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## CEA partners with IWMI to turn organic waste into high-quality fertilizer

**Colombo.25 July 2013.** At the request of the Central Environmental Authority (CEA), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) signed an agreement to collaborate towards Resource Recovery and Reuse in Sri Lanka. IWMI and CEA join hands in targeting two main challenges that Sri Lanka is currently facing: Urban waste management; and the need to increase farmers' access to organic fertilizers. Wimalasena Rubasinghe, Chairman, CEA, and Jeremy Bird, Director General, IWMI, were the signatories to the agreement on July 19, 2013.

"Like in most parts of the developing world, solid waste is also one of the major water polluters in Sri Lanka," said Mr. Bird. "However, its high organic content provides a potentially great nutrient source for farming." The cooperation will build upon the achievements of the 'Pilisarū' project of the CEA, which facilitated the setting up of more than 100 composting stations across Sri Lanka. "Phase 1 of the 'Pilisarū' project is coming to an end and project evaluation is a vital step in formulating the next phase of the project," said Mr. Rubasinghe. The evaluation of phase 1 is part of this agreement that has been signed. Differences in performance between the composting stations will also be analyzed. Looking forward, this study will assist CEA in formulating activities for improving effectiveness of the composting process in phase 2 of the 'Pilisarū' project.

Addressing our waste challenges by making an asset out of waste is not only supporting agriculture but is also an important strategy which can help to reduce the indiscriminate dumping of waste in our waterways and thus lowering environmental pollution.

IWMI has a long tradition of working on resource recovery and reuse (RRR), and this is not only in relation to wastewater. IWMI's work on domestic waste co-composting, for example, with fecal sludge started a decade ago after the Institute merged with the International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM), in recognition of the fact that plants needed nutrients as much as water.

Currently, IWMI studies about 150 RRR success stories across the globe and understands the major challenges involved. However, there are many positive examples of sustainable and viable compost stations. "A key characteristic of sustainable projects is cost recovery," explained Dr. Sudarshana Fernando, Postdoctoral Fellow - Resource Recovery and Reuse, IWMI. "To achieve this, stations have to produce a quality compost and carefully study its market."

IWMI will support CEA with its experience in a) the application of a *'Business thinking'* approach to maximizing cost recovery, and b) the introduction of *new technology* to increase the value of the compost. This involves compost blending, for example, with rock phosphate or septic sludge, and its pelletization, to improve the nutrient value and handling of compost. Both measures can enhance its market potential, which would help cost recovery and increase the sustainability of composting efforts in Sri Lanka. Mr. Rubasinghe said, "The Sri Lankan market has a high demand for fertilizers, and it is best to produce them locally to avoid dependence on chemical fertilizer imports." This agreement complements IWMI's existing assistance to the Government of Sri Lanka in the area of fecal sludge management and co-composting.

A feasibility study will be conducted (covering the Colombo region) for normal and enhanced compost production. Currently, similar studies, which carefully analyze different market segments, are being conducted by IWMI in nine cities around the world. "The approach used in this feasibility study could become an example for all stations of the 'Pilisaru' project," said Mr. N. S. Gamage, Director, national 'Pilisaru' project. "The next steps would then be to set up demonstrations in one or more of our stations."

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