife and help maintain ecological balance.

A new conversation

Therefore, a new conversation is taking root today. It is a conversation that recognizes plantations not only as production landscapes, but also as ecosystems that must sustain biodiversity, regulate water, and build resilience to climate change. On 4 March 2026, senior leaders from Sri Lanka's plantation sector gathered in Colombo for a Plantation Sector Forum brought together by the "Partnerships and Innovative Financing to Mainstream Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Management in the Wet Climatic Zone of Sri Lanka" Project.

The event brought together CEOs and senior executives of Regional Plantation Companies (RPCs), high-level government representatives, and development partners to explore how plantations can evolve into landscapes that support both economic productivity and environmental sustainability. The Global Environment Facility (GEF-7) funded project is implemented by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka, with the private sector playing a central role in implementation.



Opening the forum, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Dr Sunimal Jayatunga conveyed the government's appreciation by stating that, "Many RPCs have already taken commendable steps to conserve biodiversity within the landscapes they manage," Dr. Jayatunga noted. "This project seeks to build on those efforts by strengthening partnerships with the private sector and introducing innovative financing mechanisms that support biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management." However, he went on to say that, "Tea and rubber plantation landscapes face mounting pressure. Climate change is altering rainfall patterns. Land degradation threatens soil health and productivity. Biodiversity loss is weakening ecosystem functions that agriculture depends upon. Against this backdrop, the GEF-7 initiative seeks to rethink how plantations are managed by integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management into everyday estate operations. By integrating these approaches into plantation management, we can protect ecosystems, strengthen climate resilience, and ensure that plantation landscapes continue to support both livelihoods and nature for generations to come."

Having initiated the project while being at the Ministry of Environment, the Secretary of the Ministry of Plantations and Community Infrastructure, Mr Prabath Chandrakeerthi, who is also the newly elected Chief of Staff of the Presidential Secretariat, was confident that this project is "a timely and strategic effort that aims to increase the productivity of tea and rubber landscapes". He went on to inform that the project will "improve sustainable and climate-resistant land management practices in six primary districts, namely: Nuwara Eliya, Kegalle, Ratnapura, Galle, Matara and Kalutara. In addition, this initiative will support the upgrading and strengthening of system certification within the RPCs. I am confident that this initiative will create added value for plantation companies while ensuring compliance with globally accepted sustainability standards." Adding his thoughts to the forum, Secretary to the Ministry of Environment Mr K. R. Uduwawala, emphasized the national significance of the initiative:

"Sri Lanka's plantation landscapes occupy some of the most environmentally sensitive regions of the country. Protecting biodiversity within these landscapes is not simply an environmental obligation; it is essential for safeguarding our water resources, ecosystems, and long-term economic resilience," he said. He went on to state that, "the project will strive to introduce sustainable land management practices. In line with this, we are also planning to establish an authority that would be responsible for safeguarding the island's rich biodiversity and environmental assets".

His words capture a growing realization. The future of Sri Lanka's plantations cannot be separated from the future of the ecosystems that sustain them.

Business and nature

For many years, biodiversity conservation was often seen as something separate from agricultural production. That perception is rapidly changing. Healthy ecosystems perform services that plantations rely upon. Forest patches stabilize slopes and reduce erosion. Riparian vegetation protects water sources. Pollinators and natural predators help maintain ecological balance. Diverse landscapes are also more resilient to pests, diseases, and extreme weather. In other words, biodiversity is not an external environmental issue. It is part of the natural infrastructure that underpins the productivity of plantation landscapes.

This perspective was echoed by Resident Representative of UNDP Sri Lanka, Ms Azusa Kubota, who noted that nature and development must be viewed together: "Nature and economic development are deeply interconnected. In the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah, by working with the plantation sector to mainstream biodiversity and sustainable land management, this project has an opportunity to demonstrate how productive landscapes can also become resilient ecosystems," she said. Ms Kubota further elaborated,

“This approach reflects a growing global shift. Around the world, businesses are beginning to recognise nature-related risks and opportunities. Environmental degradation is no longer seen only as a conservation issue. It is also a business risk. This project is giving the plantation sector a platform to contribute to Sri Lanka’s national climate strategy while pitching for global funds through innovative finance mechanisms.”

Working together

Sri Lanka’s Regional Plantation Companies collectively manage vast areas of land across the country. Their decisions influence forests, wildlife habitats, and water systems that extend far beyond estate boundaries. Because of this, the private sector has a crucial role to play in shaping the future of Sri Lanka’s landscapes.

According to the project’s Senior Technical Advisor Prof Devaka Weerakoon, the project represents an opportunity to transform how plantation landscapes are viewed and managed: “The GEF-7 project is taking a proactive approach by working directly with plantation companies to build technical knowledge, conduct biodiversity surveys, and develop land-use planning approaches that balance production with conservation. It also explores innovative financing mechanisms that could encourage companies to invest in ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management. Through such a broad partnership approach, this initiative is about moving beyond isolated conservation efforts and integrating biodiversity considerations into estate planning and operations. By doing so, we can create plantation landscapes that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable,” explained Prof Weerakoon. The project aligns with the Ceylon Tea Road Map 20230 and the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure. We have identified a number of new species in the plantations, and these can be used to promote products from these landscapes.

The project will also be drawing up sustainable energy management plans that can be applied to the plantation sector.

Questions and answers

A discussion time facilitated by Project Consultant Dr Keerthi Mohotti underscored a simple truth: environmental challenges cannot be solved by any one sector alone. Government institutions provide policy direction and scientific expertise. The private sector brings operational capacity and investment. Development partners such as UNDP support innovation and knowledge sharing. When these actors work together, they can reshape how landscapes are managed.

Concluding the forum, Director of the Biodiversity Secretariat and Project Director Dr Achala Attanayake highlighted the importance of this collaboration: “Thank you for the role that each of you is playing to achieve sustainable land management in plantation landscapes. This requires strong partnerships, and the Government, the private sector, and development partners are working together to protect biodiversity while sustaining economic growth through this project,” she concluded.





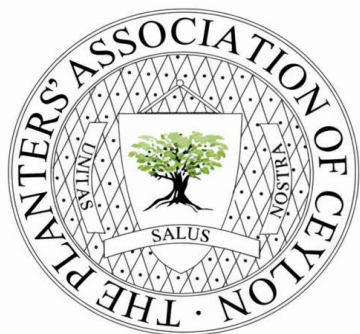
Narrow path ahead

The global context is also changing rapidly. Frameworks such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework are encouraging governments and businesses to assess their impacts on nature and take action to halt biodiversity loss.

For Sri Lanka's plantation sector, this transition presents both challenges and opportunities. The challenge lies in adapting long-established production systems to incorporate biodiversity considerations. The opportunity lies in positioning Sri Lanka as a global leader in sustainable plantation landscapes that integrate agricultural production, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. If successful, Sri Lanka could demonstrate that productive landscapes need not come at the expense of nature. Instead, they can become part of the solution.

The Plantation Sector Forum held on 4 March 2026 therefore marked more than just another industry gathering. It signaled the beginning of a deeper conversation about how Sri Lanka's plantation landscapes can evolve to meet the environmental realities of the 21st century. In a country blessed with an extraordinary natural heritage, that conversation could not come at a more important time.





A Sip of History: The Enduring Legacy of Dambattenne Estate

Planters Association of Ceylon

Nestled in the misty hills of Sri Lanka's Uva Province is a living piece of Pure Ceylon Tea history in the form of Dambattenne Estate. Sprawling across the verdant slopes of Haputale, this iconic estate holds the legacy of one of the most famous names in tea Sir Thomas Lipton. Dambattenne estate is a place where past and present converge, offering visitors a unique window into the origins of Sri Lanka's tea industry and the enduring global reputation it continues to command.

Together with the father of Ceylon Tea himself, James Taylor whom at the time of Lipton's arrival in then Ceylon, had already established Sri Lanka's very first commercial tea plantation and factory at Loolecondera Estate, the duo set about the development of Pure Ceylon Tea that continues to form the foundation of the brand today.

Walking the estate's picturesque paths today, to the scenic bungalow in which Sir Lipton himself resided that is still maintained in pristine condition 134 years later, visitors trace the footsteps of a pioneer whose passion for tea reshaped Sri Lanka's economy and revolutionized how the world consumes tea.

The Birth of a Tea Empire: Sir Thomas Lipton's Vision

Founded in 1890, Dambattenne Estate was selected by Sir Thomas Lipton for its ideal tea-growing conditions: cool temperatures, rich soil, and abundant rainfall.

Lipton's visionary approach transformed these remote Sri Lankan highlands into a powerhouse of tea production, kindling a global tea empire that helped make high quality tea accessible to millions.

Lipton recognized the unique advantages of Dambattenne estate to produce tea leaves of exceptional quality almost instantly. His radical approach of bypassing the expensive brokers controlling the tea trade allowed him to bring tea "directly from the garden to the teapot", while still making it affordable for the average consumer. This groundbreaking model laid the foundation for Lipton Tea, a global giant in tea that has been synonymous with quality, affordability, and innovation for generations.

Today, Dambattenne Estate spans a total of 873 hectares, including 376 hectares of tea and 183 hectares of forestry and high conservation sensitive areas. Following significant investments in replanting, over 74% of the estate's tea is now vegetatively propagated, which has significantly increased the production of tea.

The estate's rich history and legacy continue into the present day, with locations like the iconic Lipton seat remaining carefully preserved a tourist hotspot. Famed as Sir Thomas Lipton's favourite vantage point, Lipton's Seat offers stunning panoramic views of multiple provinces including Handapanagala Lake and Udawalawe Lake.

These sites are also being strategically developed, with a new tea center being established at the location, to offer visitors from across the globe a chance to savour the living heritage of Dambattenne estate at the very same location as Sir Thomas Lipton himself.

For over a century, the estate has infused care and craftsmanship into every batch of tea it has produced, standing as a living testament to Lipton's enduring legacy and the estate's pivotal role in the rich history of Ceylon tea.

A Modern Icon of Tradition and Innovation

Dambattenne remains at the forefront of Sri Lanka's tea industry, it skillfully blends tradition with modern advancements. The estate adheres to the highest international quality standards, including Rainforest Alliance, ISO 22000:2018, and ISO 9001:2015, reaffirming its commitment to excellence. Similarly, the company has embarked on a strict polythene-free policy within the property, while investing significantly in hydropower, solar, and biomass renewable energy.



The factory at Dambattenne is a remarkable feature of the estate, being the longest tea factory in Sri Lanka. Situated at elevations ranging from 1,560 meters to 1,970 meters above sea level, the estate enjoys ideal conditions for cultivating high-quality tea leaves that contribute to its exceptional output. It produces an impressive 700,000 to 1 million kilograms of tea annually, showcasing the scale and efficiency of Dambattenne's operations while maintaining the highest quality standards.

The estate also manages 183 hectares of forestry and environmentally sensitive areas, including 126.47 hectares of timber plantations located at high elevations above 5000 ft MSL. These areas are not only important for conservation but are also being considered for sustainable timber harvesting and ecotourism opportunities. The potential for utilizing forest areas for ecotourism, such as introducing cabins within these scenic locations, has been recognized as an exciting prospect for sustainable tourism moving forward.

Innovation plays a pivotal role in the estate's operations today. Automated machinery has enhanced harvesting efficiency, ensuring minimal environmental impact. Dambattenne's focus on eco-friendly production is further supported by comprehensive waste management initiatives, which include composting. These efforts underscore the estate's leadership in sustainable tea production.

In hand with technological advancements, Dambattenne continues to honour its century-old traditions. The estate's tea-making process respects the time-tested methods introduced over a period of time, creating a harmonious blend of innovation and heritage. This careful balance ensures that Dambattenne's tea continues to captivate tea enthusiasts worldwide, offering a sip of history in every cup.

Building Communities Beyond the Tea Leaves

Dambattenne's influence extends beyond tea production; it is a vital part of the local community. As one of the largest employers in the region, the estate has played a pivotal role in uplifting local families through fair labour practices, skills development, and community empowerment.

Dambattenne's investment in corporate social responsibility initiatives is another cornerstone of its legacy. From offering scholarships to supporting local schools, the estate ensures access to quality education for the workers' children. The estate's commitment to its workforce is reflected in several initiatives aimed at improving their daily lives. Tea harmony centers have been established in each division, providing workers with comfortable spaces for rest during their workday. The estate is also in the process of constructing field toilets for workers, further enhancing their working conditions. Workers are equipped with personal protective gear, including wellington boots, goggles, and protective clothing, ensuring their safety and wellbeing. In addition, annual health scans are conducted for all workers, with referrals to specialized medical attention when necessary, underscoring the estate's dedication to comprehensive healthcare.



Recognizing the importance of nurturing future generations, Dambattenne provides midday meals to children at the creches located within the estate. Dental clinics are also organized specifically for children, ensuring their oral health is prioritized. Furthermore, the estate management offers a monthly grant to the children of workers who are selected for local universities, encouraging educational aspirations and higher learning among its community.

The estate's contributions to infrastructure such as housing, sanitation improvements, clean water systems, and access roads, have enhanced the quality of life within the estate and the surrounding villages. The estate also recognizes the potential for further expanding tourism, including the development of a tea center at Dambattenne, which will further contribute to community development and economic growth.

A Legacy of Tradition and Innovation

Echoing the larger Sri Lankan tea industry's challenges, Dambattenne also faces fluctuating global tea prices and labour shortages. Yet, the estate's forward-thinking approach has turned these challenges into opportunities, including the use of automated machinery prioritizing mechanical harvesting.

Dambattenne Estate stands out as more than just a tea plantation; it is a living symbol of Sri Lanka's rich tea heritage and a beacon of progress in sustainable agriculture. From its humble beginnings under Sir Thomas Lipton to its current standing as a leader in eco-friendly tea production, Dambattenne's commitment to quality, innovation, and community remains unwavering.

Revitalizing Sri Lankan Plantations:

Blending Heritage Tourism with Crop Legacy.

Dimantha Samarasinghe

In today's tourism landscape, travelers crave immersive experiences over mere sightseeing. Sri Lanka's plantation sector rooted in tea, rubber, and terrain stands at a pivotal crossroads. Single-crop revenues no longer suffice amid volatile commodity prices, rising costs, and shifting global demands.

The age-old ratios of plantation economics have crumbled, demanding diversification. The paramount opportunity lies in scaling plantation tourism at a grand level, recreating the aura of the bygone British Raj to magnetize visitors worldwide. Imagine estates transformed into living museums of colonial splendor. Estates like those pioneered by Sir James Taylor, the father of Ceylon tea, or Thomas Lipton, whose brands still dominate global shelves, could host lavish celebrations of their lives.

Tourists from affluent Brits nostalgic for empire-era tales to adventure-seekers would flock to experiential events: plucking tea leaves at dawn, touring vintage factories, and savoring high tea rituals amid misty hills. This isn't nostalgia for its own sake; it's a marketable story spanning one-and-a-half centuries, preserving heritage while generating new revenue. Key assets abound for conversion.

Iconic plantation bungalows, with their polished wood floors and sweeping verandas, could become boutique heritage hotels. Factories once humming with pluckers and rollers might offer interactive tours culminating in personalized tea-blending workshops. Even line rooms, symbols of plantation labor history, could evolve into rustic eco-lodges, blending authenticity with modern comforts. British tourists, ntl luxury, represent a prime market, alongside Europeans, Americans, and growing Asian cohorts.

Merging plantations with tourism forges a robust business model. Estates gain multiple income streams: accommodations (40-60% occupancy potential in peak seasons), guided experiences, merchandise sales, and corporate retreats. Early adopters like the Pekoe Trail demonstrate viability, with visitor numbers surging post-pandemic.

Scaled nationally, this could inject billions into rural economies, create jobs in hospitality and guiding, and sustain crop operations through cross-subsidization. Way Forward for RPCs Regional Plantation Companies must act decisively: Pilot Conversions: Select 5-10 high-potential estates (e.g., in Nuwara Eliya, Haputale or Badulla) for bungalow and factory upgrades, partnering with tourism boards for certifications.





Storytelling Infrastructure: Develop digital campaigns and AR/VR apps recreating Raj-era journeys, tied to Lipton-Taylor festivals. Collaborative Funding: Seek PPPs (public-private partnerships) with Sri Lanka Tourism, international investors, and sustainability funds for eco-restoration. Sustainability Safeguards: Ensure conversions preserve biodiversity, support pluckers via profit-sharing, and align with UN tourism goals.

By weaving tourism into our plantation fabric, we don't just survive we thrive, safeguarding a legacy for generations while captivating the world.

Sri Lanka's plantation sector has long been one of the pillars of the national economy. For over a century, tea, rubber, and coconut plantations have shaped the country's landscape, employment, export earnings, and cultural identity. Yet today, the industry faces significant challenges, including fluctuating global commodity prices, rising labor costs, climate-related pressures, and changing market dynamics.

At the same time, tourism remains one of Sri Lanka's most promising economic sectors. As travelers increasingly seek authentic, experiential, and sustainable destinations, the country's historic plantations present an untapped opportunity. By integrating heritage tourism with plantation agriculture, Sri Lanka can create a powerful model that preserves history, diversifies revenue, and revitalizes rural economies.

The Untold Value of Plantation Heritage

Sri Lanka's plantations are more than agricultural enterprises. They are living museums that tell the story of colonial history, agricultural innovation, community development, and cultural transformation.

Across the hill country and lowland estates stand elegant colonial bungalows, century-old factories, railway connections, workers' settlements, and breathtaking landscapes that attract visitors from around the world. These assets already possess significant tourism appeal, yet many remain underutilized.

Countries such as India, Malaysia, and Kenya have successfully transformed parts of their plantation sectors into tourism destinations, offering estate stays, guided tours, cultural experiences, and educational programs. Sri Lanka is equally positioned to capitalize on this growing market.

Why Plantation Tourism Makes Economic Sense Diversification is no longer a luxury it is a necessity.

Plantation companies traditionally rely on commodity sales, leaving them vulnerable to global market fluctuations. Tourism introduces a secondary revenue stream that can stabilize estate finances and improve long-term sustainability.

Potential revenue opportunities include:

- Boutique plantation hotels and heritage bungalows
- Tea, rubber, and coconut experience tours
- Plantation museums and visitor centers
- Eco-tourism and nature trails
- Adventure tourism activities
- Cultural performances and local cuisine experiences
- Agricultural education programs
- Wellness and retreat centers

By leveraging existing estate infrastructure, companies can create new income streams while enhancing the value of their core agricultural operations.

Transforming Tea Estates into Living Experiences

Tea remains Sri Lanka's most iconic plantation crop. Yet many visitors experience Ceylon Tea only as a finished product. Imagine visitors walking through mist-covered tea fields at sunrise, observing traditional tea plucking, learning about processing techniques in historic factories, and participating in guided tasting sessions led by tea experts.

Such immersive experiences transform tea from a commodity into a story. They increase visitor spending while strengthening the global brand value of Ceylon Tea.

Premium tourism experiences can also encourage direct to consumer tea sales, creating additional export opportunities and strengthening international customer loyalty.

Celebrating Rubber and Coconut Heritage

While tea often dominates tourism discussions, rubber and coconut plantations possess equally compelling stories. Rubber estates can offer educational tours demonstrating tapping techniques, processing methods, and the evolution of Sri Lanka's rubber industry.

Interactive exhibits can showcase how natural rubber contributes to modern manufacturing and sustainability initiatives.

Similarly, coconut plantations can highlight traditional harvesting methods, coconut-based products, local food culture, and sustainable farming practices. Coconut tourism can connect visitors to wellness trends, organic products, and eco-friendly lifestyles that are increasingly popular among international travelers.



Preserving History Through Commercial Sustainability

One of the greatest advantages of plantation tourism is its ability to fund heritage conservation. Many colonial-era buildings and estate facilities require significant maintenance. Agricultural revenue alone often struggles to support preservation efforts. Tourism can generate the financial resources necessary to restore and maintain these historic structures. Rather than allowing heritage assets to deteriorate, plantation tourism provides a commercially viable path toward preservation. Visitors gain meaningful experiences, while future generations retain access to important pieces of Sri Lanka's history.

Empowering Local Communities

Successful plantation tourism should extend benefits beyond estate owners and investors.

Local communities can participate through:

- Employment opportunities
- Hospitality services
- Craft production
- Cultural performances
- Guiding services
- Transport operations
- Local food and beverage businesses

This inclusive approach creates broader economic development, strengthens community support, and enhances the authenticity of the visitor experience.

A community-centered model ensures that tourism growth contributes directly to rural prosperity and social sustainability.

Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage

Modern travelers increasingly prioritize sustainability when choosing destinations.

Sri Lanka's plantations can position themselves as leaders in responsible tourism by integrating:

- Organic farming practices
- Biodiversity conservation
- Renewable energy solutions
- Water management initiatives
- Carbon reduction strategies
- Community engagement programs

Plantations that demonstrate environmental stewardship will appeal to environmentally conscious travelers while strengthening their global reputation.

Strategic Steps for Regional Plantation Companies

To realize this vision, Regional Plantation Companies should consider a phased approach:

A Vision for the Future

Sri Lanka possesses a unique opportunity to redefine the future of its plantation sector. By blending agricultural heritage with experiential tourism, the country can transform historic estates into vibrant economic engines that generate employment, preserve culture, and attract global visitors.

The plantation of the future is not merely a place where crops are grown. It is a destination where history is experienced, traditions are celebrated, communities thrive, and sustainable prosperity is created.

The path forward lies not in choosing between agriculture and tourism, but in recognizing that together they can create something far more valuable: a living legacy that honors Sri Lanka's past while building a stronger future.



Utilizing Underproductive Estate Lands in Sri Lanka

A Sustainable Diversification Strategy through Moringa (*Moringa oleifera*) and Soursop (*Annona muricata*)

Dr. Sampath Niroshan



Abstract

Sri Lanka's plantation sector has long been the backbone of the national economy, shaping rural livelihoods and contributing significantly to export earnings. Tea, rubber, and coconut estates continue to occupy vast tracts of land across the country. However, a growing challenge for many estate companies is the presence of substantial areas of underproductive or marginal land that yield limited economic returns while incurring ongoing maintenance costs. As the plantation industry seeks pathways toward sustainability, resilience, and profitability, diversification has become more important than ever.

One promising strategy involves the cultivation of high-value, climate-resilient crops that complement traditional plantation agriculture. Among the most promising candidates are Moringa (*Moringa oleifera*) and Soursop (*Annona muricata*), two crops gaining international recognition for their nutritional, medicinal, and commercial value.

The strategic utilization of underproductive estate lands for these crops presents a unique opportunity to create new income streams, support rural development, and strengthen environmental sustainability.

Introduction

Plantation agriculture has historically contributed significantly to Sri Lanka's GDP and export earnings. However, modern challenges have resulted in inefficiencies and idle land resources within estates. Strategic diversification can transform these lands into productive assets while supporting economic resilience.

The Challenge of Underproductive Estate Lands

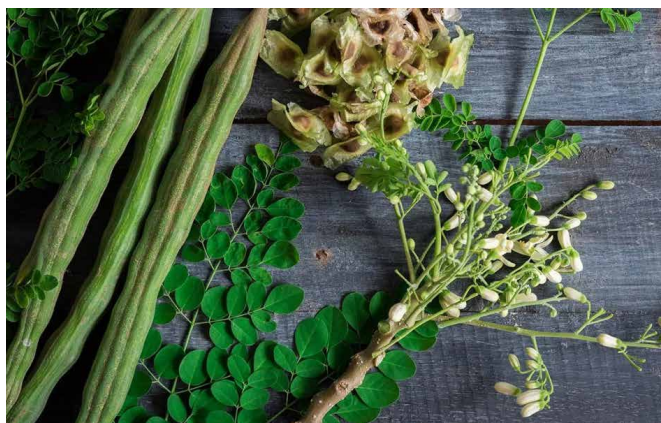
Across Sri Lanka, many estate companies manage lands that are unsuitable for profitable tea or rubber production due to factors such as:

- Soil degradation
- Low elevation suitability
- Aging plantations
- Poor drainage conditions
- Difficult terrain
- Climate-related productivity declines

These lands often contribute little to overall estate profitability while still requiring management and upkeep. Rather than viewing such areas as liabilities, estate managers can transform them into productive assets through carefully selected diversification initiatives.

The global agricultural market increasingly rewards innovation, sustainability, and functional foods. This creates a favorable environment for introducing alternative crops with strong market demand and long-term growth potential.

Why Moringa?



Often referred to as the “Miracle Tree,” Moringa has gained worldwide recognition for its exceptional nutritional profile and versatility.

Every part of the tree offers commercial value:

- Leaves for nutritional supplements
- Powder production for export markets
- Herbal teas
- Animal feed additives
- Cosmetics and skincare products
- Nutraceutical ingredients

Moringa is particularly attractive because of its:

Climate Resilience

Moringa thrives in tropical and semi-arid conditions, demonstrating remarkable drought tolerance and adaptability to marginal soils. This makes it ideal for many underutilized estate lands where traditional crops struggle to perform.

Fast Growth and Early Returns

Unlike many plantation crops that require years before generating revenue, Moringa can begin producing harvestable leaves within months of planting. This allows investors and estate companies to realize returns relatively quickly.

Growing Global Demand

The international wellness and health-food sectors continue to expand rapidly. Demand for organic Moringa powder, capsules, teas, and plant-based nutritional products has increased significantly across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Sri Lanka has the potential to position itself as a premium supplier of high-quality Moringa products, leveraging its reputation for agricultural excellence and sustainable production practices.



The Untapped Potential of Soursop

Soursop, also known as Graviola, is another crop with significant commercial promise.

The fruit is highly valued for:

- Fresh consumption
- Juice production
- Functional beverages
- Ice creams and desserts
- Nutraceutical applications
- Herbal products

Soursop is increasingly sought after in health-conscious markets due to its rich content of vitamins, antioxidants, and bioactive compounds.

Adaptability to Estate Conditions

Soursop performs well in many tropical regions of Sri Lanka and can be cultivated successfully on lands unsuitable for intensive tea cultivation.

Its deep-rooted growth habit also contributes to soil stabilization and efficient water utilization.

Rising Export Opportunities

Global demand for exotic tropical fruits continues to rise. Processed fruit products, frozen pulp, juices, and value-added health beverages represent expanding market opportunities for Sri Lankan producers. By investing in modern processing facilities, estate companies can capture greater value beyond primary production.

A Synergistic Diversification Model

The combined cultivation of Moringa and Soursop creates a highly attractive diversification model.

Short-Term and Long-Term Revenue Balance

Moringa provides relatively quick returns through leaf harvesting and processing.

Soursop offers medium- to long-term income through fruit production and value-added product development.

This balanced approach helps estates maintain steady cash flow while building future profitability.

Improved Land Utilization

Previously underperforming lands can become productive agricultural assets without displacing existing plantation operations.

Environmental Benefits

The cultivation of these crops can contribute to:

- Enhanced biodiversity
- Improved soil health
- Reduced erosion
- Increased carbon sequestration
- Better watershed management

Such outcomes align closely with global Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) objectives increasingly adopted by plantation companies and investors.

Creating Value through Processing

The true economic potential of Moringa and Soursop lies not merely in cultivation but in value addition.

Potential products include:

Moringa Products

- Organic leaf powder
- Herbal tea blends
- Nutritional capsules
- Functional food ingredients
- Cosmetic extracts

Soursop Products

- Frozen pulp
- Premium fruit juices
- Smoothie ingredients
- Wellness beverages
- Nutraceutical formulations

Developing integrated processing facilities within estate regions could generate employment opportunities while increasing export earnings.



Empowering Rural Communities

Diversification projects can create significant social benefits. New cultivation and processing activities can generate:

- Employment opportunities
- Youth engagement in agriculture
- Women's entrepreneurship initiatives
- Smallholder partnerships
- Skills development programs

By involving surrounding communities through out-grower schemes and cooperative production models, estate companies can foster inclusive economic growth while strengthening local supply chains.



Supporting National Sustainability Goals

Sri Lanka has committed to advancing sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and rural economic development.

The strategic introduction of Moringa and Soursop aligns closely with these objectives by:

- Enhancing agricultural diversification
- Improving land productivity
- Supporting export development
- Promoting climate-smart agriculture
- Strengthening food and nutritional security

Such initiatives can help transform plantation landscapes into multifunctional agricultural ecosystems capable of meeting both economic and environmental objectives.

The Road Ahead

The future of Sri Lanka's plantation sector depends on its ability to innovate while preserving its agricultural heritage. Underproductive estate lands represent a largely untapped resource with immense potential.

By embracing Moringa and Soursop cultivation as part of a comprehensive diversification strategy, estate companies can unlock new revenue streams, strengthen resilience against climate and market uncertainties, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable rural development.

The opportunity is clear: what was once considered marginal land can become a source of economic growth, environmental stewardship, and community prosperity.

As global demand for natural health products and tropical fruit-based innovations continues to rise, Sri Lanka is uniquely positioned to lead the way. Through visionary planning and strategic investment, the plantation sector can transform underutilized landscapes into thriving engines of sustainable development for generations to come.

Conclusion

The integration of Moringa and Soursop into underutilized estate lands presents a practical and profitable solution for RPCs. This strategy enhances productivity, supports sustainability, and contributes to foreign exchange earnings.

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The Plastic Strangling Sri Lanka's Waterways

Sri Lanka is an island defined by water. From the central highlands, a network of 103 distinct river basins radiates outward like silver veins, feeding lush wetlands, historic canals, and complex irrigation networks before emptying into the Indian Ocean. For millennia, these waterways have been the lifeblood of the nation, sustaining agriculture, driving ancient civilizations, and harboring rich biodiversity.

Today, however, a slow-motion ecological disaster is unfolding across these precious water ways channels. Sri Lanka's rivers and canals are being choked by an unyielding tide of plastic pollution. What was once a localized waste management issue has expanded into a full-blown national crisis that threatens public health, destroys marine and freshwater ecosystems, and undermines the island's economic stability.

The Anatomy of a Plastic Highroad

To understand how plastic takes over Sri Lanka's waters, one only needs to stand on any urban bridge in Colombo or Gampaha during a heavy downpour. Within minutes, storm drains and roads transform into conduits, flushing thousands of discarded plastic bottles, polythene shopping bags, and single-use lunch sheets directly into regional waterways.

The scale of the problem is staggering. Environmental studies estimate that Sri Lanka generates hundreds of metric tons of plastic waste every single day. Due to gaps in municipal collection infrastructure, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, a highly dis-proportionate amount of this waste is left unmanaged.

Madawa Gunaratna



It is either burned openly, creating toxic air pollution, or dumped haphazardly onto riverbanks and roadsides. When the monsoon rains arrive, these informal dumps are swept directly into major river systems.

Several key rivers bear the heaviest burden of this ecological failure:

The Kelani River: Flowing through the heavily industrialized and populated Western Province, the Kelani acts as a massive conveyor belt for plastic waste. It supplies a major portion of Colombo's drinking water while simultaneously absorbing immense volumes of municipal and industrial consumer plastics.

The Mahaweli River: Sri Lanka's longest river carries agricultural runoff and plastic debris from the central hills all the way to the eastern coast at Trincomalee.

The Hamilton Canal: Originally built to facilitate trade during the colonial era, parts of this historic canal have frequently become so dense with floating bottles and bags that the water beneath is entirely hidden from view.

From Macro to Micro: The Hidden Toxic Threat

The visible pollution the vast carpets of floating bottles and snagged supermarket bags is only the first stage of the crisis. Over time, exposure to solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation and the abrasive action of water breaks these large plastics down.

They do not biodegrade; instead, they fragment into microscopic fragments less than 5 millimeters in size, known as microplastics. Microplastics represent an invisible, pervasive threat to Sri Lanka's food security. Freshwater fish, crabs, and river prawns easily mistake these tiny particles for food. Because plastics act like sponges, absorbing heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants from surrounding industrial runoff, they become highly toxic chemical bombs.

When these aquatic creatures ingest microplastics, the toxins bioaccumulate up the food chain. Recent studies by local universities have detected microplastic particles in the tissues of fish caught in urban lagoons and estuaries. Ultimately, these chemicals land directly on the dinner plates of local consumers, raising alarming long-term public health questions regarding endocrine disruption, carcinogens, and reproductive issues.



The Impact on Waterways and Ecosystems

Plastic waste does not simply disappear. It accumulates in rivers and drainage systems, eventually reaching the ocean. Along the way, it causes numerous problems:

1. Threat to Wildlife

Sea turtles, fish, birds, and marine mammals often mistake plastic for food. Ingested plastics can cause starvation, internal injuries, and death. Animals can also become entangled in discarded fishing nets and plastic packaging.

2. Increased Flooding

Blocked drains and canals reduce water flow during heavy rains. Urban areas, especially around Colombo and other major cities, experience more frequent flooding due to plastic-clogged drainage systems.

3. Damage to Fisheries

Plastic contamination affects fish breeding grounds and coastal ecosystems. This threatens the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families who depend on healthy marine environments.

3. Damage to Fisheries

Plastic contamination affects fish breeding grounds and coastal ecosystems. This threatens the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families who depend on healthy marine environments.

4. Tourism and Economic Losses

Plastic-covered beaches and polluted waterways diminish Sri Lanka's appeal as a tourism destination. Cleanup costs place additional burdens on local authorities and communities.

5. Human Health Risks

As plastics break down into microplastics, they enter the food chain through fish, shellfish, and drinking water sources. Long-term health impacts remain a growing global concern.

Human Activities Driving the Problem

Several human behaviors contribute significantly to plastic pollution:

- Excessive use of single-use plastic bags, bottles, and packaging.
- Improper disposal of household waste.
- Illegal dumping into rivers and canals.
- Poor waste segregation practices.
- Lack of recycling awareness and infrastructure.
- Industrial and commercial waste mismanagement.
- Littering in public spaces and tourist areas.



Key Barriers to Solving the Crisis

Despite growing awareness, several challenges hinder progress:

Limited Waste Management Infrastructure

Many local authorities struggle with collection, sorting, recycling, and disposal facilities.

Public Attitudes and Behavior

Convenience often outweighs environmental responsibility, leading to continued reliance on disposable plastics.

Weak Enforcement

Environmental regulations exist but are not always consistently enforced.

Insufficient Recycling Markets

The recycling industry faces economic challenges, making it difficult to process all collected plastic waste.

Rapid Urbanization

Growing populations and consumption patterns generate increasing volumes of waste.

Financial Constraints

Municipal councils often lack sufficient resources for large-scale waste management improvements.

Solutions for a Cleaner Future

Addressing plastic pollution requires collaboration between government, businesses, communities, and individuals.

Strengthen Waste Management Systems

- Expand waste collection services.
- Establish modern recycling facilities.
- Improve waste segregation at source.

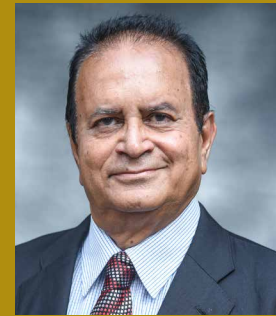
Reduce Single-Use Plastics

Promote reusable bags, bottles, and containers. Encourage eco-friendly alternatives made from natural materials.

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HR, TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT ON PLANTATIONS 'PEOPLE' ON ESTATES



Dyan Seneviratne

'The People' are all those attached to plantations typically the workers, staff and executives; yet one should also take the children and 'pensioners' into the equation as they too would have a hand in total productivity! Anyone who is directly and or indirectly affected by activities on a plantation would form the definition of 'people' on a plantation.

Let's take the pluckers those who are entrusted with harvesting tea bushes of an estate to begin with. The usual practice is when a child usually a female is around 17 to 18 years they are selected to pluck certain 'old fields' [to do least damage to the plucking table!] or some are supposed to be tutored by an experienced plucker and after a few months of such 'training' they are drafted in to the main gangs of pluckers. The question of planned and structured HRD type initiation does not really get the attention it should receive.

The undersigned recalls when he was managing SL's largest tea property Hapugastenne, he realized that in order to extract its potential he had to recruit at least another 100 pluckers urgently. The problem was that all the resident pluckers were already deployed on plucking.

He was then compelled to source potential pluckers from a radius of 3 to 4 km from the divisional boundaries by sending out motivated 'scouts' who were briefed on the 'profile' of the pluckers required at least physically we did not want emaciated runts to begin with! Surprisingly quite a few sturdy- looking young females turned up most of them had never 'touched' a tea bush, leave alone plucking them.

However most of them had done their O/L – some even had passed their O/L in Science subjects! Plucking would have been furthestmost from their minds! We called them 'Harvesters' and gave them attractive T-Shirts with the term 'Harvesters' emblazoned only after the writer carried out a crash course of 3 weeks on theory of plucking, even giving them botanical terms relevant to the tea bush and leaf, photosynthesis, transpiration, naming the different leaves etc and Do's and Don'ts of plucking with appropriate scientific terms in Sinhala that struck a chord with them and they gradually changed their attitudes! Then we got onto to the practical side of training plucking aided by the champion pluckers, capping it off by selecting the best three trainees at a 'test' based on theory & practice.

VILLAGE LASSES TRANSFORMED INTO CHAMPION PLUCKERS

Within a mere six months down the road these very same young 'village lasses' became champion pluckers themselves, beating those experienced ones hollow! This trained and motivated group of pluckers certainly helped towards establishing records in YPH hitherto never ever reached and exceeded thereafter! So pluckers need to be carefully selected and thereafter vigorously trained both in theory and practice before they are sent out to the fields. We need to motivate them. We need to listen to their issues/ woes at home; we need to know what type of food they consume; they need to be aware of the importance of consuming milk, eggs, pulses etc. We need to check their blood and see if they are anemic; if so immediate action be taken with iron supplements etc. We need to genuinely CARE.

Before looking at improving the quality of an estate, one must improve the quality of his workers overall! Isn't this then fundamental without looking at workers and / unions with an adversarial stance? Workers are not a 'cost' to be cut! Instead a motivated work-force you sincerely love as they could then do wonders that were hitherto unimaginable!!

Plucking [harvesting] was and is the costliest item on a tea plantation. It requires much planning, training, motivation of gangs, monitoring physical / mental aspects of pluckers etc. Sadly little supervision is seen by many estate executives on this vital aspect.

THE ESTATE MEN MATTER TOO

The next matter under 'People' the other workers apart from pluckers: usually the male 'sundry' workers here too one must identify the inherent talents of each and every worker looking into historical data / kanganyies' assessments and decide further on what type of further training they need,

depending on their physical attributes, general behaviour and of course the needs of the estate both short and long term.

TALENT IDENTIFICATION & MANAGEMENT

Part of Human Capital Management is to identify talent amongst your pool of workers; today's corporate jargon calls it 'Talent Management'. We did not have such theories to guide us then; we just went ahead using our God given common sense. Period.

For instance on one estate, on assumption of duties the writer found that there was an apparent dearth of 'Pruners' the young SD [Assistant Superintendent] had been 'told' that that was it! We called for the checkrolls of the past 4 years and it transpired that quite a few workers who had feigned ignorance on how to handle a pruning knife had in fact been enthusiastically pruning! On further probing it was revealed that most of the pruners had decided on a plan to inform the new 'Durai' / Superintendent [the young SD had also been relatively new] that they did not know how to prune! Pruning is considered one-of-the toughest physically taxing jobs on a tea estate; we did not adopt a confrontational course but spoke to each of the 'actors' on a one-to-one basis [addressing them together would have been suicidal!] and before long they were smiling, willing and able pruners.

Similarly the estate's executive staff Manager and executive assistants must keep a record of each and every worker and then by extension even their dependents one must know their names [including their nick-names!] details of their houses / toilets / gardens, even names of their pet dog and more importantly their proven competencies and potential. Would they fit [pruners apart] in as good carpenters, masons, even cooks? One has only got to look at the bigger picture we did so during the pre-computer era. How easy record keeping of such magnitude would be in today's context.

Human Resources: Training & Development

Reverting to 'Estate Managers' it is no use to appoint 'Superintendents' and thereafter spoon-feed him or worse, make him feel impotent! Give him the 'Big Picture' and let him come up with the suggestions. During the early 1970s estate superintendents would come up with proposals – a.k.a budget proposals a good six months before they huddle together to work out the annual budgets. Today the 'Clean Copies' that are handed over to Managers sometimes we are told a month or two after the new financial season has commenced is only an arithmetical formula.

This fixation with figures must stop if we are to resurrect this vital industry! For instance when subject of 'Re-Planting' is spoken of, many of those in authority today take on a negative stance and say things like 'Don't talk of Re-planting it is impossible with today's high costs! Re-planting is not viable because it would take 20 years to bear fruit! Such views are totally unacceptable! At one time we re-planted 75 to 100 acres per year per estate.

Besides a planter worth his salt could plan, think creatively and indeed make things happen. 30 to 40 years ago none spoke about KPIs and KRAs; about 'effective delegation'; top down or bottom up communication; vision, mission, 'balanced score-card' etc. Yet they effectively made 'things happen'.

The Manager of a large plantation then was in effect the CEO of a large business enterprise. The Manager then did not have computers & printers; scanners and photo copiers; there were no ERP solutions; no HR Managers, no Manager Talent Retention, IT geeks, no Manager Finance, Manager this and Manager that! No MYOBE Accounting Software, instead only Checkrolls and CR books, but tons of can do it attitude; they enthusiastically discussed their plans with their staff and workers in their respective languages;

importantly they built trust it was mutual. 100 acres of tea being re-planted in just one year was routine; no worthy, crunching numbers and pontificating that "New Clearings cannot be done" as its ROI was negative, impacting on the GP & NP ratios! Planters then relied on their God-given common-sense. And they mostly delivered. And how.



Today, sadly there's 'Information over-load' via emails, Smartphones, Notebooks, Tablets etc; ironically a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and common sense! It's perhaps a case of too many cooks spoiling the soup; that maybe explains the inaction by some RPCs towards replanting, new planting, alternate forms of energy; resource identification towards producing those matching global demand the list goes on. Yes many RPCs seem rooted to age-old thinking and negativism whilst conversely non-traditional planter a.k.a. Small Holder goes on new planting and indeed re-planting unhesitatingly! From a trivial input in the 1960s Small Holders deliver 75% of National Tea production! Today's planter instead of fritting away his precious time drinking and idle gossip should use his leisure time for active physical sports and self-help books on a plethora of topics available to upgrade his Leadership skills, speaking and writing ability, agricultural chemistry, Human Resource Development and Management; accounting skills, IT knowledge etc. Yes, there's so much to study and learn and re-learn.

The advice by this writer to planters: You have a job that most sane people will envy. Be aligned with nature and appreciate it. Count all the blessings you have and the myriad resources you administer; change the paradigm; don't wallow in self-pity and negativism; start opening your eyes, look around for those untapped resources, see how you could add value; seek new markets.; work out the ROI and go for it, if feasible.

Be an ideas man, yet be practical; not just a dreamer! Create an insatiable thirst for knowledge; start reading quality books. Yes, that's a hobby that's hard to beat! And, if you don't know Tamil or need to brush up your English, do so pronto! In short be focused on what needs/could be done and MOVE!

Henry Mintzberg wrote in Business Week that too many leaders don't see themselves as managers. They believe that their job is "to do the right things," while others are responsible for "doing things right." That may be impressive in a consultant's PowerPoint presentation or academic white paper.

Yet fundamentally, the best leaders are, first and foremost, managers. Like a good planter, they make things happen. They get results. They organize people; allocate resources, implement strategies yes, whatever it takes to get things done. And that's key! I wish to share some management concepts.



Let me quote Brian Tracy from his best seller: 'How the Best Leaders Lead'. Tracy talks of the Seven Roles of the Manager: In any enterprise there are seven key roles of the manager. Each of them is only learned through trial and error and continuous practice. But they are all learnable, and he says, 'they must be learned for you to realize your full potential as a leader'. Brian Tracy continues: One of the most important management qualities is flexibility. The more different mental tools and skills you have to get the most and the best out of your people, the more flexible and therefore, the more effective you can be as a manager. So what are the seven roles of a manager, indeed of a Plantation Superintendent?

They are Planning,Organizing,Staffing,Delegation, Supervising,Measuring,Reporting.

Fundamental stuff, really! Think about it: effective planters have been doing so for eons without a leadership guru telling us these basics! Yet today they have dissected and analyzed 'Management' to its finer elements. And we need to look at this science with an open mind.

PLANNING: Planning is the process of determining exactly what is to be done: Action without planning is the cause of every failure. Action preceded by thorough planning is usually the reason for every success. Find the time to be alone. As soon as you get a spark of an idea, write it down! 'Think on paper' write down every detail of the goal or objective and every step you will have to take to achieve it. Get the facts, especially the financial facts. Refuse to rely on guesswork or the hope that everything will turn out all right. That's courting disaster! Be even mentally prepared to abandon the plan and try something else if required. But once all aspects are sorted out, start visualizing 'successful completion' that's when your right brain kicks in then you can do it! Just as there's an 80/20 rule, there is also a 10/90 rule that says: "The first 10% of the time you spend in planning often accounts for 90% of your success when you put your plan into action.

"In business strategy, the purpose is to increase return on investments [ROI] and in totality, on equity, or ROE.

The goal of the company or indeed plantation is to earn the very most possible on the amount of money invested in the business. On the other hand, in setting personal strategy, your goal is to increase "return on energy," the amount of mental, emotional, and physical energy that you invested to get results. Think about it because you save 10 minutes in execution for every minute you invest in planning, you achieve an ROE of 1,000 percent by thinking through every critical detail (Left Brain thinking) and then visualizing success [Right Brain Thinking] to make it happen. This is not some mumbo jumbo, guys it does make sense! This may be a cliché now, but worth repeating the Six P Formula:

Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

ORGANIZING: Organizing is the process of assembling the people and resources you will need to fulfill the plan and achieve your goals; this is a key skill of leadership. People with good organizational skills are invaluable to any organization or Regional Plantation Co. Nothing is possible without them! In its simplest form, organization requires that you make a list of everything you will need to carry out the plan on schedule and on budget. These ingredients include money, people, offices, equipment and technology. To ensure that you do not forget something essential, your list should be completed thoroughly before you take any action.

"For want of a nail, a horse was lost. For want of a horse, a rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. From the loss of the battle, an empire was lost. Oh! What a loss for one small nail!" An oft repeated English Proverb'.

Organize your list of requirements by sequence what you need to do before you do something else, and by priority what is more important and what is less important. Start on the most vital elements of your plan first. Practice the 20/80 Rule of Organization. It's a truism that the first 20% of time spent planning is as valuable or more valuable, than the remaining 80% of tasks.

STAFFING: You must attract and keep the people you need to carry out the plan and achieve the desired results. Your ability to hire the right people will account for as much as 95% of your ultimate success. Most of your frustrations and failures will be the result of having the wrong persons in a key position. Leadership of RPCs: this gem of Management applies to you too. Period.

DELEGATION: Delegation, simply defined is the skill of assigning the right job to the right person in the right way. You always have two choices: You can either do the job yourself, or you can get someone else to do it. Proper delegation is how to make sure that someone else does the job to an acceptable level of quality.

Your ability to delegate effectively is the key to leveraging yourself and multiplying your value to your company or estate. Delegation allows you to move from what you can do personally to what you can manage. Indeed delegation is one of the most important management skills. Without the ability to delegate effectively and well, it is impossible for you to advance in management to higher positions of responsibility. Today's businesses depend on the 'Speed of Trust' and effective delegation is integral.

Delegation is not only about maximizing your own productivity and value; it is also about maximizing the productivity of your staff. Your job as a manager is to get the highest return on the company's investment in people. According to global research findings the average person today is working at 50% of capacity. With effective delegation, you tap into that unused 50-percent potential to increase your staff's productivity. After all, your job as a manager is also to develop people. Delegation is the means that you use to bring out the very best in the people that you have.

The first step in delegation is to think through the job. Decide exactly what is to be done. What results do you/they want? The second step in delegation is to set performance standards.

How will you measure to determine whether the job has been done properly or not? The third step is to determine a schedule and a deadline for getting the job done, conforming to the overall quality set.

The Art of Delegation

There are seven essentials for effective delegation:

Pick the right person. Picking the wrong person for a key task is a major reason for failure. Match requirements of the job to the abilities of the person. Be sure that the 'delegatee' is capable of doing the job. This factor is obvious but is often overlooked.

Delegate effectively to the right person: This frees you to do more things of higher value.

Delegate smaller tasks to newer staff to build their confidence and competence

Once all factors are considered, delegate the entire job. One hundred percent responsibility for a task is a major performance motivator. The more often you assign responsibilities to the right people, the more competent they become.

Delegate clear outcomes: Make them measurable. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Explain especially to you sub-staff, kanganies etc what is to be done, how you think it should be done and the reasons for doing this job in the first place. They are not morons after all.

Delegate with eager participation and discussion, for instance after picking a 'Quality Circle' from your factory staff and workers: When workers, now called 'Associates' seem wanted and recognized, they respond in ways unimaginable; the writer has done so throughout his planting career and that half accounts for his YPH records, lowest COPs and Top Prices consistently whilst attending to New & Re-Planting,

infilling, establishing commercial nurseries, absolute weed-free conditions with leaf litter working as an inhibitor of weed germination; estate roads and paths in perfect condition, wonderful worker/staff-management engagement & harmony! Sounds Utopian? Well he did it! Remember: delegate in such a way that people walk away feeling -"This is my job; I own it."

Practice management by exception when you delegate. Set clear goals, standards and deadlines for the delegated task/s. A job without a deadline is merely a discussion. Delegation is the key to growing your people. When you become effective at delegating with a few staff members, you will soon be given more people to delegate to, plus greater responsibilities, as a result of your delegating skills. All excellent managers are excellent delegators. In old-school thinking, people used to say that, "If you want the job done right, you have to do it yourself." However in new-school thinking the correct statement is, "if you want the job done right, you have to delegate it properly to others so that they can do it to the proper, cost-effective, quality standard."

SUPERVISING

Whether one is a PD Manager or SD Asst. in plantations displaying excellent plucking and/or tapping standards mean that your management is A1. And such results are not accidental. They revolve around intelligent planning and smart supervising.

This writer remembers, even as a senior manager of Diyagama West, if he had half an hour of relatively free day time he would gleefully hop on to his personal Honda XLR 250CC and 'do a quick run' to the highest point of a plucking field and walk through a plucking field, supervising plucking. After all plucking cost was/is the costliest item on a tea plantation. It is critical that one devotes some time to plucking. Perfect standards and well managed plucking costs means: half the battle won.



Supervising is the process of making sure the job is done on time and on budget. However, delegation is NOT abdication! You are still accountable for results. The job of a manager is to get things done effectively through others. Your ability to organize the work and to supervise your workers, staff effectively to get the job done on schedule and on budget is the key to getting the results for which you are responsible. Your ability to supervise others can be greatly improved by learning what other excellent, well proven managers of estates have discovered and done over the years and by applying these principles and ideas to your interactions with your subordinates.

For example when the writer was an Assistant Superintendent on Brunswick Group Maskeliya way back in the early '70s he used to rummage through the archives with help from an accommodating Chief Clerk and pore over old files, noting down key points in circulars issued by a former Superintendent of Brunswick Estate Mr. Perkins who had an eye for detail! So be humble learn from others and give credit to them as gratitude. Sometimes you don't have to reinvent the wheel! Pick up from others and progress up.

Five Keys to Excellent Supervision

Accept complete responsibility for your staff. You choose them, you assign them, and you manage them. Look upon your staff with the same patience and understanding as you would look upon younger members of your family. Practice the 'Friendship Factor' with them, which consists of three components: time, caring, and respect. Give staff time when they want to talk to you. Express caring and concern for them and their problems. Treat them with respect even your Thalaivars [Labour Leaders] the same way you would treat a customer or friend. This aspect should be part of your estate managerial DNA.

Practice Servant Leadership, by seeing your job a position of trust with your subordinates.

Just as they are there to serve you and the company/plantation, you are there to serve them, as well. Practice Golden Rule Management: Treat each person the way you would like to be treated if the situation were reversed. When you practice Golden Rule Management you manage other people the way you like to be managed you will then elicit higher performance from your people than in any other way. Try it. Practice it. It worked/works for me always! The Best Managers: According to numerous surveys of employees in the 'work world', the best bosses and supervisors possess three critical qualities:

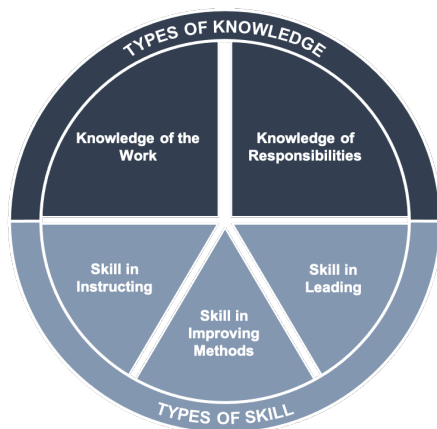
Structure: Everyone knows exactly what needs to be done, why it is to be done, and to what standard.

Consideration: The boss makes employees feel that he or she really cares for them.

Freedom: Good bosses give their people freedom to perform. Once they are assigned a task, they try to stay out of the way, except to comment and to help when needed.

Back to School One of your jobs as the leader or Peria Dorai (Manager) of a plantation is to be a teacher. The reason you are in charge is because of your superior level of knowledge and skill (presumably) One of the most helpful things you can do is to pass on your knowledge and skill to those who report to you. Teach other people how to do the job that you have already mastered. You multiply your output by teaching someone else how to do something that only you can do. And you, along the way, increase their value to the business and to your plantation and by extension to your RPC.

MEASURING: Measuring requires setting metrics measures and numbers for each part of the work, including setting standards of performance for each job; every business activity and that includes your plantation and even a Division and/or Factory can be expressed and defined in numbers of some kind, typically financial numbers.



In Jim Collin's famous book *Good to Great*, he emphasizes the importance of the economic denominator in any business. This is sometimes referred to as the Critical Success Factor (CSF) the measure of which is the best indicator of the health of the business, or some part of the business. In sales, the measure can be the number of calls, or the number of face to-face appointments.

If it is the leadership of the company, the critical measure can be quarterly sales, profitability, or the share price. In business, the ultimate number is usually the net cash flow, the actual amount of free cash that is available after all charges to pay out as profits and dividends. One must establish numbers for yourself in each key area. These become your targets and measures how well you are doing. Significantly, you must select one number that is more indicative of your success than any other and focus on that number, literally, every day guaranteeing success! All rewards, recognition, promotion and bonuses in your set-up should be tied to performance, to achieving the numbers and measures you have set.

REPORTING: You must keep the key people inside and outside of your business plantation informed at all times. This is one of the most important responsibilities of leadership and of people at every level of the organization.

Perhaps 95% or more of problems in a company can be traced back to poor or nonexistent communications.

People were not informed of events or given information that was essential to their ability to do their jobs correctly. When in doubt, more information is better than less information. Make a list of everyone who needs to know what you are doing and how well you are doing it. Sometimes you need to blow your own trumpet as no one else will do so! Start with your boss. What information does your boss need from you on a regular basis? Go and ask. Write it down. Report back regularly. What about bad news? Be sure you tell it first! If someone else conveys the negative information, it can easily get distorted and reflect badly on you before you even get a chance to comment! Practice a "no surprises" strategy.

Knowing how to report to your boss is a key skill of 'managing up'. Leadership is not only about 'managing down' managing your employees and subordinates it is also about managing your boss! Give those you report to honest and complete information and speak with candor. Don't be afraid to suggest initiatives and to campaign hard for what you believe. To get things done, you not only need your employees buy in to your goals; you need your boss to buy in as well.

Finally, to fulfill your potential, you must become excellent at what you do. Resolve to be the best, to join the 10 percent in your field. Set your standards high. Look around you at the best people in your field: think about how you could be as good as or better at your job than they are. The key to moving from good to great in your field is to ask yourself the brutal question: "Why aren't I already the best at what I do?" The answer is always the same. The reason you are not at the top of your business field is because you have not yet decided to be there or you have not backed that decision up with the proactive, focused, smart, results-oriented hard, hard work on yourself that is necessary.

Tea Plantations and the Importance of Biodiversity in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka



Vimukthi D.W. Sumanasekara

The Central Highlands of Sri Lanka represent one of the country's most valuable natural and cultural resources. Dominated by rolling tea-covered hills, misty mountains, cloud forests, and rich biodiversity, this region contributes significantly to Sri Lanka's economy, environmental sustainability, and international reputation. Tea plantations have shaped the landscape and livelihoods of the highlands for more than a century, while the surrounding ecosystems provide essential habitats for a remarkable variety of flora and fauna found nowhere else on Earth. The Central Highlands include internationally recognized conservation areas such as Horton Plains National Park, Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, and Knuckles Conservation Forest. Together, these areas form the core of the UNESCO World Heritage Site and play a vital role in conserving Sri Lanka's environment.

The Legacy of Tea Plantations

Tea cultivation was introduced to Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century and rapidly transformed the country's central hill country. Today, Sri Lankan tea is renowned worldwide for its quality and distinctive flavor.

Tea plantations cover large areas of the uplands, particularly in regions such as Nuwara Eliya, Hatton, Talawakelle, and Badulla. Beyond their economic importance, tea estates provide employment opportunities for thousands of people and support rural communities through housing, education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. The scenic tea-covered hills have also become major tourist attractions, drawing visitors from around the world who seek to experience the beauty and culture of Sri Lanka's hill country.

However, tea cultivation depends heavily on healthy environmental conditions. Stable rainfall patterns, fertile soils, clean water resources, and favorable temperatures are all essential for sustainable tea production. These environmental services are closely linked to the biodiversity of the Central Highlands.

A Global Biodiversity Hotspot

Sri Lanka is recognized as part of the Western Ghats, Sri Lanka Biodiversity Hotspot, one of the world's most biologically rich regions. The Central Highlands contain a remarkable concentration of endemic species of flora and fauna found nowhere else on earth.

The montane forests and grasslands support numerous unique species, including Sri Lankan Leopard, Mountain Slender Loris, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, and numerous endemic orchids, ferns, amphibians, reptiles, and freshwater fish.

Many of these species are highly sensitive to environmental changes and depend on intact forest habitats for survival. The Central Highlands therefore serve as a critical refuge for biodiversity conservation. Biodiversity is much more than the variety of plants and animals. It provides essential ecosystem services that directly benefit tea plantations and local communities.

Water Resources Protection

The Central Highlands are often referred to as the “water towers” of Sri Lanka. Forests capture rainfall, regulate stream flow, and recharge groundwater. Major rivers such as the Mahaweli River, Kelani River, and Walawe River originate from these mountainous regions. Healthy forests reduce soil erosion, maintain water quality, and ensure a reliable water supply for agriculture, hydropower generation, industries, and domestic use.

Soil Conservation

Vegetation cover helps stabilize steep slopes and prevents landslides, a significant concern in Sri Lanka’s hill country. Forest roots bind the soil, while leaf litter improves soil structure and nutrient cycling. Conserving biodiversity therefore contributes directly to reducing land degradation and disaster risks.

Climate Regulation

Forests absorb and store carbon dioxide, helping mitigate climate change. Biodiverse ecosystems are generally more resilient to droughts, extreme rainfall events, pests, and diseases.

Maintaining ecological balance strengthens the long-term sustainability of tea production.

Pollination and Natural Pest Control

Many insects, birds, and other organisms provide natural pollination and pest control services. Biodiverse landscapes often support healthier agricultural systems by reducing dependence on chemical inputs and enhancing ecological stability.

Challenges Facing Biodiversity

Despite its ecological significance, the biodiversity of the Central Highlands faces several challenges.



Habitat Fragmentation

Over the years, forest areas have become fragmented due to agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and human settlements. Fragmented habitats can isolate wildlife populations and reduce genetic diversity.

Climate Change

Rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns threaten both biodiversity and tea cultivation. Many endemic species are adapted to cool montane environments and may have limited ability to move to suitable habitats as climate conditions change.

Invasive Species

Non-native plant and animal species can outcompete indigenous species, alter ecosystems, and reduce biodiversity. Effective management of invasive species remains an important conservation priority.

Land Degradation and Pollution

Unsustainable land use practices, soil erosion, and improper waste management can negatively affect water quality, ecosystem health, and agricultural productivity.

Towards Sustainable Tea Landscapes

The future of Sri Lanka's tea industry and biodiversity conservation are closely interconnected. Sustainable plantation management practices can help achieve both economic and environmental objectives.

Some important measures include:

- Conserving remaining natural forest patches.
- Establishing ecological corridors between fragmented habitats.
- Promoting soil and water conservation measures.
- Reducing excessive use of agrochemicals.

- Restoring degraded lands with native vegetation.
- Implementing biodiversity-friendly certification schemes.
- Encouraging environmental education and community participation.

Many tea estates are increasingly adopting sustainable practices that balance production with environmental stewardship. Such initiatives contribute to biodiversity conservation while enhancing the international reputation of Sri Lankan tea.

Conclusion

The tea plantations of Sri Lanka's Central Highlands are more than agricultural landscapes; they are part of a complex ecosystem that supports livelihoods, water resources, climate regulation, and an unusual diversity of life. The forests, grasslands, rivers, and wildlife of the highlands provide invaluable ecosystem services that sustain tea cultivation and benefit the entire nation.

Protecting biodiversity is therefore not only a conservation responsibility but also an investment in the future of Sri Lanka's tea industry, environmental security, and sustainable development. By integrating biodiversity conservation into plantation management and land-use planning, Sri Lanka can ensure that the beauty and productivity of its Central Highlands continue to thrive for generations to come.

Tea Plantations and the Importance of Biodiversity in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka

The tea plantations of Sri Lanka's Central Highlands are more than just picturesque landscapes; they play a vital role in supporting biodiversity. These ecosystems provide shelter and sustenance to a wide range of flora and fauna, including many endemic and threatened species. Conserving biodiversity in tea-growing regions ensures ecological balance, protects endangered species, and maintains the natural heritage that makes Sri Lanka unique.



Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush



Sri Lanka Leopard



Sri Lanka Bush Warbler



Dull-Blue Flycatcher



Purple faced langur



Sri Lanka Leopard



Sri Lanka Bush Warbler

Play - Based Education in Early Childhood



Achini Weerasinghe

Play-based education is a child-cantered approach that uses play as the main method for learning and development in early childhood. Instead of focusing only on formal teaching methods such as writing and memorization, this approach allows children to explore, imagine, create, and interact with their environment in meaningful ways. Through play, children naturally develop cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills that form the foundation for lifelong learning. In early childhood, play is not separate from learning, **it is learning**. Activities such as building with blocks, role-playing, drawing, physical activities or playing outdoors help children understand the world around them. Play-based education respects children's natural curiosity and supports their holistic development in a joyful and engaging manner.

Early Childhood Development and Brain Development

Early childhood, especially from birth to five years, is the most critical period of human development. During this stage, about 90% of brain development occurs. Children's brains are highly active, forming millions of neural connections every second based on their experiences and interactions. By the age of 14, most of the brain's structural development is completed. This means that the early years lay the foundation for learning, behaviour, health, and overall development throughout life.

Because of this rapid brain development:

- Children need stimulating environments rich in play and interaction
- Positive relationships with caregivers are essential
- Experiences during early childhood have long-term impacts.

Play-based learning is especially important during this period because it provides the stimulation and experiences necessary for healthy brain development. **When children play, they are not just having fun, they are building brain connections that support thinking, emotional regulation, and social skills.**

Importance of Play-Based Education in Early Childhood

Play-based education is essential because it supports multiple areas of development:

1. Cognitive Development:

Through play, children learn problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. For example, when building something, they experiment with balance, structure, and design.

2. Social and Emotional Development:

Play helps children learn to share, cooperate, negotiate, and express emotions. Group play encourages teamwork and communication skills.

3. Physical Development:

Active play improves motor skills, coordination, and overall health. Running, climbing, and manipulating objects strengthen muscles and body control.

4. Language Development:

During play, children communicate with peers and adults, improving vocabulary and language skills naturally.

5. Creativity and Imagination:

Play allows children to explore ideas freely, fostering creativity and innovation.

Without sufficient opportunities to play, children may miss out on these critical developmental experiences, especially during the early years when brain growth is most rapid.

STEM practices for Plantation children

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education can be effectively introduced in early childhood through play-based learning, where children naturally explore, experiment, and discover concepts in meaningful ways.

• Science:

Children explore nature, observe insects, play with water, and ask questions about how things work. For example, a child pouring water between containers begins to understand volume, while watching ants carry food sparks curiosity about living things.

A common myth is that science requires formal experiments or lab settings, but in reality, everyday play, like mixing sand and water or observing plants, builds strong scientific thinking skills.

• Technology:

Simple tools, puzzles, and age-appropriate devices help children understand basic technological concepts. For instance, using a magnifying glass to examine. A frequent misconception is that technology in early years means screen time (TV and Smart phones); however, true early technology learning focuses on using tools to solve problems rather than passive device use.

• Engineering:

Building with blocks, sand, or recycled materials encourages design thinking and problem-solving. A child stacking blocks to make a tower learns about balance and structure, while creating a bridge with cardboard teaches planning and testing ideas. One myth is that engineering is too advanced for young children, yet these simple building activities are foundational engineering experiences.

• Mathematics:

Counting objects, sorting shapes, and measuring during play introduce mathematical concepts naturally. For example, children might count how many steps it takes to reach a tree, sort buttons by colour and size, or compare which container holds more water. A common myth is that math must be taught through worksheets, but play-based experiences often lead to deeper understanding and longer retention.

Play-based STEM activities make learning enjoyable and meaningful. Instead of memorizing facts, children experience concepts through hands-on exploration, which strengthens understanding, encourages curiosity, and builds a strong foundation for lifelong learning.



Value of Local and Eco-Friendly Play Materials

Local materials such as sticks, leaves, sand, stones, recycled items, and elements from nature like plants and small animals can be excellent learning tools. These materials:

- Encourage creativity and imagination
- Help children connect with their natural environment
- Promote eco-friendly attitudes
- Are affordable and easily accessible
- Support exploration of living things, helping children learn about animals, habitats, and nature.

By interacting with natural surroundings, such as observing insects, caring for small animals, or exploring outdoor environments, children develop curiosity and a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Children often learn more from simple, open-ended materials and real-life environmental experiences than from expensive toys with limited functions.

Challenges in Home-Based Care Practices

In plantation families, home-based play opportunities are limited due to:

- Parents' busy work schedules
- Poor household facilities and spaces
- Limited space for play
- Poor hygiene conditions and safety
- Social and economic challenges
- Weather conditions
- Lack of awareness about the importance of play.



Many parents prioritize book-based learning and discourage play, believing it is the best way to educate children. However, this can limit children's natural development during the most critical years.

Improving Centre Based and Home Based Play Opportunities

To support children's development, both home and early childhood centres need to promote play-based practices.

1. Increase Time for Play Activities

- Preschools should focus more on activity-based learning rather than writing tasks. Through simple play, children gain significant benefits for brain development.

2. Educate and Engage Parents

- Encourage parents to allocate daily playtime.
- Raise awareness about the importance of play.
- Emphasize that play is more beneficial than early writing practice.

3. Create Inclusive Play Environments

Child Development Centres should provide safe and stimulating play spaces for all children and welcome every child, regardless of their differences.

4. Encourage Parent-Child Interaction

Parents should actively engage in play, maintain friendly communication with their children, allocate time for them, and understand its value.

5. Develop Safe Play Spaces

- Establish community play areas with shared play materials.
- Build playgrounds.
- Create safe community spaces for children.

6. Support Children's Choices

Allow children to explore their interests and make their own choices during play.

7. Promote Outdoor Experiences

Encourage short trips with parents to explore nature and social environments, enhancing real-world learning.

8. Care for Animals

Encouraging children to observe and care for animals helps develop empathy and emotional skills.





In summary, Early childhood is a critical period when the brain develops rapidly, making it essential to provide rich, meaningful experiences. Play-based education supports this development by promoting learning in a natural and enjoyable way.

By understanding the importance of play, addressing misconceptions, and creating supportive environments at home and in CDCs, we can ensure that children grow into healthy, creative, and capable individuals. Play is not just an activity; it is the foundation of lifelong learning and development.

Product Branding and Marketing Ethics in Sri Lanka

New Trends, Strategic Approaches, and Building Long-Term Brand Value

Nilantha Hulugalla



Sri Lanka's business environment is undergoing a significant transformation. The emergence of digital technologies, changing consumer expectations, social commerce, sustainability concerns, and a growing demand for transparency are reshaping how brands communicate with customers. Modern consumers no longer purchase products solely based on price or quality; they increasingly seek authenticity, purpose, trust, and ethical behavior from the brands they support.

As Sri Lanka continues its economic recovery and digital expansion, businesses must rethink traditional marketing models and embrace branding strategies that create lasting relationships rather than short-term sales. Successful brands today are built on values, customer experiences, and social responsibility.

This article explores the latest branding trends in Sri Lanka, the growing importance of marketing ethics, and strategic approaches for building sustainable long-term brand success.

The Evolution of Branding in Sri Lanka

Branding in Sri Lanka has evolved considerably over the past decade. Traditionally, businesses focused on mass advertising through television, newspapers, radio, and outdoor billboards. While these channels remain relevant, digital platforms have fundamentally changed consumer behavior.

Sri Lanka's internet and social media user base continues to grow rapidly, creating new opportunities for businesses to engage directly with customers. Social commerce, influencer marketing, online reviews, and digital storytelling have become central elements of modern branding strategies. Consumers increasingly discover products through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp.

This shift has created a more informed and empowered consumer. Customers can compare products instantly, read reviews, and publicly share their experiences. As a result, trust has become one of the most valuable assets a brand can possess.

Emerging Branding Trends in Sri Lanka

1. Purpose-Driven Branding

Consumers are increasingly supporting brands that stand for something beyond profits.

Purposedriven brands connect with social, environmental, and community issues that resonate with their audience.

Many Sri Lankan companies are now incorporating sustainability, community development, environmental conservation, and employee welfare into their brand identity. Brands that demonstrate genuine commitment to these causes often enjoy stronger customer loyalty and positive public perception. Purpose-driven branding is particularly attractive to younger consumers who expect businesses to contribute positively to society.

2. Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage

Sustainability has moved from being a niche concept to a mainstream expectation. Consumers are increasingly considering environmental impact when making purchasing decisions.

Forward-thinking Sri Lankan brands are adopting:

- Eco-friendly packaging
- Sustainable sourcing
- Waste reduction initiatives
- Renewable energy solutions
- Ethical supply chains
- Carbon footprint reduction programs

Sustainability is no longer simply a corporate social responsibility initiative; it has become a powerful brand differentiator. Research indicates that consumers are increasingly willing to support environmentally responsible companies.

3. Social Commerce and Community-Based Marketing

Social media has evolved from a communication platform into a complete sales ecosystem.

Customers now discover products, interact with brands, read reviews, communicate through messaging apps, and complete purchases without leaving social media platforms. Social commerce continues to grow rapidly in Sri Lanka, creating new opportunities for businesses of all sizes.

Successful brands focus on building online communities rather than simply broadcasting advertisements. They encourage user-generated content, customer testimonials, and interactive engagement. Community-driven brands create stronger emotional connections and often enjoy higher customer retention rates.

4. Short Form Video Marketing

Video content has become the dominant form of digital communication.

Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts are capturing significant consumer attention. Businesses are increasingly using short-form videos to:

- Demonstrate products
- Share customer stories
- Educate audiences
- Showcase company culture
- Build brand personality

The most effective videos focus on authenticity rather than polished corporate messaging. Consumers often respond more positively to genuine, relatable content than to traditional advertising.

5. Personalization and Customer Experience

Modern consumers expect brands to understand their preferences and provide tailored experiences.

Data analytics and digital technologies allow companies to personalize:

- Product recommendations
- Marketing messages
- Customer support
- Loyalty programs
- Online experiences

Brands that successfully personalize customer interactions often achieve stronger engagement and greater customer satisfaction.

Marketing Ethics: A Critical Business Imperative

As marketing channels expand, ethical concerns have become increasingly important. Marketing ethics refers to the principles and standards that guide honest, fair, and responsible promotional activities. Ethical marketing protects consumers while helping businesses build longterm credibility. In today's connected world, unethical practices can quickly damage a brand's reputation.

Common Ethical Challenges

Misleading Advertising

Exaggerated claims, deceptive promotions, and false promises can create short-term gains but often result in long-term reputational damage.

Consumers are becoming increasingly skilled at identifying misleading marketing messages and are more willing to publicly criticize brands that engage in deceptive practices.

Influencer Transparency

Influencer marketing has become a powerful promotional tool in Sri Lanka. However, concerns have emerged regarding the disclosure of paid partnerships and sponsored content.

Many consumers expect influencers and brands to clearly identify promotional content to maintain transparency and trust. Online discussions frequently highlight concerns regarding undisclosed sponsorships and misleading endorsements.

Ethical influencer marketing requires:

- Clear disclosure of sponsorships
- Honest product reviews
- Genuine brand partnerships
- Transparent communication



Social Responsibility and Inclusion

Brands are increasingly being held accountable for the social messages they communicate. Advertising that promotes stereotypes, discrimination, or harmful social norms can face significant public backlash. Consumers expect brands to demonstrate respect for diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility. Discussions among Sri Lankan consumers increasingly reflect expectations for greater accountability in advertising and promotional campaigns.

Building a Strong Long-Term Brand Strategy

1. Define a Clear Brand Purpose

Successful brands begin with a clear understanding of:

- Why they exist
- What they stand for
- How they create value
- What makes them different

Purpose provides direction for marketing decisions and helps create emotional connections with customers.

2. Focus on Trust Before Sales

Trust is one of the most valuable assets in modern marketing. Brands should prioritize:

- Honest communication
- Product quality
- Customer satisfaction
- Transparent policies
- Consistent experiences

Trust takes years to build but can be lost quickly.

3. Invest in Brand Storytelling

Consumers remember stories more than advertisements. Effective brand stories communicate:

- Heritage
- Values
- Customer impact
- Social contribution
- Innovation journeys

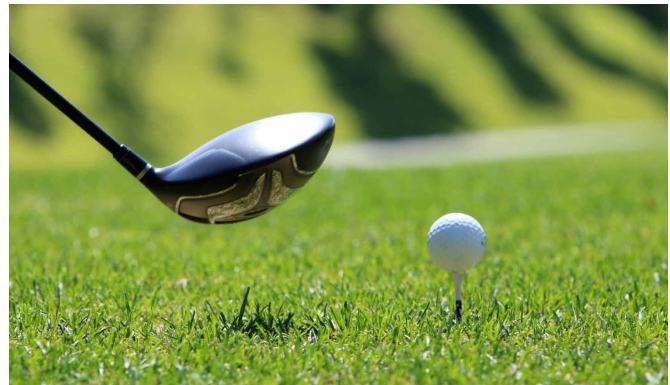
Authentic storytelling helps create meaningful emotional engagement.

4. Create Omnichannel Experiences

Customers interact with brands through multiple channels. Successful businesses ensure consistency across:

- Websites
- Social media
- Physical stores
- Mobile applications
- Customer service channels

A unified brand experience strengthens recognition and trust.



5. Build Brand Communities

The future of branding lies in creating communities rather than simply attracting customers.

Brands should encourage:

- Customer participation
- User-generated content
- Brand advocacy
- Feedback and dialogue
- Shared experiences

Communities create stronger loyalty and generate organic growth.

6. Embrace Data Responsibly

Data-driven marketing enables better customer understanding, but ethical data management is essential.

Responsible brands:

- Protect customer privacy
- Obtain proper consent
- Use data transparently
- Avoid intrusive practices

Ethical data use strengthens trust and regulatory compliance.

The Future of Branding in Sri Lanka

Several key trends are likely to shape the future:

Artificial Intelligence and Automation

AI-powered customer experiences, predictive analytics, and personalized marketing will become increasingly important.

Sustainable Business Models

Consumers will continue demanding greater environmental and social responsibility from brands.

Hyper-Personalization

Brands will deliver increasingly tailored experiences based on customer preferences and behaviors.

Digital-First Consumer Journeys

Mobile-first and social-first experiences will dominate customer interactions.

Authenticity and Transparency

Brands that demonstrate genuine values and ethical conduct will gain a significant competitive advantage.



Conclusion

Sri Lanka's branding landscape is entering a new era defined by digital innovation, ethical responsibility, and consumer empowerment. The most successful brands of the future will not simply sell products; they will build trust, create communities, and deliver meaningful value to society.

Marketing ethics and long-term brand building are no longer optional considerations. They are essential components of sustainable business success. Companies that embrace transparency, authenticity, sustainability, and customer-centric strategies will be best positioned to thrive in an increasingly competitive and connected marketplace. The future belongs to brands that understand a simple truth: consumers may buy products, but they remain loyal to brands they trust.

THE BENEFITS OF ETHICAL BRAND SRI LANKA

Ethical today. Trusted tomorrow.
Stronger Sri Lanka.

Ethical brands don't just create products or
services — they create positive change.

CHOOSE ETHICAL.
BUILD A BETTER
SRI LANKA.



1 BUILDS TRUST & LOYALTY

Ethical brands earn the trust of
customers, creating long-term loyalty
and stronger relationships.



2 ENHANCES BRAND REPUTATION

A strong ethical identity sets you
apart and builds a positive reputation
in the market.



3 DRIVES SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Ethical practices lead to better decision-
making, efficiency and long-term
business success.



4 SUPPORTS SOCIETY & THE ENVIRONMENT

Ethical brands contribute to a fairer
society and a greener, healthier
Sri Lanka.



5 EMPOWERS EMPLOYEES & COMMUNITIES

Ethical brands inspire pride, motivation
and create a positive impact on
people's lives.



6 REDUCES RISKS

Integrity, transparency and accountability
help minimize legal, financial and
reputational risks.



7 STRENGTHENS OUR NATION

Ethical businesses drive national
progress, global respect and a
better future for all Sri Lankans.



When businesses choose
ethics, everyone benefits.



TOGETHER, LET'S BUILD
A BETTER SRI LANKA.





FUTURE ROOTS START WITH A GLOBAL LANGUAGE!

Build Confidence. Shape Tomorrow.
Speak English, Grow Global.



COMFORTABLE CLASS

Safe, calm & inspiring spaces
to learn and grow.



PROFESSIONAL TEACHERS

Experienced, friendly &
passionate educators.



NEW TECHNOLOGY

Smart boards, digital tools &
modern learning methods.



INDOOR & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Learn, play, explore &
communicate in English!

LOCATIONS

GALLE

RATNAPURA

KANDY



ENGLISH TODAY, SUCCESS TOMORROW!

- ✓ Speaking
- ✓ Listening
- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing

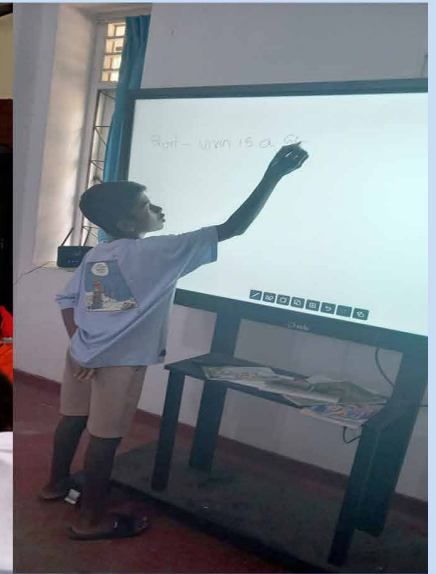


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