



# YOUTH CALL TO ACTION SRI LANKA

*Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for a sustainable future for young people in all their diversity.*

## Situational Analysis

Sri Lanka remains committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development despite unprecedented economic, climatic, and social challenges. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the country has continued to integrate national development priorities with the global goals. Strong SDG budget tagging within the current fiscal policy demonstrates deliberate alignment between national expenditure and sustainable development outcomes.

The institutional foundation for SDG governance remains anchored in the Sustainable Development Council (SDC), established under the Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act of 2017. This framework continues to strengthen coordination, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms across ministries and agencies. The country's third Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) for the period 2026-2035 further reinforce policy coherence between climate

ambition and the SDGs.

However, 2025 marked a critical turning point. Cyclone Ditwah triggered one of the most severe humanitarian crises in Sri Lanka's recent history, affecting all 25 districts and approximately 2.3 million people. The UN Sri Lanka data shows that as of 29 December 2025, 638 fatalities were confirmed, 175 individuals remain missing, and 129,435 houses were damaged, including 6,121 completely destroyed homes. This represents 2.1% of the national housing stock. The disaster severely disrupted infrastructure, livelihoods, and essential services, placing additional strain on social protection systems and development gains.

Sri Lanka's third Nationally Determined Contributions<sup>2</sup> (NDC 3.0) for the period 2026-2035 reflects increased ambition in both mitigation and adaptation, including a commitment to reduce cumulative greenhouse gas emissions by 20.09% relative to business-as-usual and

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to enhance carbon removals. The framework outlines sectoral actions across energy, transport, waste, industry, forestry, and blue carbon ecosystems, while promoting circular economy principles, Nature-based Solutions, and gender equity and social inclusion. The emphasis on renewable energy expansion, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, and forest restoration aligns climate ambition with broader SDG priorities. Nevertheless, the scale of recent climate impacts reinforces the urgency of accelerating adaptation measures, strengthening resilience, and addressing loss and damage.

In relation to SDG 6, Sri Lanka has achieved high levels of sanitation coverage<sup>3</sup>, with 98.9% of the population using improved or safely managed sanitation services as of 2019. Access to safe drinking water stands at 88.5%, with a national target of universal access by 2030. However, only 12.30% of local administrative units have established and operational policies for community participation in water and sanitation management, indicating gaps in decentralised governance and inclusive service delivery. The damage caused by Cyclone Ditwah further highlights the need for resilient water infrastructure and strengthened local-level engagement.

Under SDG 7, the country has made significant strides in renewable energy generation<sup>3</sup>, achieving a 50% share of renewables in total electricity generation in 2023, with a target of 70% by 2030. Electricity access has reached 99.9% of the population. Despite this progress, a considerable proportion of households continue to rely on hazardous firewood for cooking, disproportionately affecting women and girl children and exposing them to health, environmental risks and increasing care burdens. Expanding clean energy access therefore requires a comprehensive just transition that includes clean cooking solutions alongside electricity sector reforms.

Progress under SDG 9 remains mixed<sup>3</sup>. Manufacturing value added accounts for 16% of GDP, against a target of 21.88% by 2030, while manufacturing employment represents 17.3% of total employment, with a target of 36%. Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP remains very low, limiting innovation-driven growth and industrial competitiveness. The destruction of transport

infrastructure during Cyclone Ditwah further disrupted economic productivity and connectivity. Recovery efforts must therefore prioritise resilient infrastructure reconstruction, technological upgrading, and diversification of the industrial base in alignment with sustainable and low-carbon development pathways.

Under SDG 11, the housing crisis has intensified following the cyclone, with limited progress made toward the relocation of vulnerable families into permanent housing despite a target of 2,500 families by 2030. Climate-induced disasters continue to expose urban and rural poor communities, as well as gender minorities and other marginalised groups, to repeated displacement and distress, increasing the demand for stronger social security systems and disaster-resilient urban planning. Integrating climate risk assessments into housing and infrastructure development remains critical to preventing recurrent losses.

With regard to SDG 17, Sri Lanka continues to face financing, governance, and data challenges. The aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah has amplified the need for international support and strengthened partnerships. Sustainable industrial investment and improved debt management strategies are essential to ensure fiscal stability. While the ratification of the UN High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement) signals commitment to international environmental cooperation, gaps persist in SDG data availability, particularly disaggregated data necessary for targeting vulnerable groups. Planning, monitoring, and reporting deficiencies, alongside governance challenges, continue to constrain effective implementation. Strengthened coordination, policy coherence, transparency, and improved data systems will be central to accelerating progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations for Sri Lanka on selected SDGs under review to achieve the optimum target are as follows:

### SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

- » Combat the salinisation of groundwater

in coastal and island cities, which directly threatens the drinking water security of youth and children.

- » Provide access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, with special attention to children, women, persons with disabilities, and rural youth in vulnerable situations.
- » Install rainwater harvesting systems in all schools and public buildings to increase water-use efficiency.
- » Take immediate action to protect and restore traditional irrigation systems to enhance water security and buffer against droughts.
- » Ensure gender-responsive WASH services through inclusive design, menstrual health support, safety measures, and participation of women and marginalised communities.
- » Immediately halt illegal construction and the filling of wetlands, which are critical for natural flood mitigation and biodiversity.
- » Integrate traditional knowledge with modern forecasting tools to help rural communities adapt to water stress.

## **SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY**

- » Provide financial support for low-income households to transition from firewood cooking to cleaner and safer energy sources.
- » Modernise the national grid to ensure the government can achieve its 70% renewable energy target by 2030.
- » Call for the early decommissioning of high-cost coal power plants to reduce carbon emissions.
- » Upgrade TVET centers into Green Skills Centers, ensuring young people and women are able to upskill and participate in the renewable energy transition.
- » Create financing mechanisms that specifically support youth-led innovations and renewable energy projects.
- » Ensure local communities are consulted and ecosystems are safeguarded when building new

solar and wind power plants.

## **SDG 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

- » Develop climate-resilient infrastructure specifically for schools, universities, and children's spaces.
- » Promote regenerative and circular economy models among young entrepreneurs to double industry's share of employment through sustainable practices.
- » Channel concessional credit and climate financing toward youth-led green startups and MSMEs.
- » Invest in "Green Skills Innovation Labs" at universities to enhance the technological capabilities of the youth workforce.
- » Enhance global partnerships to facilitate the transfer of sustainable and resilient infrastructure technologies to Sri Lanka.
- » Enforce stronger Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence to hold local polluters accountable for industrial waste dumping.
- » Bridge the digital and gender divide by expanding equitable STEM education, digital infrastructure, and innovation opportunities for women and marginalised communities.

## **SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES**

- » Ensure the relocation of communities from disaster-prone areas is carried out through bottom-up strategies that protect livelihoods and traditions.
- » Upgrade and expand the public transportation system to address urban traffic congestion and reduce emissions.
- » Ensure public spaces remain safe, accessible, and inclusive for all, especially women, children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.
- » Mandate the meaningful consultation of youth, children, women and persons with disability

in the design and management of cities and community spaces.

- » Conduct Cultural Impact Assessments (CIAs) to safeguard natural and cultural heritage from climate-induced damage.
- » Form Youth Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Task Forces to lead community early warning systems.
- » Promote traditional construction knowledge alongside modern planning to build sustainable and resilient structures.

## **SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS**

- » Introduce a National Youth Climate Sounding Board to ensure policy coherence and intergenerational equity in all national plans.
- » Institutionalise youth participation in policy development and implementation across all government ministries and agencies, ensuring intergenerational justice.
- » Explore debt-for-nature swaps with bilateral and multilateral creditors to both protect

ecosystems and reduce the debt burden.

- » Develop financial mechanisms specifically designed to support youth-led environmental initiatives and startups.
- » Promote youth-driven data collection disaggregated by age and gender to ensure equity in SDG and NDC reporting.
- » Encourage women's and youth upskilling and employment in sustainable and climate-resilient industries and services.

*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 18-20 February, 2026. The Sri Lanka country brief was drafted by Bodh Maathura. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.*