

# SEMINAR

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Hosted by Prof Koh Lian Pin

## Engaging Stakeholders to Combat Biodiversity Conservation Challenges: Sharing Experience from Sri Lanka



By Enoka Kudavidanage  
*Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka*

Enoka P. Kudavidanage is a Professor in Conservation Biology, affiliated with the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka since 2001. She completed her Ph.D. at the Department of Biological Sciences, the National University of Singapore in 2012 under the supervision of (late) Prof. Navjot Sodhi and Prof. Edward Webb. Her research areas include Wildlife Crime Mitigation, Ecology, and Conservation of the Sri Lankan Leopard, Protected Area Management, and Utilizing Biological Indicators to monitor the Impacts of Land-use change and Community-level impacts of Agro-Chemicals. She co-founded the Topical Ecosystem Research Network (TERN), a non-profit organization to facilitate conservation work and networking. She has been conducting environmental education programs islandwide for children for the last 25 years. Enoka is the regional secretary for the Association for the Tropical Biology and Conservation-(ATBC) Asia Pacific chapter, Co-chair of the Wild Cat Conservation Committee of the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (WNPS), Senior Advisor to the Multiregional Leopard Research and Monitoring Network of Sri Lanka, and a Trustee of the Federation of Environmental Organizations (FEO).

Conserving biodiversity has surpassed the simple “saving of wildlife”. We are striving to protect the life support systems, their elements, and resilience, within protected areas as well as human-dominated landscapes. Biodiversity-rich Sri Lanka currently is facing a dangerous combination of unplanned development, and an economic crisis, which calls for solutions to maintain the intricate balance of natural systems in the face of impending threats, putting our capacity to survive through a crisis on trial during this pandemic situation. Conservation no longer is the obligation of only the national level decision makers. It has become a “people’s function”, the responsibility of every individual, where linking up stakeholders to complement and support their positive contribution and minimize detrimental impacts is crucial. We require solutions through multi-sectoral approaches and partnerships with skilled and experienced parties from all socio-economic strata. Further, to scale up solutions with real impacts, it is necessary to translate knowledge into practical implications. This discussion aims to share some lessons learned from years of experience on the tropical island of Sri Lanka. As a conservation biologist working in rural Sri Lanka, I have been attempting to bridge the gap between science and practice through community engagement and empowerment at the ground level to find solutions to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management issues.