

# Women2030 Monitoring and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals and Development Justice



## Sri Lanka

Prepared by Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)

### Country Background

The 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees equality and non-discrimination to all citizens. Sri Lanka has followed a private sector led liberal market oriented economic policy since 1977 privatising public enterprises and reducing social sector expenditure. The end of the 30-year armed separatist conflict in 2009 saw the economy growing but is at present it is on a low growth trajectory. The debt ratio is over 75 per cent of GDP while revenue is only 13 per cent. The current development thrust is to promote trade-led growth, attract more export-oriented Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and enter into private public partnerships especially for infrastructure development with the FDI projected to triple to US\$ 4 billion by 2022<sup>1</sup>.

These, along with the current push for development of land markets, Public-Private Partnerships, are expected to have significant environmental and social impacts such as land grabbing and landlessness, displacement and consequently involuntary resettlement, influx of foreign labour while exacerbating gender-based violence.

Poverty has declined over the years, but income and regional disparities are stark between the Western and other provinces. Critical issues to be addressed are youth unemployment, the country's ageing population, the spread of non-communicable diseases, climate change and extreme weather events. Persons with disability, female heads of households, and those who are geographically isolated are often the most vulnerable to the impact of the macro policies mentioned above.

### Architecture for SDGs Implementation

The Sustainable Development Act, No. 19 of 2017 provides the legal and administrative framework to implement the SDGs. The fragmented institutional structure that includes 51 ministries and 425 public institutions, nine provincial administrations, 325 local authorities, and 25 districts poses challenges to the achievement of the SDGs. A Stakeholder Engagement Platform was set up by the Ministry of Wildlife, Sustainable Development & Regional Development for consultations when preparing Sri Lanka's Voluntary National Review that was presented at the HLPF in June 2018. CSOs including women's organisations were invited twice in workshops where the majority of the stakeholders were from the line ministries. The government has prioritised Goals 1, 4, 7, 10 and 11 for implementation in three phases - 2017-2020; 2020-2025; and 2025-2030. It has developed a National SDG Roadmap, National SDG Action Plan and an Institutional coherence mapping. A Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) by UNDP however, showed a nonalignment between the policy initiatives in the current Public Investment Programme and the various SDGs target areas.

<sup>1</sup> Santander Trade Portal. Retrieved from <https://en.portal.santandertrade.com/establish-overseas/sri-lanka/investing-3>

**Country population:**  
21.67 million (2018)

**GDP per capita:**  
4,073 USD (2017)

**Palma Ratio:**  
1.9 (2010-2017)

**UNDP Gender Inequality Index:**  
0.354 (2017)

**UNDP Gender Inequality Rank:**  
80 (2017)

**Government budget expenditure:**

**Military Expenditure:**  
4.9 Billion USD (2.17% of GDP) (2017)

**Education Expenditure:**  
2.81% of GDP (2017)

**Health Expenditure:**  
3.5% of GDP (2017)

✓ **Are CSOs included in the mechanisms for developing the national plan and implementation of the SDGs?**

✓ **Are women's rights organisations included in the mechanisms for developing the national plan and implementation of the SDGs?**

✓ **Is the information/ data accessible?**

## Women's Priorities: Findings on selected targets and/or indicators

CENWOR conducted field work and the research with women and civil society groups in seven districts based on the five targets of SDG 5. The findings of the study are presented in the diagram below showing the current situation of implementation of Goal 5. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the best outcome, and the orange dots represent the current situation for each of the criteria based on the realities of these groups.



### Goal 5



Sri Lanka closed its gender gap in the category of 'health and survival' in 2006 and increased its score in 'educational attainment'. However, Sri Lanka's overall gender gap has been declining since 2006 due to low labour force participation and lack of political empowerment.

Priorities for women are the repeal of discriminatory laws, livelihood generation, eliminating violence, and participation in political decision making. Discriminatory personal laws prohibit women disposing property without the permission of the spouse, and the general law denies inheritance of state land to females if there is a male in the family. Women have lost their productive resources due to the acquisition of land by the state for large scale development projects, allocation of land to private companies, and encroachment by developers with the connivance of the political establishment.

	2006		2018	
	Rank out of 115	Score	Rank out of 149	Score
Global Gender Gap Score	13	0.720	100	0.676
Economic Participation and Opportunity	84	0.545	125	0.549
Educational Attainment	52	0.990	90	0.988
Health and Survival	01	0.980	01	0.980
Political empowerment	07	0.365	65	0.188

Women have become victims of unsupervised micro credit agencies and the demand for women's labour has dwindled with increasing agricultural mechanisation. In the formal sector, recruitment of workers especially in export processing zones, where labour regulation and protections are minimised and unionising is prohibited, are dominated by women, and the state through manpower agencies have removed employer accountability, and eroded labour rights. A government regulation banning women with children under five years from migrating has also given rise to trafficking of women.

Women's representation has not exceeded 5.8 per cent in the parliament; and only 4.3 per cent hold ministerial positions. Affirmative action was introduced at the local government level but structural barriers such as family disapproval, financial constraints, political party dynamics and difficulty in getting nominations, being compelled to campaign for male candidates, and subversion of the law when political parties prioritise women that they have selected over those who were elected, continue to demotivate women in political participation.

Domestic violence, rape and incest have increased over the years. Over 90 per cent of women have faced sexual harassment in public transport. Cyber violence is an emerging concern. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is often considered almost non-existent, is being carried out surreptitiously in elite and rural communities.

## Recommendations

In order to achieve meaningful implementation of Goals 5 and 8, the government of Sri Lanka must:

- Repeal discriminatory personal laws and administrative provisions such as the Penal Code, the Land Development Ordinance, general personal laws, the Muslim Personal Law, the Kandyan Law and the Tesawalamai Law, Vagrants Ordinance;
- Enact the Women's Rights Act; establish the National Commission on Women;
- Introduce a quota for parliamentary representation and cabinet portfolios;
- Repeal discriminatory cadre provisions e.g. Sri Lanka Police that restrict women's entry and upward career mobility;
- Increase women's labour force participation by providing public quality childcare services, encourage skill development of women in non-traditional vocations that have a market demand, support female entrepreneurship, recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid/informal care work, and eliminate discriminatory labour practices including in wage setting
- Criminalise all form of violence against women;
- Increase public investments on education and health, advance women's access to essential public services and universal social protection for all women;
- Increase the budgetary allocations for achieving Goal 5 and the cross-cutting targets; and
- Introduce participatory gender budgeting.



The Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) was established in 1984 with a mission to empower women through engaging in research, action research, training, information dissemination, and advocacy. CENWOR's overall objective of this project is to monitor the implementation of SDG 5 and its interlinkages with other goals and targets across the SDGs. CENWOR expects to use the learning from this project to strengthen women's ability to influence the development of policies and programmes, and monitor their implementation.

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