

SRI LANKA'S LEGAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE: THE URGENT NEED FOR A STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

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Climate change presents an existential threat to Sri Lanka, with rising sea levels, erratic weather patterns, and increasing natural disasters threatening vulnerable ecosystems and communities. Despite this, Sri Lanka's legal and policy frameworks remain fragmented and inadequate, with no dedicated Climate Change Act and a constitutional framework that does not recognize the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental right. These gaps undermine disaster resilience and hinder sustainable development. This study critically examines Sri Lanka's existing legal and policy frameworks, identifying key deficiencies in mitigation, adaptation, and governance. The research involves a comparative analysis of international models, particularly the Climate Change Acts of the United Kingdom and Kenya, to explore best practices in regulatory frameworks. The findings highlight significant shortcomings in Sri Lanka's climate governance, including the absence of a comprehensive legal framework, limited disaster resilience, and insufficient integration of environmental sustainability into national policy. Furthermore, the lack of constitutional recognition for the right to a healthy environment severely limits Sri Lanka's ability to effectively address the climate crisis. The study proposes the introduction of a tailored Climate Change Act for Sri Lanka, focusing on environmental sustainability, disaster resilience, and distributive justice. It also advocates for constitutional amendments to recognize the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental right, thereby positioning environmental protection as a national priority. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of institutional reforms to ensure better implementation, transparency, and accountability, as well as the need for equitable climate financing to support the most vulnerable communities. By offering practical legal reforms and proposing context-specific solutions, this study provides a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening Sri Lanka's climate governance, ultimately fostering a resilient, sustainable, and just future for all its citizens.

Keywords: Constitutional Reform, Climate Change Act, Disaster Resilience, Environmental Justice and Sri Lanka