

Legal Protection of the River Environment against Sand Mining: A Case Study in Downstream Area of the River, Kalu

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Sand mining has become a serious environmental and socio-economic issue in Sri Lanka and the downstream area of the river Kalu is subjected to excessive levels of sand mining. This case study was conducted on sand mining activities in the downstream of river, which has not been focused recently. The objectives were to explore the extent of environmental and socio-economic impacts of unregulated sand mining and to examine the role of existing laws and regulations in controlling this issue. Two locations were selected for the study where excessive sand mining is taking place. The research methodologies, socio-legal and black letter approaches were followed and structured interviews were carried out to gather information from inhabitants residing near the river, sand miners, proprietors and sand distributors. Key informant interviews were carried out with scholars involved in research and relevant authorities. Legislation, journal articles, websites and reports were also referred. The study identified environmental damages such as river bank and riverbed erosion and obstructions to sediment flow. Disappearance of lands and damages to infrastructure due to river bank erosion have also been reported. Saltwater intrusion due to riverbed erosion created consequences of poor drinking water quality and salinization of agricultural lands. The presently implemented laws are adequate for proper control against over exploitation of river sand. However, the respective authorities do not enforce them appropriately due to political interventions. This study suggests that the best remedy is to build a transparent and strict legal and institutional framework to ensure sustainability in riverine environments.

Keywords: *the river Kalu, riverine environments, sand mining*