

Provincial Council cooperation for a coordinated, national approach to provide safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030

Sri Lanka has made a solemn commitment to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6, that of ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all households in Sri Lanka by 2030. Ensuring entire population in the country is provided with clean and safe drinking water while increasing the access to pipe borne water is a commitment included in the *National Policy Framework: Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour* as presented by the President to Parliament.

As shown in Table 1, much must be done to close the gap in drinking-water supply, especially rural and estate areas. The situation is, if anything, worse regarding sanitation. Most households in Sri Lanka have proper toilets. There is a need for effective removal of waste material in addition to providing toilets that meet minimum standards for all. Wastewater treatment and hygienic removal and treatment of septage (fecal sludge) is for now a challenge in Sri Lanka. As an upper-middle-income country, there can be no debate about the urgency of remedying these shortcomings and ensuring all Sri Lankans the basic right of clean water and sanitation.

Table 1: Distribution of Households by source of Drinking Water (percentage)

Source	Urban	Rural	Estate	Total
Pipe borne water (main line)	73.5	28.3	19.2	35.2
Tube well	2.9	3.8	0.4	3.6
Protected well	11.0	33.9	8.1	29.1
Semi-protected well	3.4	13.1	4.3	11.2
Rural water supply project	4.3	8.7	11.0	8.1
Bottled water	3.5	3.2	0.1	3.1
“Non-improved Source”	1.3	9.0	56.9	9.7

Source: Demographic and Health Survey: http://www.statistics.gov.lk/social/DHS_2016a/Chapter2.pdf

Drinking water services are currently supplied by the National Water Services and Drainage Board (NWSDB), created in 1974, by certain local authorities and by community-based organizations (CBOs). To meet the national policy objectives, it is necessary to ensure coordination among multiple suppliers and entities such as the Department of Irrigation which control water resources. It is necessary to create the proper conditions for investment in modern water services and their proper maintenance and distribution. Quality must be raised and gaps in service provision closed.

At present there is no systematic oversight and coordination of CBOs in Provincial Level, except for a 2013 Statute on CBOs promulgated by the Wayamba Provincial Council. Department of National Community Water supply is functioning under Ministry of Water Services in overseen the operations of CBOs. It is also necessary to safeguard the consumers who obtain services from various geographically defined monopolies and may thus face problems of access, quality and price.

In 2003 a Water Services Reform bill was gazetted with the intention of advancing the national policy objectives regarding water services. It was challenged on the ground that water and sewerage services had been provided by local authorities who came under the authority of the Provincial Councils whose views had not been sought. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the petitioners. As a result, the proposed reforms stalled.

In view of the urgent need for coordinated actions to achieve the SDG targets on water and sewerage and national policy objectives in a timely manner and the demonstrated lack of capacity in some local authorities, especially some Pradeshia Sabha, the Ministry responsible for the subject and the Public Utilities Commission (PUCSL) wish to conduct consultations in all the provinces. For this purpose, independent experts have been appointed to compile the evidence and prepare analytical recommendations, including on effective co-regulatory mechanisms that would include the Provincial Councils. The cooperation of the Chief Secretary and the Commissioner of Local Government is sought to organize these important events. Annex 1 provides the profiles of the independent experts and Annex 2 presents a tentative schedule.

Annex 1: Profiles of independent experts

Prof. Rohan Samarajiva, Policy Expert

Samarajiva is an expert on digital connectivity and public utilities (water, energy, electricity) with relevant policy and regulatory experience across South and South East Asia. He is the founding Chair of LIRNEasia, a policy and regulation think tank active across emerging Asia. He was CEO for eight years from its inception in 2004. Samarajiva served as Chair of the ICT Agency, the apex body for information and communication technology within the government of Sri Lanka, in 2018-19. He was one of its founding directors in 2003-05. He is a member of the UN Global Pulse Advisory Group on the Governance of Data and Artificial Intelligence.

He was Team Leader at the Sri Lanka Ministry for Economic Reform, Science and Technology (2002-04) responsible for infrastructure reforms, including the legislation setting up the Public Utilities Commission and reforms in telecom, electricity, water and other sectors. He was Director General of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission in Sri Lanka (1998-99), Honorary Professor at the University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka (2003-04), Visiting Professor of Economics of Infrastructures at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands (2000-03) and Associate Professor of Communication and Public Policy at the Ohio State University in the US (1987-2000), where he was also associated with the National Regulatory Research Institute. Samarajiva was Policy Advisor to the Ministry of Post and Telecom in Bangladesh (2006-09).

He is Senior Advisor to Sarvodaya Fusion, the ICT unit of Sri Lanka's largest community-based organization, Advisor to Advocata, a Sri Lankan economic policy think tank, and Non-Resident Fellow at Carnegie India. He is a member of the Board and former Chair of the Lanka Software Foundation. He serves on the editorial boards of five academic journals.

He has conducted capacity building sessions and designed courses for senior policymakers, regulators and officers at the Sri Lankan National Water Supply and Drainage Board, Sri Lankan Ministry for Economic Reforms, Science & Technology, Public Utility Commission of Sri Lanka, Central Electricity Regulatory Authority of India, Electricity Regulatory Commission of Thailand, South Asia Forum for Infrastructure Regulation (SAFIR), and the University of Moratuwa. He has experience in conducting public hearings and consultations, including those on telephone billing, universal service, dam safety that were conducted in the regions.

Eng. Lal Premanath, Water Services Expert

Eng. Lal Premanath is the former Chief Executive Officer of the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) in Sri Lanka (2007-13). His career at NWSDB spanned from 1976 until 2013 when he retired from Government service. He has since been involved in several projects and initiatives in the water sector as an independent consultant, providing expertise to the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Western Region Megapolis Projects and others.

He holds an MEng (Construction Management), Faculty of Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, a Diploma with Distinction in Sanitary Engineering from the Institute for Hydraulic & Environmental Engineering, Delft, the Netherlands, and a BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering, from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

He is currently a Member of Water Supply and Sector Coordination Group of MCPWS and Member of the Lanka Rain Water Harvesting Forum. Lal has also been a Member of the Review Committee of Water Supply Proposal, Member of the Board of Directors of the Road Development Authority, a Member of the Board of Directors of the Condominium Management Authority, a Member of the Board of the University of Moratuwa (2004-06), the Chairman of the Civil Engineering Sectional Committee, a Council Member of the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka (IESL), and a Steering Committee Member of the Sri Lanka Water Partnership.

Annex 2: Proposed schedule

Schedule of Public Consultations

Province	Consultation Location	Date of Public Consultation	Written submissions to be submitted before
North Western	Kurunegala	27 th Aug. 2020	21 st Aug. 2020
Southern	Galle	24 th Sept. 2020	18 th Sept. 2020
Central	Kandy	22 nd Oct 2020	15 th Oct. 2020
Eastern	Trincomalee	23 rd Oct 2020	15 th Oct. 2020
North Central	Anuradapura	19 th Nov. 2020	13 th Nov. 2020
Northern	Jaffna	20 th Nov. 2020	13 th Nov. 2020
Uva	Badulla	17 th Dec. 2020	11 th Dec. 2020
Sabaragamuwa	Rathnapura	18 th Dec. 2020	11 th Dec. 2020
Western	Colombo	21 st Jan. 2021	15 th Jan. 2021