

A STUDY ON THE IMPACTS OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN A TROPICAL WETLAND

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Wetlands provide important and valuable goods and services. They are natural water purifiers and life supporting systems. Demands associated with increasing population exert much pressure on the wetlands. Imbalances in the protective measures and development activities have created serious environmental problems in many wetlands, including the Kuttanad wetland in the south-west coast of India. It is a unique wetland with most of the area lying nearly one metre below sea level and is a rich rice cultivation area where agriculture is made possible by constructing dikes and pumping out water. Measures to multiply crop production cause concentration of pesticides and fertilisers on logged water, poisoning surface and groundwater, as natural flow is controlled by regulators. The projects to prevent brackish water intrusion produce negative results. The proposed water diversion scheme is going to worsen the situation. Land reformation processes are contracting the region, adding to environmental problems and make it inhospitable to living organisms. All these make reliable water a rare resource in a region where the rainfall is heavy. Inefficient management and untimely operation of regulators have reduced the agricultural production, the primary aim while designing the project. In this study, a detailed investigation has been carried out on the impact of development activities in the environment and freshwater availability in the wetland region. Some suggestions for the better management have been given.