Palmyrah (*Borassus flabellifer* L.) as a Strategic Economic Resource in Sri Lanka for Sustainable Development: Opportunities, Challenges and Future Prospects

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Palmyrah (*Borassus flabellifer L.*) so called "Karpakatharu-கற்பகதரு-" is a widely distributed salient crop, and resilient natural resource that abundantly exists in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka with multiple economic benefits and uses. The Palmyrah tree, from its crown to root, supports rural livelihoods and the national economy by providing raw materials for multiple sectors including food and nutrition, Jaggery & treacle, distillery industry, traditional medicine and Nutraceutical, timber, handicrafts and small-scale industries, etc. Further, multibillion dollar export-oriented business is running all around the world directly associated with the Palmyrah. Due to its drought tolerance and substantial adaptability attributes to climate change, the Palmyrah tree plays an important role in sustainable agriculture. There is a strong believe of palmyrah based fence to hope up with the raising crop-elephant-human conflicts and

natural resource management in dry zones of Sri Lanka. Moreover, a wide range of products, including palm jaggery, palm sugar, toddy, fruit pulp, tubers, fiber, and leaf-based handicrafts, provide considerable opportunities for value addition and rural entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka.

However, insufficient investment, political negligence and corruption in the past, lack of value-added technologies and capacity building training, hike in tree felling and land clearance, marketing challenges and low participation of the younger generation are major obstacles to the full development of the palmyrah sector. Therefore, there is great potential to strengthen the rural economy of Sri Lanka by utilizing palmyrah resources through scientific research, technological development, policy support and entrepreneurship development.

Researchers identify several high-potential areas for future growth such as organic palm sugar for premium international markets; functional foods and nutraceutical ingredients from palmyrah fruit and sap; climate-resilient agroforestry in dryland regions; Biodegradable packaging and fibre-based products; carbon sequestration and ecosystem-service payments and, eco-tourism centered on traditional palmyrah landscapes and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Palmyrah represents an important yet underexploited economic resource with considerable potential to support sustainable rural development and climate-resilient livelihoods in Sri Lanka. Strategic investments in research and development, value-chain modernization, product diversification, capacity building, and supportive public policies are essential to enhance the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of the palmyrah industry. Strengthening collaboration among government agencies, research institutions, universities, and the private sector will be critical for realizing the full economic potential of this indigenous resource.

Keywords: Palmyrah, *Borassus flabellifer* L., Sri Lanka, rural livelihoods, value addition, climate resilience, sustainable development, agro-based industries.

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