

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

# Bringing generations together for our Sri Lanka

*“Investing in women as  
game changers for Sri  
Lanka’s future  
development: what  
does it take for women  
to fulfill their potential  
as leaders?”*



*Colombo, Sri Lanka  
29 March 2016*

# 2

## Table of Content

	Page
<b>Rationale: Why inter-generational policy dialogues?.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Kick Start.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Intergenerational Policy Points</b>	
<b>1. Educating Potential Women Leaders for the Job Market.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Investing in the Security of Women in the Labour Force .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Tapping into the Potential of Female Headed Households to         Contribute to the Economy.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Conclusion: Connecting the Dots .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>UNFPA Publications on Women’s Rights and Health.....</b>	<b>11</b>

## Rationale: Why inter-generational policy dialogues?

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

The United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka, UNFPA, is facilitating a series of inter-generational policy 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.

# Why “Inter-generational” dialogues?

The second dialogue of this series, **“Investing in women as game changers for Sri Lanka's future development: what does it take for women to fulfil their potential as leaders?”** aims to create an inclusive platform for both young and old, from different walks of life and expertise, to contribute towards creating policy solutions.

These inter-generational policy dialogues however are not self-standing, but constitute the cornerstone of UNFPA Sri Lanka's Policy Engagement Framework. The evidence and insights gathered through the dialogues will support policy makers and decision-making processes with an in-depth analysis of population dynamics beyond data.

**“Gender equality is also a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty: Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation.”**

- United Nations Population Fund

## Kick Start

United Nations Population Fund's 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?”***, facilitated a discussion on identifying the impediments holding women back, and what kind of investments are needed to allow Sri Lankan women to fulfil their potential as dynamic leaders. The second dialogue was held on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016, in Colombo.

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

With Sri Lanka emerging as a middle-income country, UNFPA Sri Lanka focuses on assisting the government develop evidence based policies in the areas of women, youth, 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.

By using and analysing data from Sri Lanka's Population and Housing census of 2012, various surveys, research studies and administrative records and, through recommendations from a series of intergenerational policy dialogues, UNFPA hopes to build a body of evidence that documents shifting population dimensions, and identify policy needs.

The policy dialogue was held in two sessions. The first session consisted of Hon. Cabinet Minister of Digital Media and Infrastructure, Mr. Harin Fernando, and Hon. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Harsha De Silva, moderated by Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka Ms. Ambika Satkunanathan.



The following panel discussion included the following participants:

- Prof. Lakshman Dissanayake, Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo
- Prof. Savitri Goonesekere, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Colombo
- Ms. Shanaaz Preena, Director, Women Go Beyond Programme, MAS Holdings
- Mr. Anushka Wijesinha, Development Economist
- Ms. Maithreyi Rajasingam, Executive Director - Legal, at Viluthu
- Dr. Manoj Fernando, Lecturer in Health Promotion, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

Moderator: Ms. Tracy Holsinger, Artistic Director, Mind Adventures Theatre Company

## Inter-generational Policy Points:

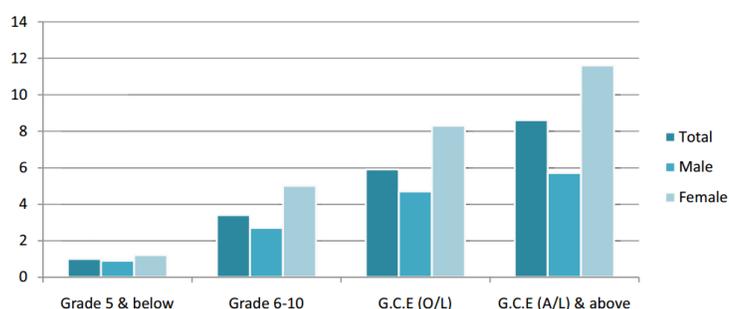
The following **three key policy points** were discussed among participants from three generations on Investing in women as game changers for Sri Lanka's future development.

### Issue 1: Educating Potential Women Leaders for the Job Market

*“Despite Sri Lanka faring well in several aspects of gender equality compared to its South Asian counterparts; it's still lagging behind in terms of female labour force participation”.*

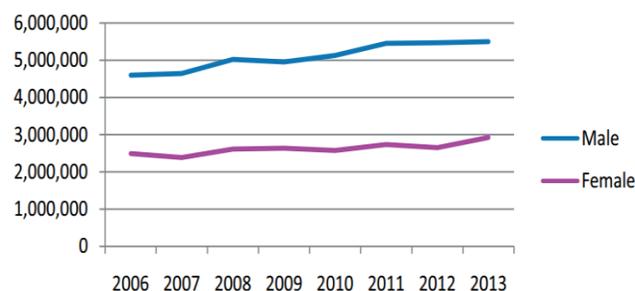
Source: 20.4 Million – Sri Lanka's population at a glance (2015)

Currently, Sri Lankan women account for 59.7% of students enrolled in universities. However, the total labour force participation has remained relatively unchanged over the past three decades, with the men's participation in the workforce exceeding women's labour force participation by 2.6 million. As of 2013, there were 2.6 million more men than women employed. Therefore, the trend in women taking the lead in education is not translated into actual labour force participation.



Unemployment by Education Level

Source: 20.4 Million – Sri Lanka's population at a glance (2015)



Employed population by gender

Source: 20.4 Million – Sri Lanka's population at a glance (2015)

#### Key factors that affect the leadership potential of Sri Lankan women in the labour force:

- **Gender stereotyping of education options:** Highest female enrollment in education is seen in streams such as arts, paramedical studies, and indigenous medicine, males enroll in streams such as engineering, architecture and ICT where there are more jobs available.
- **Lack of flexi-work conditions:** 62% of economically inactive women of working age are actively engaged in housework.
- **Minimal child care options:** Lack of high quality, cost effective, accessible childcare has prevented women from reentering the labour force after child birth.
- **Male bias in the private sector:** In 2012 the private sector shed over 10,000 female workers while adding over 45,000 male workers.

Source: 20.4 Million – Sri Lanka's population at a glance (2015)

#### Policy discussion points on educating potential women leaders for the job market:

- How can we change gender stereotypes in Sri Lanka's education system and target women and girls to focus on what – are traditionally considered as male dominated fields?
- Where can women be taught soft skills such as leadership skills, negotiation skills and conflict resolution skills?
- What flexi-work options are available in Sri Lanka? Are there any existing policies regarding this?
- Is entrepreneurship education for women the way forward?
- What are reasons for male bias in the private sector? And how do we address them?

## DISCUSSION

The following key points on educating potential women leaders for the job market were discussed at the dialogue:

1. Mismatch between undergraduate programs attended by female students, and the skills demanded by the labour market.
2. IT sector vocational education programs and facilities to educate and expand the capacity of young women to enter the IT sector job market are needed.
3. Lack of soft skills training to enhance employability of undergraduates in national universities.
4. Importance of introducing career guidance at school level, to ensure increase women's labour force participation.
5. Need for education for students on constitutional and legal rights as a prevention against gender-based violence and redress.

*“When females go to the employers they are reluctant in employing females because the demand and supply of skills does not match. Most girls come with Art related backgrounds which does not target them to the right destination of employment”*

- Hon. Harin Fernando  
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

*“When it comes to employability and university education, the issue is not with the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student; the issue is with the soft skills.”*

- Prof. Lakshman Dissanayake

### Present policy options

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

### Policy pointers from the panelists:

- Introduce soft skills development programs in schools and universities to develop skills of young people to become more employable while/ upon completion of their education.
- Diversification of vocational education programs to expand into new sectors of employment.
- Mainstream *Rights Education* in the national education system to educate the future labour force about their rights. Hence, overcoming gender stereotyping in the labour force through long term awareness raising.
- To establish good quality childcare options for working mothers in work places and in communities.

## Issue 2: Investing in the Security of Women in the Labour Force

***“Street harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace, non-discriminatory payment structures, and promotions should become key areas of policy intervention to increase female labour force participation”***

*Source: 20.4 Million – Sri Lanka’s population at a glance (2015)*

In most institutions/workplaces, there is - minimal awareness of sexual harassment or mechanisms to address sexual harassment. Therefore, employees complaining of sexual harassment or seeking redress could be unfairly further penalized; transferred to other departments or forced to resign or unfairly dismissed, thereby compounding the injustice. In addition, it has negative impacts on women’s livelihood strategies and their bargaining position. In addition to the workplace women face widespread harassment in public transportation to and from the workplace.

### **Statistics that provide a snapshot of sexual harassment faced by women who are or who have potential to be part of the labour force:**

- Almost 29% of Sri Lankan female journalists have experienced sexual harassment in the work place (Survey conducted by the International Federation of Journalists) (2015)
- 94% of 200 women reported being sexually harassed in a survey done at the Maradana railway station in 2004 (Amarasinghe et al)
- 51.2% of respondents indicated the presence of domestic violence in their lives. (4004 households in 11 Districts) UNOPS (2011)
- 44% of undergraduates have faced sexual abuse; and 36% of undergraduates have faced physical abuse. (Out of 1322 undergraduates from all over Sri Lanka) Fernando & Karunasekera (2009)
- 18.3% of pregnant women have faced physical abuse in Badulla District (Study done with 1200 pregnant women) Moonesinghe (2002).

### **Possible policy discussion points on Investing in the security of women in the workforce:**

- What measures can be taken at a national level to address harassment in public transportation?
- Should there be different policies on sexual harassment for the different sectors? (Public, private, estate etc.) Or should there be one uniform policy on sexual harassment in the work place for the country?
- What measures can national policies take to ensure decent work environments for women working in the informal sector such as domestic workers?
- What collective measures can the state and private sector take to ensure decent work environments for women working in the estate sector?
- Should trainings to employees on addressing harassment in the workplace be mandatory for all companies in all sectors?

## DISCUSSION

The following points on Investing in the Security of Women in the Labour Force were discussed at the dialogue:

1. The need to address and create awareness about the rising rates of cyber-crimes.
2. Lack of legitimized flexi hour jobs for both men and women to allow women to work from home.
3. The need to sensitize employees in the private sector about address stereotyping gender roles in the labour force, including education on gender-based violence.
4. Lack of knowledge by both men and women about sexual and reproductive health which causes many issues within the labour force, challenging the safety and security of women participating in the labour force and willing to be part of the labour force.

### Present policy options

- National Health Policy (1996)
- National Health Promotion Policy (2012)
- National Human Resources and Employment Policy (2012)
- National Plan of Action for Women (2002-2007)
- Sri Lanka Action Plan (2008-2015)
- National Policy Framework and National Action Plan to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2016)

### Policy pointers from the panelists:

- Mainstream sexual and reproductive health education throughout the education system primary through tertiary, to ensure safety and security of the future labour force.
- Legitimize flexi-hour jobs to retain talent and skills of women especially after child birth.
- Policy intervention to make gender-sensitization programs mandatory in all state and non-state organizations as a preventative measure of sexual harassment at the work place.

***“The lack of state engagement in law enforcement has been a crisis in this country. State has played a critical role in this country, not only putting policies into place, but enforcing them.”***

– Prof. Savitri Goonesekere

***“Flexi-work hours must be available to men as well, so they can help take care of the children.”***

- Ms. Maithreyi Rajasingam

### Issue 3: Tapping into the Potential of Female Headed Households to Contribute to the Economy

***“Out of 5.3 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.3 million households are female headed households.”***

20.4 Million – Sri Lanka’s population at a glance (2015)

Among the total female heads of households, 34.6 percent are widows, while 53.3 percent are married and 7.4 percent have been reported as never married. Thus, more than one third of women who head households are widows who are a vulnerable group. The large number of female headed households highlights the need for policy and legal reforms to address discriminatory laws and practices in land inheritance that both disadvantage women and hinder economic productivity.

#### A Snapshot of the characteristics of women headed households:

##### Age

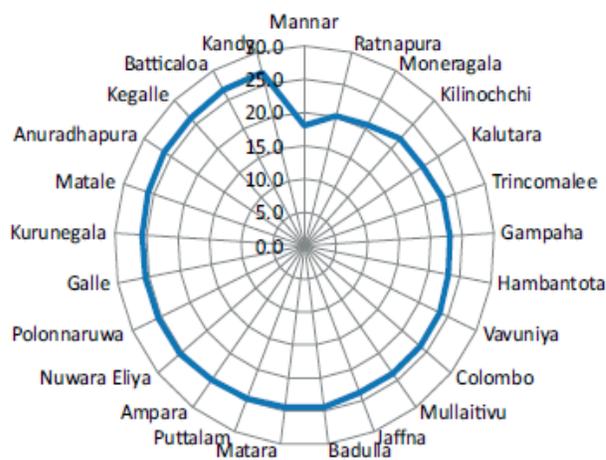
- Over 60% of female heads are under 60
- The highest concentration is within the age group 40-59
- 20% of women heading households are below 40

##### Education

- 7% have no schooling (this figure is twice the national figure)
- 27% have only primary education

##### Employment

- Employment of female heads is below 35%
- In the estate sector 52% are employed, but in precarious employment
- 22% indicated that they are unable or too old to work



Percentage of female headed households by district – 2012  
Source: Department of Census and Statistics

#### Possible Discussion Points on How to Support Female Headed Households

- Legislative reforms are crucial to address the challenges faced by female headed households, to enter the labor force, is this adequate? What other policy measures need to be taken?
- What type of employment opportunities and trainings should be provided to Female Headed Households to enable them to contribute to the economy through steady employment?
- What type of government led coordination mechanism is needed to address the challenges faced by female headed households throughout the country?

## DISCUSSION

The following point on Tapping into the Potential of Female Headed Households to contribute to the Economy was discussed at the dialogue:

- There is a gap between the needs of female headed households (FHH) and opportunities provided to empower them.
- It is crucial to provide FHHs with the right opportunities and support to expand their livelihood, taking into account their needs, socio-economic status and location.

*“Needs of female headed households should be understood in an emerging context. This can create an entire shift in structure of females who are employed, and who will be employed in the new economy”*

- Hon. Dr. Harsha De Silva

*“When it comes to rural women headed households, we can do a lot better with the vocational trainings. These trainings have to be done focusing on emerging sectors. For example the tourism sector”*

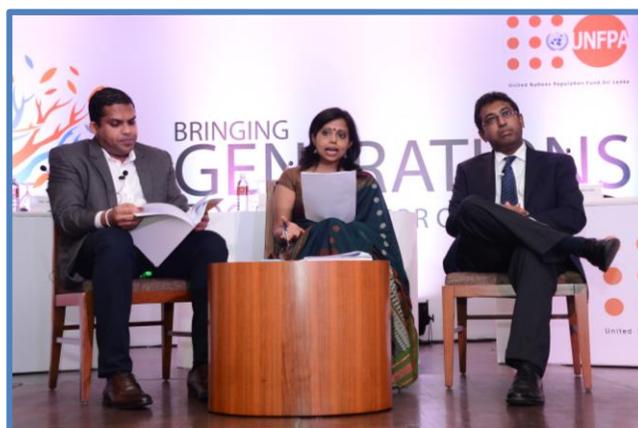
- Mr. Anushka Wijesinha

### Policy pointers from the panelists:

- Need to strengthen micro-financing opportunities conducive for female headed households.
- Providing continuous training and skills development programs on emerging sectors, for female headed households in rural areas.

### Present policy options

- National Human Resources and Employment Policy (2012)
- National Plan of Action for Women (2002-2007)
- National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical & Vocational Education (2009)
- The Women’s Charter (1993)
- Draft Policy on Female Headed Households (2016)
- National Policy Framework and National Action Plan to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2016)



[L-R]: Mr. Harin Fernando - Hon. Cabinet Minister of Digital Media and Infrastructure, Ms. Ambika Satkunathan - Human Rights Commissioner of Sri Lanka, Dr. Harsha De Silva - Hon. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

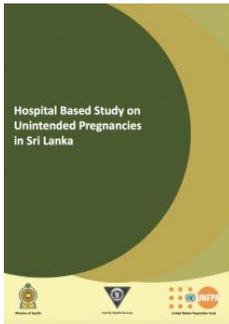
## Conclusion: Connecting the dots



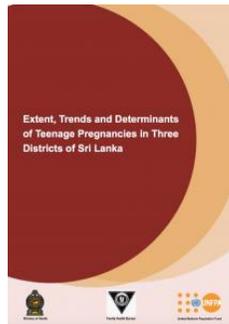
The inter-generational dialogues will be an integral part of the United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka's national policy engagement framework to advance policies on women and youth, rights and health.

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.

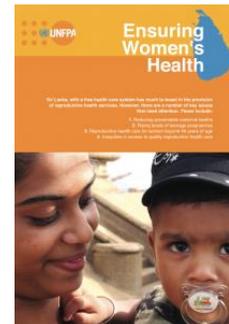
## Publications on women’s rights and health



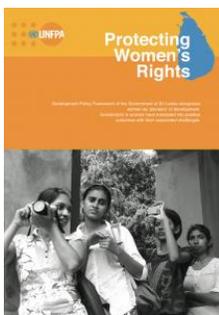
Hospital Based Study on Unintended Pregnancies in Sri Lanka (2011)



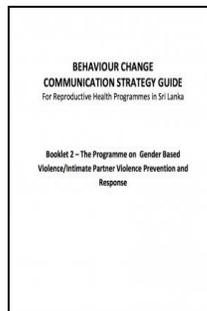
Extent, Trends and Determinants of Teenage Pregnancies in Three Districts of Sri Lanka (2011)



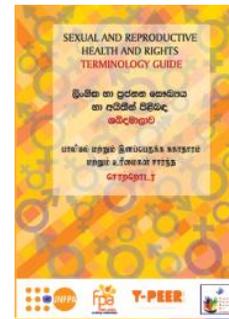
Ensuring Women’s Health – Factsheet (2013)



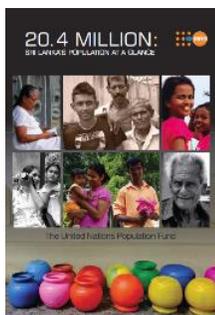
Protecting Women’s Rights – Factsheet (2013)



Behavior change communication strategy guide for reproductive health programmes in Sri Lanka (2014)



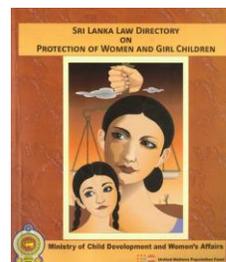
Sexual and reproductive health and rights terminology guide (2015)



20.4 Million: Sri Lanka’s population at a glance (2015)



Gender and Development in Sri Lanka: Implications for Policy and Action (2016)



Sri Lanka Law Directory on Protection of Women and Girl Children (2012)



100 Voices Leading for Change (2015)

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