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Improve Climate Resilience of Key Economic Drivers

Emerging from nearly three decades of conflict, Sri Lanka is now racing ahead to rebuild and revitalize the country's development. Over the next decade, major new investments are being planned in economic infrastructure covering road, rail and air transport, housing, and power.

Parallel to this, key industries such as tourism and shipping are being expanded and modernized. According to the government's over-arching policy documents -- the Mahinda Chinthana: A Vision for a New Sri Lanka, which is a Ten Year Horizon Development Framework 2006-2016, and Mahinda Chinthana: A Brighter Future (Idiri Dekma) -- the total investment for the 2007 to 2016 plan period is over LKR 1.4 trillion (approx. USD 12.5 billion). These investments will transform the country's infrastructure, economy and society.

Strengthening Capacity for Climate Change Adaptation in Sri Lanka

**National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy:
Strategic Thrust Area #4**

However, climate change impacts resulting from human-induced global warming can affect these development plans – unless adequate considerations are built into plans to 'insure' these investments from known and likely impacts.

Climate change impacts

Some key economic sectors are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

For example:

- Some of our most critical roads and railways run through coastal areas. They are already exposed to periodical coastal erosion. Sea level rise, storm surges and sustained coastal erosion can further damage or destroy these economic lifelines.
- Beautiful beaches and forests rich with wildlife are among our key tourist attractions. Climate change can impact all these, and seriously damage future tourism prospects.
- We cope with floods and landslides every year in certain parts of the country. Climate change will make these disasters more frequent and intense, increasing the pressures on infrastructure and economy.

An integrated approach is needed to minimize the climate change impacts on food security. This needs to take into account irrigation, agriculture, fisheries, nutrition (health) and environment factors.

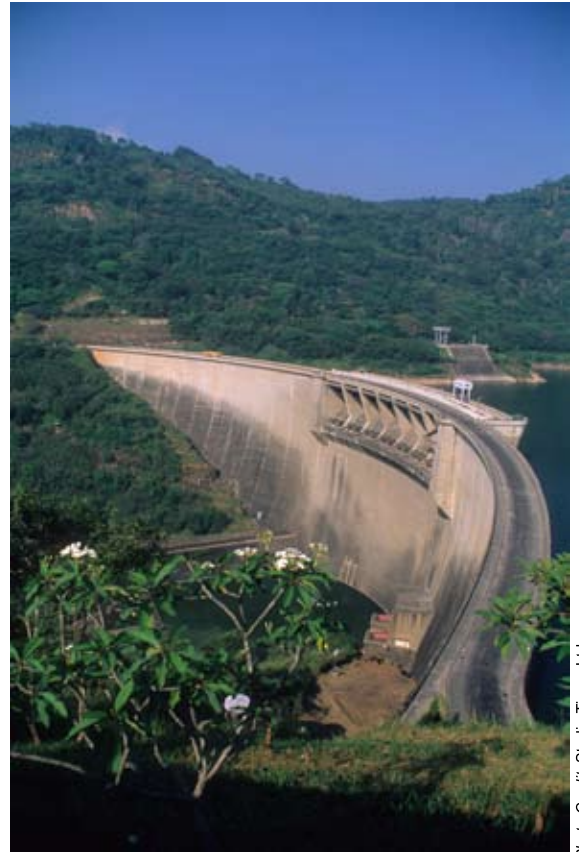


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Thematic Areas

An integrated approach is needed to improve the climate resilience of key economic drivers such as tourism, transport and commercial agriculture. During stakeholder consultations for development of the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, a number of priority issues and responses were identified. These have been grouped under five thematic areas.

Minimize impacts of climate change on infrastructure

Many roads, railways, drainage systems and other infrastructure have not been built with climate change in mind. It may not matter in some cases while it is a critical factor in others, e.g. roads and railways in certain coastal areas could be submerged with sea level rise. We need to first survey and assess which national infrastructure might be badly affected, and then decide how best to increase their climate resilience. Some could be strengthened or retro-fitted, while others may need total relocation. And some technologies may have to be phased out. For example, bitumen used for paving roads may no longer work under higher temperatures expected in the coming decades.

Minimize impacts of climate change on plantation sector

Scientists are still studying how climate change can impact the major plantation crops of tea, rubber and coconut. Few people in the plantation sector are aware of these risks, and there are no plans yet to take adaptive measures to safeguard these industries that still earn a major share of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange. Climate change presents both threats and opportunities – better targeted research can show us the right way forward.

Assist key industries in coping with climate change impacts

Individual industrialists and entrepreneurs who grapple with day to day challenges of doing business rarely have the time to take the long term view of slowly emerging threats (or opportunities). This is also true for national planners, industry regulators, bankers and investors. Climate change forces us to change this business as usual approach. We need to think medium to long term and take stock of the bigger picture. Engaging the many layers of large industries in such discussions can begin with technically informed managers and industry networks, and expand later to cover others.

Raise awareness about climate vulnerability in key economic sectors

Climate awareness in key economic sectors is currently low and vague. This calls for raising the awareness and understanding of climate vulnerabilities, adaptation options and costs. A balanced approach is needed that factors climate change risks into economic sectors. For example, tourist resort developers rely on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures to guide them on environmental suitability and compliance. Climate considerations are not yet part of the EIA framework. Local communities are not aware of the potential climate change impacts on industries that provide jobs and incomes.

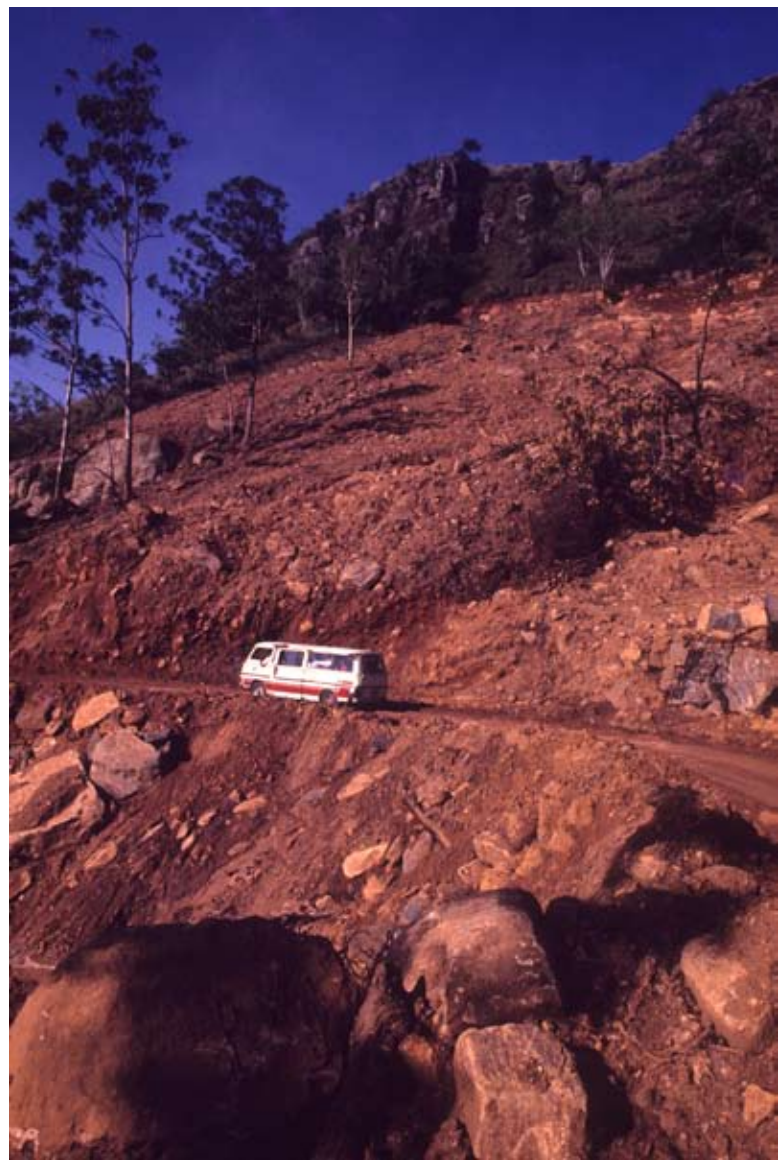




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Living and coping with uncertain impacts of climate change is no longer a choice; it is an imperative. Sri Lanka needs to address climate change adaptation to ensure that its economic development can continue without disruption or setbacks, and investments in poverty reduction, food and water security and public health will not be undone.

This brochure has been produced based on the work carried out under the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Technical Assistance Project ADB TA 7326 SRI: Strengthening Capacity for Climate Change Adaptation in Sri Lanka.

ADB is working with the Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka, in formulating a national strategy for climate change adaptation to increase Sri Lanka's resilience to climate change impacts whilst pursuing sustainable economic development. When adopted, the strategy would stimulate improved effectiveness of environmental management and better organization of stakeholders to address climate change adaptation.

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