



Mangrove Ecosystems and the Right to a Healthy Environment: Strengthening Legal Frameworks, Governance, and Environmental Education in Sri Lanka

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Mangrove ecosystems are critical to coastal environmental governance, supporting biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and effective realization of the emerging human rights to a healthy environment. In Sri Lanka, however, accelerating coastal degradation and fragmented environmental governance threaten mangrove sustainability and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Despite increasing recognition of the right to a healthy environment in international law, Sri Lanka's legal and institutional frameworks remain sectoral and inadequately equipped to ensure effective mangrove ecosystem protection. This study examines the absence of a coherent, rights-based legal framework integrating environmental protection with enforceable human rights obligations and evaluates its implications for ecosystem conservation and community vulnerability. This study critically interrogates the extent to which the right to a healthy environment is recognized and operationalized within Sri Lanka's constitutional, statutory, and policy regimes, evaluates the effectiveness and limitations of existing governance mechanisms in regulating mangrove conservation, and examines the role of environmental education and capacity building in facilitating participatory, rights-oriented environmental governance. Employing a doctrinal legal methodology, the study systematically analyses constitutional provisions, statutes, regulations, national policies, and judicial decisions, supplemented by relevant international environmental and human rights instruments as well as a critical review of secondary literature. The study further applies thematic legal analysis to evaluate statutory inconsistencies, institutional overlaps, and governance gaps affecting mangrove protection. The literature review process involved examining peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, international conventions, judicial decisions, and governmental publications relating to environmental governance, human rights, and coastal ecosystem protection. Primary legal sources for the analysis were examined through a review of constitutional provisions, statutes, regulations, national policies, and reported case law relevant to mangrove conservation and environmental rights in Sri Lanka. The findings demonstrate that deficiencies in legal coherence, institutional coordination, and enforcement capacity significantly undermine the protection of mangrove ecosystems. At the same time, the absence of explicit constitutional or statutory recognition of the right to a healthy environment constrains both accountability mechanisms and judicial oversight. Moreover, limited environmental legal awareness and inadequate community participation further weaken governance outcomes. The article contends that the meaningful realization of mangrove sustainability in Sri Lanka necessitates the doctrinal and institutional entrenchment of a human rights-based approach within environmental law, supported by targeted legal reforms, strengthened governance frameworks, and the strategic integration of environmental education and capacity-building initiatives.

Keywords: *Right to a healthy environment, Mangrove conservation, Environmental governance, Human rights law, Coastal management, Environmental education*