

**G2G Voices**  
**UNFPA Inter-generational Dialogues**

# Bringing generations together for our Sri Lanka

**“Is our young  
population a driving  
force to determine  
Sri Lanka's middle  
income status?”**

*Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka  
16 December, 2015*



## Table of Content

	Page
<b>Rationale: Why inter-generational dialogues?.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Kick start.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Inter-generational Discussion Points</b>	
<b>1. Youth unemployment.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Need for youth participation in politics.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Increase in Sri Lanka’s aging labour force.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Conclusion: Connecting the dots.....</b>	<b>8</b>

## Rationale: Why inter-generational dialogues?

Sri Lanka has heard the voice of the experienced; the older generation. We have learnt from their wisdom. Sri Lanka recognizes the energy of young people; the energy for innovation and social change. Generations have been appreciated and recognized for their unique strengths. But has Sri Lanka been able to harness the collective potential of its entire population, capturing all generations together?

# Why “Inter-generational” dialogues?

This is why United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka is facilitating a series of inter-generational dialogues to bring generations together; bringing wisdom together with the energy for social change, to collectively voice the opinions of three generations towards Sri Lanka’s socio-economic development.

The inter-generational dialogues aim to create an inclusive platform for both young and old, to contribute towards maximizing the demographic dividend in support of Sri Lanka’s middle income status.

This initiative is however not self-standing but constitutes the cornerstone of the UNFPA Sri Lanka’s Policy Engagement Framework. The evidence and insights gathered through the dialogues will be part of UNFPA’s population portal ([www.population.lk](http://www.population.lk)) and will support policy makers and decision-making processes with an in-depth analysis of population dynamics beyond data.

**“A country with both increasing numbers of young people and declining fertility has the potential to reap a demographic dividend”**  
- United Nations Population Fund

## Kick Start

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sri Lanka launched its first inter-generational dialogue on the shifting population dimension in Sri Lanka on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 in Colombo. The dialogue was open to the public and the audience consisted of both young and elderly. The focus of the discussion was on youth as a driving force in maintaining Sri Lanka's middle income status, taking into consideration the demographic bonus, increased dependency and an ageing population.

With Sri Lanka emerging as a middle-income country, UNFPA Sri Lanka focuses on assisting the government develop evidence based policies in the areas of women, youth, aging, fertility and migration, to advance equity, accountability and quality in all spheres of decision making in the country, by providing evidence based policy recommendations.

By using and analyzing data from Sri Lanka's 2012 census and, through recommendations from a series of intergenerational policy dialogues, UNFPA hopes to build a body of evidence that documents shifting population dimensions, and identifies needs, that policymakers need to fulfill.

Population data is used as a basis for the generation to generation dialogues, and is taken from UNFPA's publication "20.4 Million" which provides a comprehensive but simple overview of Sri Lanka's population. The analysis in the publication is based on the latest available information from the Population and Housing census of 2012, various surveys, research studies and administrative records.

The panelists at this inaugural dialogue were;

- Professor Mohan Munasinghe, shared the 2007 Nobel Prize for Peace and Chairman of Munasinghe Institute of Development
- Ms. Aaranya Rajasingam, Executive Director, Viluthu Centre for Human Resource Development
- Mr. Travis Gomez, Economist and Vice President at Frontier Research (Pvt) Ltd
- Ms. Naushalya Rajapaksha, the official youth delegate from Sri Lanka to the United Nations General Assembly
- Ms. Shyama Salgado, Senior Programme Manager, International Labour Organisation (ILO)
- Mr. Samantha Liyanawaduge, Executive Director of HelpAge Sri Lanka



Guest speaker:

Ms. Hirunika Premachandra, Member of Parliament

## Inter-generational Discussion Points:

**“There is a high level of unemployment recorded among youth – i.e. new job seekers, as there appears to be a mismatch between the aspirations of those who enter the job market and the availability of jobs.”**

- 20.4 Million -UNFPA Publication on the population of Sri Lanka (2015)

The following three **key points** were discussed among participants from three generations on how Sri Lanka’s young population can play a positive role in determining the country’s middle income status:

### 1. Youth Unemployment

Data from the Labour Force Survey 2014 by the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka reveals that there is 20.3% of youth unemployment in the country among young people between the ages 15-24 years and a further 8.3%

unemployment among youth between age 25-29 year olds. This issue of youth unemployment was discussed as a hindrance in determining Sri Lanka’s middle income status.

### Points raised at the dialogue:

- A conducive policy environment is needed to maximize the demographic dividend and sustain economic growth especially in the manufacturing and service sectors in the country.
- The use of soft skills such as negotiation skills and conflict resolution skills – without which the sustainability of new entrants to the labour force will be negatively impacted.
- There is a need for values education which will enable young people to work with integrity, respect and tolerance in a labour market which is competitive for resources.
- Addressing unemployment among young people requires a multi-faceted approach which brings together all national policies to emphasize on the importance of maximizing youth potential while the demographic dividend lasts.

***“In Sri Lanka the demographic dividends started in 1992, and a lot of this working age population was not fully utilized in terms of building that manufacturing base. As a result we have only a few more years to go and there isn’t much space to use this labour surplus to build up”***

- Mr.Travis Gomez, Economist

### Sri Lanka’s policy landscape on youth:

- The National Youth Policy (2014)
- The National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical & Vocational Education(2009)
- The National Human Resources and Employment Policy (2011)
- National Enterprise Policy (2009)
- National Action Plan on Youth Employment (2006)

### Policy pointers from the participants on how to make youth a driving force for change:

#### Job creation and training:

- The service sector in Sri Lanka needs to be developed.
- Create flexi-hour jobs for youth taking into account new modes of communication through IT, and part-time youth education programs.
- Strengthen public employment services.
- Mainstreaming soft skills training and development as part of the national university curricula for undergraduates.

- Mechanism to monitor and evaluate the presence of youth in the skilled and unskilled labour markets in Sri Lanka and dissemination of this evidence among youth through the national secondary and tertiary education institutions to make youth aware of the present context of the youth labour force.

#### **Education reforms:**

- Job oriented education curricula with insight on job prospects of undergraduate programs offered at national universities.
- Strengthen entrepreneurship education with an emphasis on innovation and social change.
- Soft skills development programs at tertiary/university levels to promote professionalism in the workforce – promote comprehensive reproductive healthcare knowledge.
- Mainstream values education in the national education curricula through the life education program which already exist in the school education system. – Reform in the life education curricula upon evaluation.
- Develop a coordinating mechanism between ministries and institutions in the education field.

#### **“Youth” in all policies:**

- Recognize “youth” as an economic and social opportunity in all policies. Hence, identifying the issues and potentials of young people will not be limited to the National Youth Policy. This will render all national policies to have an inter-relation, coordination and cohesiveness among each other, resulting in a conducive policy environment.

#### **“Policy into practice”:**

*“The faculty of law at the University of Colombo is working on introducing an internship program in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year for their students. In addition, the Employers Federation of Ceylon (EFC) is working on tying up with universities (9 as of now) to place young people in the membership in EFC. Some of these young people will then go into internship and shadowing programs in their 4<sup>th</sup> year – this is a salutary move in the part of the universities and the EFC”*

- Ms. Shyama Salgado, Senior Program Manager International Labour Organisation



**“71.5% young people in Sri Lanka were largely inactive politically; only 1.9% was involved in any political work and 1.3% in trade union activities.”**

20.4 Million - UNFPA Publication on the population of Sri Lanka (2015)

## 2. Need for youth participation in politics

Youth participation in politics is becoming increasingly important for Sri Lanka due to the large youth population it currently possesses. Therefore, greater participation of young people in politics would reflect in youth sensitive policy formulation in the country, making young people an integral part of policy formulation which enables social and economic growth to determine Sri Lanka’s middle income status.

The following points on youth participation in politics were raised at the dialogue:

- Lack of female participation in politics due to marginalization and discrimination at the local and national level. – It was heavily debated if a quota should be in place to encourage women entering the parliament and how it may impact the dilemma of merit vs. gender.

**In favor of a quota for women’s participation in parliament**

***There is very strong resistant among men and women to accept women as leaders even though women are very involved in political participation. This is why we need a quota”***

- Ms. Aaranya Rajasingam, Executive Director, Viluthu

**Against a quota for women’s participation in parliament**

***“A woman should not participate in the parliament just because we have reserved seats for women. A woman should be in the parliament if only she actually deserves it”***

- Ms. Naushalya Rajapaksha, UN youth delegate 2015

### Present policy options

- National Youth Policy (2014)
- Women’s Charter Sri Lanka (1993)
- National Policy Framework on Social Integration (2012)
- National Action Plan on Youth Employment (2006)

### Policy pointers from the participants on making youth a driving force for change:

#### Encourage young women’s political participation in government:

- Local level awareness initiatives among women to promote political participation in government.
- Promote women’s political participation in government through national education curricula such as the school curricula in civics education.
- Engage with female undergraduates (already in youth leadership positions) through capacity building programs at the university level to promote educated women to enter local government/ national level politics.



**“With enhanced life expectancy, Sri Lanka will need to work towards retaining a larger proportion of the population within the labour force for a longer duration to maintain a sustainable dependency ratio.”**

- 20.4 Million – UNFPA’s Publication on the population (2015)

### 3. Increase in Sri Lanka’s aging labour force

An increase in the aging population can be considered both a boost and a curb to Sri Lanka’s economic growth. In the case of young people, following can be highlighted as drawbacks of increasing in aging population in the labour force:

- An increase in the number of older people in

the economy would mean the dependency ratio would increase with greater number of older people depending on youth people.

Increasing the age of retirement could be a solution to balancing the dependency ratio but it would also mean that older workers remain in the labour force for longer, creating a backlog of young people, unable to enter the labour force until the older ones retire.

#### Participant views on the aging labour force in Sri Lanka:

*“The mandatory age of retirement should be raised which is currently happening in places like the World Bank (raised from 62 to 67) – to make use of the huge wealth of experience in the ageing population”*

- Prof. Mohan Munasinghe,  
Nobel Prize winner

*“There is a need to increase the retiring age we can see more and more elderly people continuously working in the future”*

- Mr. Samantha Liyanawaduge,  
Executive Director, Helpage

#### Present policy options

- Population and reproductive health policy (1998)
- National human resources and employment policy (2011)
- National Council for Elders, Ministry of Social Services

#### Policy pointers from the participants on making youth a driving force for change:

##### Education reforms:

- Knowledge on elderly healthcare and other support services need to be mainstreamed into the education system in order to accommodate for a rapidly ageing population in the future.



## Conclusion: Connecting the dots



The inter-generational dialogues will be an integral part of the United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka's national policy engagement framework to advance policies on women and youth, rights and health.

The dialogues will not only capture voices of three generations, but also take into account the opinions, critiques and recommendations of both young and old in the areas of women, youth, aging, fertility and migration. Future dialogues will continue to highlight these areas, supporting national decision making with evidence beyond data. G2G dialogues will also be taken to the outskirts of the country, to assure every voice is counted towards Sri Lanka's decision making process.

**For more information:**

Contact: Jenneth Macan Markar- Sonntag  
Policy and Social Change Specialist  
Address: United Nations Population Fund,  
202, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka  
Email: [macanmarkar-sonntag@unfpa.org](mailto:macanmarkar-sonntag@unfpa.org)  
Telephone: +94 11 2580840

**Follow us on:**



[www.srilanka.unfpa.org](http://www.srilanka.unfpa.org)



[www.facebook.com/unfpa.srilanka](http://www.facebook.com/unfpa.srilanka)



[www.kiyanna.lk](http://www.kiyanna.lk)



[www.twitter.com/UNFPASriLanka](http://www.twitter.com/UNFPASriLanka)



**UNFPA Sri Lanka's population portal**