

“A Vision for Citizen Science and Wetland Resilience” – A Stakeholder Consultation

On 2 February 2019, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and other co-organizers will be conducting a special session on “A Vision for Citizen Science and Wetland Resilience” at the *Diya Saru Park, Battaramulla*. This IWMI led session will look at how wetlands can be beneficial in adapting to vagaries of Climate Change, and enhancing livelihoods of those who depend on them. There will be a discussion on how local communities can get involved and contribute directly to wetland wise-use.

Developing a vision for citizen science to wisely use wetlands in Colombo

The Colombo wetland complex includes 25-27 notified wetlands, with multiple ownerships. The ecosystem services that they provide are diverse and require different strategies for conservation and wise-use. Conservation and wise use strategies require data collected throughout the year to enable informed decision-making (to ensure that while wetlands benefit people, their ecological integrity is maintained). The public can contribute to data collection through a Citizen Science program.

In general, a Citizen Science program covers a suite of innovative tools to engage with the public to apply their curiosity and contribute their talents to science and technology. Citizen scientists can provide information that would not otherwise be available due to time, geographic, or resource constraints. Successful programs provide the opportunity for citizens to learn about environmental science and environmental protection.

Citizens are mobilized to participate in the scientific process to address problems. This can include identifying research questions, collecting and analyzing data, making new discoveries, and developing technologies and applications.

We hope to have a public consultation with a number of stakeholder groups in order to understand the different perspectives of community groups on wetland conservation. Those that we are hoping to include in the consultation are GCE Advanced Level students, University students (tech and science), Local government bodies, regulators (SLLRDC, CEA, UDA, Irrigation Department), CBOs/NGOs, government policy makers, University Scientists, wetland direct beneficiaries.

Agenda:

1. Setting the scene with a 15 minute presentation (The case for Citizen Science examples across the globe, tools)
2. Stakeholders will work in groups discussing some pre-set questions. The Setting is “The Colombo Wetland Complex”.
 - I. How shall we define “Citizen Science” in the context of the Colombo wetland complex and in relation to the topic – Climate Resilience, Management and Wise-use
 - II. What are the Citizen Science projects that will benefit wetland management/wise-use? What type of data should be collected? Can such data be collected via a Citizen Science Program?

- III. Which institutions are best placed to initiate/implement and oversee a Citizen Science program for the Colombo Wetland Complex? Who should analyze the data collected?
- IV. What type of citizen science tools might be useful? And why?
- V. How can Citizen Scientists engage in decision-making processes?

Expected Outcome: It is envisaged that the information collected will be used to develop a suitable tool/s that can be used by the institutions (Sri Lanka Land Reclamation Development Corporation, Central Environment Authority and Urban Development Authority) that have to manage the wetlands on a day-to-day basis. Any idea promoted through this consultation will supplement the existing data collecting methods and strategies (perhaps with revisions) that are being adopted by a number of institutions. In the event the follow-up activities are successful, the tool/s will become a key element of the Wetland Management Strategy that was co-developed by the government institutions and supported by the World Bank.

Priyanie Amerasinghe (p.amerasinghe@cgiar.org),
Sanjiv de Silva (s.s.desilva@cgiar.org)
Matthew McCartney (m.mccartney@cgiar.org)
International Water Management Institute, Colombo, Sri Lanka
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