

NARBO workshop participants' Study tour to tail end part of Maha Oya on 27 of April 2005

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The problem in general in lower part of rivers in the country:

Sand mining in lower stream of rivers has been an activity performed by people in time immemorial. The sand generates naturally in rivers and extraction of limited quantity of sand therefore, had not been a problem until recent past. With the increase of infrastructure development the annual sand requirement of the country is fast increasing by about 10%. (The annual sand requirement of the country is about 7 M cubic meters). In response to ever increasing sand requirement the people started excessive mining of river sand using machineries. It is estimated that the mechanized sand mining enables the excavation of about three times the volume of material generated in the river system naturally.

The sand mining has created following problems to the river and river rine resources:

- Erosion of river and stream banks
- Lowering the water table in the near by areas of the river and streams (negative impact on shallow wells used for domestic water)
- Salt water intrusion creating problems for the domestic water supply schemes
- Tendency to increase sea shore erosion
- Damages to the infrastructure (roads, bridges etc)
- Damages to the vegetation in the riverbanks
- Damages to the bathing points of the communities
- Tendency to change the directions of river flows.

The specific problems in Maha Oya:

Two sources are being used for sand mining in Maha Oya, river bed and land areas near river banks. The land areas near riverbanks are being mined for extracting two resources, sand and clay. Although river bank clay mining is observed in almost all basins in Sri Lanka, the extent in Maha Oya is exceptional resulting in substantial impacts on the local community and resources. The average depths of clay and sand pits in this area reach 40-50 feet and cover 1-2 hectares. The value of land in these resource rich areas is very high, about SL Rs 10 M/acre (about US\$20,000/ha) compared to US\$ 7500/ha for agricultural lands. It is unsurprising that farmers have sold their lands to mining investors and have moved to other areas.

Mining laborers use boats to transport the excavated materials to the bank. These mines also use large mechanical excavators and drag line cranes. Once mining is completed the remaining pits resemble small tanks (the Sri Lankan term for reservoirs) often full of water. In some areas almost all the river side land has been excavated.

The features observed and information gathered on lower part of the Maha Oya basin:

The following are the observations made in short field trip:

- The large scale investors have collected quantity of sand and clay for about 10-15 years of use in their factories. The collection of sand from the huge pits is done using boats. This is not so with the local communities who are mining on small scale for their cottage industries. The livelihoods of the small scale mining persons also have been affected due to government's ban of sand and clay mining in Maha Oya basin. The large scale investors are not so affected because they have many other income generation sources.
- The water in domestic wells gets drain to the deep pits excavated by the sand miners as the pits are deeper than most private wells. The local communities are compelled to deepen their wells to secure water supplies.
- The excavating huge pits have created another problem on the sand deposits in the land area around deep pits. The sand deposits in the area get drain to the huge pits with water.
- The local communities vehemently object to transportation of clay and sand in heavy vehicles through out the night disturbing sleep and social activities. It is claimed that children find difficulties to do their studies and also infants and elderly persons are seriously disturbed on their sleeps and so on. Therefore, in one occasion the local youths organized and made the tire punctures of the heavy vehicles used for transporting sand and clay.
- The local climate has changed due to large number of water ponds created.
- At present sand and clay mining has been banned by the government. The police and other local politicians had various types of incentives from the large scale miners and therefore, they were very powerful and local communities could not do any thing to stop the clay and sand mining. Some community members refer the large scale sand miners as the "Mafia" migrated to the local area to exploit their natural resources. Some of the marginal people from local communities too have some incentives from sand miners because the local people can sell food and other needs to the migrated labors to the area.
- Some of the clay and sand mining lands were used to grow rice prior to mining was begun but now most of these paddy lands have been sold to the large scale mining merchants.

The program on 27th of April to the Dankotuwa area (tail part of the Maha Oya basin)

Time	Point	Details	Remarks
8.00 AM	Hotel	The breakfast will be taken from the hotel	
9.00 AM	Dankotuwa DS office	Pick up local officers who will assist the team	P-1 of field visit map
9.15 -9.45 AM	Buddhist temple at Yogyiyana	The high priest who opposes large scale clay and sand mining in the area will brief the team about the activities he is carrying out to oppose the mining.	P-2 of field visit map
10.00-10.30 AM	Large scale clay and sand mining location – Jankurawela –Duwa road	Observe the large scale pits and also small scale cottage industries based on clay. Talk to few small scale cottage industry people	Snap-1 Snap- 2 P-3 of field visit map
10.45 – 11.15 AM	Location of river bank erosion due to river sand mining. Negative impacts on river water users for bathing and washing etc. – Galweka- Jankurawela Grama Niladhari division (GN division) – Katanamankada Thotupola	One or two community members will be there to have informal discussions. Large gathering for meeting is not advisable due to sensitive environment.	One photo of river bank erosion Snap- 3 Snap- 4 P-4 of field visit map
11.30-12.00 PM	Point on serious road erosion due to clay and sand miming- Atiyawela GN division	Observation in the surrounding where various impacts can be observed	Photo of road erosion Snap- 5 Snap- 6 P-5 of field visit map
12.30- 1.00 PM	Lunch at DS office at Dankotowa		
1.00 to 1.30 PM	A location where one large scale sand mined pit has been filled with soil (land	Can observe the impact of reclamation of mined land	Photo of the filled land Snap- 7 P-6 of field visit map

	reclamation).		
1.30 to 2.00 PM	A domestic well of a community member – Atiyawela GN division	Observation of impact on clay and sand mining on domestic water	- Snap- 8 Snap- 9 P-7 of field visit map
2.15 -2.45 PM	Randatha- tile and clay based industry	Discussions with the industry owner and some workers	Photo of the heaps of clay and sand stored for long term use. P-8 of field visit map
3.00 to 4.00 PM	Discussion at Dankotuwa DS office	-	-
5.00PM	Return to Hotel		

Snap -1



Snap – 4



Snap -2



Snap – 5



Snap -3



Snap – 6



Snap – 7



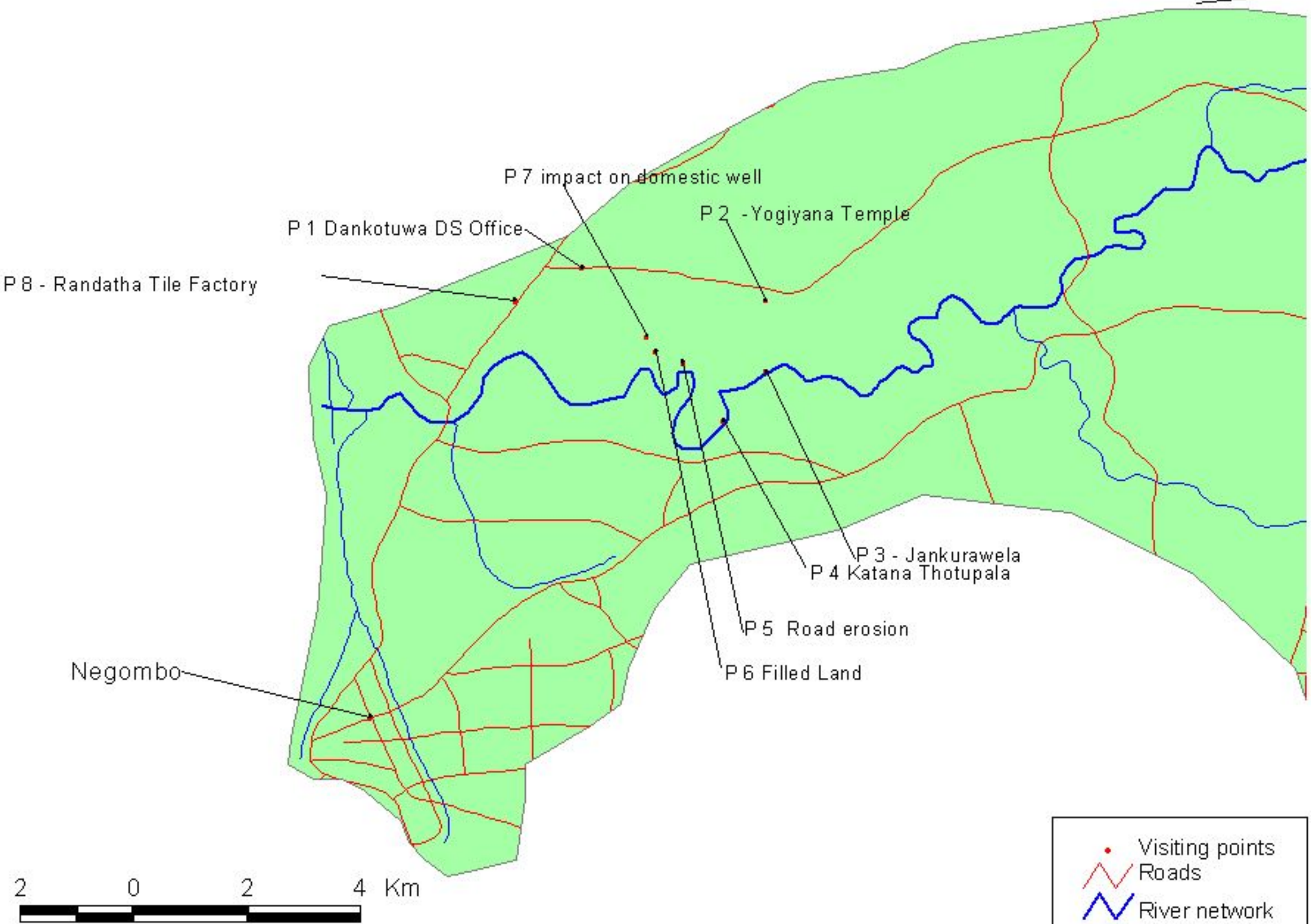
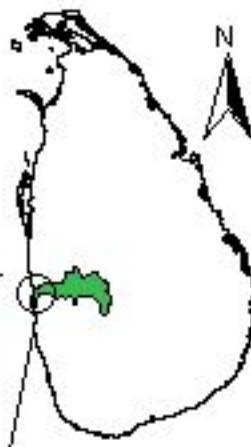
Snap – 8



Snap – 9



Maha Oya Basin Lower Reach



Legend:

- Visiting points
- Roads
- River network
- Maha Oya Basin

