

# G2G Voices

## UNFPA Inter-generational Dialogues

# Bringing generations together for our Sri Lanka

*“Shifting Demographics and Development Opportunities”*

Colombo, Sri Lanka  
9th December 2016



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# WHY “INTER-GENERATIONAL” DIALOGUES?

Sri Lanka has heard the voice of the experienced; the older generation. We have learnt from their wisdom. Sri Lanka also 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?

This is why the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sri Lanka is facilitating a series of generation-to-generation (G2G) 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.

## “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MEANS SAFEGUARDING THE WELL-BEING OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

- High Fertility and Population Growth, UNFPA

### PREVIOUS G2G DISCUSSIONS

UNFPA held the second inter-generational policy dialogue ‘Investing in women as game changers for Sri Lanka's future development: What does it take for women to fulfil their potential as leaders?’ in March 2016. The event fostered a discussion on identifying the impediments holding women back, and the kind of investments needed to allow Sri Lankan women to fulfil their potential as dynamic leaders.

Prior to this, UNFPA launched the first inter-generational dialogue in December 2015 on ‘Youth as a driving force in maintaining Sri Lanka's middle income status’. The dialogue focused on, 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 to develop evidence-based policies in the areas of women, youth, ageing, fertility and migration, to advance equity, accountability and quality in all spheres of decision making in the country, by providing evidence-based policy recommendations.

Thus, by using and analyzing data from Sri Lanka's 2012 Population and Housing Census, various surveys, research studies and administrative records, as well as, through recommendations from a series of inter-generational policy dialogues - UNFPA hopes to build a body of evidence that documents shifting population dimensions and identifies policy needs.



### THIRD G2G DIALOGUE ON “SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES”

A ‘demographic dividend’ is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64 years) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 years and younger, and 65 years and older). Sri Lanka’s population has increased three-fold since 1871 and the country is currently within the window of ‘demographic dividend’ where the population is shifting from having a high number of young persons to a greater number within the working age population.

Fertility rates were declining from 1960 up until 2000, after which a slight increase in fertility was first observed. If this increase is an emerging trend, the implications and responses will need to be studied carefully and policy makers will need to work toward attaining a stable decline in fertility rates. Sri Lanka also needs to solve the problem of low labour force participation by women, which is one of the lowest in Asia.

The third G2G dialogue focused on the areas of education, labour and fertility - based on statistics from the 2012 National Population and Housing Census. The following key points were discussed among participants from three generations:

- (1) **Where do we stand?** - Key demographic indicators and emerging trends with regard to education (of youth), labour and fertility in Sri Lanka;
- (2) **What should Sri Lanka be concerned with?** - Some statistics and trends that Sri Lanka needs to address in order to further development in areas of education, fertility and labour;
- (3) **Data for policy making** – Key opportunities and potential areas of intervention and efforts in order to advance positive trends in education, fertility and labour for the development of the country.

The dialogues began with a key note address by Dr. Amara Satharasinghe, Director General of the Department of Census and Statistics. Following this, three monographs on education, labour and fertility were launched. The monographs were: ‘**Educating Sri Lankans for Development**’ written by Dr. Iresha Lakshman, ‘**Labour Market Characteristics**’ by Dr Nisha Arunatilake and ‘**Fertility and Nuptiality**’ by Professor Indralal De Silva.

This was followed by a discussion which included the following panelists:

- Dr. Iresha Lakshman - Senior Lecturer, University of Colombo
- Dr. Nisha Arunatilake - Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS)
- Professor. Indralal De Silva - Senior Professor of Demography, University of Colombo
- Ms. Ashani Basnayake - Senior Researcher, Verité Research
- Dr. Muttukrishna Sarvananthan - Development Economist and Principal Researcher of Point Pedro Institute of Development
- Mr. Nalaka Umagiliya - Vice President of John Keells Holdings PLC

Moderator: Mr Alain Sibenalar, Country Representative for UNFPA, Sri Lanka.



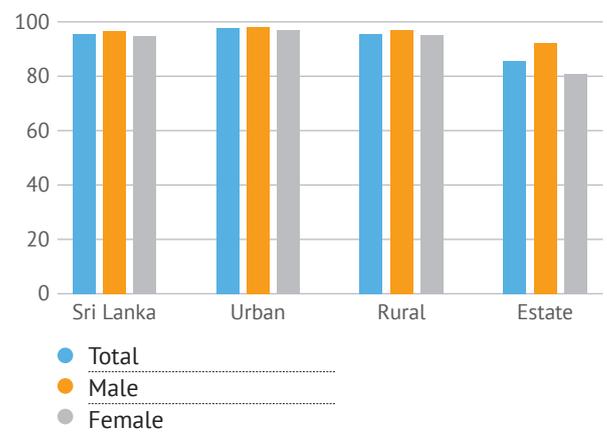
# 1. EDUCATING SRI LANKANS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Education is directly linked to achieving youth potential and reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend that Sri Lanka is currently experiencing. According to the 2012 Census of Population and Housing, the overall literacy rate across the country is impressive at 95.7% and significant regional differences were observed.

## EDUCATION TRENDS<sup>1</sup> :

- 43.6% of individuals in the age category of 17-24 have not obtained their Ordinary Level (O'Level) qualification;
- Gampaha (98.5%) and Batticaloa (89.5%) records the highest and the lowest literacy rates, respectively;
- The number of young people not engaged in education after 15 years of age is highest in the estate sector;
- Difference in literacy rates among three sectors (urban, rural and estate) is a reflection of the quality of education, standard of living and level of income;
- Only 13.3 % of the 15 + years population were educated up to tertiary level. Of this 3.3 % obtained university-level tertiary education and 10% obtained technical-level tertiary education;
- **The lowest literacy rate among the three sectors was recorded by the females in the estate sector (80.9%). This means that up to 1 in 4 women are illiterate in this sector;**
- **In all three sectors, males record a higher literacy rate compared to their female counterparts.**

Literacy Rates of Populations aged 10 years and over by sector and sex 2012



Source: Census of Population and Housing - 2012

## “YOUTH LITERACY IS VERY HIGH. HOWEVER, THIS HAS NOT TRANSLATED INTO A HIGH LEVEL OF EDUCATION BEYOND LITERACY”

(Source: 20.4 Million: Sri Lanka's Population at a Glance)

### 1.1. EDUCATION FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED<sup>2</sup> SRI LANKANS:

- About 1,617,924 persons (or 8.7 % of the 5 years and above population) are experiencing at least one partial or full difficulty/disability;
- The most prevalent difficulty is in regard to vision, with a rate of 54 persons per 1000 people whose main difficulty is sight. This is followed by the prevalence in walking difficulties (39 persons per 1000) and hearing difficulties (21 persons per 1000);
- Education of children and youth with special needs is a key concern in rural schools in districts with the highest number of differently abled persons in the school-going age;
- Lack of facilities in schools to accommodate children with special learning needs and the social stigma attached to differently abled persons, could be playing a role in holding rural and estate children back from pursuing formal schooling.

### 1.2. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMPUTER LITERACY

- According to the 2012 Census, 56% of persons 15 years and older are unable to use a computer;
- This situation is worse in the rural sector (77%) and worst in the estate sector (91.2%) even when IT programs exist and operate in schools
- In all three sectors, the number of females with the capacity to use a computer is less than that of males

<sup>1</sup> 2012 National Population and Housing Census

<sup>2</sup> Legally as per Government of Sri Lanka (1996), "any person who, as a result of any deficiency in his/her physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable by him/herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life". Differently-abled persons is also referred to in the 2012 National Population and Housing Census as 'persons with difficulties'.

## “A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WAS OBSERVED BETWEEN THE ABILITY TO USE COMPUTERS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVELS” (Source: Educating Sri Lankans for Development - Monograph 2016)

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

#### *Investing in the fields of science and technology (S&T)*

Science, technology and innovation are essential for staying competitive and driving growth in a country. The backbone of science, technology and innovation is a highly skilled workforce. According to a methodology developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – S&T workers are those with a tertiary education and/or persons employed in a science and technology occupation.

Statistics show that the country does not make full use of tertiary educated persons in the S&T fields. The quality of tertiary education may not provide the skills needed to obtain employment in the S&T field. Likewise, the quality of S&T employment in the country may be so low, that individuals prefer to be employed in better jobs outside the S&T field.

#### *Educating persons with difficulties in accessing employment*

According to the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, employment is considered as a right. Sri Lanka has put in place several acts, policies and trust funds to improve the employability of persons with difficulties and help them secure employment.

There are 546 special needs units affiliated with government schools. However, they are mostly in the western province while there is a need for such units and initiatives in rural areas.

### DISCUSSION

The following key points on Education were discussed at the G2G dialogue:

#### *The need to address gaps and inequalities in the education sector*

- While Sri Lanka is now classified as a lower middle income country, there are many inequalities to be addressed including equitable distribution of resources for national educational institutions depending on need of students, communities, sectors and regions;
- The fact that 43.6 % of youth in the 17–25 age group have not passed their O-Levels is a serious concern for Sri Lanka. This is a significant portion of the population who do not have a basic qualification despite government funding and investment in secondary education. There is a need to identify and address the root causes of this gap;
- Education related figures for estate sector females is lower as women from mostly low income families are pushed into employment at a younger age. Parents do not see the value in educating girls until O-levels or A-levels and instead, pull them out of school for employment;
- Many schools do include differently abled students and while this is a positive trend, most teachers have not been trained to work effectively with special needs students, especially when specific forms of learning support and methodology need to be provided.

#### *Fostering innovation and innovative teaching*

- Sri Lanka is experiencing a demographic dividend, which is a window of opportunity for development if the country invests strategically in young people;
- There are a large number of young people who are not in education, employment or any form of training;
- The Ministry of Education is allocating resources into training teachers. However, in many classrooms, the teaching style remains traditional which limits creativity and innovation.

“Educational inequalities (especially in the estate sector) is due to the attitudes of the community that value employment over education” - **Dr. Iresha Lakshman**

“There is also a level of gender stereotypes that are continually enforced on young girls and women that need to be addressed in order to tackle the disparities between literacy, education, and labour force participation levels” – **Ms. Ashani Basnayake**

#### **Policy directions:**

- Educational policies must ensure that disparities, inequalities and inequitable distribution of resources between sectors and genders are addressed;
- ‘Inclusive education’ needs to pay more attention toward developing awareness and sensitivity amongst other students and teachers about the plight of students with difficulties. Teachers should also be educated to deal with the physical and psychological difficulties of special needs students;
- In Sri Lanka, measures will need to be taken to improve the S&T sector. The efforts underway to improve the quality of education at the tertiary level need to be further strengthened. In addition, investments that bring in tertiary level training and S&T job creation should be encouraged;
- It is recommended that the school IT programme be implemented with adequate IT facilities in all schools in the island, particularly rural and estate sector schools where disparities are highest.

## 2. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT LINKAGES

### LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION TRENDS

An analysis of the 2012 National Housing and Population Census shows a high correlation between education and labour force participation rates, especially for females. The following data and trends were obtained from the census.

## “FEMALES WHO HAVE COMPLETED SECONDARY EDUCATION (THOSE WITH AT LEAST O-LEVELS) AND THOSE WITH A DEGREE HAD THE LOWEST UNEMPLOYMENT:

### 2.1 UNEMPLOYMENT

- Sri Lanka's overall unemployment rate is at 4.7% with it being 3% for males and 7.6% for females
- A large proportion of persons who obtained tertiary level education (21.7% are university-level tertiary educated and 38% are technical level-tertiary educated) are not in the labour force;
- The overall unemployment rates are highest in the Northern Province, followed by the Eastern and the Southern provinces;
- There are large variations in the Divisional Secretariat (DS) level unemployment rates, particularly in the districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

### 2.2 FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION TRENDS<sup>3</sup>

- For females in the 15 years and above population, labour force participation decreased from 39.5% in 2006 to 34.7% in 2014;
- There is not much variation in the labour force participation rates for males across districts but the labour force participation rates for females fluctuates across districts;
- The female labour force participation rate was highest in the Nuwara Eliya district (44.1%). This is mainly due to the high concentration of estate sector population in this district;
- The lowest rate recorded was in Mannar (17.1%).

### 2.3 LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED POPULATION

- Labour force participation for differently abled population is low (29%);
- Persons who are differently abled were most likely to be in vulnerable employment (45.7% were own account workers);
- Proportion of differently abled youth (15–29 years) who were government workers was the same as youth without difficulties who were government workers. This possibly suggests that policies for including differently abled persons in public sector employment have improved over time<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.4. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY WORKERS IN SRI LANKA

- Of the employed, 13.2 % are in S&T occupations. Of this, 6.8 % are professionals and 6.4% were associate professionals. Of the professionals, 60 % are teachers and a further 17 % are health professionals.

### 2.5. VOCATIONAL TRAINING

- Other than for a few exceptions, females with vocational training had a lower unemployment rate at each level of education;
- Females with O-levels and vocational training had lower unemployment rates than those with just O-levels;
- There are DS level factors affecting the labour force participation of females. This is especially so for females with vocational training;
- These factors need to be identified and rectified to improve labour force participation.

<sup>3</sup> Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Report – 2014, Department of Census and Statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Labour Market Characteristics: Thematic Report based on Census of Population and Housing 2012.

### DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

#### *Investing in education for young women*

**Sri Lanka has poor labour force participation of women, and has previously underperformed on Millennium Development goals (MDG's) on gender. While being a challenge for the country, increasing labour force participation of women also remains one of the main opportunities for supporting national development and improving the well-being of citizens.**

Statistics indicate a high correlation between education and labour force participation rates. Females with some form of educational qualification are more likely to be part of the labour force. Further, at each level of formal education, those with vocational training participate more in the labour force than those without vocational training.

### DISCUSSION

#### *Enhancing skills in addition to qualifications*

- Educated Sri Lankans may have gone through a course of study, however they often lack the necessary skills for jobs;
- Highly educated women are also not entering the work force as they may either lack the soft skills required for the jobs or the jobs themselves may not be offering appropriate or attractive packages;

#### *Investing in technology and innovation*

- The current generation is the most educated generation in human history with highly sophisticated knowledge of technology in comparison to previous generations – there is a lot of potential and untapped innovation capabilities;
- Information Technology as a field is evolving rapidly. Therefore, the Sri Lankan education system needs to also be adapting to these changing demands, especially at the tertiary level;

#### *Addressing socio-cultural and legal barriers and challenges*

- Child care facilities have increased and are standardized in developed countries, however Sri Lankan organizations severely lack such accommodations for working women;
- There are also cultural and legal restrictions (such as personal laws eg. Thesawalamai) which restrict women from property ownership and thereby limit ability to raise capital for income generation. Analysis of data on labour force participation does not capture these perceived 'sensitive and cultural issues'.

“The disparities when it comes to female labour force participation is mainly with regard to females with lower levels of education who have less access to ‘good jobs’ (with job security, pension, fixed working times etc).” - **Dr Nisha Arunathilake**

“Today’s employment is driven by innovation. Sri Lanka needs people who seek innovation and will be able to create more jobs and thus not only should Sri Lankan youth be educated, but also encouraged to be innovative.” - **Mr Nalaka Umagiliya**

#### **Policy directions:**

- In capitalizing the high correlation between education and labour force participation rates, especially with regard to females - educational policies, in addition to formal curricula, should aim to develop skills and encourage innovation at each level of formal education and beyond;
- Education, IT and skills development programs and policies need to aim at encouraging and fostering innovation and not just literacy;
- Sri Lanka needs policies that give better access to education, vocational training and employment to differently abled persons, with both partial and complete difficulties
- For decades, the country’s education policy has attempted to eradicate differences between educational facilities (both physical and human) for schools in the different sectors in the country. However, the attempt still remains largely futile. It is recommended that these efforts continue with more focus placed on rural and estate schools.



# 3. FERTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The size of a population of a country is mainly determined by demographic components of fertility, mortality and migration. Fertility is the main factor of human reproduction and it is directly linked to the realisation of full potential of the population.

There are several demographic and socio-economic determinants of fertility relevant to women in a population-such as age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, place of residence, level of education, employment status, income etc. These, alongside migration and some other background characteristics of women are also very important determinants of fertility. The following data and trends were obtained from a 2012 National Housing and Population Census.

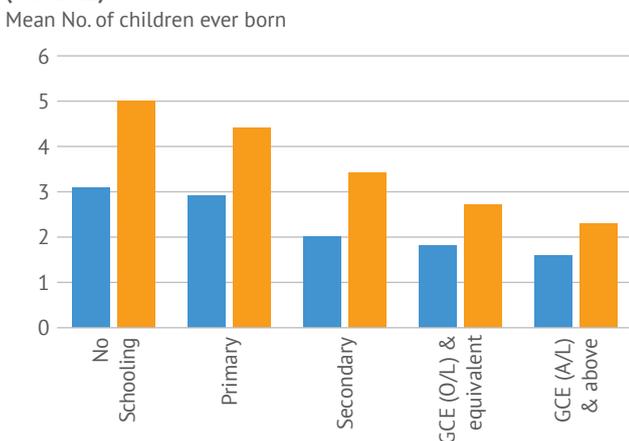
### 3.1 FERTILITY TRENDS

- Sri Lanka is the only South Asian country in which the mean age at marriage has dropped and where fertility rate has increased;
- The highest total fertility rate and lowest mean age at marriage is reported by women who are economically inactive;
- Decreasing mean age at marriage could be linked to the rise in fertility, as reproduction is almost entirely within marriages;
- The highest child/woman ratio is in the estate sector (409 children per 1000 women), this means that women tend to have more children in the estate sector;
- The lowest value of child/woman ratio is observed in the urban sector (284 children), which is significantly lower than the estate sector and even lower than the national average;
- The level of contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) remained stagnant since 2000 (remains at 70.25% among currently married women. Source: DHS 2006-2007);
- The National Youth Survey 2013 indicates that nearly 57% of the respondents in the age group 15-29 reported that they were not aware of contraceptive methods.

### 3.2. NUPTIALITY TRENDS

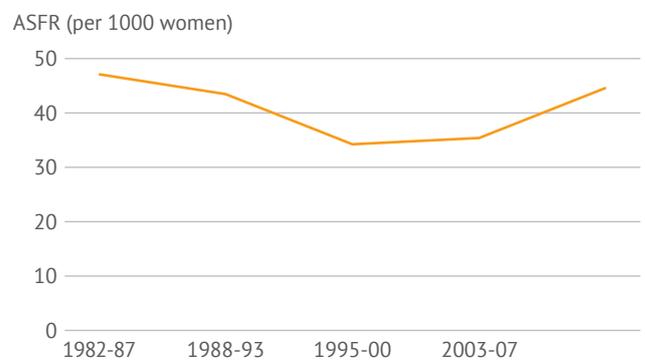
- Marital status of women may determine their participation in the labour force, which in turn affects levels of economic dependency and poverty.
- Since 1993, Sri Lanka has seen a decline in the mean age at marriage particularly amongst females (25.5 years in 1993 to 23.4 years in 2012);
- Between 1981 and 2012, the proportion of those that have never married declined significantly for males from 43% to 30% and for females from 32% to 22%;
- In contrast, the currently married proportion increased significantly over the same period for males from 55% to 68% and for females from 59% to 68%.

Mean no. of children ever born to ever married women by education (DCS 2012)

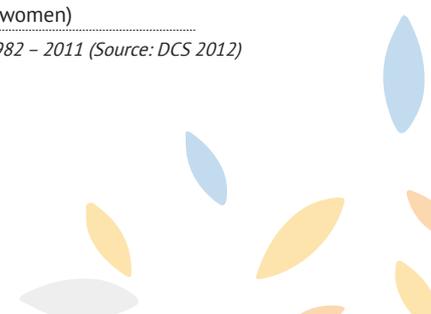


- Women aged 15-49 years
- Women aged 50 years and above

Adolescent Fertility Rate (ASFR) of 15-19 Year (per 1000 women)



— ASFR of 15-19 (per 1000 women)  
Adolescent Fertility Rate from 1982 - 2011 (Source: DCS 2012)



### 3.3. TEENAGE PREGNANCY TRENDS

- From 1995 to 2010, the fertility of 15-19 year olds in Sri Lanka increased, while in all other Asian countries, teenage fertility had fallen significantly;
- The teen fertility rate of the age group 15-19 of Sri Lanka had increased from 27 to 36 live births per 1000 females over the period 1995-2000 to 2011;
- In 2011, teenage fertility contributed to 7.4% of the total fertility in Sri Lanka, an increase from the preceding period recorded of 2003 to 2007 (5.9%);
- In Sri Lanka, although adolescent fertility rate at age 15 is significantly low, statistics demonstrate that there is risk of girls entering to early pregnancy;
- The upturn in teenage fertility observed in Sri Lanka could be related to specific socio-economic characteristics of females in the country such as level of education, income of family, access to support services, level of security/insecurity etc.

## “WOMEN WHO DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN LABOUR FORCE TEND TO HAVE THE HIGHEST FERTILITY RATE”

(Source: Fertility and Nuptiality Monograph 2016)

### DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

#### Investing in educating young women

- Women’s education is another factor that has a strong correlation with fertility;
- Educated women have more opportunities in the labour market
- Also, their engagement in employment is higher than the average housewives;
- The least number of children was reported by the highly educated women while women with no education or with primary education demonstrate a high level of fertility.

### DISCUSSION

#### Fertility rate is not only about health, but also about education and economics

- It is important to note that Sri Lanka’s increasing trend of fertility is highest amongst women who are economically inactive;
- Only Jaffna and Colombo have below replacement fertility while fertility rates are increasing in all other parts of the country. This highlights the importance of education and labour force participation of females which needs to be capitalized on;

#### Early identification and mitigation of consequences of the rising fertility rate

- Along with the increase in fertility there is also an emergence of a large volume of children and young people. 2016 saw the highest number of students sitting for their O-Level examinations;
- Therefore, the country needs to prepare for a population of 25 million by 2040 which will create significant environmental problems, deforestation, other land issues and a serious strain on resources;

#### Health education must include sex education and gender equality

- In addition to the Comprehensive Reproductive Health Educational (CRHE) curriculum, the importance of self agency, consent and decision making must also be taught to girls and boys, and teachers must be trained on the best way to educate students regarding these topics;
- The onus of responsibility for fertility and child bearing is on women and girls, but this has to also be made issues that men and boys are actively involved in addressing.

“Analysis of census data shows that women who got married very young, have the highest number of children and are among the economically inactive. This demonstrates the correlation between fertility, nuptiality and labour force participation.”

- Professor Indralal De Silva

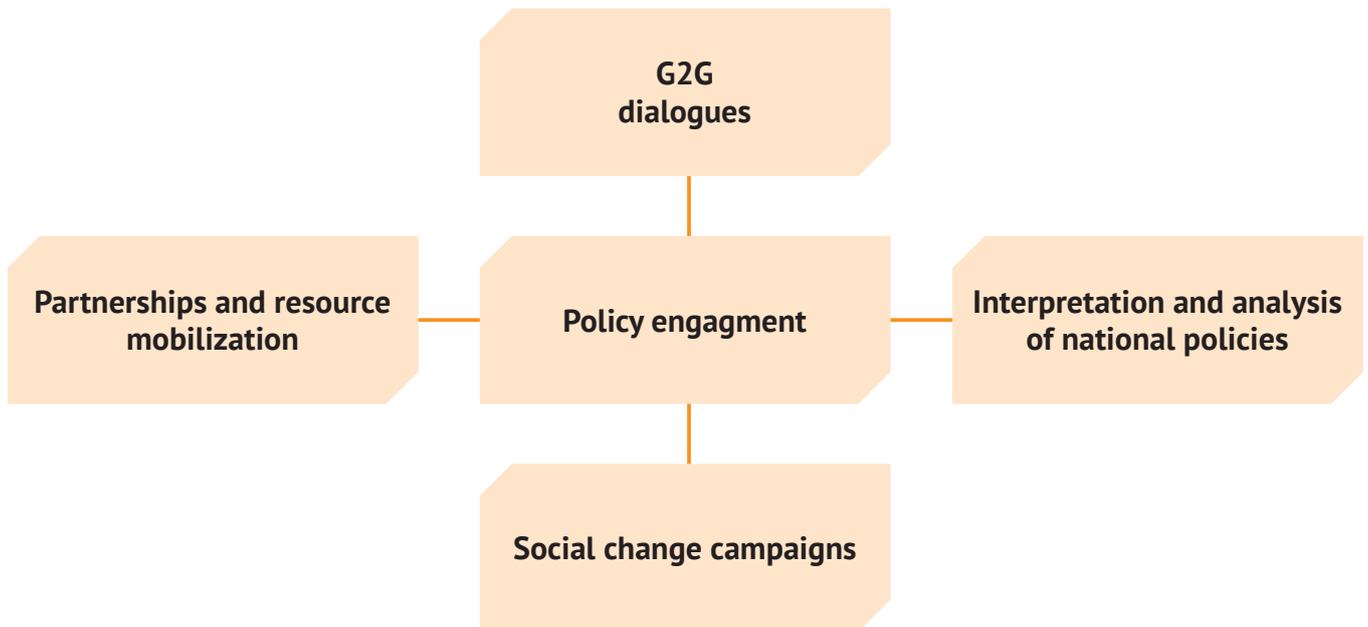
“There is need to highlight three issues (with regard to lower age of marriage and rising fertility) – firstly the need for comprehensive sex education for young people, secondly the consequences of abortion being illegal in Sri Lanka and low access to emergency contraceptives and thirdly the disparity in minimum age of marriage for the minority Muslim community”

- Professor Muttukrishna Sarvananthan

#### Policy Directions:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) highlight the need to have more women in the labour force. It is priority for Sri Lanka to develop a suitable population and reproductive health policy for Sri Lanka for the next 10-15 years;
- Sri Lanka needs to develop and implement a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for school and out of school children;
- Targeted policy and reformation of national laws (including personal laws) that directly address issues of reducing age of marriage, early cohabitation and teenage pregnancies is an urgent development concern for Sri Lanka.

## 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.

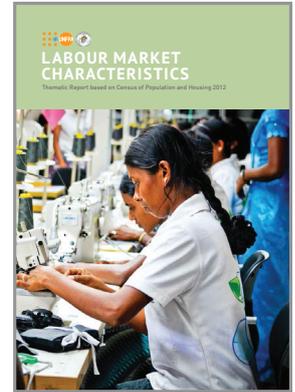




Educating Sri Lankans  
For Development (2016)



Fertility and Nuptiality  
(2016)



Labour Market  
Characteristics (2016)

**For more information:**

**Address:** United Nations Population Fund, 202, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka

**Telephone:** +94 11 2580840

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