

Mini hydro power projects vital

BY LALIN FERNANDOPULLE

Sri Lanka depends on expensive petroleum resources. At present it is over 60 percent. A barrel of crude oil now costs US \$ 72 according to the prevailing world oil prices. The quick surge in world oil prices will be a burden on the economy and the masses will have to pay for it, Consultant for Mini Hydro Power Projects, National Council for Economic Development, Nishantha Nanayakkara said.

"We need to go for alternative indigenous renewable energy resources such as hydro, wind and dendro which is cheaper and affordable to the common masses. Air, water and wood are renewable energy resources because, they are gifts of nature and its lifecycle is short," he said.

Since we are gifted with such resources we should produce our own energy requirements instead of depending on costly thermal power from abroad. Producing hydro, wind and dendro power is cheaper and environmentally, socially and economically feasible, Nanayakkara said.

There are misconceptions among people that when we say hydro there should be a waterfall. That may be true for major hydro power projects such as Upper Kotmale, Victoria and Ran-

denigala. Nanayakkara said for mini and medium hydro power projects we need a flowing river or canal.

Therefore mini hydro power projects are less costly and harmful to the environment. Unlike coal and thermal and even major hydro power projects small hydro power projects are less harmful to the environment. There is no adverse impact on nature like in the Upper Kotmale project where St. Clare's waterfall is affected.

The first mini hydro power project was started in 1996 in Dickoya. During the past ten years we produced 85 MW through 35 projects in Nakkavita, Eratne, Hapugasthanna, Niriella, Belihuloya and Wewganga.

Nanayakkara said with 85 MW there is potential to generate 400 MW. For mini hydro power projects we do not have to depend on foreign funds, experts and contractors.

In mini hydro power projects it is local investment and domestic engineers who are involved. Of the total investment only 30 percent is spent on importing machinery. It enables local entrepreneurs to develop their skills.

Through mini hydro power projects there is a huge job market created for local professionals, engineers and technicians. As a result there is waste

know-how built in Sri Lanka. This is the key factor to develop the country, Nanayakkara said.

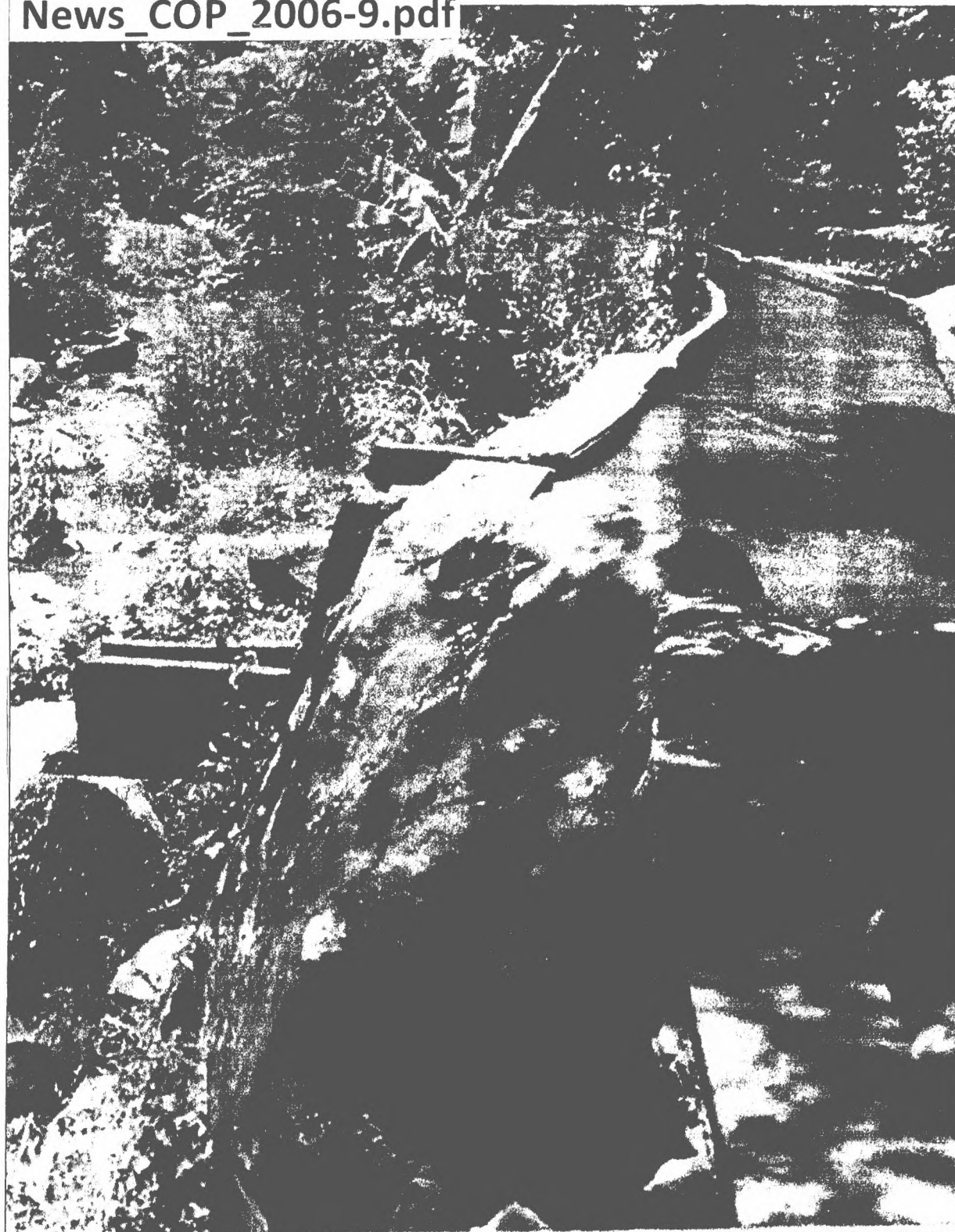
These local professionals could go abroad for higher salaries or consultations. Two local mini hydro power companies are involved in mini hydro power consultation and construction contracts in the African region.

He said this is a more profitable scheme than sending our poor mothers abroad for a petty income at the expense of the family. We spend extensively on free education and health but we have to think of its return. We have to exploit our human resources by creating a professional job market in our country.

There will be employment opportunities for engineers, technicians, accountants and skilled welders and civil contractors. Villagers will be employed in the projects and the village will get a share of the electricity generated.

This is purely a local exercise where the money is invested back in the country. It is the cheapest of all independent power projects in Sri Lanka. Therefore the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) should encourage mini hydro power projects to solve the national energy crisis and save foreign exchange, Nanayakkara said.

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Over 60 percent of Sri Lanka's energy needs are met through expensive petroleum resources and alternative renewable energy resources which are cheaper and affordable to the common man should be explored.