

# RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING COVID-19



**ANNUAL REPORT 2020**  
UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND SRI LANKA







Our goal is to help Sri Lanka achieve zero unmet need for family planning by ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services; zero preventable maternal deaths by ensuring every childbirth is safe; and, zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls by safeguarding individual rights to a safe, fulfilling and dignified life.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE UNFPA REPRESENTATIVE



“Yet through it all, the UNFPA Sri Lanka team rose to the challenge of adapting to the new normal while strengthening our focus on delivering results. Our collective and critical reflection on our work helped us to address the needs of the most vulnerable in the emerging context.”

2020 was a challenging year for all of us. COVID-19 proved not only to be a public health pandemic but also created enormous socio-economic shocks affecting everyone across the world.

The spread of the virus exacerbated existing inequalities, jeopardizing decades of gains and advancements made towards the rights of women and girls.

Yet through it all, the UNFPA Sri Lanka team rose to the challenge of adapting to the new normal while strengthening our focus on delivering results. Our collective and critical reflection on our work helped us to address the needs of the most vulnerable in the emerging context.

As the United Nations' sexual and reproductive health agency, UNFPA set out to achieve three world-changing results by 2030: Zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender-based violence, including harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Through our work, we hope to reach those especially far behind, to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights are fully realized by everyone, especially women and

girls, and other vulnerable populations. This publication provides a snapshot of progress made in 2020, and gives a view of the organization's work amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and everyone who is on the frontlines of the pandemic. I am encouraged by the strength of health workers and first respondents who have sacrificed so much to attend to those who need help and support. I take motivation in the fact that together as an organization committed to delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled, we can contribute by supporting some of the leading ministries and stakeholders tasked with the COVID-19 response. UNFPA, in co-operation with donors and partners, is fully dedicated to serve the people of Sri Lanka.

**Ritsu Nacken**  
*Representative*  
**UNFPA Sri Lanka**







## ABOUT US

UNFPA is the United Nations' sexual and reproductive health agency. Since UNFPA started its work in 1969, the world has seen progress: The number and rate of women dying from complications of pregnancy or childbirth has been halved. Families are healthier. Young people are more connected and empowered than ever before. Women and girls are empowered to make choices on their reproductive rights.

More effort however, needs to be focused on those left behind. In Sri Lanka one in five (20.4%) ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Women's Wellbeing Survey, 2019). Young people have limited access to comprehensive sexuality education with a reported 50% unaware about most aspects of basic sexual and reproductive issues, which exposes them to higher risks of HIV and unplanned pregnancies (National Youth Health Survey, 2013 & 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic has also hampered progress, further exacerbating inequalities and existing vulnerabilities. Much more needs to be done to

ensure a world in which all individuals can exercise their human rights, including those that relate to the most intimate and fundamental aspects of life.

UNFPA is working in Sri Lanka and the world-over to achieve three transformative results in line with the International Conference on Population and Development Agenda to ensure:

- » Zero unmet need for family planning
- » Zero preventable maternal deaths
- » Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices

To drive these results locally, UNFPA in Sri Lanka dedicated the year 2020 to comprehensively mainstream results based management across all functions of the organisation.







### To achieve this goal, we work to ensure:



Every adolescent and youth, in particular adolescent girls, is empowered with access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in all contexts



Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and reproductive rights are advanced in development and humanitarian settings



Everyone, everywhere, is counted, and accounted for, in the pursuit of sustainable development

## MY BODY MY CHOICE: EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INFORMED CHOICES



**We work towards ensuring young people have more opportunities to participate in national development and peacebuilding processes with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.**

Good sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so.

To maintain one's sexual and reproductive health, people need access to accurate information and access to the safe, effective and affordable contraception method of their choice. And when they do decide to have children, women

must have access to maternal health services that ensure a fit pregnancy, safe delivery and a healthy baby.

In Sri Lanka UNFPA works to achieve zero unmet need for family planning by 2030 by promoting comprehensive sexuality education for young people whilst addressing harmful gender and social norms.



## PROMISES PROJECT

In 2019, UNFPA received USD 1.47 Million from the Government of Japan with the objective of improving access to sexual and reproductive health services and information by strengthening the capacity of partners to better meet the needs of women and young people such as the Family Planning Association in Sri Lanka, and civil society organizations working in this area. This is UNFPA's 'PROMISES' project - Project for the Improvement of Access to Information and Services of SRHR and of GBV for Women and Young People.

To ensure access to services among adolescent and young people, in 2020, the project strengthened the capacity of 32 Women and Youth Friendly Health Centers (Yowun Piyasa, Mithuru Piyasa and Family Planning clinics) within the Ministry of Health, and supported the Ministry of Education to develop and conduct training modules on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to equip teachers, trainers and in-service advisors with knowledge on SRHR and other related topics. The project aims to enable young people's access to accurate information and quality services to counter the myths and prejudices around SRHR that perpetuate communal violence.

By working together with the Jaffna Social Action Centre, the Women's Development Centre and Women in Need, the project also supports shelters operating across the country to provide safe spaces for women and girls experiencing violence.

## PEACEBUILDING PROJECT

In 2017, UNFPA together with UNV and UN WOMEN received funding worth USD 410,000 through the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to promote the participation of youth and women in the peacebuilding process. As such, UNFPA worked closely with the Youth Peace Panel (YPP) which comprises of 30 young people, to support them to better engage with peers and stakeholders to gather views and data to advocate for policy changes and promote peace and youth participation. The initiatives focused on advocating for,

1. the reimplementation of the youth quota to ensure youth representation in governance
2. a social media policy to address fake news and hate speech, and
3. changes in the school curriculum to promote social cohesion.

Through the project, the YPP received training on advocacy and design thinking processes which they were able to apply in designing their own initiatives. Even as the project ended in 2020, the YPP will continue their advocacy initiatives post project completion. These youth-led initiatives will create greater visibility for young people's concerns, while enabling them to actively engage in peacebuilding processes. Through the establishment of the steering committees and consultations at the Provincial level, the project enabled youth to directly engage with key Government stakeholders to share their perspectives and contribute to the development of youth policies and initiatives at the sub-national level.



## MY BODY MY CHOICE: EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INFORMED CHOICES (CONTD.)

### KEY INITIATIVES IN 2020



#### International Conference on Birth Defects and Disabilities in the Developing World

25th February

UNFPA brought together experts from the fields of medicine and sociology for a panel discussion, as part of the 9th International Conference on Birth Defects and Disabilities in the Developing World. The panel discussion titled “Addressing birth defects from the lens of Human Rights & Inclusion” focused on the need to build capacity in middle-income countries for the prevention of birth defects and preterm birth and care. This was the first attempt by UNFPA to host a comprehensive dialogue on disability towards the 2030 SDG agenda.



#### Panel Discussion on ‘Delivering Comprehensive SRH Services For All in the New Normal’

26th July

UNFPA partnered with the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) to organize a panel discussion at SLMA's International Medical Congress on the “Rights-based approach to delivering comprehensive SRH services for all in the new normal”. The session explored the accessibility of health care services for ALL in the context of quality enhancement with a specific focus on marginalized groups.



#### ‘Launch of Aayu+’

14th October

Recognizing the strong links between preventing and controlling non-communicable diseases and protecting and promoting the advancement of healthy lifestyles amongst women and girls, UNFPA partnered with the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) to launch Aayu+, an exclusive social media platform that engages celebrities and social media influencers to talk about reproductive and other forms of cancers to bust myths and to encourage health-seeking behaviour among the general public of Sri Lanka, and youth in particular.





### **‘Commemorating Breast Cancer Awareness Month’**

**30th October**

UNFPA has been working with the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) to improve early detection and prevention of reproductive cancers since 1996. As a continuation of this decades long support and in marking breast cancer awareness month, UNFPA partnered with Zonta Club and the NCCP to recommence the regular supply of breast cushions in Sri Lanka. Breast cancer and cervical cancer are the most common types of cancer among women in Sri Lanka. The cushions were developed to provide pain relief as well as physical and emotional comfort to women recovering from breast cancer surgery. Improving access to the cushions is expected to improve the quality of life and recovery process for women.



### **Discussion on the ‘Implications of Gender and Disability on Perinatal Outcomes’**

**15th December**

UNFPA in collaboration with the Perinatal Society of Sri Lanka hosted a panel discussion on the “Implications of Gender and Disability on Perinatal outcomes”. The session explored the need for inclusive and comprehensive perinatal (the period immediately before and after birth) care with a focus on equal access to quality care, without discrimination, and accountability across all programming and policymaking with a specific focus on disability and gender. As countries race to recover from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, recovery measures must factor in gender and disability particularly in a perinatal context to ensure that no one is left behind.



### **Launch of the ‘Happy Family’ Communication Package**

**22nd December**

UNFPA supported the Health Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of Health in developing a ‘Happy Family’ communication package which was launched in December 2020. The video package contained over 50 videos designed as training modules for healthcare providers. The videos contain interactive virtual training modules consisting of exercises, role plays, case studies, etc, which explore challenges faced within relationships and how communication can help overcome these challenges, leading to a happy family. The videos also address myths and misconceptions around gender-based violence, alcohol use, maternal and child health, women’s health, family planning, menstruation and nutritional habits.







## ANYTHING BUT EASY

The journey has been anything but easy, yet, perseverance, patience and a resilient spirit have managed to help 20-year-old Irushi reach heights. Despite the odds, Irushi fought her way back up and hopes to help others like her fight against the gross violation of rights that sexual and gender-based violence presents to thousands across Sri Lanka.

Poverty is rampant in the estate sector where she was born, to a visually impaired father and mother who was employed as a domestic worker who received a menial salary. The parents, busy trying to provide for and flourish their two daughters, had failed to notice that Iru was being destroyed at the hands of a monster on a regular basis. A child of only 12 when it started in 2011, a neighbor who was married and much older had noticed her vulnerability and taken advantage of it. The sexual abuse including rape continued for two more years, till others in the area had finally taken notice of his advances and alerted her parents who approached the police for help.

Iru's situation needed immediate help. Her family went to the Women's Development Centre (WDC) where she was placed in a safe house with others who had experienced similar pain in their lives. She found solace in their sisterhood while they worked to move past their trauma.

At the age of 18, Iru was finally moving beyond her past. With years of trauma, her education had also been neglected. So WDC decided to assist her to gain an education till she could stand on her own two feet. Equipped with laptops and other essentials needed to pursue her education provided by UNFPA with support from the Government of Japan\*, Iru began studying, turning her grief into strengths.

Now as a 20-year-old, she has started working within WDC on data entry. After a few weeks of training and skills development support it was clear that she had the ability to do more. She is now the inhouse trainer for other staff on technology and has an eye for photography. "Someday I want to become a lawyer, so that I can ensure that more laws are in place to protect women and children against sexual violence. No one deserves that kind of pain" says Iru.

Many like Iru from the shelter have pursued careers in the law enforcement sector with a helping hand from WDC counsellors and service providers. She has been WDC's official event photographer since, earning praise from all her friends and the staff on the diversity of her talents.

Iru is known for her kindness and undying loyalty towards her "sisters" at the home. She speaks fondly of teaching the younger girls, reading Sinhala novels, and playing netball. It has been anything but easy for Iru, but through it all she stands as someone who is now there for other aspiring young girls, striving to break free from a cycle of violence.

*\*UNFPA is working with funding from the Government of Japan to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services and information through the 'PROMISES' project - Project for the Improvement of Access to Information and Services of SRHR and of GBV for Women and Young People. By working with the Jaffna Social Action Centre, the Women's Development Centre and Women in Need, the project also works to equip shelters operating across the country to provide a safe space for women and girls experiencing violence.*



## GENDER EQUALITY: UPHOLDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO A SAFE, FULFILLING AND DIGNIFIED LIFE



**We work towards preventing and responding to gender-based violence through the strengthening of national policies and systems that advance gender equality and reproductive rights in development and humanitarian settings. Our work aims to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable groups.**

As countries strive for gender equality, violence against women and girls remains a global pandemic hindering the progression towards an equal world for all. One in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime globally. Approximately one in four girls in the developing world is married before age 18. Public health crises such as COVID-19 have caused a rise in violence against women and girls. With women locked at home with abusers and a rise in household tensions, calls for help have increased indicating a rise in domestic violence in particular. With health systems stretched in responding to the pandemic, women's shelters are also reaching capacity with many seeking solace and support.

COVID-19 has also severely disrupted access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and hampered

authorities' ability to respond to gender-based violence, at a time when women and girls need these services most. As the pandemic continues, violence at home is likely to increase with multiple impacts on women's mental health and wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and their ability to participate at decision making level in the recovery of this crisis.

UNFPA works to prevent and respond to gender-based violence through its work with policymakers, social services, health systems and humanitarian partners. UNFPA focuses on eliminating harmful practices on women and girls, and helps to engage men and boys to advance gender equality.



## WE ARE WITH HER PROJECT

1 in 3 female homicides in Sri Lanka are related to intimate partner violence and 69% of such incidences go unreported, according to a study done in 5 provinces commissioned by UNFPA.

In 2018, the Government of Canada issued a grant of CAD 900,000 to UNFPA in support of addressing sexual and gender-based violence by strengthening public institutions. The project 'We are With Her' aims to ensure public officials stand with survivors of gender-based violence to provide a cohesive chain of essential services that support their safety, wellbeing and access to justice supported through evidence.

The project is implemented in collaboration with the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-schools and Primary Education, School Infrastructure and Education Service, the Department of Census and Statistics, and the Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka. In response to the pandemic, the Government of Canada provided an additional CAD 400,000 for COVID-19 response which supported the digitalization of Mithuru Piyasa help desks and upgrading the women and children's desks under the State Ministry of Women and Child Development.



## GENDER EQUALITY: UPHOLDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO A SAFE, FULFILLING AND DIGNIFIED LIFE (CONTD.)

### KEY INTERVENTIONS IN 2020



#### Training of Trainers on Women's Rights are Human Rights 24th -28th February

Continuing the work with the Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka (HRCSL), UNFPA conducted a five-day 'Training of Trainers (TOT)' with substantive sessions on SGBV and SRH, information sharing and training. The TOT further enhanced the capacity for officials to respond to fundamental rights cases from a gender perspective.



#### International Women's Day

UNFPA and Sri Lankan fashion designer Amilani Perera, embarked on a partnership to address the issue of violence via the fashion and apparel industry. Through this partnership, UNFPA was able to support survivors of violence to engage in the process of curating the pieces, which was vital for both entities as the pieces were curated to display the stages and emotions of their experience. The pieces also featured hand paintings by Amilani Perera and were part of the brand's 'UNBREAKABLE' collection launched at the Colombo Fashion Week 2020, in line with the Responsible Fashion Movement in Sri Lanka.

Both UNFPA and Amilani Perera are now looking ahead to the 2021 Colombo Fashion Week.





### Media Sensitization Workshop 31st July

Physical trauma is the leading cause of hospitalization in Sri Lanka. This violation of human rights has seen a sharp spike during the COVID-19 lockdown. Responding to this violence requires a range of interlinked actions, including reaching out to those with the ability to influence mass numbers to avoid serious implications.

In line with UNFPA's communications strategy and promoting the principle of 'do no harm', UNFPA conducted a media sensitization on the issue of violence against women and girls as part of the longstanding project titled "We are with HER". The discussion was used to drive a continuing conversation amongst renowned journalists on responsible reportage of intimate partner violence as advocates against gender-based violence and the norms that help perpetuate it within the island.



### 16 Days of Activism 26th November - 10th December

During the global 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, UNFPA took several initiatives to shed a light on this shadow pandemic. One such intervention was the lighting of South Asia's tallest structure 'Lotus Tower' in orange, in solidarity with those who have experienced violence in the midst of the pandemic. This was done with support from the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka.

Another initiative was to highlight the services of gender based violence service providers and counselors through a series of feature stories. These looked at people who have worked tirelessly beyond their duty in difficult lockdown environments to provide a shelter and safe space for women and girls experiencing violence.







## BRINGING THE SHADOW PANDEMIC TO LIGHT

Please.... Relieve us from this hell! These are the pleas from women and girls across the world, trapped in a cycle of violence. Do we hear these voices echoing louder and louder?

Saroja's\* is one compelling voice among many. As a mother of 3, it was heartbreaking to hear of the abuse she faced by her husband. She didn't want to leave - not without her children, and so she endured it all for years. She didn't want her children to see her like this, nor did she want them to get used to this violence. So she pleaded to relieve her from this "hell" she and her children were living in.

This is just one story and sadly not unique.

Across the world, countries are in lockdown, with millions confined to their homes due to COVID-19. However the positive efforts to tackle the spread of the virus also bring to light another deadly danger. We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women and girls.

For countless women worldwide experiencing domestic violence, being in lockdown at home is not safe. Abuse survivors like Saroja\* suddenly found themselves shut in with their abusers. Helplines are reporting a rise in the number of calls for help against violence that is taking place behind closed doors - in the shadows.

In Sri Lanka, since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports show an increase in the number of calls made to the 24 hour 1938 National women's hotline and other helplines. This number may not fully reflect the extent of the problem as many women are not aware of the hotline services, are unable to make a call, or don't make the call for various reasons.

Lengthy confinement coupled with tensions fueled by the stresses of job losses, health and safety, and money worries, have made family situations worse, further exacerbating violence from an intimate partner. This also hinders victims and survivors from reaching out for support and care.

Health systems are stretched in responding to the pandemic, and domestic violence shelters are also reaching capacity – aspects that needs to be addressed

within recovery measures from the crisis, as this has both immediate and long term consequences.

Crises have been always linked with a surge in reported cases of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), and it also undermine strategies to end violence against women. Even before COVID-19 plagued the world, SGBV was one of the greatest human rights violations.

In 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), world leaders formed the consensus that sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are a bedrock necessity for the growth of every country. The 2019 Nairobi Summit re-energized this rights movement as it mobilized political will to achieve the goals of the ICPD and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Sri Lanka has always been part of this global effort.

The Nairobi Summit rallied support to achieve "three zeros" – zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, zero gender-based violence and harmful practices – by 2030. A year later COVID-19 threatens to slow the pace of progress and undo the achievements. Even before the pandemic, it was clear that more data was needed for policy makers to comprehend the extent of the problem and thereafter formulate effective evidence-based solutions so Saroja\* and other women can be safe from violence.

With this in mind, the United Nations Population Fund with support from the Government of Canada provided technical assistance to the Department of Census and Statistics to





undertake a survey to collect data on SGBV in Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on intimate partner violence. According to the study, one in five (20.4%) ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. The study also highlighted that nearly half (49.3%) of the women who experienced sexual violence by a partner did not seek formal help anywhere due to reasons such as shame, embarrassment and fear of being blamed, and/or thinking the violence was normal or not serious enough to seek help.

In addition, the study clearly shows the damage on the next generation. For example, women with school age children who had experienced physical or sexual partner violence were twice as likely to report their child(ren) had nightmares than women who had no physical or sexual partner violence. Women who experienced violence by a partner were also three times as likely to have a child who dropped out of school compared with women who never experienced violence.

Global evidence also shows children who have experienced or witnessed violence at home are more likely to become either perpetrators or victims of SGBV. We must stop this vicious cycle.

Violence against women and girls continues to plague women in Sri Lanka and across the world, but this year COVID-19 has fanned the flames and this is the reason to highlight it now more than ever. The pandemic's long-term socio-economic effect may make the road steeper, but our joint efforts must continue.

Post-COVID-19, families may need a financial push, and countries need to make the right investments commensurate with the needs of the most left behind women and girls—for prevention, for education, for support and for lifesaving sexual and reproductive health and SGBV services. Failing to pay particular attention to the specific needs of women and girls in times of crisis will limit their capacity to enjoy their basic rights and to contribute to national development and recovery processes. As Sri Lanka tries to recover from COVID-19, this survey is particularly important as it the first ever comprehensive national study on SGBV prevalence in Sri Lanka, and provides an accurate baseline to assess progress and contributes to monitoring the indicators of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development.

During this year's 16 days of activism against GBV, marked universally from 25 November to 10 December, we want to draw focus on the millions of women like Saroja\* who are suffering in silence. Let's pay tribute to the frontline health workers and GBV service providers who strive to create a safer world for all. Let us also call for action by policymakers to prioritize this issue even amidst of the pandemic because the world cannot prosper if a home is not safe for women and girls. This is an important part of our commitment to leaving no one behind, & UNFPA and the Government of Canada will continue to support the Government of Sri Lanka as well as local civil society organizations to achieve this vision.

Together, let's shed some light on this shadow pandemic and eliminate violence against women and girls!



*This Opinion-Editorial is co-authored by H.E. David McKinnon, High Commissioner of Canada to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and Ms Ritsu Nacken, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Representative of Sri Lanka and Country Director, Maldives*

*\*The name was changed to maintain confidentiality.*







## POPULATION DYNAMICS: ENSURING EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE IS COUNTED AND ACCOUNTED FOR



**Our goal is to strengthen Sri Lanka's capacity for use of evidence-based analysis of population data for decision-making at national and subnational levels to address inequalities and advance the International Conference on Population and Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.**

The pursuit of development is the pursuit for a better life and the ambition to improve human wellbeing. In this road to achieve sustainable development, changes in population size, structure and spatial distribution have a profound impact. These changing population structures affect the socio-economic dynamics of the country and will play a pivotal role as countries race to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This has created additional challenges resulting in a negative impact on economic growth and slowing the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and ICPD agenda. It has shown how demographic trends can increase the risk for spreading contagions and our vulnerability to viruses. Increased migration, travel, urbanization and population density have made the spread of the virus easier and faster.

Population ageing has also made us more vulnerable as older persons are at high risk due to existing preconditions such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases etc. Sri Lanka is fast becoming a country that has the oldest people in the South Asian region. It is predicted that by 2030, 1 in 5 Sri Lankans will be over the age of 60, with women making up the majority, marking the 'Feminization of Ageing'. Ageing is a triumph of development: People are living longer because of better nutrition, sanitation, health care, education and economic well-being. However, it brings about unique social and economic challenges, particularly relating to long-term care. As most women are caregivers even as they age and transition from providers to dependents due to the deterioration of their health. The right set of evidence-



based policies can equip individuals, families and societies to address these challenges and to reap a demographic dividend. We continue to work to raise awareness about population ageing and the need to harness its opportunities and address its challenges.

We advocate a life-cycle approach to create optimal solutions – investing in health and well-being from pregnancy through childbirth, childhood and adolescence, and on to adulthood and eventually old age, cultivating community involvement in the process, and emphasizing the rights of individuals of all ages. We support research and data collection to provide a solid base for policies and planning and make sure ageing issues are integrated into national development programmes and poverty reduction strategies.

We are committed to support the Government to strengthen population data collection and analysis to improve both the availability and use of data to inform plans, policies and programmes – ensuring targeted investments to achieve SDGs, and everyone, everywhere is counted, including those furthest behind. As Sri Lanka prepares for conducting the Census of Population and Housing in 2021, we continue to provide technical support to the Department of Census and Statistics to ensure that the census is of high quality, upholds international principles and standards, and produces data that is widely disseminated and utilized for development.



## POPULATION DYNAMICS: ENSURING EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE IS COUNTED AND ACCOUNTED FOR (CONTD.)

### KEY INTERVENTIONS IN 2020



#### Elder Abuse Awareness Day Campaign

15th June

UNFPA conducted a week long campaign on social media to raise awareness on elder abuse as part of our work on ageing. Elder abuse is a global social issue which affects the health and human rights of millions of older persons around the world. The campaign focused on encouraging people, especially the younger generation to think about how COVID-19 has affected the elderly. If it has exacerbated their situation and what we can do to help. It employed the tactic of user driven content to generate the sentiment that elders matter.



#### World Population Day

11th July

UNFPA and the Advocata Institute partnered to host a live panel discussion on the topic 'Thinking differently for achieving progress for women and girls in the new normal' in commemoration of World Population Day 2020. The Advocata Institute is an independent policy think tank that works to promote sound public policy ideas very much in-line with the mandate of UNFPA.

Especially within the context of COVID-19, this partnership reinforced the relevance and necessity to continue the discussions stemming from the ICPD. Advocata offered valuable inputs given their research experience around sexual and reproductive health, UNFPA was able to reach wider audiences and facilitate new engagements as a result of the partnership such as the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce.



“THE YOUTH MUST RAISE CRITICAL QUESTIONS WHICH WERE NOT THOUGHT OF AND SHALL FIND ANSWERS AND SOLUTIONS. THIS WOULD CERTAINLY BE THE WAY FORWARD TO BRING ABOUT LASTING CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY.”

- Segar Dhanukshan, Research and Programme Consultant, Office for Reparations.

### International Youth Day 12th August

In commemoration of International Youth Day, UNFPA developed a video series engaging young people in representing different walks of life, answering rapid-fire style questions relating to their experience as a young person in Sri Lanka.



### Rebranding the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS)

#### December

As the UN's population agency, UNFPA has been supporting DCS to strengthen its communication and data visualization capacity with the aim to make it a user-friendly, public oriented organization that connects directly with its audience in an effective manner. As part of this ongoing collaboration UNFPA supported the DCS in designing, developing and implementing a Communications strategy which will ensure that data can be made accessible to all.

As a first step, the Communications Strategy recommended refreshing DCS's visual identity, reasserting and amplifying the brand's visual expression. The new logo was designed to create a prominent simplicity and strives to be inclusive by including 'DCS' spelled out in braille; making Sri Lanka's Department of Statistics, the first National Statistical Organization in the world to speak to the visually impaired via its brand identity. The rebranding marked the beginning of a concentrated effort to gradually introduce DCS outputs in braille along with all three national languages thus ensuring that no-one is left behind.







## A DATA-DRIVEN FUTURE!

Behind every statistic is a human face, a personal story. It talks about the health and well-being of people, challenges and opportunities, and socio-economic conditions. Well analyzed statistics have the power to advance a country's sustainable development.

The importance of data and statistics cannot be stated enough. A birth not recorded, for example, means a child without access to education and healthcare and deprived of future possibilities as a productive member of society. Uncounted people mean, unplanned infrastructure, and ill-equipped hospitals and schools.

It's also about going beyond just numbers. Analyzed well, data could show population trends, including fertility rates, gender parity in school enrolment, information on sexual and reproductive health, and much more. Together, these data shine a light on the health and rights of people around the world, especially women and young people.

This is why in Sri Lanka, UNFPA supports the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), Sri Lanka's apex institution mandated on data collection and dissemination. As Sri Lanka gears to recover from COVID-19 and achieve its SDGs, data collected through the census plays a key role in terms of resource allocation and mobilization, recovery efforts and support for the government's development goals.

A census involves the complete enumeration of the population in a country. It generates a wealth of data, including numbers of people, their spatial distribution, age, and sex structure, as well as their living conditions and other key socioeconomic characteristics. This information is critical for good governance, policy formulation, development planning, risk reduction, crisis response, social welfare programmes, and market analyses.

It requires careful planning, resourcing, and implementation – from mapping an entire country, mobilizing and training large numbers of enumerators, and conducting major public awareness campaigns, to canvassing all households, carefully monitoring census activities, and analysing, disseminating, and using the resulting data. Hence DCS

embarked on the journey of transformation in order to better communicate the data it produces.

As a population data agency, UNFPA provides technical and financial support to ensure that censuses are of high quality, upholds international principles and standards, and produces data that is widely disseminated and utilized for development.

Data also needs to be freely accessible with easy-to-understand analyses to help people understand and make their own personal decisions. UNFPA is supporting DCS to design, develop and implement a Communications Strategy and Data Visualization Plan which will ensure that data can be made accessible to all. "Over the years the department has focused its communication strategy on dissemination as opposed to communication," says Kosala Kumara, UNFPA consultant to DCS. "Simply churning out numbers becomes unsustainable...so the ultimate aim of this Communications Strategy is to add value to statistical information so that it becomes more meaningful and thereby useful to citizens and organizations operating within a society."



As a first step, and one of inclusion, the Communications Strategy saw the need to revamp the DCS logo to include 'DCS' spelled out in braille; making Sri Lanka's Department of Statistics the first National Statistical Organization in the world to speak to the visually impaired via its brand identity. This is the start of a new initiative to gradually introduce DCS outputs in braille along with all three national languages thus ensuring that no-one is left behind.

The next step is to prepare and gear the staff of DCS to expand the teams to take over Social Media, public relations, and all other related communications through training and skills development so as to ensure that publicity for the 2021 census and the dissemination of the census findings reaches every member of the population, thus making the organization more visible and relatable.

Looking back at 2020, Poorani Radhakrishnan, Programme Analyst for population Data and Ageing at UNFPA stated - "visualization is a powerful way to tell a story. Using visualizations will help DCS communicate its information in an attractive form and more effectively. Through this it can provide good insights and help improve evidence based decision-making."

"DCS has been working closely with UNFPA for the past several years....", says Vasana Jayakody, Director, Statistics, Training and Data Dissemination. "And, UNFPA's contribution in the last census of 2012 was immense. They assisted with almost every aspect with a special focus on engendering the census and data dissemination.... This year, in preparation for the census, we are working together on a much-needed communications strategy."

The final step in the strategy is focused on targeted campaigns to ensure that growth in data is accompanied by

a widespread demand for it, a demand that leads to a better understanding, which in turn translates into that data being used to reduce inequalities, and ultimately enabling people to hold their leaders accountable on the direction of their societies and their futures. Thus, the new Communications Strategy that underlies the creative rebranding efforts aims to create DCS as a modern and transparent Department that connects directly with its audience in an engaging and effective manner, making DCS: the go-to organization for official statistics for Sri Lanka.





## COVID-19 RESPONSE

In 2020, UNFPA worked closely with its partners to respond to the emerging needs of women and girls in particular on several fronts:

### DIGNITY KITS

The needs of women and girls were kept at the centre of UNFPA's COVID-19 response. 4000 pre-positioned dignity kits were provided to ensure that women and girls of reproductive age are able to maintain their hygiene and health. Maternity kits were provided to assist in the postpartum care of expectant mothers.

### CONTRACEPTION

Reproductive health is a critical part of UNFPA's COVID-19 response as it ensures that women's basic health needs are not left behind. UNFPA handed over 10,000 contraceptive items to the Family Health Bureau to be distributed by the Ministry of Health to ensure every pregnancy is wanted.

### DIAPER HANDOVER

UNFPA with the support of, the Hayleys Group, a private sector partner, donated baby diapers to four selected hospitals in Sri Lanka to support the well-being of mothers and babies during COVID-19.

### MEDIA CAMPAIGN - MAHARAJA

UNFPA launched a media campaign in the two local languages under the project "Addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence" funded by the Government of Canada. The objective of the campaign was to raise awareness on the importance of addressing the issue and to call for action to break the silence around this grave human rights violation.

### SOCIAL MEDIA AWARENESS ON COVID-19

UNFPA created a number of social media posts to raise awareness on areas such as elder abuse, mental health, and hotlines for domestic violence during Sri Lanka's lockdown period which saw the rise of misinformation and fear amongst the general public.

### SUPPORT TO THREE SHELTER PROVIDERS

UNFPA supported 3 key shelter providers to remain open during the pandemic and increased the hotline support by expanding the services of the shelters.

### CAPACITY BUILDING ON THE 1938 HOTLINE

UNFPA supported the capacity building of the National Hotline 1938 through a 3 day workshop. Additionally through the Forum Against GBV, UNFPA developed and circulated a key Guidance Note for response and prevention of SGBV and a short Module for remote support for SGBV.







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## PARAMOUNT NEEDS FULFILLED

Women represent nearly 70 percent of the healthcare workforce globally, yet the sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial needs of frontline workers are largely ignored in the face of the health pandemic. As countries around the world impose lockdown and curfew measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, a spectrum of women lose access to reproductive health-related products, services and information.

This shows that women are disproportionately affected when a crisis sets in. Women and girls also shoulder unpaid care and informal jobs especially during crises which can put an immense strain on the possibility of self-care, particularly during such trying times that have warranted an overhaul of daily life routines. UNFPA is working to ensure that women and girls have access to their sexual and reproductive health needs and their dignity is preserved in the midst of the pandemic, through the prepositioning and delivery of dignity and maternity kits.

UNFPA's trademark dignity kits are designed to help maintain the basic hygiene of a woman of reproductive age during emergency situations, be it floods, landslides and any other natural or man-made crises. Dignity is more than physical or mental wellbeing. It is about meeting the basic needs of women and girls who hold together the fabric of our communities during catastrophes. These dignity kits, which include sanitary napkins, bath soap, washing powder, and toothpaste and other essentials, are carefully curated to match the specific needs of the local society. In Sri Lanka, UNFPA supplied over 4000 dignity and maternity kits in partnership with the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka in 2020.

Initially this was administered and distributed by the Colombo Municipal Council as they carried out PCR tests within the Colombo City limits. "We provided these kits to women and girls of reproductive age as we continued the PCR testing systematically through the entire city amidst the rising cases. I remember mothers crying when they received the kits as nobody had cared for their SRHR needs, and purchasing and accessing these items during the lockdown was impossible. It was nice to see how appreciative they were" said Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr. Chintha Jayampathi.

Fully appreciating the provisions of the dignity kits, Hasanthi from Wanathamulla stated "The curfew meant that the small shops that were close to our home were no longer functioning and we couldn't step out even for a moment. Though this was a measure of protection, it also became a point of contention because we no longer had access to menstrual pads. Both my 12-year-old daughter and I were really struggling as online shopping was not accessible to us. We are forever grateful for this initiative that finally understood the distress that all the women and girls of this country were going through."

Modern contraceptives are central to ensuring adolescent and women's health and empowerment. However, due to COVID-19 supply chains have faced interruptions as a result of safety precautions and economic downfall. This could have had life-threatening consequences and reverse





recent gains to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Yet, in collaboration with the Family Planning Association and the Ministry of Health, UNFPA was able to address this by redoubling efforts to ensure appropriate dissemination of condoms were in place. As an addition to these efforts, UNFPA also supported frontline workers who put themselves at risk day in and day out, by procuring and providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and kits for the clinical management of COVID-19.

“The pandemic has restricted the mobility of women and girls, and their accessibility to family planning services and basic hygiene products, leaving them exposed to other risks apart from the coronavirus such as unplanned pregnancies. With the support of UNFPA and other agencies, we have also been able to distribute the products and support female sex workers, persons with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community and other populations who continue to face an array of difficulties in accessing health and safety measures” says Tharanga Sachinthani, Senior Manager outreach, who works as the humanitarian effort coordinator at the Family Planning Association in Sri Lanka.

As the pandemic continues, UNFPA perseveres to support the relevant Ministries to ensure that paramount sexual and reproductive needs of women and girls are not overlooked in situations of emergency. Despite the health systems being stretched and overwhelmed in responding to this crisis. Without careful consideration of women and girls, and other vulnerable populations, in both response and recovery plans, countries will not be able to fulfill their goal in ensuring we truly leave no one behind.





## ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS



### RESULTS BASED MANAGEMENT (RBM) SEAL

UNFPA has always been committed to instilling a culture of results based management (RBM) throughout the organization. In 2020, in a bid to further accelerate the institutionalization of RBM and instill transformational leadership at all levels, UNFPA Sri Lanka participated in the UNFPA RBM Seal which is a corporate certification that recognizes good performance of UNFPA country offices in results-based management. UNFPA Sri Lanka engaged with this staff-wide initiative to mainstream the results culture in office and further motivate staff to achieve the results committed in the country programme and support national partners to accelerate progress towards the ICPD agenda and the SDGs.

Sri Lanka was among the only 2 countries selected for the pilot from the Asia Pacific Region. The Country Office made commitments and changes to create an adaptive organization and the use of results not only for accountability but as a continuous learning initiative. Internal structures of meetings, knowledge sharing, increasing the capacity of staff on RBM practices and having the infrastructure such as the innovative digital platforms for collaboration and co-creation and the refurbishment of the

office space to fit the purpose ensured we were adaptive and agile in the context of COVID-19. With a commitment to adaptability, the staff embraced the changes and took forward the process of digitalization to the partners we work with to ensure the rights of women, girls and vulnerable communities are addressed in these difficult times.

### SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Globally, UNFPA has offset its emissions by purchasing and cancelling Certified Emission Reductions. So UNFPA has been climate neutral since 2014 well ahead of the 2020 deadline provided by the Secretary General.

In keeping with this standard, in 2020, UNFPA Sri Lanka re-assessed its processes in-country to make sure to offset any unavoidable emissions every year in order to keep this climate neutral status. With the Country Office going through a refurbishment in the midst of a pandemic, this proved challenging. However, sustainability was at the forefront of all initiatives by installing energy saving options wherever possible, designing open office structures by increasing natural light and ventilation, reducing wastage and switching to a paper-less digitized office.

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UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO

University of Colombo



Women's Development Centre



Women In Need



the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age is expected to increase from 1.1 billion to 1.5 billion.

As the world's population grows, the demand for food and other resources will increase. This will put pressure on the environment and on the world's food supply.

One way to meet this demand is to increase the amount of food that is produced. This can be done by using more land for agriculture, by using more water, or by using more fertilizers.

Another way to meet this demand is to increase the efficiency of food production. This can be done by using better farming techniques, by using better seeds, or by using better fertilizers.

There are many ways to meet the world's growing demand for food and other resources. It is up to us to decide which way is best.

One of the most important things we can do is to make sure that we are using resources wisely. This means using less land, less water, and less fertilizer.

Another important thing we can do is to make sure that we are using the best farming techniques. This means using the best seeds and the best fertilizers.

There are many other things we can do to meet the world's growing demand for food and other resources. It is up to us to decide which way is best.

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