

COUNTRY YOUTH

CALL TO ACTION 2025

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Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence based solutions for the 2030 agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific



SRI LANKA

Situational Analysis

Sri Lanka has made significant progress in integrating its National policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since they were adopted in 2015. The current national policy framework, “A Thriving Nation – A Beautiful Life,” and the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) demonstrate effective integration with the SDGs. The mapping of the policy alignment by the Sustainable Development Council shows that 108 out of the 169 SDG targets are being covered by the country’s national policy framework. Besides this, Sri Lanka has also established a strong institutional framework for SDG governance, monitoring, and coordination primarily through the enactment of the Sustainable Development Council (SDC) by the Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act of 2017. The SDC helped achieve better ownership of the 2030 Agenda by various stakeholders with more efficient implementation.

Sri Lanka has made significant strides in financial inclusion and data availability for SDG progress. The launch of the National SDG Data Portal has enhanced the capacity of the nation to monitor and evaluate SDG progress, with data available for 159 SDG indicators. This ranks Sri Lanka in the top 13 nations in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of data availability. Besides, the country has also put in place instruments like SDG Budget Coding and Tagging, and the Sri Lanka Green Bond Framework to align public budgets and private investments with SDG goals, particularly climate adaptation and environmental protection. Despite these efforts, SDG performance of Sri Lanka has also shown some regressive trends, with a decline in its overall ranking from 76th in 2022 to 93rd in 2024. However, Sri Lanka’s performance is higher than the regional average,

which shows that the country remains committed to the 2030 Agenda despite the current challenges.

In SDG 3, Sri Lanka has made significant progress in health, including reducing the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 29.5 per 100,000 live births, while achieving the 2030 target of below 16 remains a challenge. Child mortality has increased slightly, with under-five mortality at 12.5 per 1,000 live births in 2023, indicating the need for stronger neonatal and pediatric healthcare. The country has made progress in combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Dengue and leishmaniasis remain significant public health problems, requiring more robust disease surveillance and prevention. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, are the main causes of premature death, while mental illnesses, such as high suicide rates, indicate deficiencies in mental health services.

As far as the SDG 5 is concerned, Sri Lanka has taken steps toward gender equality, with legal frameworks promoting non-discrimination. However, enforcement remains inconsistent. Women hold 5.33% of seats in National parliaments and 22.98% in local governments, but their participation in managerial positions remains below 30%, highlighting the need for greater gender equality in leadership. Violence against women and girls persists, with 14.5% of ever-partnered women reporting physical, sexual, or psychological violence. While child marriage rates have decreased, harmful practices still exist. Women also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work, particularly in rural areas.

Co-convended by:



In collaboration:



In partnership:



In SDG 8, economic growth in Sri Lanka has been unstable, falling sharply in 2020 by the pandemic, but recovering to 3.1% in 2021, though still below the target of 7%. Sri Lanka must focus on enhancing productivity through diversification, innovation in new technologies, and increasing labor-intensive sectors. The informal employment sector is growing, and while efforts to formalize micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are called for, more targeted policies are required to stimulate entrepreneurship and increase access to finance. Gender imbalances in employment, particularly among women and young people, persist, as well as barriers to providing decent work for persons with disabilities. Achievement of SDG 8.4 requires improved resource efficiency and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation, with tourism having the potential for sustainable employment creation.

In regard to SDG 14, Sri Lanka has made significant progress in conserving marine resources, with efforts focused on reducing marine pollution, restoring ecosystems, and ensuring sustainable fisheries. The Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) has led initiatives to reduce marine plastic debris, with a decrease in floating plastic density from 103 kg/km in 2017 to 92.5 kg/km in 2020. Coral restoration has expanded significantly, from 40 m² in 2017 to 400 m² in 2023, and mangrove restoration has grown from 0.04 ha to 2.48 ha. Despite these successes, land-based pollution continues to affect coastal ecosystems, and only 25% of Sri Lanka's coastline is under protection. Ocean acidification is also a growing concern, requiring increased monitoring and mitigation. The country has improved its compliance with international fisheries regulations but faces challenges in combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Enhancing access to resources for small-scale fisheries remains an area for improvement.

With regard to SDG 17, Sri Lanka has made mixed advancement in mobilizing financial resources for sustainable development. Remittances are an important economic source, but susceptibility to external economic volatility highlights the need to diversify financial flows. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in sustainable industries and improving debt management strategies are essential to ensuring fiscal stability. Sri Lanka's international partnerships, including signing treaties like MARPOL, have strengthened its legal framework for environmental protection. However, planning, monitoring, and reporting deficiencies retard progress, and corruption and poor governance continue to hinder sustainable development initiatives. Greater coordination, policy coherence, and available data are key to eliminating these barriers.

Recommendations

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

- Expand access to sexual and reproductive health services for youth, especially in rural areas, to reduce teenage pregnancies and improve maternal health.
- Launch awareness campaigns targeting young people on mental health, stress management, and early intervention to address rising mental illness rates.
- Provide youth-friendly health services offering contraception, STD prevention, and family planning, ensuring confidentiality and accessibility.
- Strengthen school health programs to promote physical fitness, healthy eating, and mental health awareness among students.
- Increase education on the dangers of substance abuse through targeted school and community programs for youth.
- Develop recreational and sports programs for youth to prevent obesity, encourage physical activity, and promote overall well-being.
- Establish peer-led support networks and digital health solutions, including mental health apps and online counseling, to ensure accessible care for young people.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Introduce youth quotas in political leadership and corporate roles to ensure greater youth representation, particularly for women.
- Provide leadership training and mentorship programs to equip young women with the skills necessary for decision-making positions.
- Establish accessible support systems for youth survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), including shelters, counseling, and legal assistance.
- Strengthen youth-focused laws and policies related to GBV and ensure their strict implementation, particularly in rural areas.
- Introduce youth-specific pay audits to ensure wage equity and reduce gender disparities in youth employment.
- Enforce regulations against gender-based discrimination in hiring, promotions, and workplace environments, focusing on youth empowerment.
- Create financial empowerment programs, including microloans and business development services, to support young women, particularly in rural areas.



- Improve access to education and healthcare for rural youth, focusing on bridging digital divides and increasing access to technology.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Promote investment in green industries and sustainable businesses to create environmentally aligned jobs for youth and women.
- Support the adoption of green technologies that boost productivity while minimizing environmental impact, focusing on youth engagement.
- Expand vocational training programs targeting skills in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-friendly business practices for youth and women.
- Establish job creation schemes and internships specifically designed to help young people and women transition into formal, sustainable employment.
- Provide access to finance, legal support, and tax incentives to help informal businesses, especially those led by youth and women, formalize and grow.
- Offer business development training for micro and small enterprises, focusing on women-led ventures in green and sustainable sectors.
- Strengthen labor laws to ensure protection of workers' rights, particularly in sectors that employ large numbers of youth and women, such as agriculture and domestic work.
- Improve labor inspections to ensure fair wages, working conditions, and promote gender equity in the informal sector.

SDG 14: Life Below Water

- Strengthen laws and regulations to reduce plastic waste and pollution in coastal areas, encouraging youth-led beach cleanups and awareness campaigns.
- Promote youth involvement in waste segregation and recycling initiatives, empowering them to lead community-driven marine conservation efforts.
- Engage youth in expanding marine protected areas (MPAs) through education programs and volunteer opportunities for hands-on conservation.
- Support youth-led community-based conservation programs that involve local stakeholders in protecting marine ecosystems and raising awareness.

- Encourage young people to advocate for sustainable fishing practices by organizing workshops, campaigns, and online platforms to combat illegal fishing.
- Encourage innovation in sustainable aquaculture through youth entrepreneurship programs, focusing on environmentally friendly and socially inclusive businesses.
- Increase funding for youth-led research and projects focused on marine biodiversity, ocean acidification, and the effects of climate change on marine ecosystems.
- Provide youth with training and resources to enhance data collection and monitoring systems, empowering them to contribute to ocean health management.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Strengthen youth engagement in SDG-related partnerships by involving young people in collaborations with international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector to share knowledge and resources.
- Increase youth participation in regional and global sustainable development networks, giving opportunities for them to contribute to SDG progress.
- Promote youth-driven data collection initiatives, ensuring transparency and equity in data reporting, and involving young people in tracking SDG progress, with a focus on gender, age, and location.
- Establish youth-focused green finance mechanisms, such as creating green bonds specifically for youth-led environmental initiatives and sustainable projects.
- Encourage public-private partnerships (PPPs) for youth employment, focusing on sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy, and climate adaptation projects that provide job opportunities for young people.
- Create platforms for youth advocacy and decision-making, ensuring that marginalized groups, such as youth from rural areas or indigenous communities, have a voice in SDG-related decision-making processes.
- Strengthen youth leadership training and mentorship programs to prepare young people for leadership roles in sustainable development, helping them contribute to future policy-making and initiatives.



The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 19-21 February, 2025. The Sri Lanka drafting team consisted of Kuda Kotunnage, Malsha Sandeepani Gunasinghe, Noorul Jinnah Zeron Anas, Lilan Dayananda, and Harini Fernando. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.

