

GRANTING LEGAL PERSONHOOD TO ECOSYSTEMS: A NEW APPROACH TO COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION IN SRI LANKA

M.G.I. Nadeeshan
PGIHS, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
ishankanadeeshan999@gmail.com

Environmental pollution remains a critical challenge in Sri Lanka, threatening the country's rich biodiversity and the well-being of the people. This paper explores the concept of attributing legal personality to natural ecosystems as a potential solution to mitigate pollution and enhance environmental protection. Granting legal rights to ecosystems such as rivers, forests, and wetlands could empower them to be represented in courts, hold polluters accountable, and enforce regulations more effectively. It can also be pointed out that the lack of ability to face the current challenges of some existing environmental laws is a strong reason for highlighting such a concept. Drawing on global examples where legal personhood has been granted to natural entities, this paper analyzes the potential benefits, challenges, and practical implications of applying such a framework in Sri Lanka. It argues that recognizing ecosystems as legal entities could provide a robust legal mechanism to safeguard the environment, promote sustainable development, and support the island nation's cultural and ecological heritage. It is also intended to focus on why this approach is no longer a prevalent concept in most countries of the world, the flexibilities that need to be created in applying that approach, and the extent to which this approach will work in the institutional structures of justice in practice. One of the aims is to discuss the examples Sri Lanka can take from states like New Zealand and Ecuador as international model states for this concept. The necessity, practical ability, and limitations of implementing this concept in Sri Lanka will also be discussed with examples from the *Kelani* River, which was polluted due to improper urbanization. The study further examines the role of local communities, policymakers, and legal practitioners in operationalizing this approach, ultimately proposing that legal personhood for ecosystems could be a transformative step toward reducing environmental pollution in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Environmental pollution, legal personality, ecosystem rights, Sri Lanka

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