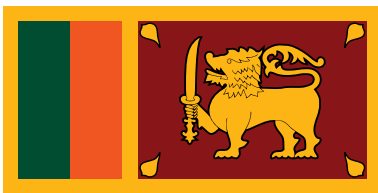




Asia-Pacific Regional Youth Call to Action 2024



Sri Lanka and Maldives

Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: The Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient and Innovative Solutions in Asia and the Pacific with Young People at the Forefront

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Sri Lanka and the Maldives, respectively, are traversing complex terrains of economic, social, and environmental challenges while endeavouring to align their national development strategies with the SDGs. Despite recent economic challenges, Sri Lanka has made progress in poverty reduction through targeted social welfare programmes. Statistics indicate that the national poverty rate has decreased from 4.1% in 2016 to 2.7% in 2021. However, the economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the need for innovative strategies to ensure sustained progress. In the Maldives, heavily dependent on tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed economic challenges, particularly in terms of poverty. Initiatives to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on a single sector are imperative for sustainable poverty reduction.

Both nations grapple with malnutrition challenges. In Sri Lanka, malnutrition remains a concern, with 18.7% of children under five experiencing stunting. The Maldives, with its focus on sustainable fishing practices, is critical for ensuring food security and community well-being. Sri Lanka has made progress in women's empowerment and gender equality. Policies promoting equal opportunities in education and employment have contributed to narrowing gender gaps. However, challenges persist, with gender-based violence and unequal representation in leadership roles remaining significant concerns. In the Maldives, advancements in gender equality are evident, with increased female participation in education and the workforce. Nevertheless, ongoing efforts are needed to address gender-based violence and promote equal representation in decision-making roles.



Both nations are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In Sri Lanka, awareness campaigns, sustainable agriculture practices, and reforestation initiatives contribute to climate resilience. The commitment to balancing development projects with environmental conservation is important. Sri Lanka has faced monsoon changes, and sustainable practices are essential to mitigate the impact on agriculture and water resources. As a low-lying nation facing the threat of rising sea levels, the Maldives is at the forefront of climate action. The government's commitment to carbon neutrality and renewable energy projects exemplifies efforts to align with SDG 13. Rising sea levels, impacting coral reefs and fisheries, necessitate robust adaptation and mitigation measures.

Sri Lanka is navigating political changes, emphasising the importance of strong institutions for peace and justice. Ensuring accountability, transparent governance, and strengthening rule-of-law institutions contribute to progress in SDG 16. In the Maldives, political stability has improved, although governance challenges persist. The country's commitment to anti-corruption measures and strengthening institutions demonstrates a dedication to SDG 16. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranks the Maldives 129th out of 180 countries, indicating ongoing challenges.

Both nations recognize the importance of international cooperation and partnerships for achieving the SDGs. Collaborative efforts with international organisations, NGOs, and neighbouring countries are crucial for leveraging resources, knowledge, and expertise. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are navigating dynamic landscapes of challenges and opportunities in their pursuit of the SDGs. Despite facing unique circumstances, both nations demonstrate a commitment to sustainable development through various initiatives aligned with the SDGs. Continued collaboration, innovative strategies, and a focus on inclusivity are key to ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for these island nations.

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

SDG 1: No Poverty

- Introduce comprehensive youth entrepreneurship programmes tailored for vulnerable populations, with a focus on persons not in education, employment or training.
- Implement robust social protection systems to ensure access to basic needs and services for individuals and families living in poverty mainly focusing on

health care, education, housing, and income support, promoting social inclusion.

- Promote inclusive economic growth by focusing on job creation initiatives. Encourage the development of industries that cater to a diverse workforce, ensuring that the benefits of economic progress are shared equitably.
- Implement structured youth mentorship programmes that connect experienced professionals with young individuals providing guidance, support, and insight, in order to help shape the aspirations and skills of the younger generations, with a focus on those facing socio-economic challenges.
- Encourage the formation of Policy Advocacy Networks led by young people, advocating for the development of effective, multidimensional poverty-alleviation policies by actively engaging with policymakers.
- Develop initiatives aimed at empowering individuals through education, skill-building, and entrepreneurship, emphasising self-sufficiency and autonomy, in order to break the dependency mindset prevalent in impoverished communities.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

- Implement modern and sustainable farming practices by investing in modern technologies, irrigation systems, and providing farmers with access to relevant training and resources to enhance their agricultural practices.
- Develop programmes that support local agriculture by providing subsidies for nutrient-rich crops, and ensure the availability of affordable, high-quality produce in underserved areas by improving access to nutritious and diverse food options, particularly for vulnerable populations, mainly women, children, and impoverished communities.
- Initiate urban agriculture programs to utilise available spaces within cities for sustainable food production including community gardens, rooftop farming, and vertical farming initiatives that contribute to local food supplies, promote green spaces, and enhance community engagement in urban settings.
- Establish food innovation hubs that serve as collaborative platforms for young researchers, entrepreneurs, and agricultural experts which focus on sustainable agriculture and food security, fostering innovation, research, and the development of technologies that improve crop yields, reduce waste.
- Integrate education on sustainable farming practices into school curricula to instil environmentally conscious agriculture approaches from an early age.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Advocate for the decriminalisation and equal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights. Reform existing legislation to protect individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, fostering an inclusive society that respects diversity.
- Implement affirmative action policies to increase women's representation in political spheres and encourage and support women's participation in decision-making processes to ensure a more equitable and diverse political landscape.
- Establish a comprehensive and rights-based approach towards sex work and address the legal status, working conditions, and rights of sex workers, emphasizing harm reduction, health services, and protection against exploitation.
- Ensure access to safe and legal abortion services, recognising and upholding women's reproductive rights, and develop and implement policies that destigmatise abortion, provide comprehensive reproductive healthcare, and respect individual autonomy.
- Incorporate comprehensive sex education into school curricula, promoting a holistic understanding of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This education should encompass diverse identities, relationships, and consent, fostering informed and responsible decision-making, inclusive of persons with disabilities and persons with special educational needs (SEN)
- Enforce strict legislation against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and implement educational programmes to raise awareness about the physical and psychological consequences of these practices and work towards their complete eradication.
- Ensure equal access to sexual and reproductive health services for LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Advocate for gender-sensitive media reporting and content creation.
- Implement and enforce policies to close the gender pay gap.
- Advocate for and protect women's land rights. Develop policies that guarantee equal access to and ownership of land, empowering women economically and socially.
- Strengthen adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and encourage rigorous implementation of CEDAW principles, fostering gender equality and women's rights.

- Advocate for the ratification of international agreements, such as Convention 190, to strengthen commitments to gender equality, non-discrimination, and human rights.
- Strengthen social welfare policies to accommodate individuals with mental disabilities and develop community-based support systems, mental health services, and destigmatisation initiatives to ensure their well-being.
- Implement policies to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- Initiate comprehensive sex education programs tailored for religious leaders.

SDG 13: Climate Action

- Implement programmes to revive traditional farming skills and knowledge. Support farmers in adopting sustainable and agroecological practices that promote biodiversity, soil health, and resilience to climate change.
- Explore and implement technology for artificial humidification systems to regulate a healthy monsoon and research and invest in innovative solutions that can supplement natural weather patterns, ensuring optimal conditions for agriculture and water resources.
- Initiate projects for artificial coral planting along coastlines to prevent wave damage.
- Develop and implement a system to control marine animal populations, especially predatory species which can help prevent overfishing, protect endangered species, and maintain a balanced marine ecosystem.
- Address human-elephant conflicts by implementing sustainable solutions to strengthen the relationship between the wildlife department and local communities through community-based conservation initiatives, education, and the use of traditional methods to mitigate conflicts.
- Advocate for and support the development of sustainable Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- Promote private sector engagement in climate-focused disaster risk reduction and emergency response. Develop supportive policy frameworks, encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors, and invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and technologies.
- Strengthen STEM to find innovative solutions for climate change and empower youth through entrepreneurship initiatives focused on climate change.

- Conduct workshops and training programs on disaster resilience specifically tailored for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Sri Lanka and Maldives' tourism sector. Equip businesses with the knowledge and tools to adapt to climate-related challenges, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- Promote policies that unequivocally affirm and protect the right to religious freedom for every individual.
- Ensure that elections prioritise the rights of persons with disabilities. Implement accessible voting facilities, provide information in accessible formats, and promote inclusive political participation, fostering a democratic process that accommodates diverse needs.
- Review and amend counterterrorism legislation to strike a balance between national security and safeguarding human rights. Ensure that laws are not used to infringe upon citizens' freedoms, and provide safeguards against arbitrary detention and abuse of power.
- Implement programmes that promote solidarity among ethnic groups. Encourage dialogue, cultural exchanges, and initiatives that celebrate diversity, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation among different communities.
- Strengthen anti-corruption measures by enhancing investigative and enforcement capacities.
- Promote multiculturalism and pluralism through education and public awareness initiatives.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Foster stronger collaboration between UN agencies and local grassroots organisations. Establish mechanisms for regular communication, resource-sharing, and joint initiatives to address pressing issues at the community level effectively.
- Encourage active participation of non-governmental organisations in decision-making processes to create platforms for NGOs to contribute their expertise, experiences, and insights in policy formulation, ensuring a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to addressing societal challenges.
- Facilitate the establishment of feminist movements and organisations in Sri Lanka. Recognise and support their contributions in advocating for gender equality,

empowering women, and challenging societal norms that perpetuate discrimination.

- Empower grassroots-level organisations focused on persons with disabilities and provide training, resources, and capacity-building initiatives to enhance their ability to advocate for disability rights, accessibility, and inclusion at the local level.
- Develop comprehensive strategies to address the lack of opportunities and access for persons with disabilities. Implement affirmative action policies, accessibility measures, and awareness campaigns to create an inclusive environment that accommodates diverse abilities.
- Enhance connections between the government and nonprofit organisations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).
- Establish foster homes specifically designed for women who have faced sexual abuse. Develop robust support systems, including legal aid and counselling services, to assist survivors in their recovery and pursuit of justice.
- Implement educational programmes to provide comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) knowledge for children in foster homes. Equip them with information on healthy relationships, consent, and their rights, ensuring their well-being and protection.
- Prioritise and encourage the private sector to fund research on SRHR topics to establish partnerships between private entities and research institutions to support studies that contribute to evidence-based policies and programmes.

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 February 15-17, 2024. The Sri Lanka and Maldives drafting team was led by Nilupuli Nayanathara, with inputs provided by Gayani Dissanayake (Sri Lanka), Dimalsha Dasanayaka (Sri Lanka), Asma Ashraf (Sri Lanka), Sudesh Abeynayaka (Sri Lanka), Charith Yohan (Sri Lanka), and Sandali Rupasinghe (Sri Lanka). Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.
