



The GMSL observes that the lack of real ownership of CSO exercises to improve bio-stocks resulted in their near total failure

Tree planting, seed distribution, plant distribution, bio-stock regeneration are all activities that have been programmed into project designs for decades. In the experience of the GMSL, these highly laudable efforts had one serious drawback – their durability. In a survey of such activities (Seneviratne:2014) across 37 diverse CSOs (CBOs, local NGOs, national NGOs and INGOs), it was seen that the outcome of 4% of the activities lasted just one year past the PLC, 81% lasted only to the end of the PLC, and 15% did not last even to the end of the PLC to yield the concerning result that there was zero durability to any of those efforts. Yet, during the same survey, it was noted that there were strong green cover stands (both natural and agricultural) but these were almost exclusively done by individuals or

organizations on privately owned land parcels. The cause for weak sustainability of such efforts was not hard to see. Lack of ownership on the part of any of the stakeholders. With most CSO programs, planting a tree, throwing up a seed bank, giving a household a few fruit trees were either budget line clearing efforts or photo ops or both. For the communities it was a bit of cash or kind thrown in their general direction. For officials who supported the effort it was at best a bit of busywork to justify their positions. The zero result of well-meaning but very casual efforts was noted at the time by the surveyor as "...a development tragedy of no mean proportions given the time, effort and money expended on them"



Weak sick plants abandoned after planting, or eaten by cattle or trampled by wild animals or even no plant at all but a cover to hoodwink someone looking from afar

The GMSL changes the lens: A tree is not simply a bit of flora but rather, the unifier of many people, ideas and agenda



The GMSL's change was simple. It reminded the community of the first part of the traditional saying that tells every human being to plant a tree, write a book and make a child. Obviously, all three are not only for the individual but for the common advantage and benefit of all. The shift was based on tradition but its outcome was a move from rights to responsibilities and the people didn't need to be told that every tree that stood on neutral ground was common property and their upkeep a collective effort. That shift not only encouraged people to plant and maintain on communal commons but more importantly, to work towards preserving green cover already available in the terrain. Therefore, while the GMSL provided some of the bio-assets for planting, it was very clear to the people that they could and should source their own and continue to keep the areas under such cover under their own watchful eyes and that meant that there had to be give and take and a stronger sense of internal bonding when there was common ownership of the trees they planted bringing all of them closer to one another. The plan gave the GMSL the simple rule below:

A commonly advantageous, non-invasive, non-threatening, non-competitive cause had a tendency to bring people together and keep them together

The GMSL understood that the improvement of green cover had to be treated from multiple angles

People are diverse and have diverse interests and triggers. One type of activity may appeal to one demographic while another might be more in line with the thinking of another. For example, the youth might want to fight through dense forest to a tank or river whose environs have degenerated and repair that damage while an adult might think that planting trees by the side of a road might appeal to kids. The key was not to allow this sort of segregation among the community and the GMSL made sure there were multiple types of foliage planting, improving, tending exercises were in place and that everyone had to get involved in everything. This allowed everyone a chance to do their pet thing and take leadership in that while also supporting someone else's favourite activity. At first, the GMSL noted that the communities saw engaging in all activities as a good compromise (i.e. one that made no one happy). However, as they got involved in each different action, there was a gradual grasp of the importance of the whole and the whole effort became a common exertion on the part of everyone and collective enthusiasm for the effort grew. In many cases, the GMSL saw not only mutuality of effort but also communes helping one another, volunteering to locate good tree types for the terrain, obtain some of the bio-assets that were rare and hard to find, providing their own premises to hold some of the plants until they could be taken to earmarked sites, earmarking areas for possible future nurseries and so on. This was a happy collateral outcome and gave the GMSL another small rule.



When people become enthusiastic about something, they collectivize and volunteer their own capabilities, abilities and material resources to support it

KEEPING EVERYONE

TOGETHER



GMSL's use of green cover initiatives to improve community cohesion

Changing the approach to a common civil society activity to give mutual ownership of any and all to any and all

THE OUTCOME

I didn't really have to mobilize the people, they did it themselves - Anura

We have to get them to prune their trees, otherwise there is no point to giving them trees for their home gardens, they are already choking - Suranjan

When I looked at the work we needed to do it looked impossible. Then the community stepped in. We only have them a few things. They provided the rest - Amal

In the end, the effectiveness of something like this lies in the durability of the outcomes. A tree planted must outlive the planter.

To ensure this, the first 36 months are crucial. Project Life Cycles do not permit oversight over such a long period.

This is why community cohesion and enthusiasm are so important. Without it, there would be no long-term oversight. Without it, this would degenerate into yet another failed CSO effort.

At commencement, the GMSL had no idea that this would become a push-pull type of endeavour. Approaching the matter with ownership in mind, a deeper insight was obtained through the practice into the dynamics of human-environment harmony

"When attempting to create harmony between environment and society, nature must be positioned within the existentialist cloud of people and people must place themselves within the existentialist cloud of nature. Without that symbiosis each shall contend with the other to the detriment of both" - Arjuna Seneviratne

On the surface, livelihood seems exclusively a human thing while biodiversity seems exclusively a natural thing. Yet, when GMSL defined community as everything and everyone that line ceased to exist and the effort to improve green cover by the people had that effect of nature asking the people the cohesion question by default. The whole action therefore unified not only the people but the relationship between people and environment, livelihoods and biodiversity with one radiating towards the other and the other gravitating towards the one. This was an unlooked for but certainly very interesting outcome grammar of this segment of the COLIBRI project and one that the GMSL feels should be espoused by everyone wishing to conserve nature within the human societal context.



Young, old, official, unofficial, enforcement, regulatory, community - everyone pulled together as one

Many NGOs have come and gone with similar programs to this area. None had the organizational capacity we had from the Green Movement. They got everyone involved. The government officials, the community, the women's societies, farmers' societies, youth and especially the children who are our future. Everyone worked together and that is the most important. - Pallegaladebokka Economic Development Office Sunil Bandara



The youth of the community - came into their own



These days the number of children and youth who get involved in common village activities are very few. I am very happy that the kids of Dungolla and Pallegaladebokka are fully into this. Also, before this, the police came to the village only if there was a complaint. Now, not only police but other officials who have never ever come here are now visiting us because we are working together. Good connections are now made. - Chairman of Farmers' Society Pallegaladebokka



From watershed green cover management to home garden green cover management - we took care of everything with everyone contributing



We didn't have a children's society when we were growing up. The Green Organization allowed us to create one and to get all the children, the adults, and the other officers and everyone together to plant trees. Now we got to know the young group from Dungolla as well. That day was a very happy one for me. I am going to the tree planting work at Meegahamadana tank on the 6th. Y.M. Hasindu Sanjaya, youth from Newumwala.



Health is one's primary profit, trust is one's primary relative - Lord Buddha

The GMSL's approach to improving the biological diversity through community ownership has been an eye-opener for even the organization because at the start it was only a vague idea. As the work progresses towards the closure of the project, there are signs through these practices that something truly lasting can well be the outcomes of this approach. Through it, as the Buddha said the community may well continue to increase their greenery and thereby both their health and that of their environment while simultaneously increasing that crucial mutual trust among the many types of people who have called in on these types of efforts. Its new in the sense that everything was looked into as an amorphous whole and not piecemeal as has been the case with activists, sociologists, CSOs and others.

This is at present, a work-in-progress and as mentioned, the true durability of the intervention will only be seen two years past the end of the project. The GMSL has lived in these climes for decades. It will continue to be present and see how it all pans out in the end.

Positives that came out of the effort
Minimizing of distrust/mistrust if not complete eradication of it between communities, officials and other stakeholders
Multiple types of green cover improvements simultaneously engaged
Complete ownership of all common flora vested in the hands of all members of the community
Community in-kind contribution through time, resources, knowledge and abilities far outweigh program budget
Significant and much needed improvement of practical knowledge on how to manage home garden and area flora to optimize its ecosystem services for economic, social and environmental rewards.
Durability of effort beyond project life cycle ensured by the level of commitment and enthusiasm among the entire community to see that their environs are continuously improved.

Despite the fact that the approach and the outcomes seems to provide signs that this is a best practice, the GMSL is guarded on claiming it to be so since the actual effectiveness of any green cover improvement lies years into the future