

VIDU 6-2-1

# The MAB Programme in Sri Lanka

**B. A. ABEYWICKRAMA**

*Chairman, MAB National Committee*

The UNESCO-Biosphere Conference of 1968 highlighted:

- (a) the intimate and inextricable relationships between man and his environment;
- (b) the extremely delicate nature of the equilibrium in eco-systems; and
- (c) the destruction and degradation of environments that have already been caused by the extravagant and unwise use of land and natural resources;

and drew attention to the urgent need for a more rational approach to the use of resources.

As a follow-up program, MAB was officially started in 1971 as an interdisciplinary program of research emphasizing an ecological approach to the study of the relationships between man and his environment. Its main objective was to develop the basis, within the natural and the social sciences, for the conservation and rational use of nature and the resources of the Biosphere. This program now has National Committees in about 100 countries and about 900 Research Projects are in progress in these countries.

In Sri Lanka, the Man and the Biosphere activities are coordinated by the National Science Council and are directed by a National Committee which was appointed by the Ministry of Scientific Affairs with the concurrence of the Ministry of Education. At the outset the Committee noted the very rapid destruction that was going on of the few remaining natural forests in the island and the acute shortage of personnel trained to carry out environmental studies. It was observed that we had only about 20,000 ha of relatively undisturbed forests in the whole country. The committee therefore decided to give high priorities to the establishment and protection of biological reserves and to the education and training of personnel in Environmental Studies.

It was also decided to sponsor field studies in the following areas:

- (a) the ecology of selected natural communities with special attention paid to the role of mycorrhizae in tropical rain forests,

- (b) the impact of man's development activities in a selected area,
- (c) the study of patana grasslands with emphasis on methods of making them more productive, and
- (d) monitoring of pollution from industrial sources.

The actual implementation of the studies were delayed by limitations of personnel and facilities. Activities were initiated in 1975 on a modest scale with a socio-economic survey of a few selected blocks in the Kalawewa area with funds from the National Science Council (N.S.C.) In 1977 activities were expanded with additional funds from the N.S.C. Soon afterwards a very generous grant from the Mahaveli Development Board for equipment enabled us to begin the monitoring of the physical environmental conditions in the Kalawewa area. Two offers of aid for equipment from UNESCO and the IFS were also accepted. We are deeply grateful to all the donor agencies for their assistance.

All the co-ordinators of the MAB projects and the supervisors of the various studies have given their services in a purely honorary capacity. They have worked under very difficult conditions, at times, even without any Research or Technical Assistants. As we can give the assistants only temporary appointments many of them leave on getting permanent assignments elsewhere. This has delayed work considerably. Still we have made a substantial amount of progress and several studies have been completed and published. This has been possible mainly because of the devoted service of the co-ordinators and their co-workers, and the supporting services provided by the National Science Council. The present Secretary-General, Dr. R. P. Jayawardena, his predecessor, Dr. Neil Jayasuriya, the Deputy Secretary General Mr. Leslie Wijesinghe and the N.S.C. staff have at all times given their fullest co-operation and assistance. The Chairman Mahaveli Development Board, Mr. D. Ladduwahetty, and the General Manager Dr. Walter Abeygunawardena took a personal interest and assisted us in numerous ways in the Kalawewa area studies. I wish to record here our sincere appreciation of, and grateful thanks to all of them and to all participants in the projects for their very valuable contributions to the MAB program in Sri Lanka.

<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>Title of Project</b>
Mr. V. R. Nanayakkara	— Demarcation & Maintenance of MAB Reserves
Mr. M. Ponnampalam	— Surveying Levels of Pesticides in Food
Miss C. J. Padmaperuma	— Monitoring the Water Quality in the Colombo canal system
Prof. S. Balasubramaniam	— Grassland Eco-systems
Prof. B. A. Abeywickrama Prof. K. D. Arudpragasam Dr. (Mrs.) W. T. T. P. Gunawardena	} — Education & Training in Environmental Studies
Dr. W. T. P. Silva	— Mahaweli Project — Socio Economic Studies.
Dr. (Mrs.) U Coomaraswamy	— Mahaweli Project — Monitoring of Biotic Environment — FLORA.
Prof. K. D. Arudpragasam	— Mahaweli Project — Monitoring of Biotic Environment — FAUNA.
Dr. H. D. Gunawardena	— Mahaweli Project — Monitoring of Physical Environment — WATER
Dr. K. A. de Alwis	— Mahaweli Project — Monitoring of Physical Environment — SOIL
Dr. S. G. Ullangatilleke	— Mahaweli Project — Monitoring of Physical Environment — CLIMATE & HYDROLOGY.
Dr. I. A. U. N. Gunatilleke	— Sinharaja Forest Studies
Dr. (Mrs.) K. Abeynayake	— Ectotrophic Mycorrhizas in Forest Trees of Sri Lanka.
Dr. (Mrs.) C. V. S. Gunatilleke	— Ecological Investigation of a Montane Forest in Sri Lanka.

#### **MAB NATIONAL COMMITTEE**

Prof. B. A. Abeywickrama  
Department of Botany  
University of Colombo, Colombo 3.

Mr. V. R. Nanayakkara  
Conservator of Forests  
Forest Department  
Kew Road — Colombo 2.

Mr. Lyn de Alwis  
Director  
Department of Wild Life Conservation  
Anagarika Dharmapala Mawatha — Dehiwala.

Dr. G. C. N. Jayasuriya  
30/5, Park Road — Colombo 5.

Dr. R. P. Jayewardene  
Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority  
47/5, Maitland Place — Colombo 7.

Prof. H. M. W. Herath  
Department of Agricultural Biology  
Faculty of Agriculture  
University of Peradeniya — Peradeniya.

Dr. W. P. T. Silva  
Department of Geography  
University of Colombo, Colombo 3.

Mr. J. P. Herath  
Curriculum Development Centre  
Buddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7.

Mr. E. E. Jeyaraj  
C. I. S. I. R.  
Colombo 7.