

Generation Youth

Yielding the Returns on Investments



United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka
202, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka
Tel: 94-11-2552431, 94-11-2580840 Fax: 94-11-2580698
Website: <http://srilanka.unfpa.org>

 www.facebook.com/pages/Unfpa-Sri-Lanka-Page
 <https://twitter.com/UNFPASriLanka>





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Generation Youth

Yielding the Returns on Investments





The Story of Success...



Over the last years, and as the world community is preparing for the 2015 review of the Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, young people have been at the center of the international development discourse. Invest in Youth. Young People bear the future of the generations to come. Unleash young people's potential. Such phrases have become common among policy – and decision-makers and make the headlines in social media and at various youth fora around the globe.

What does this mean for Sri Lanka? At UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and as our host government is welcoming the world's youth to the World Conference on Youth in Colombo, we thought we would tell the story of Sri Lanka's youth. The aim of this booklet is to showcase what the investments over years in young people,

their health and their opportunities have yielded. What you are about to discover are the faces, the stories and the lives of young Sri Lankans who have excelled in their areas of interest and in their passions. They have managed, through their spirit of entrepreneurship, combined with an enabling – albeit sometimes challenging – environment to demonstrate leadership. These young women and men are leaders in their own right. UNFPA is aware that the eight portraits are only some of the many successful examples of Sri Lankan youth leadership. We believe that these young Sri Lankan women and men are heroes and role models. We hope that they inspire you.

Alain Sibenaler
Representative Sri Lanka
United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka

Why Invest in Young People?

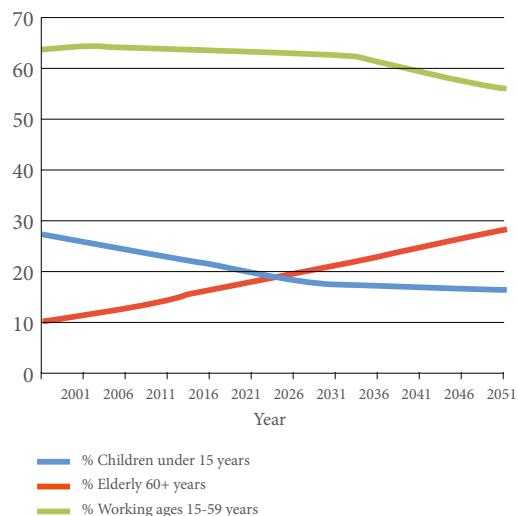
In almost all countries in Southeast Asia, a phenomenon called the demographic dividend has had a positive impact on economic growth. The demographic dividend is the accelerated economic growth that may result from a decline in a country's mortality and fertility and the subsequent change in the age structure of the population. The age structure transition in any country, after the lapse of a specific period of transitional process, will approach a demographic dividend phase and during that time the country will have a high ratio of population in the working ages, in relation to the dependent age categories, the aged and the children. This period is recognized as the "window of opportunity" suitable for an economic take-off, provided that the other factors such as political stability, adequate savings and investment, human capital and an IT-based knowledge economy exist. Therefore, the main and first manifestation of the demographic dividend is the change in the population structure of a country.

This demographic phenomenon has been a constantly debated topic among policy-makers, researchers and other stakeholders. However,

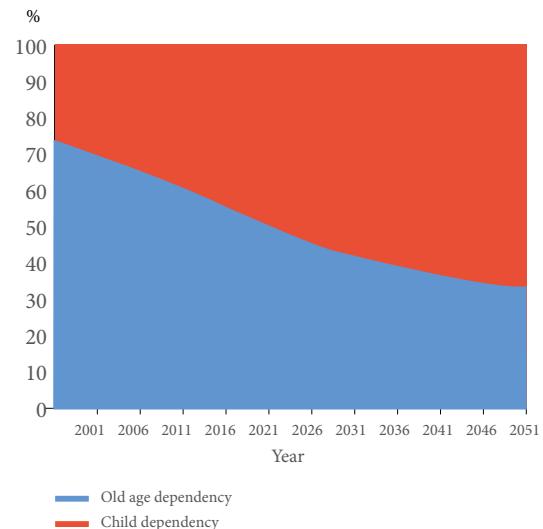
a demographic dividend will not last forever. During this period, the identification of the socio-economic policy instruments that yield the maximum out of the demographic dividend is a priority. At the same time, this is a challenging task for any developing country and Sri Lanka is not an exception.

Changes in age structure occurred predominantly as a result of the changes in fertility and mortality. Broad age categories of children, labour force and elderly can have major implications for Sri Lanka's socio-economic development. Age structure changes are clearly reflected in the dependency ratios. Dependency ratio shows the number of dependents in the child (<15 years) and in the old (60 years and over) populations per 100 persons in the working ages. Child age dependency ratio shows the number of children (<15 years) per 100 persons in the working ages while old age dependency ratio shows the number of aged persons (60 years and over) per 100 persons in the working ages.

Percentage distribution of broad population groups, 2001 to 2051



Dependency Ratios, 2001-2051, Sri Lanka



The proportion of children under 15 years of age is projected to decrease from 26.3 per cent in 2001 to 14.9 per cent in 2051. The proportion of persons whose ages range from 15 to 59 will change gradually, passing from 64.5 per cent in 2001 to 56.2 per cent in 2051. The proportion of persons aged 60 years or over is 9.2 percent in 2001 but by 2051, it will increase to 28.8 percent.

In 2001, the total dependency ratio was 55.0 which means that there are 55 dependent persons for every 100 working age persons of which 41 persons were child dependents while 14 were old dependents. Child dependency has declined and old dependency increased during the period 2001 to 2051. As a result of the rapid growth in old age dependency which out paces the decline in young

dependency, total dependence of the population is expected to grow significantly from mid 2030s.

It is against the background of these demographic dimensions that Sri Lanka has successfully managed to invest in its youth by prioritizing investments in women, in health and in education. Sustained and increased investment in sexual and reproductive health services promises tremendous benefits to women, families and societies. In addition to improved health, sexual and reproductive health services contribute to economic growth, societal and gender equity, and democratic governance. Sexual and reproductive health services encompass three main areas: contraceptive services, maternal health services and services related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, and other gynacologic and urologic problems.

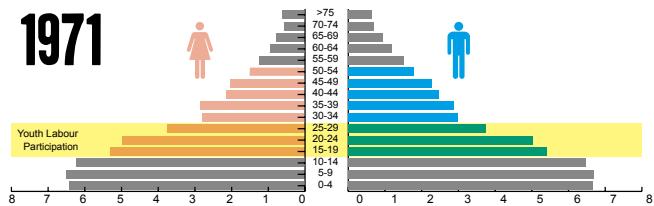
Sri Lanka, with a free health care system has much to boast in the provision of reproductive health services. By applying the right policies and making the right investments to increase access to family planning, emergency obstetric care and skilled attendance at birth Sri Lanka has

shown that maternal mortality can be reduced in a country even prior to attaining high levels of economic development. Thus, Sri Lanka now has the lowest maternal mortality rate in South Asia at 38.6 per 100,000 live births (2009-2010).

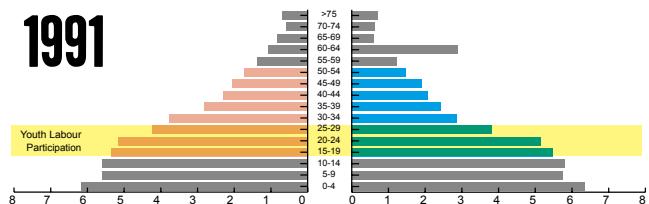
While maintaining these investments and applying the existing policies, several issues under reproductive health needs to be given attention to further capitalize on its positive health outcomes. These include, reducing preventable maternal deaths, addressing the rising levels of teenage pregnancies, providing reproductive health care for women beyond 49 years of age and tacking inequities in access to quality reproductive healthcare.

DEMOCRAPHICS AND LABOUR PARTICIPATION

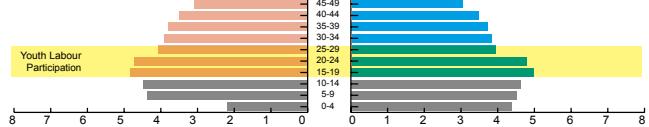
1971



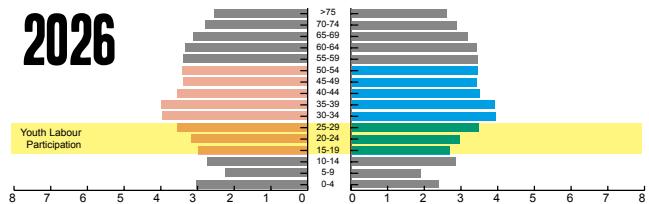
1991



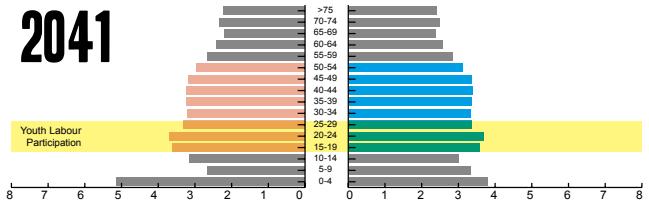
2011



2026



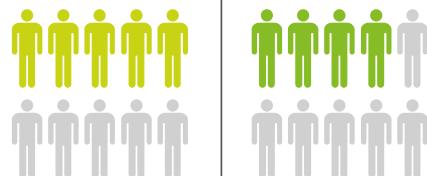
2041



YOUTH LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY SECTOR

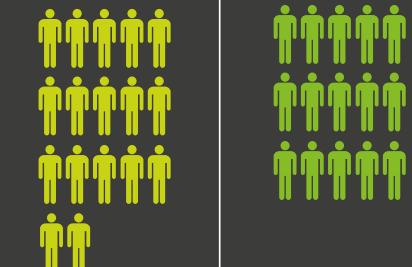
NATIONAL

2006 2010
51% 44%



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

17% 15%



Unemployment is a percentage of the youth labour force participation rate.



Nimali

Gunawardane

Pursuing the Entrepreneurial Dream

Failure did not stop Nimali Gunawardane's persistence to find success. It merely emboldened her. Hailing from Ambalantota, this dynamic young woman personifies the fighting spirit that makes a successful entrepreneur.

Stalling at the start

There were seven people in my family. It was difficult for us to afford basic living expenses.

Consequently, a General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) is the only formal qualification I was able to achieve. I sat the exams three times over three years. When I finally passed, my results were not sufficient to secure a place in a university.

I started looking for a job immediately after the last set of exams. Job prospects were grim for a young girl with just a high school certificate. A job offer came from a clothes manufacturing factory. I took it.

Two steps forward, one step back

While I was at the garment factory, a friend contacted me offering an investment plan for a start-up in the coir industry. Coir is the fibre derived from the outer husk of coconuts. It has quite a few uses. The idea was to start a coir mill. I found this very intriguing.

I borrowed money from friends and family to start the mill. I had absolutely no experience in business. My inexperience caused a loss of over Rs. 300,000. This was a devastating financial loss.

My parents derided my effort as a mere shot in the dark. In their eyes, I was a girl was attempting a man's job. They said I would not be a success.

Fighting on

I wanted to get back on my feet. I was convinced that the coir mill was a good business. I wanted to try again armed with all the lessons I learned from the initial failure.





I approached many banks for assistance. All my applications were rejected. However, I had confidence in myself and that the opportunities available in my country would not let down an enterprising and determined young person like me. Finally, I approached the local Chamber of Commerce. The officials here offered their assistance to pursue my venture. The Chamber of Commerce provided a loan for equipment and a fresh start.

Youth Business Sri Lanka, a member of Youth Business International (YBI), provided mentorship and support to grow the mill.

**Within a matter of months,
I revived my business.**

Today

Today, I employ about ten individuals. My environmentally-conscious business produces and exports coir for mattresses and piths. We also make coconut husk chips. This is an extremely unique product. These chips are exported to Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom. They are used in agriculture and water purification.

My business now has projected turnovers reaching millions of rupees.

In 2013, YBI chose me to be the 'Start-up Entrepreneur of the Year'. Entrepreneurs from over forty countries were considered for this title. This was a thrilling experience.

I am thankful to those who believed in me when no one else would. I am also thankful to the failures I had. Without failure, I would not have found success today.



Thavarajah

Jeyaseelan

Doctoring an Era of Prosperity

Sri Lanka's performance in maternal health indicators is enviable. For example, the nation's maternal death rate is the lowest in South Asia. Contribution from doctors like Jayaseelan makes all this possible.

Healthcare in Sri Lanka

After medical school, I became an intern in the Vavuniya General Hospital (VGH). This was in 2009. VGH is a state funded hospital in northern Sri Lanka. It is about 140 kilometres south of Jaffna.

Maternal health is a particularly important area that we see continued improvements.

Over the last few years, I have had some exceptionally rewarding experiences and can truly say I am part of a healthcare system that really goes a long way in saving lives.

Life as a doctor

Out of my many experiences as a doctor, there is a particular incident that I recall very clearly. A woman in her last three months of pregnancy was visiting some relatives. During the visit, she suddenly went into labour. The family called a public health midwife. The public health midwife did not have the time to rush her to the nearest hospital. She took a quick decision to deliver the baby immediately.

Following delivery, the mother began to experience severe bleeding, known as Postpartum Haemorrhage (PPH), profuse bleeding after delivery, which is the leading cause of maternal deaths in Sri Lanka. In this case, the public health midwife correctly recognized that a portion of the placenta was retained inside the mother. Retained placenta is one of the causes of PPH.

The midwife requested help from the nearest hospital and an ambulance was immediately dispatched to the location. The patient's assessment at the scene showed an immediate need to transfer her to a hospital.

I was on duty when the mother arrived at our hospital. The patient's state was serious. We had very little time to intervene before the unthinkable could happen. Fortunately, our team quickly stabilized the patient and treated the retained placenta.

Its rewarding to know that the mother and the child are living today because of the skills and collective effort of our health staff, whether at the community level or the hospital.

Nurturing Life

There are many programmes in our area that support healthy pregnancies. Some initiatives for example cover issues such as underweight pregnant women and sometimes teenage pregnancies.

A mother and child form the most precious unit of life. It is very encouraging to see the level of care afforded to mothers in Sri Lanka today.

I am proud to be a part of a robust healthcare system where my potential as a medical doctor can be reached.





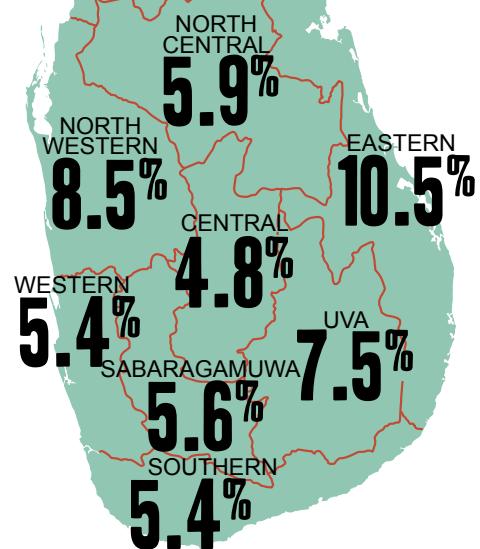
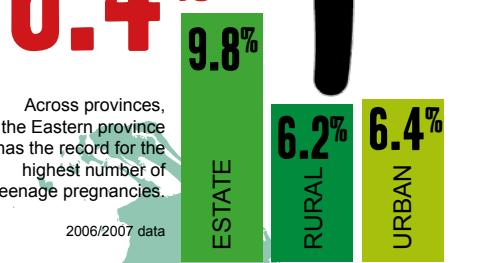
TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Adolescent women aged 15 to 19 have begun child bearing or were already mothers or are pregnant with their first child.

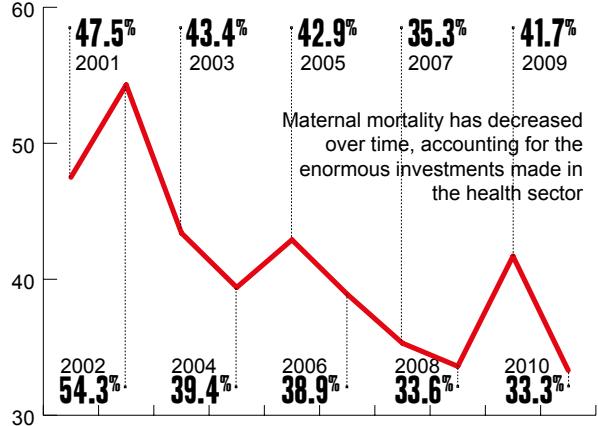
6.4%

Across provinces, the Eastern province has the record for the highest number of teenage pregnancies.

2006/2007 data



MATERNAL MORTALITY RATE ON THE DECLINE



15-19
41%

20-29
22%



**MALNOURISHED
FEMALE YOUTH - 2006**



Anoka
Abeyratne

Empowerment Through Conservation

Anoka Abeyratne is an environmentalist and a budding lawyer. She was listed as one of twenty-five most powerful and influential young people in the world by Youth Service America. Anoka's passion is transforming Sri Lanka's ecology.

The tsunami

I was 13 when the tsunami devastated Sri Lanka. Coastal towns were destroyed. The death toll quickly rose to unimaginable numbers. The devastation left a nagging question in my mind. Why were some areas more damaged than others?

Surprisingly, the answer turned out to be mangroves. Mangroves are unique ecosystems teeming with life. Just one hundred meters of mangrove vegetation is able to reduce up to 66% of a tidal wave's impact. I wondered how many lives could have been saved if mangroves were present in the affected areas.

Mangrove replantation

Mangrove replantation became my very first initiative. I set to work immediately deploying mangrove replantation programmes across the island. We have now planted over 12,000

mangroves. However, it was a difficult journey. No one was willing to take me seriously as a thirteen year old. Fortunately, I gained support from organisations like the National Youth Services Council. Support from these authorities has made many things possible.

As I pursued mangrove replantation, I came across a number of other environmental threats. Since my work had gathered a lot of momentum at this point, I began to broaden efforts to engage other conservation projects.

Looking back, I am very proud of the work we did at Bolgoda Lake. Bolgoda Lake was a precious ecosystem under serious threat. It is located just south of Colombo. Our efforts restored the lake back to an environment rich with animal and plant life.

I founded Sustain Solutions, a non-profit volunteer organization, to act as an umbrella for all this activity. We are a team of six working to conserve the environment and empower youth. Aside from environmental projects, Sustain Solutions provide youth training; offer consultation; and organize volunteer activities.

Growin' Money

One thing we realised with our replantation project is that villagers in relevant areas needed additional motivation to get involved. This is when the social enterprise Growin' Money was conceived.

Growin' Money gave villagers ownership of the replantation effort. Once mangroves were grown, we would use them to create designer handicraft. Our unique designs are sold at a premium price. With the absence of middlemen, most of the proceeds end up in the villager's hands. 5% of the revenue is allocated to a social fund dedicated to developing these communities.

One of our greatest achievements is increasing the income in these communities by 45% through this initiative.

Recognition

I was appointed as a Global Youth Ambassador for Education with the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education in New York. I received the SAARC Youth Award in 2010 and the Commonwealth Youth Award in 2013.

I am very thankful for the continuing support from the British Council, Commonwealth Secretariat, World

Economic Forum, Youth Service America, SAARC and the Ministry of External Affairs.

I was very humbled to be featured on the Huffington Post and Youth Services of America as one of the 25 most influential young people in the world. I also had opportunity to speak at the TEDx conference in Colombo.

I feel very fortunate to be living in a country where the youth are recognised for their work.

The future

I am currently completing a master's degree in development at the University of Colombo. I am also completing an attorney-at-law qualification.

I am hoping to participate actively in formulation of environmental policy. I plan to significantly expand Sustain Solutions.

I am continually motivated by the vision of preserving the beauty of our country and planet for centuries to come. I hope all youth are inspired with this same idea. When I consider the progress we have been able to make, I do not think this is a far-fetched goal.





Bathiya &
Santhush

The Musical Bridge to the World

Bathiya and Santhush are household names in Sri Lanka. The pair of musicians had enormous impact on the local music industry. These superstars modernised Sri Lankan music and took it to the world.

Our beginnings

Music brought us together. We were just out of school when we started collaborating. Sadly, we noticed a big divide in society based on music. There was no local music equally enjoyed by all Sri Lankans. We saw this as an opportunity to create something fresh. However, developing a sound that appealed to a tri-lingual multi-ethnic society was not going to be easy.

In 1998, we released our very first album 'Vasanthaye'. The album was different to anything else in the music scene at the time. It had a heavy dose of oriental sound complemented by strong western rhythm and melody.

Elevated by youth

We faced a lot of resistance to our creative approach from the industry and existing musicians. Not everyone enjoyed our music from the beginning. Fortunately, Sri Lanka is a country with a strong youth segment. We knew if our music could rally the youth, our music had a chance. This is exactly what happened.

Our young fan-base drove increasing airplay on local stations. With this exposure, our fans began to diversify. With renewed confidence, we set to work on our second album titled 'Life - Sahashraye Manusath Kule'. This album had a very heavy western influence.

It was at this point we represented Sri Lanka at the Kazakhstan Music Festival. Over 64 countries participated in the festival. We never expected a big response. We were ecstatic to be placed second in the festival rankings. Our style of music worked.

A photograph of two men performing on stage. The man on the right is wearing a white fedora hat and a light-colored suit jacket over a patterned shirt, singing into a microphone. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and singing into a microphone. They are positioned in front of a large banner for "SriLankan Airlines".

SriLankan
Airlines

On to stardom

Our third album 'Tharunyaye' was tailored to a Sri Lankan audience. We derived heavy influence from local folk music. Sri Lankan responded very favourably, 'Tharunyaye' became one of Sri Lanka's highest selling albums of all time.

We quickly began work on a fourth album called 'Neththara'. This was an experiment designed to enter the Indian market. 'Neththara' enjoyed a lot of success. Our neighbor India started to notice that Sri Lanka had a strong music movement. This gave us opportunity to work with some legendary Indian artists.

From then on, our music snowballed into what it is today.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka affords artists an amazing level of opportunity. The local music industry is experiencing a revolution driven by talent and technology.

We want people to take pride in knowing that they are Sri Lankan. We believe in demolishing barriers of ethnicity. The song 'Yaalpanamen' was created in both Sinhala and Tamil to show support for our nation's most important principle - unity.

If our music has played even a minute a role in advancing this beautiful nation, this would be our greatest success.



Thilini

Wijesekare

Reaping The Harvest of Innovation

Thilini Wijesekare has taken an ancient industry into the digital age. By turning challenging circumstance into opportunity, she has created one of the most unique ventures in the country.

How it all started

I grew up in a city called Kurunegala. Kurunegala is far away from the hustle and bustle of Colombo. My mother passed away when I was very young. I had no siblings. Therefore, I grew up with my father. My father and I were like best friends.

When I finished high school, I started studying at the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants in Sri Lanka.

It was during this time that I got the biggest shock of my life. My father suddenly passed away.

A lot of things in my future seemed uncertain at that point. I had to learn a lot very quickly to adjust to new circumstances. I was working full-time while studying to meet living expenses. After some thought, I started exploring options for developing my own source of income.

Considering the lack of capital, options were limited. Fortunately, I inherited a plot of land in Kurunegala from my father. My father had invested in this land with hopes of cultivating it. I decided to follow his line of thinking.

Building the farm

The lack of capital and expertise in the industry posed a serious challenge for me. Although my father was always involved in agriculture, I had no experience in it.

I decided to approach an organization that provides support for cultivation. This company possessed the expertise necessary to cultivate the land. However, I was held back by a lack of financial resources. I eventually managed to reach an agreement with the company to pay in monthly instalments.

I also decided to plant coconuts on my farm. Here, I worked very closely with the Coconut Development Board of Sri Lanka. They provide the farm with much needed technical expertise and concessions on plants. Representatives from the Coconut Development Board also directed me towards options for financial aid from the government. A 'Kapruka' loan was one such option. I was granted the loan after inspection of my land.

Fruit Market

fruitmarket.lk

777 508 494

Super low cost Fruits, Vegetables, Greens and Coconuts
from our community of small growers and farmers in the heart





Finally, propagation of the land was initiated. I funded the operation with great difficulty. I sacrificed many things to bring my idea to life. I would work and study over a five day week and do the long drive to Kurunegala on Friday so I can tend to the farm over the weekend.

Despite the challenges, I was driven to make my farm an exceptional business.

Driving growth

I used to bring some mangoes back from the farm to Colombo on Sunday evening. These mangoes were sold very quickly to friends and colleagues. It became obvious that there was a huge demand to purchase fresh fruit directly from the source. I decided to take orders and deliver fruit to explore this model further. This business model turned out to be very profitable.

The next few months saw fast growth in sales. This growth allowed me to hire a small truck to transport a lot of produce to Colombo. I also diversified from supplying mangoes alone to other crops.

Going digital

I kept searching for strategies to keep increasing sales. After some thinking, I noticed that Sri Lanka's online presence was

booming. Communications infrastructure has been deployed nationwide. Many people from all over the country were online. More importantly, e-commerce was growing at a rapid pace.

That is when I had the idea to establish a virtual marketplace for my produce. Fruitmarket.lk was born. Fruitmarket.lk has become a very successful operation. We simply take orders online and deliver produce directly from our farm to the customer.

Sustainability

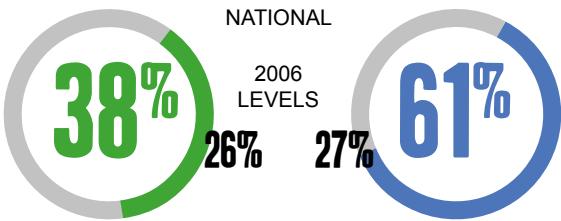
I employ contract workers from the local community. This empowers the local population. We provide fair wages to the workers. I offer young women in the area part-time work manufacturing boxes and bags for transporting produce. This has become a very popular initiative.

The future

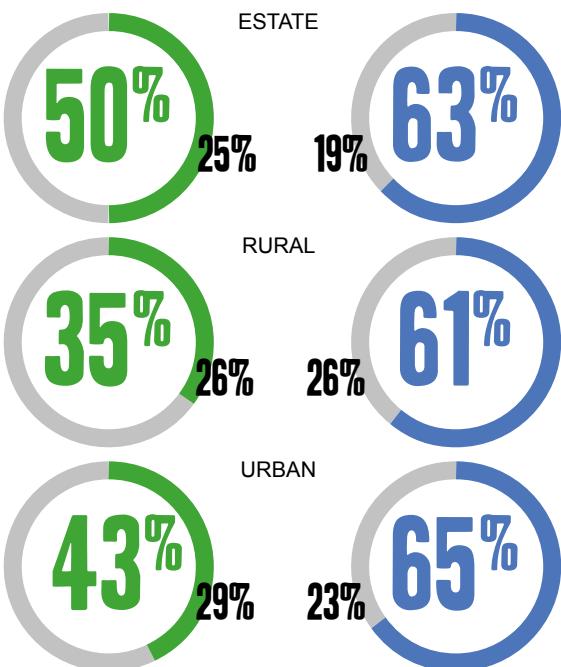
There is still a lot of opportunity in Sri Lanka to grow my venture. The country is changing rapidly. It is a great place to do business now.

The journey from my block of land to where the business is today has been long but rewarding. I encourage anyone who has a challenge to try convert it into an opportunity. You will be surprised at how far you can go.

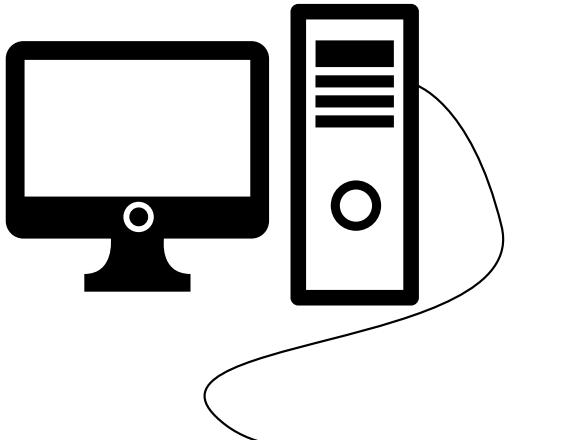
LANDLINE PROVISION & MOBILE POSSESSION BY YOUTH



Cost per unit and the ease of obtaining a handset and a connection has pushed mobile penetration beyond landline services across all sectors. However, according to officials at Sri Lanka Telecom, landlines are most of the time a signal of the stability of your residence, because generally landlines are issued for permanent structures. Therefore, they conclude that the increase in the landline coverage is an indirect measure of housing conditions. At a national level, by the year 2010, 38% of youth had landlines as opposed to 26% in 2006.



POSSESSION OF **DESKTOP** **COMPUTERS** BY YOUTH

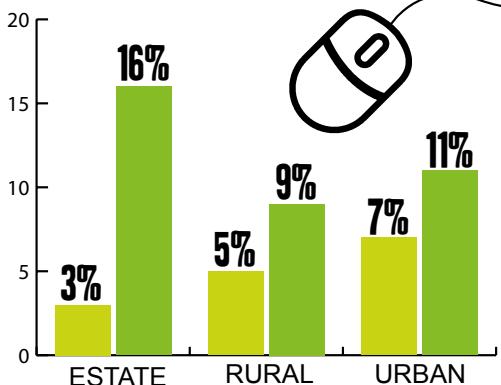


NATIONAL

10%
2010



5%
2006





Gopika

Varnam

Exemplifying The Perfect Integration

She dreamt of being a lawyer. This was not to be. Gopika Varnam was forced to be part of the conflict. Her journey from being shot in the battlefield to playing international cricket is nothing short of astonishing.

Stolen time

During the height of the war, at least one person from every home in northern Sri Lanka was in the battlefield. In a family of six, I was the one.

I could not let my gentle sisters be to part of it. I volunteered so they will be safe . I always wanted to be a lawyer but my dream was sacrificed for my siblings.

I was in the battlefield for six months. I struggled here and witnessed so much death. The memories still haunt me. Finally, salvation came in a surprising way.

During a particularly fierce battle, I sustained a serious head injury. I fell to the ground, completely unconscious. My only memory is being taken to the Mullaitivu hospital. The

doctors took exceptional care of me. I gradually regained consciousness.

Rehabilitation

As I recovered, the rehabilitation process began. Rehabilitation was not just physical. I had to be rehabilitated as an ex-combatant. I was offered the opportunity to develop skills to help reintegrate into society.

In my rehabilitation camp, there was a lady called 'Janani Madam'. I referred to her as 'Periya Amma'. This is a term reserved for your mother's eldest sister in the Tamil language. Periya Amma became more of a mother to me than my biological mother. She took care of me. , She cared for me like her own daughter. Periya Amma was there for me throughout the rehabilitation process.

I was a sports fanatic who loved cricket. The rehabilitation programme helped me develop skills in the sport. With support, I became very adept at cricket. Eventually, I played in a number of international T20 cricket matches. This was an amazing period in my life.

I completed a General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) while in rehabilitation. I continued on to complete a media course at the University of Kelaniya.

Serendipity

Although I expected negativity, society has been welcoming.

I am now happily married with a wonderful husband. He is also an ex-combatant. We are both working now. I am excited about my future. I have a great career, family and friends.

If I had not been part of the conflict, my life would have been very different. I think my experience was a blessing in disguise for me. Today, my friendships go beyond ethnicity. They are built on brotherhood and love.







Sivaganaselvan

Dinesh

Following Through on Aspirations

Sivagnanaselvan Dinesh rode his bicycle to school through the streets of Jaffna everyday. Determination was his only fuel. Today, the boy who had barely left his hometown has the world in his palm.

Home

I never dreamed of a life away from Jaffna. I lived there all my life - even during the conflict. Our family of eight was often terrified by the war. Life was not easy. We often sacrificed luxuries in food and clothing to stay afloat.

Despite our hardships, I was always determined to turn things around. The key to my success lay in something offered freely throughout Sri Lanka. Quality education.

Chasing a dream

I rode my bicycle to school every single day. School was like my second home. I was hungry

for knowledge. I believed that through education, anything can be achieved. Since childhood, I knew what that 'anything' was.

I was always fascinated by doctors. I saw doctors saving lives and making an unbelievable impact in the world. This was not just a profession of service. It was one of intellectual challenge and discovery. This is what I always wanted to do. A career in medicine was my dream.

However, my journey was not easy. I had no friends or other support. It was just me and a pile of books.

Then, during the latter part of high school, the war ended. Suddenly, Jaffna started to change. Even the Internet came to our humble city. These were times of change. While changes took place, I continued pursuing my dream.

Eventually, it was time to sit the grueling General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) exams.





How I perform here will decide whether my dream becomes reality or a distant memory. I put aside my bicycle and books. The anxious waiting game began.

The victory

I was absolutely ecstatic when my results finally arrived. I was ranked sixth in the country for my stream of study. I was first in northern Sri Lanka for biological science. The reality of what this means set in. I was going to become a doctor.

The future

The entrance standards for medical school in Sri Lanka are extremely high. Only a handful of students are chosen. However, my results guaranteed a position in medical school.

It was amazing to achieve what I dreamed of my whole life. I am fortunate to have access to a superb state-funded medical school. I hope to become a cardiologist one day. Now, I am on the road to giving back to my country what it gave me.

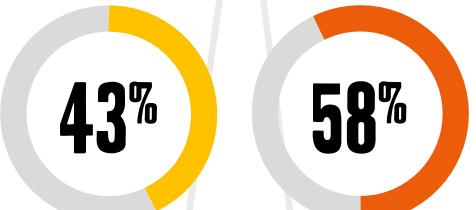
NATIONAL EXAMINATION SUCCESS RATE

Each year, about 400,000 students sit for O/L but only 50% to 60% qualify for A/Ls. From that only 4 to 6 percent qualify to enter public universities.

2003

2010

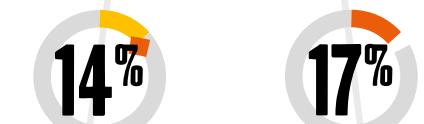
No. Sitting for O/L
434,131 **433,673**



No. Sitting for A/L
213,201 **233,354**

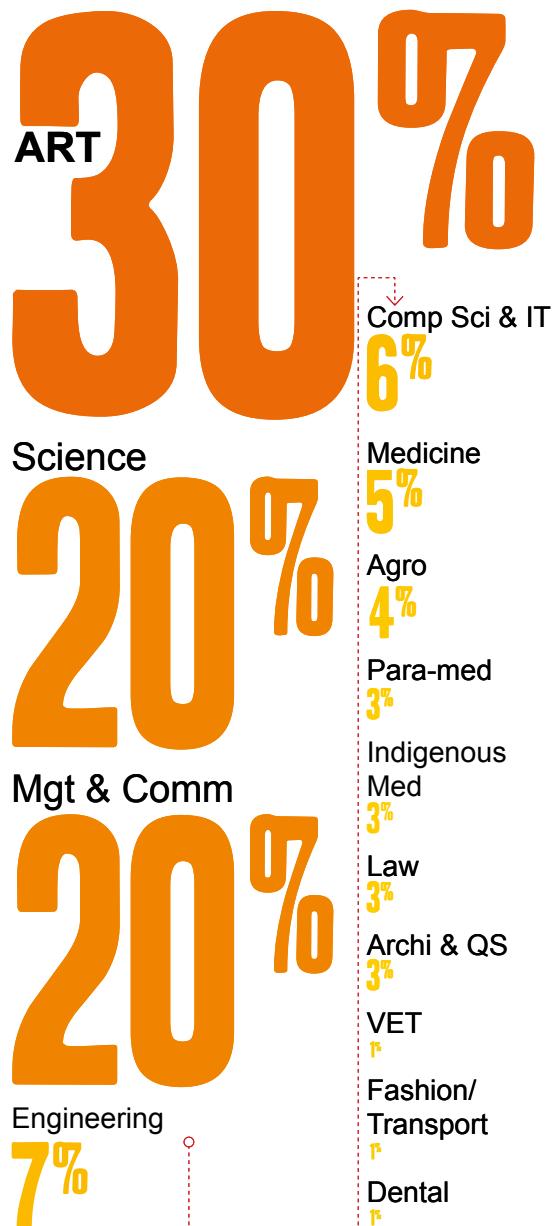


No. Qualifying to enter University
93,292 **142,415**



No. Admitted to University
12,736 **21,547**

DISTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSION BY SUBJECT





Kumar
Sangakkara

Shaping Lives Through Sport

Kumar Sangakkara needs no introduction. For more than a decade, Sangakkara's electrifying performance has thrilled cricket fans around the world. Exceptional achievements inside and outside cricket makes him one of the most inspiring citizens of modern Sri Lanka.

Early life

I always participated in sport as a child. However, cricket was always in the periphery. It was only at about 17 years of age that cricket became serious. After high school, I was accepted to read law at the University of Colombo. During law school, I was balancing sporting and academic career.

I was eventually given an opportunity to play for the national 'A-team'. I performed well in the One Day Internationals. I had some issues in Test games but persisted. Suddenly, I was called to the national team.

During my first national game, I realized the tremendous amount of work required to endure

in this level of the game. I had to make a difficult choice between law and cricket.

All or nothing

I decided to focus completely on cricket. This was a big leap of faith for me. Needless to say, I made the right decision. I have been fortunate to be a part of Sri Lanka's amazing journey in cricket.

We worked very hard on and off the field. It was unwavering commitment and singular focus that helped the team find victory. Our team rose from being underdogs to making a lasting mark in international cricket.

So many changes have taken place in the way we handle the game. There is an incredible pool of talent in the country. We have great systems in place to recognise talented players. Most importantly, our players have recognised the imperative to be socially responsible. An entire nation supports us with its heart and soul. Though humbling, this means we have a great responsibility outside of cricket as well.

Social responsibility

Sri Lanka's cricket team has always maintained an account that holds contributions from players. These funds are used to help people in need. Over the years, we have provided assistance to many requiring help with diverse needs.

I am closely involved with the Foundation of Goodness. The foundation works to improve living standards in the community of Seenigama, a small town in southern Sri Lanka. In the beginning, contributions were allocated to the underprivileged in Seenigama.

Today, we deploy recreational infrastructure, health clinics, vocational training and psychosocial assistance in the area. Eventually, people outside Seenigama began to access our initiatives as well.

Equal opportunity is very important. The Harmony Cup is a great cricket tournament contributing to equal opportunity and access. Harmony Cup takes top teams from all over the country and to northern of Sri Lanka. The Harmony Cup is a great platform for talented cricketers to showcase their talent.

The future

I am very happy about our team's direction on and off the field. The win at the 2014 World T20 Championship was a wonderful achievement for the country. Sport unites people. It is blind to almost anything. I feel fortunate to play a part in bringing people together through sport.





Sustaining the Success: Policy Challenges and Way Forward

- Continuing investments in family planning and reproductive health are a must.
- Measures need to be taken to support the growing ageing population.
- Need to further increase the resource allocation for public health.
- Creating an “enabling environment” to increase women’s political participation is essential in realizing the benefits of the demographic dividend.
- Needs to invest more in education for youth and women so that the transition from school to work is smoothed.
- Need to invest in ICT infrastructure to improve access to ICT education and improve ICT literacy so that youth and women are globally connected opening up more opportunities to actively participate in economic development.
- Need to invest more on creating more, better and equal employment opportunities for young and women.
- Investments in adequate housing, safe drinking water and sanitation are needed so that safe and healthy living standards are ensured, enabling youth and women to actively take part in education as well as employment.