



BIODIVERSITY SRI LANKA (SRI LANKA BUSINESS AND BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM) Recent Milestones and Achievements in 2015

Mooted by three like-minded organizations, the Sri Lanka Business and Biodiversity Platform was initiated in August 2012, by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, IUCN and Dilmah Conservation. It was created to respond to a demand for the establishment of a facility where businesses can come together to share experiences and best practices, learn from their peers and voice their needs and concerns, aiming to strengthen the link between the business sector and the conservation community.

The SL B&B Platform was created as a solely private sector driven mechanism – the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka - to promote dialogue and improve the exchange of knowledge, information and methods on biodiversity conservation among the corporate sector. It was created to help businesses find solutions to adjust their activities to ensure fair income and sustainable growth, whilst providing benefits for biodiversity and ecosystems.

Stemming from a request made by the Membership during its 1st Meeting of Members held in September 2014, the legal process for formalizing the status of the Platform under the Companies Ordinance, as a not-for-profit entity limited by guarantee was completed in October 2015. Thus, the Platform metamorphosed and was re-branded as **Biodiversity Sri Lanka (BSL)**, taking a bold step forward, focusing on national priorities that would set higher standards for Sri Lanka's private sector to further commit towards the conservation of our valuable biological heritage.

The backbone of BSL is its members. Membership is open to Sri Lanka based businesses ranging from national to multinational companies and SME's. Currently, thirty (30) leading corporates - all with high standards of environmental custodianship have backed the Platform by becoming its invited Patron Members. As another significant milestone, the doors are now open to General Membership and 26 General Members have been confirmed to date. Membership of BSL brings in a wide array of benefits to its members, in the arena of biodiversity conservation and environmental protection. As a part of the services offered, BSL has developed a comprehensive technical database, carrying information on expertise available in diverse and relevant subject areas. Conservation related requirements of businesses are channeled to the intellectual mainstream and academia through this database. Knowledge of current best practices is disseminated through workshops and learning events, recognizing outstanding corporate contributions to biodiversity conservation.

BSL is a member of the Global Partnership on Business and Biodiversity established under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Further international linkages have been forged with centers of excellence and networking bodies such as the United Nations Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. BSL will continue to build and strengthen international relations by networking with key global business partners in a wide array of sectors, sharing experiences and best practices. BSL was represented at the Global Business and Biodiversity Forum held in Helsinki, Finland in November 2015.

In its formative years, and even at present, the BSL Secretariat is nurtured by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, with all administrative and secretarial functions supported by the Chamber's core divisions. A Board of Directors consisting of 9 members largely from the Private Sector direct the activities of BSL. Bi-monthly meetings of the Board are held. 4 Sector based standing committees

cater to the specific biodiversity needs of the Plantations and Agribusiness, Tourism and Hospitality, Construction and Banking and Finance sectors.

A small Secretariat is staffed by a part time Advisor, a Co-ordinator and a full time Projects and Communications Co-ordinator. In our quest for providing opportunities and capacity building for young graduates, one internship position has been offered by the Secretariat. The BSL Secretariat operates within an annual budget and activity plan approved by its Board of Directors.

The Secretariat carried out scoping surveys in 2014 and 2015 amongst the Members to explore ongoing and planned activities with regard to biodiversity conservation. Some interesting results emerged leading to the establishment of an on-line project bank focusing on national biodiversity priorities. 09 out of the 18 awardees recognized for 'Sustainability Project Awards' by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce in 2014, were Members of BSL. It is also interesting to note that 10 out of the 24 'Sustainability Project Awards' were biodiversity-related and that all 10 awardees were Members of BSL.

The organization and hosting of various networking and learning events is a medium by which BSL encourages dialogue and sharing of best practices whilst harnessing the potential for collaborative work. Events of BSL also provide opportunities for Members to showcase their activities connecting them to wider local and international networks and fora. Special Learning Events for the Plantation Sector; Banking and Finance Sector and the Tourism and Hospitality Sector were well attended and well received.

BSL's flagship event to commemorate the International Day for Biological Diversity is usually held on 22nd of May on the UN declared theme. This event was supported by the Hatton National Bank. This year, a most successful event to mark World Environment Day on 5th June, was held in partnership with the University of Colombo and the Institute of Environmental Professionals, Sri Lanka. More partnerships have been forged with the UN-REDD Programme in Sri Lanka, the Forest Department, UNDP, the Tourism Promotion Bureau and the Federation of Environmental Organizations with which events were held with large member participation.

Projects remain the cornerstone of BSL's progress. Phase I of the project on the 'Estimation of Sloth Bear Population Densities in the Wilpattu National Park' which was initiated in June 2013 with Biodiversity Education And Research, supported by CIC Holdings PLC and the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) was successfully concluded yielding some interesting facts and information about the understudied Sri Lankan Sloth Bear and its numbers present in the Maradanmaduwa area within the Wilpattu National Park. Phase II of the project is now ongoing.

BSL is now facilitating more projects with its Members some of which are the conservation of the Knuckles watershed in partnership with HSBC Sri Lanka and IUCN Sri Lanka; the enhancement of the environment around the Tea Trails Bungalows for Resplendent Ceylon with the support of Dilmah Conservation and CEA and the conservation of the Bolgoda Wetland ecosystem for Sampath Bank in partnership with the Sri Lanka Water Partnership.

BSL is also undertaking its own internal projects with the best technical experts for the benefit of the membership: the creation of a biodiversity credits accrual mechanism; the compilation of a compendium of best biodiversity practices in the Plantations sector and the formulation of a biodiversity-related project ranking scheme, are some of these.

BSL's website launched in 2013 was completely revamped and redeveloped with a more interactive interface, in March 2014 and September 2015. The website – www.business-biodiversity.lk now

features a Home page with constantly updated news and events notifications and hosts individual pages elaborating on different aspects of the Platform. We are a part of social media channels - Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr and Youtube - all linked up to BSL's website ensuring easy access to those preferring such modes of communication. BSL also produces a bi-monthly newsletter dedicating them to pre-selected themes of critical biodiversity importance.

An important role of BSL in its coming term will be in the targeting of companies, particularly SMEs that are embedded in the supply chains of large corporations. Very often, even in the case of huge multi-nationals, it is their supply chain that has the largest impact upon biodiversity. The Sri Lankan SME sector represents the bulk of the local manufacturing industry. With the advent of the open economy these SMEs are gradually put through the acid test in the market place, where they are compelled to compete with other exporters. Being market friendly is therefore an important requisite and the Platform will work towards strengthening their competitiveness through access to more information and support in their efforts to meaningfully address their impacts upon biodiversity.

There is an urgent need for international and national co-operation between policy-makers, science, the public and especially the business sector. The Platform is partnered by companies and institutions of international standing which have actively incorporated biodiversity into their business concepts and thus established themselves as pioneers in the field. As one of the first and perhaps the only national programme dedicated to biodiversity in the private sector the Platform takes a leading role in this regard.

It is very important that this Partnership is not seen as a competitor to the good work that groups dealing with these issues already undertake. We are hopeful that the Partnership will rather be seen as facilitating greater dialogue and co-operation amongst all groups, thus ensuring that our collective efforts are as complementary and as efficient as possible.