



BRINGING
GENERATIONS
TOGETHER FOR OUR SRI LANKA

**THE NEED FOR
COMPREHENSIVE
SEXUALITY EDUCATION
IN SRI LANKA**

UNFPA Generation-to-Generation Dialogues - 5
#G2GLK
July 2018

CONTENT

UNFPA'S GENERATION-TO-GENERATION DIALOGUES	1
THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE) IN SRI LANKA	2
INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION	4
DISCUSSION POINTS	5
1. BREAKING MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CSE	5
2. A HOLISTIC AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CSE	7
3. AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO ADVOCATE FOR CSE	8
CONCLUSION: CONNECTING THE DOTS	Inner Back Cover

UNFPA'S GENERATION-TO-GENERATION (G2G) DIALOGUES

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Sri Lanka, launched its first inter-generational dialogue in December 2015. Since then, UNFPA has facilitated five such Generation-to-Generation (G2G) dialogues that provide an open platform for the three generations to come together to share their ideas on socio-economic issues in Sri Lanka.

The discussions are based on analyses of the 2012 Population and Housing Census, conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics. By using and analyzing the census data, and furthering the discussion at the G2G dialogues, UNFPA hopes to build a body of evidence that documents shifting population dimensions and drives evidence-based policy making at the national and sub-national levels.



The first G2G focused on youth as a driving force in maintaining Sri Lanka's middle-income status, taking into consideration the demographic bonus (Dec 2015).



The second G2G highlighted the need to invest in women as game changers for Sri Lanka's future development (Mar 2016).



The third G2G, titled 'Shifting Demographics and Development Opportunities' focused on education, labour, and fertility trends in Sri Lanka (Dec 2016).



The Fourth G2G focused on the demographic shift in age, where UNFPA and the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) jointly launched a Thematic Report titled 'Ageing Population of Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications' (Oct 2017)



THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

THE FIFTH GENERATION-TO-GENERATION DIALOGUE

To mark World Population Day (2018), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) together with the Parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender, and the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka jointly held UNFPA's 5th Generation-to-Generation (G2G) dialogue to highlight the need for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Sri Lanka.

This report provides a snapshot of the discussions of the G2G dialogue and provides policy points that can assist in evidence-based decision making.



“Traditional family and cultural values designed to protect young people have restricted young people from access to accurate information on sexual and reproductive health” - Hon. (Dr.) Sudharshini Fernandopulle, Deputy Chair, Parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender, delivering the keynote address



“Comprehensive Sexuality Education is at the heart of achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. CSE contributes to the realization of good health and well-being, quality education and gender equality” - Ms. Ritsu Nacken, Representative, UNFPA Sri Lanka delivering the opening remarks



“Providing young people with accurate information on sexual and reproductive health can address deep rooted issues pertaining to sexual violence, abortion, puberty and access to modern contraceptives” - Ms. Sarita Jadav, National Programme Officer, UNESCO, New Delhi



Panel members of the fifth G2G Dialogue (L-R)

Ms. Sarita Jadav, National Programme Officer, UNESCO, New Delhi

Ms. Aisha Nazim, Journalist, Roar Media

Dr. Ayesha Lokubalasureiya, Consultant Community Physician, Adolescent and School Health Unit, Family Health Bureau

Ms. Renuka Peiris, Director of Education, Ministry of Education

Mr. Benislos Thushan, Programme Officer, Office for National Unity and Reconciliation

Mr. Dakshitha Wickremarathna, Director, Youth Advocacy Network (Moderator)



Key Issues in Sri Lanka

- Teenage pregnancies in Sri Lanka is at 5.2%, yet subnational disparities exist with a rate of 8-9% (*Family Health Bureau, 2015*)
- 66% of girls in Sri Lanka are not aware of menstruation until menarche (*Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools in South Asia, UNICEF, WaterAID, 2018*)
- National HIV/AIDS prevalence is 0.01%. New infections are increasing, especially among young people (*Stigma Assessment of People living with HIV in Sri Lanka, 2017*)
- A fair proportion of in-school adolescents between the ages of 14-19 are sexually active. 6% have had heterosexual intercourse and 10% have had homosexual relations (*National Survey on emerging issues among adolescents in Sri Lanka, UNICEF, 2004*)



Evidence shows that young people in Sri Lanka have limited knowledge about their sexual and reproductive health. Understanding the need to support the Government of Sri Lanka in improving the delivery of CSE in Sri Lanka, the G2G dialogue introduced the latest International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE 2018) developed by UNESCO, along with UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, and WHO.

In line with the ITGSE, the G2G dialogue aimed to facilitate a discussion on how different stakeholders, with special emphasis on policymakers and young people, can come together to address gaps in comprehensive sexuality education in Sri Lanka, through targeted initiatives and inclusive policies.



INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION

WHAT IS COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE)?

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACH

The International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) was developed to assist education, health and other relevant authorities in the development and implementation of school-based and out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education programmes and materials. It is immediately relevant for government education ministers and their professional staff, including curriculum developers, school principals and teachers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth workers and young people can also use the document as an advocacy or accountability tool, for example by sharing it with decision-makers as a guide to best practices and/or for its integration within broader agendas, such as the SDGs.

The Guidance is intended to:

- Provide a clear understanding of CSE and clarify the desired positive outcomes of CSE
- Promote an understanding of the need for CSE programmes by raising awareness of relevant sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues and concerns that impact children and young people
- Share evidence and research-based guidance to assist policy-makers, educators and curriculum developers
- Increase teachers' and educators' preparedness and enhance institutional capacity to provide high-quality CSE
- Provide guidance to education authorities on how to build support for CSE at the community and school levels
- Provide guidance on how to develop relevant, evidence informed, age and developmentally-appropriate CSE curricula, teaching and learning materials and programmes that are culturally responsive
- Demonstrate how CSE can increase awareness about issues that may be considered sensitive in some cultural contexts, such as menstruation and gender equality. CSE can also raise awareness of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages.

Learn more



DISCUSSION POINTS

The G2G dialogue brought out various perspectives and multi-dimensional angles to highlight the need for CSE in Sri Lanka.

The views and ideas discussed are summarised into three inter-linked discussion points:

1. BREAKING MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CSE

In Sri Lanka, CSE is associated with social stigma. Sex is considered a topic for ‘adults’, and the importance of CSE for young people is often overlooked. A major challenge in Sri Lanka is the lack of open conversation about CSE between parents, teachers and young people.

“ALL SCHOOLS SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONE SENSITIZED TEACHER WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE CAN REACH OUT TO FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH”

- BENISLOS THUSHAN, PROGRAMME OFFICER, OFFICE FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND RECONCILIATION

- Sri Lanka must increase general awareness about the importance of CSE to young people. CSE enables young people to develop the skills, knowledge and support needed to make informed decisions about their bodies, families and relationships.
- General awareness must be created about the fact that CSE covers not only the topics of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), but also power dynamics, gender inequality and gender-based violence
- The media can play a crucial role in shifting attitudes towards CSE
- Society should recognize and understand the importance of CSE in fostering respect for human rights, gender equality and diversity, including the recognition of the LGBTI community
- Schools should play a crucial role in providing scientifically accurate information on SRH to young people
- Conversations about CSE should encompass the aspect of pleasure and consent



“WHEN PORTRAYING SEXUALITY, THE MEDIA CAN PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN CREATING AWARENESS ABOUT THE WAYS IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BE RESPONSIBLE”

– AISHA NAZIM, JOURNALIST, ROAR MEDIA

“WE HAVE TO ENSURE THAT ACTION IS TAKEN TO MAKE SURE YOUNG PEOPLE’S OVERALL WELL-BEING, WHICH INCLUDES THE DELIVERY OF QUALITY CSE IS SUPPORTED BY SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY AROUND THEM”

– DAKSHITHA WICKREMARATHNA, DIRECTOR, YOUTH ADVOCACY NETWORK

POLICY INTERVENTION:

- In order to provide young people with accurate information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, teacher trainings should be conducted to ensure CSE is taught effectively in schools
- Develop an innovative approach to teach CSE to young people with the use of new technology
- Schools and parents must ensure that CSE is taught at a young age. This includes developing age-appropriate CSE for children as young as 5 years of age



2. A HOLISTIC AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CSE

It is a basic human right for all individuals to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights. To assure this, CSE and family planning services should be provided and maintained accessible. CSE respects young people's right to the highest attainable standard of health, including safe, responsible and respectful sexual choices free from coercion and violence.

- Research shows that in countries where teenage pregnancy has reduced, CSE has been given priority
- Measures should be taken to improve and expand services for young people. Although there are no legal restrictions in Sri Lanka for health providers to provide SRH related information and services to young people over the age of 16, due to social cultural norms and misconceptions, service providers are still reluctant to provide SRH services to young people. This is a deprivation of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people
- A holistic approach to CSE is needed: society must ensure and encourage open dialogues between parents, teachers and young people
- Health service providers must be sensitized about the needs of young people
- No one should be deprived of life-saving information in relation to harassment, stigmatization, discrimination and harm on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

“EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS IS NOT ENOUGH. A HOLISTIC APPROACH IS NEEDED”

– DR. AYESHA LOKUBALASURIYA, CONSULTANT COMMUNITY PHYSICIAN, MINISTRY OF HEALTH

“EVERYONE WANTS TO WORK TOWARDS IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO CREATE AWARENESS AMONGST RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AROUND ISSUES LIKE HIV TO ADVOCATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CSE”

– SARITA JADAV, NATIONAL PROGRAMME OFFICER, UNESCO, NEW DELHI

POLICY INTERVENTION:

- Collaboration between health, education, justice sector and all other stakeholders is essential to address the need for CSE in Sri Lanka
- It is crucial to strengthen referral mechanisms and ensure health services are delivered in a youth-friendly manner.
- Sri Lanka has 4.4 million young people. It is essential to identify a consistent approach to reach out to all youth, leaving no one behind. In doing so, resources have to be allocated continuously to ensure sustainability.
- To ensure effective monitoring and delivery of CSE, it is recommended to map out all activities that are being carried out island-wide.
- Facilitate the involvement of faith-based organizations and religious leaders in advocating for CSE.
- Strengthen government ownership of CSE. The National Policy on Education should situate sexual and reproductive health and rights under overall health and well-being, and violence prevention of young people. The National CSE curriculum should be reviewed in line with ITGSE.

3. AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO ADVOCATE FOR CSE

Island-wide data collection is critical to identify the gaps and knowledge on CSE among young people. Evidence can help break down myths and misconceptions as well as create a comprehensive understanding of the need for CSE in Sri Lanka.

- Data collection on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people must be strengthened.
- Organizations advocating for CSE must highlight the economic burden on the government due to lack of CSE.
- The political leadership of CSE needs to be strengthened.
- NGOs, civil society organizations and the UN must collaborate with the Ministry of Education, National Institute of Education and Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka to advocate for and ensure quality delivery of CSE

“AT POLICY LEVEL, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS DEVELOPED AN AGE APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM. HOWEVER, MOST TEACHERS ARE NOT QUALIFIED TO DELIVER THIS EDUCATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE DUE TO SOCIAL STIGMA. BOTH TEACHERS AND PARENTS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH CSE TO YOUNG PEOPLE. IT IS A TOPIC THAT SHOULD BE DISCUSSED OPENLY WITH YOUTH”

– RENUKA PIERIS, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

POLICY INTERVENTION:

It is recommended to conduct surveys to identify the needs of young people (what information they are lacking and what information they hope to know). Using this evidence, advocacy efforts should be made targeting parliamentarians, legislators and decision-makers to ensure CSE is accessible to all young people.



CONCLUSION

The G2G dialogue created an open forum capturing the voices of the three generations, involving key stakeholders to discuss the importance of advocating for CSE. The dialogue assisted in identifying the current status and challenges in implementing CSE programmes and provided substantial guidance on how to ensure quality CSE to young people in Sri Lanka.

Among the key stakeholders, the Parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education will take leading roles in proceeding the way forward. The dialogue highlighted the key role of Government institutions in taking the lead to include CSE as part of the health and physical education curriculum along with systematic teacher training.

UNFPA is supporting the Government of Sri Lanka and other stakeholders to ensure that the agenda to implement CSE is taken forward and strengthened by:

- Supporting the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education to train pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher trainers in National Teacher Training Colleges in accordance with the International Guidance on CSE. The trainings are based on the Teacher Training Manual designed by the Ministry of Education with support from UNFPA.
- Engaging media through workshops on CSE to strengthen reporting and increase awareness on the importance of CSE
- Supporting the Vocational Training Authority (VTA) to develop a training manual on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for VTA trainers. UNFPA has further supported the VTA in conducting training of trainers in all 9 provinces and advocated to ensure that education on SRHR is integrated in the VTA curriculum and will be implemented annually by the VTAs
- Supporting the Y-PEER youth network in developing 'Road to Adulthood' in partnership with the University Grants Commission. 'Road to Adulthood' is a self-learning e-course that encapsulates information on sexuality and gender, the reproductive system, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and drug use.



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