Abstract: Sri Lanka is faced with several aspects of land degradation, many of which are human induced. The country is free of serious natural hazards such as volcanic activity and earthquakes resulting from climatic extremes, but there are impacts of many natural disasters, such as landslides, floods and droughts, the intensity and frequency of which are increasing due to human interventions. Some areas of Sri Lanka are also periodically subject to cyclones that occur due to climatic conditions and geographical locations.

Land degradation denotes all natural or anthropogenic processes that diminish or impair productivity of land. This occurs mainly through soil erosion, loss of organic matter and nutrients in the soil; salinization and large scale land degradation in Sri Lanka. Its manifestations today are heavy loss of soil, siltation in the water bodies, reservoirs and coastal waters, unplanned settlements, loss of arable land leading to declining productivity in agricultural lands and intensification of impacts of natural hazards such as flooding and landslides.

Introduction

Land degradation is a dynamic process and is the result of both natural and biotic forces operating on the earth. The scientific information of degraded lands is thus essential for formulation of strategic plan to arrest the menace of land degradation, generation of realistic information on degraded lands of the country is the utmost necessity and taken on a mission mode in order to check further degradation of the environment and loss of top fertile soils.

Land degradation is a dynamic process operating on the earth due to natural biotic forces and human activities. Development of degraded lands is one of the options available for the growing population and to restore the fragile ecosystems in Sri Lanka. The information on the extent and spatial distribution of various kinds of degraded lands is thus essential for strategic planning. Soil is a dynamic non-renewable resource which is essential for the continued agricultural productivity and to prevent degradation.

As long as the soil and land are used according to their potentials, it is good, continued unplanned and unscientific exploitation results in land degradation. The information on land degradation is needed for a variety of purposes, like planning the reclamation programmes. The land degradation problem has reached an alarming proposition due to various factors like over exploitation and mismanagement of natural resources and socio-economic factors.

The concern for protecting the productivity of natural resources without further degradation is the key issue for both the developed and the developing nations to sustain the future generations. The satellite remote sensing and GIS technologies should be fully
utilized for monitoring the land degradation (Venkataranam and Ravisankar, 2003).

Land degradation, including soil erosion, continues to be a global constraint to economic development. Despite decades of efforts to arrest land degradation, many farmers are reluctant or unable to adopt appropriate land use practices. Often, these practices fail to combine high productivity, increased soil fertility, reduced soil erosion and enhanced welfare. Still, soil conservation is proposed as a viable route to obtain these objectives.

The methodology for land degradation mapping, using remote sensing techniques developed by the organization, is based on the expertise in the field of soil survey and remote sensing acquired since inception. Database with spatial distribution of various soil and land attributes is a pre-requisite for development of strategic planning of any land development programme.

The information system on degraded lands in the country could be developed using remote sensing and geographical information systems towards strategic development of degraded lands and monitoring the status in a periodic timescale (Das, 2003).

**Study Area**

The study area is located between the latitudes of 7°25’ 24”N and 7° 27’ 25” N and the longitudes of 81° 45’ 31” E and 81° 50’ 32” E. (Figure 1)

**Materials and Method**

The following spatial and non spatial data were used in this study: Spatial data on Contour, Soil, Land use, Streams, Reservoirs, Road map of 1:50,000 scale topographic maps of the Survey Department of Sri Lanka, demographic data (Population Density, Education, Income, Land to man ratio, and agro land to man ratio), ground truth information. Further the spatial data analysis was carried out using Arc GIS 9.3.

The land degradation severity map was prepared by integrating all spatial data layers. Weights were given to each spatial data layers according to their possible contribution towards soil erosion. Since rainfall induced soil erosion is the most influential factor in land degradation, more weight was assigned to this data layer during the analysis. The assigned weightage values are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spatial data type</th>
<th>Weightage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil loss</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agro land-man ratio</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-man ratio</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samurdhi beneficiaries</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land degradation severity was assessed by using Weighted Sum algorithm in ArcGIS software. Applying simple arithmetic calculations, final land degradation map was produced.

**Results and Discussion**

An analysis about the overall patterns of gain and loss of different categories of land degradation provides greater insights into an understanding of the changes in land uses and resultant degradation. Table 2 shows the net changes in gains and losses due to degradation of land during 1981-1991, 1991-2001, 2001-2006 and 1981-2006 in the study area.

Figure 1: Study Area

![Study Area](image)
The highly degraded land has experienced also a loss of -6.36 per cent during the 25 years of observation, which is a sign of deterioration. This class of land has experienced a loss of -2.19 per cent (1981 to 1991), -1.41 per cent (1991 to 2001) and -2.76 (2001 to 2006) during the various periods in the overall period of analysis. The overall loss of a sizeable proportion of lands in the highly degraded category reveals that measures should be taken on a war footing to preserve the quality of land in the study area (see Figures 6.17 to 6.20).

**Table 2:**
陆地退化在卡尔明到尼塔武（km2）1981-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>高度退化</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>18.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>中度退化</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>10.04</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>10.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>少度退化</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>11.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>非退化</td>
<td>34.17</td>
<td>31.63</td>
<td>30.26</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>总数</td>
<td>67.91</td>
<td>67.91</td>
<td>67.91</td>
<td>67.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Field measurements and Computation using GIS (M.I.M. Kaleel, 2010)
Conclusions

Based on the analysis of dynamics of land degradation in the study area, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. The study area has experienced an adverse effect in land degradation throughout the study period 1981-2006.

2. The annual degradation score has shown an increasing trend during 1981 to 1991 and 2001 to 2006, which is an unhealthy development.

3. The negative annual degradation rates indicate a higher level of human interference and disturbance in the normal processes in the study area.

4. Human interference has been the highest and this has been validated by the fact that nearly 70 per cent of the settlements of the area have shown wider human impacts on the environment.

5. There is a strong positive relationship between land degradation and soil erosion as well as land degradation and population density while strong negative relationship can be observed between land degradation and land to man ratio. A sound correlation could not be observed between land degradation and poverty level.

References


7. geology/geomorphology/geogmf001.htm.