



Policy Coherence and Institutional Overlap in Mangrove Governance in Sri Lanka: An Analysis of Cross-Sectoral Environmental and Resource Management Frameworks

P.C.P. Kumara*

The Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka.

**badchami@gmail.com*

Mangrove ecosystems in Sri Lanka provide critical ecological and socio-economic services. In response to increasing threats from land conversion, aquaculture expansion, and coastal development, the government introduced the National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems in Sri Lanka. However, mangrove governance operates within a broader multi-sectoral policy landscape, raising concerns about potential overlaps, institutional fragmentation, and policy coherence. This study assesses the extent and nature of overlap between the mangrove policy and key ten national policies related to coastal management, wetlands, forestry, wildlife, fisheries, climate change, and natural resource use. A qualitative documentary policy analysis was conducted using the National Mangrove Policy as the baseline instrument. Each selected policy was reviewed through an overlap matrix based on two analytical dimensions: jurisdictional overlap and substantive overlap. Jurisdiction overlap assessed institutional mandates, spatial authority, permitting functions, environmental approval processes, enforcement responsibilities, and control over coastal, wetland, forest, protected-area, lagoon, estuarine, and resource extraction zones. Substantive overlap assessed the degree of alignment in policy objectives, including biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, sustainable use, climate adaptation and mitigation, blue-carbon potential, community participation, and resource management. Policies were then classified as having high, medium, or low overlap with the Mangrove Policy. The findings show that Sri Lanka's mangrove governance framework is not policy-deficient; rather, it is institutionally dense. The strongest overlaps occur with the Coastal Zone and Coastal Resource Management Plan, National Wetland Policy and Strategy, National Environment Policy, National Forestry Policy, and National Wildlife Policy, which largely reinforce mangrove conservation objectives. However, the analysis also reveals that the same mangrove-related activity may involve multiple agencies, including CC&CRMD, CEA, the Forest Department, the Department of Wildlife Conservation, fisheries and aquaculture authorities, GSMB, MEPA, and local authorities. The most significant insight is that policy overlaps are mainly complementary at the objective level, but problematic at the implementation level where lead-agency responsibility, permitting authority, restoration roles, and enforcement powers are not clearly defined. Development-oriented policies relating to aquaculture, fisheries expansion, sand extraction, and mineral resources create additional tensions where economic objectives may conflict with mangrove protection. The study contributes new knowledge by systematically mapping Sri Lanka's mangrove policy against related sectoral policies and distinguishing between constructive policy reinforcement and operationally risky institutional overlap. It demonstrates that effective mangrove governance requires not only policy alignment, but also clear institutional sequencing, site-based lead-agency rules, integrated approval mechanisms, and cross-representation among relevant committees. The study concludes that Sri Lanka's mangrove conservation framework can become a strong model for integrated coastal ecosystem governance only if policy coherence is translated from broad alignment on paper into clear, enforceable, and coordinated action on the ground.

Keywords: *Mangrove governance, Policy coherence, Institutional overlap, Coastal ecosystem management*

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