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## **POPULATION AGEING IN SRI LANKA & ITS POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

UNFPA Generation-to-Generation Dialogues - 4  
#G2GLK  
October 2017

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# 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 four such Generation-to-Generation (G2G) dialogues that aim to bring generations together, to collectively voice the opinions of three generations towards maximizing demographic opportunities.

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).



MP Hirunika Premachandra at UNFPA's inaugural G2G on 'Youth as a Driving Force in Maintaining Sri Lanka's Middle-Income Status'



Minister Harin Fernando at the 2nd UNFPA G2G Dialogue advocating for women as game changers in Sri Lanka's future development



Nalaka Umagiliya, Vice President of John Keells Holding, at the 3rd UNFPA G2G Dialogue on the linkages between Labour, Fertility, and Education



G2G Dialogue panelists continuously engage and interact with the audience during discussions



#### FOURTH GENERATION-TO-GENERATION DIALOGUE

Understanding the need to focus on the demographic shift in age, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) jointly published a Thematic Report on **'Ageing Population of Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications'**. The report was authored by Dr. Sunethra Perera, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Demography at the University of Colombo.

The fourth G2G Dialogue was based on this Thematic Report, and was held on 6 October 2017, coinciding with the International Day for Older Persons.

This post-brief document, provides a snapshot of the discussions of the fourth G2G Dialogue and provides policy points that can assist in evidence-based policy making.



**"Ageing is a triumph of development. It is an indication of continuous investments in the health and wellbeing of the people of Sri Lanka."**

Ms. Ritsu Nacken, UNFPA Representative in Sri Lanka and Country Director in the Maldives, delivering the opening remarks



**"61% of the elderly population in Sri Lanka is between 60-69 years of age. This segment of people can still contribute to the working population."**

Dr. A. J. Satharasinghe, Director-General of the Department of Census and Statistics, delivering a presentation on the 'Current Status of the Ageing Population in Sri Lanka'



**"There is great potential in Sri Lanka to reach a second demographic dividend, by ensuring that the elderly can contribute to socio-economic development, through age-friendly policies, human rights and systems that aim to improve employment opportunities, coverage of social security and social protection"**

Mr. Bjorn Andersson, UNFPA Regional Director for Asia Pacific, delivering the Key Note Address



Panel members of the fourth G2G Dialogue (L-R):

- Dr. A. J. Satharasinghe** (Moderator), Director-General of the Department of Census & Statistics
- Dr. Sunethra Perera**, Author of the Thematic Report & Head of the Department of Demography, University of Colombo
- Ms. Ritsu Nacken**, UNFPA Representative in Sri Lanka & Country Director in the Maldives
- Dr. Harishandra Yakandawala**, Elderly Care Service Provider and Director (Medical) of the Family Planning Association in Sri Lanka
- Dr. Shiromi Maduwage**, National Programme Officer for Elderly Care, Ministry of Health
- Ms. Piyumi Fonseka**, Journalist of the Daily Mirror, Wijeya Newspapers

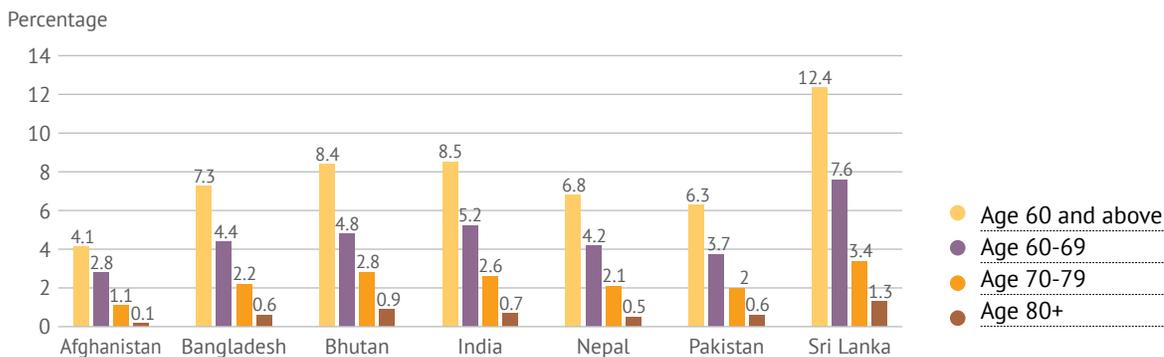


# POPULATION AGEING IN SRI LANKA AND ITS POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Population ageing, which involves an increasing share of older persons in the population, is a key global demographic challenge which developed and developing nations will continue to experience in the twenty-first century. Ageing results from demographic transition, a process of decreasing mortality and fertility and increasing life expectancy.

The United Nations reports that the global population share of aged persons (aged 60 years and above) was 12.5 per cent in 2015 and will continue to grow as a proportion of the world population, reaching 21.1 per cent in 2050. It is also estimated that by 2050, nearly 8 in 10 of the world's aged persons will live in less developed countries, and in Sri Lanka, it is projected that one in five people will be elderly by 2030, which will be the highest in the South Asia region.

Ageing population in South Asian countries - 2012



Source: Ageing Population of Sri Lanka: Emerging Needs, Issues, and Policy Implications (Perera, S., 2017)



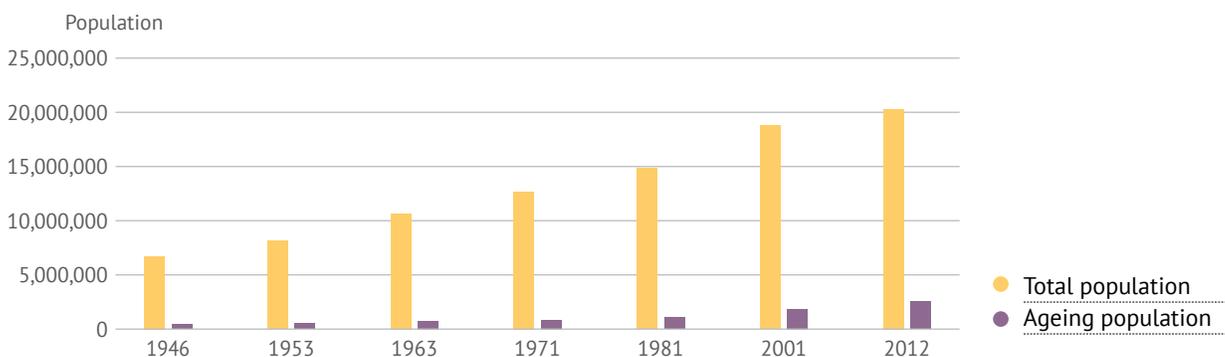
On World Elder's Day, 1 October 2017, the first copy of the Thematic Report on Population Ageing in Sri Lanka was presented to the Minister of Social Empowerment, Welfare, and Kandyan Heritage, Hon. S. B. Dissanayake, by UNFPA Representative, Ms. Ritsu Nacken

# POPULATION AGEING TRENDS

To guide more targeted policy interventions, the ageing population in Sri Lanka has been categorized into three groups: Young-old (60-69 years) | Middle-old (70-79 years) | Oldest-old (80 years and above)

- In Sri Lanka, 2,524,570 of people were over the age of 60 years in 2012, constituting 12.4 per cent of the population<sup>1</sup>
- 61% of the total old age population, are in the young-old category, 28% in the middle-old category, and 11% in the oldest-old category
- The demographic shift of population ageing is accelerating at a faster rate in Sri Lanka than any other country in South Asia
- Between 1981 and 2012, the proportion of people aged 60 years and above has increased from 6.6 per cent to 12.4 per cent
- Life expectancy at birth for male and female is 72 and 79 years respectively
- Women comprise of 56% of the total aged population in Sri Lanka, and 61% of the oldest-old group (80 years or over)
- The support base for the ageing population in Sri Lanka is shrinking. In 1981, 7 persons (aged 20-59 years) could provide support for one older person. In 2012, the number dropped to 4 persons
- Approximately, one in every three older persons live in the Western Province of Sri Lanka
- Internal migration is one of the key factors of distribution of older persons across districts
- In 2012, 88% of older men were currently married, while less than 66% of women were currently married
- One in every three older women were widowed. Among the oldest-old group, half of the female population were widowed
- Older females have lower literacy rates than males in all residence sectors, with 40-60% of elderly females illiterate in the estate sector
- In 2012, 99% of the older persons lived in households, while 1% (24,535) were institutionalized in elder homes and other institutions
- 55.6% of the older persons function as the head of households
- While 70% of older persons lived in permanent housing units, older persons who lived in the estate sector were more disadvantaged with regard to the quality of the house that they lived in
- Approximately, 43% of older men were employed, while only about 11% of older women were employed
- Over half of the older persons had physical or mental impairments about one fifth had difficulty in seeing and walking

Total population and ageing population in Sri Lanka, 1946-2012



Source: Ageing Population of Sri Lanka: Emerging Needs, Issues, and Policy Implications (Perera, S., 2017)

# DISCUSSION POINTS

The G2G Dialogue brought out various perspectives and multi-dimensional angles to the demographic transition of an ageing population in Sri Lanka.

The views and ideas that were discussed, have been clustered into three inter-linked discussion points in this policy brief:

- 1) **Community-based:** Increasing awareness on elderly rights and fostering a positive viewpoint on the ageing population
- 2) **Individual-based:** Unleashing the potential of elderly persons and capitalizing on their invaluable contributions to society
- 3) **Institution-based:** Strengthening social security systems and elderly care for the aged

These broad discussion points have been further explained to provide inputs into informed policies and decisions with regarding to Sri Lanka's ageing population

## 1. COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH INCREASING AWARENESS ON ELDERLY RIGHTS AND FOSTERING A POSITIVE VIEWPOINT ON THE AGEING POPULATION

- Sri Lanka must increase general awareness on the rights of the elderly and advocate the opportunities that an elderly population can bring to the country
- The media should shift the portrayal of ageing as a 'negative issue' to a positive sign of development and advancement of the country
- An age-friendly society should be developed where there is a sense of shared responsibility of caring for the elderly through a community-based approach
- Society should recognize and value the contributions of the elderly
- Shift from family/household responsibility of caring to community-based caring for the elderly
- Ensure the participation of the elderly population in decision-making at different segments and levels of society

**“IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE PUBLIC AWARE OF THE CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION AGEING IN SRI LANKA. WITHOUT GREATER PUBLIC AWARENESS, WE CANNOT MOVE FORWARD.”**

DR. SUNETHRA PERERA, SENIOR LECTURER AND HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEMOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO

**“AGEISM IS A SOCIAL DISEASE OF STEREOTYPING. THE MEDIA HAS TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN BREAKING THESE STEREOTYPES.”**

PIYUMI FONSEKA, JOURNALIST – DAILY MIRROR, WIJEYA NEWSPAPERS

### POLICY INTERVENTION

*Recommendation 1 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Conduct public awareness programmes on the consequences of population ageing in Sri Lanka to educate the general public and to find applicable solutions.

## 2. INDIVIDUAL-BASED APPROACH

### UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF ELDERLY PERSONS AND CAPITALIZING ON THEIR INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

- An age-friendly environment should be inculcated and promoted to increase socio-economic participation of the elderly
- Investments should be made in research to consider an increase in the retirement age
- The young-old category (60 – 69 years) constitutes for 61% of the total elderly population in Sri Lanka. This group of the elderly possess skills and experience that can continue to contribute towards socio-economic development
- Currently, there are no large-scale programmes that actively engage the elderly in the work-force, especially for women
- It is important to identify the skills and needs of the elderly population in order to create relevant opportunities that can contribute to national economic growth (such as their wisdom in knowledge for guiding policies, consultations, teaching, caring for children, etc.)
- The elderly need to be empowered to continue being active for as long as possible, without constricting their abilities to a certain age
- Currently, more females are graduating universities than males, even though labour force participation is only 36%. Policies should be in place to benefit from these educated females after they enter the elderly population
- A majority of employed elderly women are in the informal sector, where jobs are of low-status and are not secured
- Innovative models such as elderly care homes combined with day-care homes for children can be explored

**“WE ARE CURRENTLY NOT CAPITALIZING ON THE ELDERLY POPULATION. THEY HAVE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT WE MUST EMBRACE AND INTEGRATE INTO SRI LANKA’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC FABRIC.”**

DR. YAKANDAWALA, ELDERLY CARE SERVICE PROVIDER AND DIRECTOR (MEDICAL) OF THE FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION IN SRI LANKA

**“THE GENDER GAP IN LITERACY IS NARROWING. LITERACY LEVELS OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IS INCREASING AND HAS ALMOST REACHED UNIVERSAL LITERACY DUE TO SRI LANKA’S EDUCATION SYSTEM.”**

DR. A. J. SATHARASINGHE, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CENSUS AND STATISTICS, SRI LANKA

#### POLICY INTERVENTION

*Recommendation 7 of the Thematic Report on ‘Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications’:*

Encourage the older population to continue employment activities by raising the mandatory retirement age. Conduct programmes and encourage community level projects to facilitate older men and women in part-time or contract basis employments. Such interventions would help to maintain active engagement of older population in economic and social activities.



## 3. INSTITUTION-BASED APPROACH

### STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS AND ELDERLY CARE FOR THE AGED

- The healthcare system must be age-friendly. Geriatric health care services must be established at hospitals
- Manpower in the health sector, particularly elderly-care assistants, must be trained to provide such services at affordable costs
- Policies relating to social pension systems should be revised according to the latest population trends and data relating to the elderly population
- Infrastructure development (such as public transport) should take into consideration the growing elderly population
- Sri Lanka must actively learn and draw from successful ageing models, policies, and systems, in developed countries such as Japan, Switzerland, and Scandinavian countries
- Ensure establishment of care arrangements alternative to family-based elderly care support
- Urban-rural and cultural diversities within the country must be taken into consideration when revising policies and systems to support the elderly in Sri Lanka
- The private-sector must be encouraged to support the elderly through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives or through other relevant mechanisms
- Investing in the current youth age group to increase economic productivity will result in a less dependent elderly population in future

**“SRI LANKA SHOULD LOOK TO JAPAN’S EXPERIENCE, WHICH SHOWS THAT LONG-TERM, MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES ARE NEEDED TO TAKE CARE OF BOTH THE AGEING POPULATION AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.”**

MS. RITSU NACKEN, UNFPA REPRESENTATIVE IN SRI LANKA

**“THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN CARING FOR ELDERS, GIVEN THAT A LARGE SEGMENT OF OLDER PERSONS CANNOT AFFORD TO PAY FOR THEIR CARE. PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL AS IT WILL REDUCE THE GOVERNMENT’S ECONOMIC BURDEN”**

DR. SHIROMI MADUWAGE, NATIONAL PROGRAMME OFFICER FOR ELDERLY CARE, MINISTRY OF HEALTH, SRI LANKA



## POLICY INTERVENTION

### *Recommendation 2 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Design and develop alternative care arrangements for socially isolated, economically disadvantaged, and widowed older men and women in Sri Lanka based on existing community development institutions while also strengthening other government and non-governmental administrative structures, and mechanisms including voluntary services and outreach programmes.

### *Recommendation 3 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Strengthen the existing data collecting systems at Grama Niladhari level (lowest administrative level) and other levels (provincial and district levels) to collect more accurate data on older persons' needs with better coverage for effective planning, decision making and programmes interventions for older persons in Sri Lanka. Such systems are also important to recognize needs and ensure better access to economic security, welfare and other services for older persons especially the vulnerable older persons.

### *Recommendation 4 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Strengthen the current service delivery of hospitals (Teaching Hospitals, National Provincial Hospitals, Base Hospitals, all types of District Hospitals and Primary Health Care Units) by establishing dedicated geriatric health care units with special geriatric medical and nursing care for elders to address physical and mental disability and long term care issues faced by the older men and women in Sri Lanka.

### *Recommendation 5 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Ensure the provision of adequate skilled human resources in the geriatric care sector including medical officers, nurses, home and institutional care assistants, counsellors and legal officers for enhanced social protection and old-aged well-being.

### *Recommendation 6 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

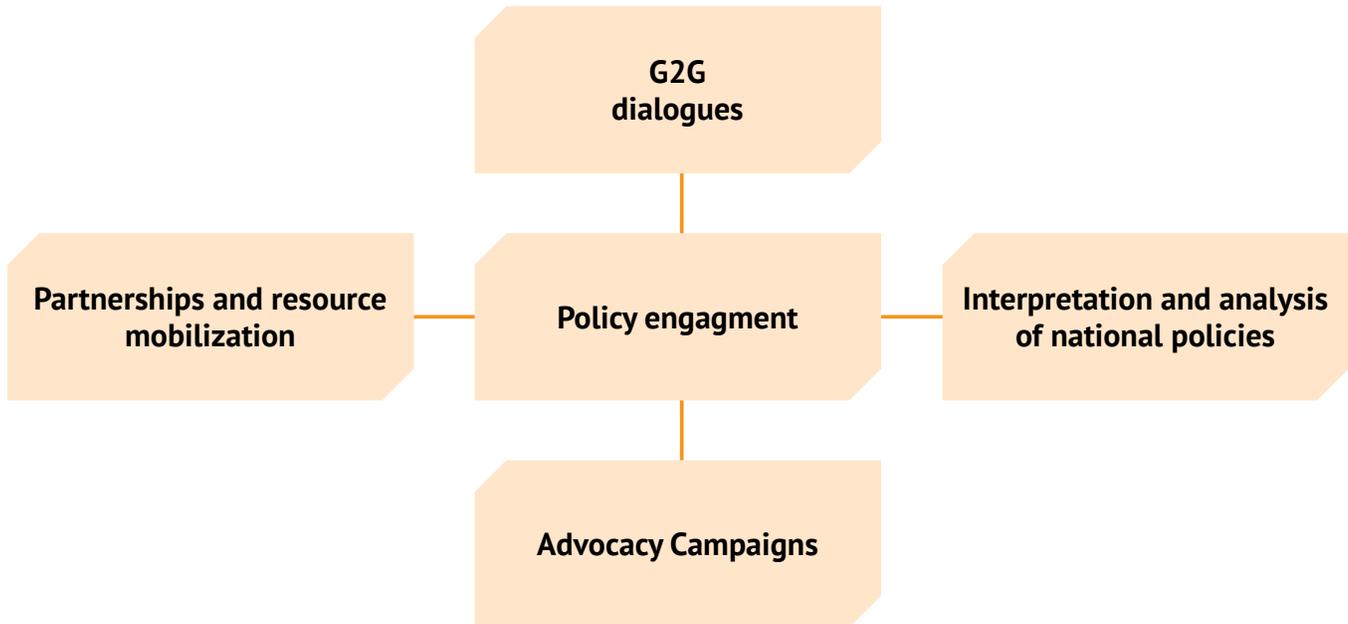
Strengthen the physical infrastructure, and social institutions, including nursing homes, elder homes, affordable and quality elderly day care centres, with appropriate elderly care support devices and equipment, and other inclusive physical infrastructure.

### *Recommendation 8 of the Thematic Report on 'Population Ageing in Sri Lanka: Emerging Issues, Needs, and Policy Implications':*

Establish a monitoring unit that can coordinate service needs and delivery mechanisms operating for elderly care at all levels (GN, DS, District, Provincial and National) and to ensure better quality of life for older persons in Sri Lanka.



# CONCLUSION: CONNECTING THE DOTS



The Generation-to-Generation dialogues are an integral part of the UNFPA Sri Lanka’s national policy engagement work in advancing policies on women, youth, and the elderly, with a rights-based approach.

The dialogues capture the voices of the three generations and take into account the opinions, critiques, and recommendations of both the young, and old. Further, the G2G dialogues support national decision-making with evidence beyond data, taking into account analysis and well-debated policy interventions and recommendations.

The fourth G2G has provided substantial guidance and direction into how Sri Lanka can be better prepared to embrace the growing elderly population. The dialogue brought out inter-linked perspectives and ideas from community, individual, and institution-based approaches, emphasizing the need for multi-sectoral interventions. These discussions were derived based on the data of the 2012 Population and Housing Census, thereby ensuring that the ideas were evidence-based, practical, and moved beyond identifying of issues.

UNFPA is committed to continue working closely with the Government of Sri Lanka in guiding policies that are based on evidence in line with the shifting population dynamics.



**For more information:**

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

☎ +94 11 2580840

✉ srilanka.office@unfpa.org

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