

## **Minutes of Stakeholder Consultations on Development of the Sri Lanka Environmental Flow Calculator (October 2012 and July 2013).**

A long observed inherent problem in research and development is the existence of a significant gap in understanding research based products, between researchers and development practitioners. This has confined some valuable research based recommendations to publications without being applied for real world problem solving. To avoid a similar situation with respect to the Sri Lanka Environmental Flow Calculator (which was developed as a tool to help sustainable water resources management in Sri Lanka) two workshops were organized in Colombo to (a) consult Sri Lankan stakeholders to understand their perceptions and current practices in estimating environmental flows in rivers, and, (b) to present the Sri Lanka Environmental Flow Calculator to them.

The workshops were held on 04/10/2012 and 25/07/2013, respectively, at IWMI Headquarters with the participation of relevant officers of key stakeholder agencies. Three categories of agencies participated. These categories included, 1) agencies involved in developing water resources projects in river basins (Mahaweli Authority, Water Supply and Drainage Board, and Irrigation Department) 2) agencies responsible in approving Environmental Impact Assessments where environmental flows are calculated and 3) other agencies which are involved in research and are also interested in environmental issues in river basins (e.g., IUCN).

Presentations were made by officials of the Irrigation Department, Central Environmental Authority, IUCN, and by IWMI researchers to highlight the need for a sound tool for environmental flow calculation. The IUCN highlighted, the need for giving priority to the ecological health of a river, the Irrigation Department, the hydrological conditions of Sri Lankan rivers, the Central Environmental Authority, the need for scientific guidelines on environmental flows for project approval and Environmental Impact Assessments, and, IWMI, the theoretical and conceptual aspects of environmental flow calculation and the specific features of the Sri Lanka Environmental Flow Calculator with example applications. All presenters pointed out the

constraints they face in estimating environmental flows, due to lack of data, lack of local expertise, low priority given to environmental issues and lack of policy support.

The project developers and approving agencies of water resources development projects hold two different views. The project developers are interested to follow the current practice of suggesting a certain quantity of river flow as environmental flow based on rules of thumb, but, the project approving agencies repeatedly highlighted the need for a scientific tool to produce realistic estimates of environmental flows, especially in sensitive rivers.

Even though the Central Environmental Authority accepted the Sri Lanka environmental Flow Calculator, they expressed their concern on the lack of internal capacity to monitor the performance of development agencies in releasing the predetermined environmental flows into rivers. One aspect agreed upon by all stakeholders was to consider each river as a specific case in calculating environmental flows, depending on its hydrology and the stage of development. However, the stakeholders finally agreed to test the Sri Lanka Environmental Flow Calculator in some of their future projects to verify its practicality of application in Sri Lanka.

Minutes prepared by K. Jinapala

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