



Guest Editorial

This third issue of the *University of Colombo Review* (Series III) is dedicated to addressing a topic of global importance and relevance, *Sustainable Futures*. The use of the term *sustainability* in the original context of “making use of natural, renewable resources that could be relied on over time” goes way back to times immemorial, with many ancient communities having had concerns regarding the capacity of their environment to sustain them in the long term. The modern use of the term *sustainability* is credited to the Brundtland Commission, formerly the World Commission on Environment and Development, set up in 1983. According to the Brundtland Report (also known as “Our Common Future”), *sustainable development* is defined as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This is the most widely accepted definition of sustainability today. Published in 1987, the first volume of “Our Common Future” strongly influenced the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and laid the foundation for all actions of the present with respect to sustainable development.

A different approach to *sustainability* emerged in the 1990s. According to this concept, sustainability is defined in terms of three interconnected pillars, namely, the environmental, the economic and the social, referred to as the “three pillars of sustainability”. The three pillars are interdependent in the long run, and none can exist without the others. Thereafter, the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all” were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, to be achieved by the year 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated; they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Each of the 17 SDGs is assigned to one of the three pillars.

The ten articles in this issue of the *UCR* address various aspects of our theme *Sustainable Futures*, in the broad categories of the “environmental, social, and economic”. They address questions that would help today’s decision makers better understand future trends and issues related to sustainability such as: What is a sustainable future? Why is a

sustainable future important? What should be done today to achieve a sustainable future? What progress can be made towards achieving sustainability in the next decade? Are there any breakthrough technologies in the pipeline that could make it easier to achieve sustainability? Would advancement in technology be a hindrance to sustainability? What socio-economic breakthroughs are needed to support the achievement of sustainability? Does the current legal framework support the achievement of sustainability?

The following paragraphs capture the essence of the ideas presented in the articles. The articles are interlinked by virtue of the three pillars of sustainability that cut across through them. In the first cluster, measures in place in terms of legislation and policies, legal frameworks, and ecological criteria, to protect and ensure the sustainability of natural habitats and wildlife are discussed along with proposed actions.

In his article entitled “The changing conservation scene” S. W. Kotagama takes us on a fascinating journey from the hunter-gatherer era to the present, where he outlines the dramatic changes in the understanding of “wildlife” and “biological diversity” to “biodiversity”, the evolution of legislation and policy, and the establishment of relevant authorities to provide guidance in conserving the biodiversity of Sri Lanka. He concludes by proposing five thrust areas as the way forward to achieving “Sustainable Development while conserving Biodiversity” of the nation.

Kokila Konasinghe and Dulki Seethawaka present a comprehensive account, in their article “A comparative legal analysis on the necessity of implementing a regional agreement to protect wildlife and habitats in the South Asian region”, of wildlife and their habitats in South Asia, difficulties relating to wildlife conservation in these countries, and the scope of existing protective domestic legal instruments. They also examine the effectiveness of the regional agreements of the European Union with a view to establishing a much-needed regional legal framework to safeguard the fauna in South Asia.

G.K. Hettiarachchi, M.S.L.R.P. Marasinghe, S. Pilapitiya and M.R. Wijesinghe address the main challenge that sustainable tourism faces, namely, to balance the adverse impacts owing to over visitation of wildlife parks with wildlife conservation, through the generation of Carrying Capacity values for the Udawalawe National Park - one of the most visited, protected areas in Sri Lanka, in their article entitled ‘Towards suitable tourism in wildlife protected areas: Estimating Carrying Capacities for the Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka’.

An overview of the country’s natural resources, how and why they should be safeguarded and utilized in a sustainable manner, their potential to boost the economy through value addition and product development; infrastructure development, resource

building and the role of technology for a sustainable and better tomorrow are addressed in the next cluster of articles.

Devaka Weerakoon provides an overview of Sri Lanka's natural resources, their current usage patterns, and issues arising therein. In his article entitled "Sustainable use of natural capital: The inconvenient imperative", he argues that well planned and wise use of these limited and rapidly depleting natural resources is an imperative to ensure sustainability for the greatest economic benefits to the country.

In the article entitled "Cues from Sri Lankan Traditional Medicine (SLTM) to the Modern Drug Development Pipeline - for a Sustainable Future", Preethi Udagama, Vindya Udalamaththa and Udaya Samarathunga document time tested, potent, nontoxic polyherbal remedies and whole plant extracts which are effectively used for a wide range of diseases/disorders in SLTM practice. The authors suggest, however, that cues taken from such plant preparations can curb the time lag of modern drug discovery by tenfold, and pave the way towards a socioeconomically sustainable future.

In a thought provoking article entitled "A sustainable future: Strategic planning and the role of technology", R.D. Guneratne, while elaborating on the role of technology in sustaining the increasing requirements of the current and projected human population, highlights the need for careful coordinated planning to ensure that human needs are met in an ethical and sustainable manner.

Suggesting that development, durability and longevity are proxies for resilience, but illustrating how they could be at variance with sustainability, Priyan Dias in his article entitled "Can Sustainability Co-exist with Resilience?" argues, nevertheless, that the concept of "ductility" (borrowed from structural mechanics) could provide a model for resilience which can co-exist with sustainability, through the saving of scarce resources.

In the final cluster of articles, the citizen's role and responsibility, and attitudinal change required to achieve sustainability, in relation to urban development, human resource management and climate action are discussed.

The article "Included to be Excluded? - A critical assessment on the inclusion of slum and shanty dwellers into the Urban Regeneration Project" by Anjali Korala critically examines the extent to which slum and shanty dwellers in the city of Colombo were included in the decision-making process of the Urban Regeneration Projects related to building a sustainable city - a requirement of Sustainable Development Goal number 11 which is to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable".

Further to identifying a research gap in the area of Green Human Resource Management (GHRM), Chathuskka Liyanapatabandi and N. J. J. Nawaratne in their article entitled “Green roles of human resource professionals” propose re-defined roles for HR professionals to ensure the successful implementation of GHRM in organizations, an important aspect in supporting initiatives by corporates to achieve future sustainability.

Erandathie Lokupitiya and Madumi Kariyawasam highlight the importance of mitigating action at institutional level to achieve the county’s overall targets with regard to SDG 13 (climate action), and propose further measures to be implemented at University of Colombo in this regard, in terms of energy, water, waste management and vegetation, in their article entitled ‘Institutional Role in Implementation of Climate Action (SDG 13): A Case Study from University of Colombo, Sri Lanka’

Finally, is a sustainable future for all merely wishful thinking or is it achievable? I believe that it can be achieved, but only with the collective effort of the multitude of stakeholders. So, let each one of us make our contribution, small though it may be, towards creating a sustainable future for all, leaving no one behind.

Ramanee D. Wijesekera

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