

INVESTING IN SRI LANKA'S UPPER WATERSHEDS: UNLOCKING NATURAL CAPITAL FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

ADB

13 AUGUST 2026

09:30 AM - 12:00 PM

12:00 NOON - 02:30 PM

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ZOOM REGISTRATION

Serendipity Knowledge Program (SKOP) is ADB's flagship knowledge platform for Sri Lanka. Since its launch in 2021, SKOP has continuously identified knowledge solutions for Sri Lanka's development challenges through discussions between Sri Lankan stakeholders and global thought-leaders and experts. Serendib is one of Sri Lanka's ancient names and serendipity refers to a fortunate finding, which is a common occurrence throughout the history of product invention and scientific discovery.

ABOUT THE EVENT

Sri Lanka's Central and Upper Watershed Area is one of the country's most important natural assets, supplying water to 23 major river basins and supporting water security, food production, hydropower generation, biodiversity conservation, tourism, and climate resilience. Often referred to as the country's "water tower," these watersheds provide critical ecosystem services that underpin Sri Lanka's economic development and the wellbeing of millions of people.

However, decades of deforestation, unsustainable land use practices, soil erosion, encroachment, and increasing climate-related pressures have significantly degraded watershed functions. The resulting impacts include loss of ecosystem services, reduced water regulation capacity, increased risks of flooding and landslides, sedimentation of reservoirs, declining agricultural productivity, and threats to downstream infrastructure investments. Recognizing the strategic importance of upper watersheds as natural capital, ADB is supporting the development of the Sri Lanka Upper Watershed Ecological Restoration Program (SUWERP). The program aims to strengthen institutions, mobilize sustainable financing, and support large-scale ecological restoration and sustainable land management interventions across priority upper watershed landscapes.

To inform the design of SUWERP, ADB commissioned two complementary studies. The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) undertook a hydrological assessment to better understand the role of upper watersheds in water security, climate resilience, and ecosystem functioning. In parallel, Alex Money conducted a valuation of water and ecosystem services to quantify the economic contribution of upper watersheds and explore how natural capital values can inform investment and financing decisions.

The SKOP event will present the findings of these studies and facilitate a policy dialogue on the importance of investing in natural capital. The event will also draw on international experience in establishing blended finance vehicles and innovative financing mechanisms for landscape restoration, with the aim of identifying practical pathways for scaling investments in upper watershed restoration in Sri Lanka. The event will provide a platform for knowledge exchange, partnership building, and policy dialogue to identify practical pathways for scaling investments in watershed restoration and strengthening climate resilience, water security, and sustainable development. The event will be attended by government agencies, development partners, international experts, academia, the private sector, and civil society representatives.

The knowledge event is jointly supported through Technical Assistance SRI: Knowledge and Innovation for Transformative Economic Solutions and the Regional Technical Assistance on Scaling Natural Capital Investment in Asia and the Pacific.



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Country Director for Sri Lanka
ADB



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Senior Additional Secretary to the
President (Finance & Economic Affairs)
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Director,
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Biodiversity Scientist
Nature as Infrastructure



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Country Economist
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NISHADI ERIYAGAMA

Deputy Country Manager
IWMI



SUMIT POKHREL

Senior Natural Resources
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Asian Development Bank



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SRIYAN DE SILVA WIJEYERATNE

Chairman PLANT
Past President WNPS



SAVITHRI RODRIGO

MC



ZOOM REGISTRATION

INVESTING IN SRI LANKA'S UPPER WATERSHEDS: UNLOCKING NATURAL CAPITAL FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

Program

MC: Ms. Savithri Rodrigo

09:30 - 09:35 AM

Welcome Address

Ms. Shannon Cowlin
Country Director for Sri Lanka
ADB

09:35 - 09:55 AM

Keynote Address

Dr. Rohan Pethiyagoda
Biodiversity Scientist Nature as Infrastructure,
The Urgency of Investing in Sri Lanka's Natural Capital

09:55 - 10:25 AM

Investing in Upper Watersheds: The Hydrological and Economic Case for Action

Presentation of findings from ADB-supported studies on:

- Hydrological assessment of Sri Lanka's Central and Upper Watershed Area

Dr. Nishadi Eriyagama
Deputy Country Manager, IWMI

- Valuation of water and ecosystem services and their contribution to the economy

Dr. Alex Money
Chief Executive, Watermarq Limited, UK

10:25 - 10:35 AM

Question & Answer Session

10:35 - 11:35 AM

Panel Discussion -

From Natural Capital to Investment - Financing Sri Lanka's Upper Watershed Restoration

Facilitator:

Mr. Sanath Ranawana
Presentation on Global Perspectives, Financing Nature at Scale

Mr. Abhijit Bhaumik
Independent Consultant

Panelist:

Mr. Sumit Pokhrel
Senior Natural Resources and Agriculture Specialist, Asian Development Bank

Mr. Russel Aponsu
Senior Additional Secretary to the President (Finance & Economic Affairs)/
Secretary (Acting) Ministry of Energy

Ms. Shashini Withana
Deputy Director, Department of External Resources,
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekera
Country Economist, UNDP

Dr. Roshan Rajadurai
Managing Director, Hayleys Plantations

Mr. Sriyan De Silva Wijeyeratne
Chairman PLANT and Past President WNPS

INVESTING IN SRI LANKA'S UPPER WATERSHEDS: UNLOCKING NATURAL CAPITAL FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

11:35 - 11:50 AM

Question & Answer Session

11:50 - 11:55 AM

Closing Remarks on behalf of ADB

Mr. Au Shion Yee
Director,
Agriculture, Food, Nature,
and Rural Development- SD2, ADB

11:55 - 12:00 NOON

Closing Remarks on behalf of Government

Mr. Rohitha Wickramarathna
Additional Director General
Department of National Planning
Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

