

GWP Sri Lanka and Water Integrity Network Partnership Roots Out Corruption

On Thursday, February 12, 2009, the *Daily Mirror* in Sri Lanka reported the arrest of seven illegal sand miners by Bingiriya police. In a separate article on the same day, the paper reported that more stringent laws against illegal sand mining are to be introduced in order to protect the environment.

In 2008, the Sri Lanka Water Partnership (SLWP) began working with the Water Integrity Network (WIN) to fight corruption surrounding illicit and unregulated river sand mining. Together the two agencies produced an integrated package of activities, including awareness programmes, brochures, posters, and a documentary. Police from Bingiriya had participated in the awareness programs. Police attendance was over 150% of target in all dialogues with community representatives.

SLWP and WIN engaged in regular dialogue with relevant agencies to promote change. “Agency representatives were invited to attend all our programs and they were getting blasted for their inaction by members of the community,” said Kusum Athukorala, deputy Chair of SLWP.

“The WIN activity was one of the most novel programmes we undertook and the results are pouring in,” said Ranjith Ratnayake, SLWP’s Programme Co-ordinator.

Sand mining over and above the natural replenishment rate of the river worsens the erosion of the river bed and affects river flows. According to the *Daily Mirror* article, “The Government considers sand mining a vital requirement for the construction industry and infrastructure development but sand mining must not affect the environment.” Illegal sand mining contributes to river-bank collapse and lowers water tables, causing havoc to ecosystems, community water needs and the livelihoods of fishermen. Erosion undermines bridges and irrigation infrastructure, productive land is lost and stagnant water breeds disease.

“SLWP made an extraordinary effort and it is inspiring to see how a relatively low-cost activity of raising awareness can create such positive chain-reactions. Curtailing illicit sand mining protects ecosystems, prevents damage to infrastructure, minimises economic loss, and reduces health risks,” said Ms. Priya Shah, Assistant Programme Coordinator, Small Grants Fund (SGF) and Information Management, for WIN.

Many policy and legal recommendations have since been implemented and more are being considered. Police action against illegal sand mining, especially in the North Western Province, has increased. The Geological Survey and Mines Bureau, the

regulatory authority, is in the process of amending the law to provide for greater penalties and better oversight, as indicated in the *Daily Mirror* report.

“The initiative shows a lot can be accomplished if one builds coalitions with key actors. And local actions can make a difference at the policy level,” said Dr. Håkan Tropp, Chairperson of WIN.

SLWP and WIN are using the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, in March, to promote water integrity. One panel discussion, “Beyond Water Bribes: How to Build a Corruption-Resistant Water Sector” will be chaired by Dr. Letitia A. Obeng, Chair of the Global Water Partnership. Dr. Obeng was on the panel at the launch of the “Global Corruption Report 2008: Corruption in the Water Sector” on June 25, 2008. The second chapter of that report, on corruption and water resources management, is co-authored by GWP’s Technical Committee Chair, Dr. Roberto Lenton.

In addition, “Beyond the Global Corruption Report 2008: Promoting Water Integrity through Partnerships,” will be a 5th World Water Forum side event providing concrete examples—such as the SLWP-WIN partnership—of anti-corruption action in the water sector.