UNFPA
Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled
The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the lead United Nations agency ensuring reproductive health and rights for all.

In Sri Lanka, we deliver this mandate by advocating for evidence-based policies that enable the full realization of reproductive health and rights of women, young people and the elderly.
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UNFPA REPRESENTATIVE’S MESSAGE

It is a privilege to work in Sri Lanka; a country of rich history and cultural heritage. This beautiful island has vast potential to achieve equitable sustainable development, especially in light of the end of the conflict in 2009. At this juncture, investing in young people, women and the elderly is critical for the country to continue to reap the benefits of its demographic and peace dividend.

My first day at UNFPA Sri Lanka, I had the honour of being a part of a public campaign to address sexual harassment in public transport. I have also had the opportunity to engage with young people from around the island as part of the initiative iVoice, to support youth to be drivers of social change. During this year, UNFPA advocated for evidence-based policies for the full realization of reproductive health and rights of women and young people and well-being of the elderly. It was a very busy year for our office with a number of high-level engagements. We appreciate the support of all our partners, including the Government of Sri Lanka, development partners, Civil Society Organizations and our sister UN agencies throughout the year.

Building on the nearly 50-year partnership between Sri Lanka and UNFPA, we are committed to continue supporting the Government in ensuring reproductive health and rights for all in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This annual report shows how UNFPA, during 2017, has helped empower women, young people and the elderly to realize their fullest potential.

Ms. Ritsu Nacken
UNFPA Representative in Sri Lanka

Ms. Nacken, a Japanese national, has been in the UN system for over 15 years, holding positions in New York, Fiji, Italy, Ethiopia, and Viet Nam prior to joining UNFPA Sri Lanka in February 2017.
Violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. It undermines the health, dignity, and security of victims, yet it remains shrouded in a culture of silence. UNFPA is one of the lead UN agencies working on gender-based violence prevention and response.
‘Does she travel safe’ ‘Does she travel safe’ was a campaign based on a study done in 2015 to assess the prevalence of sexual harassment in buses and trains which gained much traction among the media and the public. As a follow up, UNFPA convened a policy dialogue which engaged multiple stakeholders to address the issue and identify possible long and short term solutions.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=vuYTcSebFbg

90% of women & girls have been subject to sexual harassment in public transport at least once in their lifetime
Sexual Harassment on public trains and buses, UNFPA (2015)
DOES SHE TRAVEL SAFE?
In response to the low level of female labour force participation in Sri Lanka, it is imperative that organizations continuously review corporate policies to instill an organizational culture that is conducive towards its female employees.

Shifting corporate culture is a long-term process that involves addressing day-to-day biases, and stigma and stereotypes among employees. It includes ensuring staff benefits such as maternity and paternity leave, and flexible working hours are provided by organizations.

As the largest private-sector employer of women, MAS Capital is committed to ensure its female employees work in an environment that is conducive for women. In doing so, **MAS joined hands with UNFPA in Sri Lanka to ensure strengthened corporate policies and programmes that focus on identifying gaps and gender inequalities in the working environment.**

36.4% is Sri Lanka's female labour force participation, which is the lowest in the South Asia region

Due to gender-based socio-cultural norms and biases, it is understood that there are barriers to entry and engagement for women to contribute actively in politics in Sri Lanka. Violence against women in elections is regarded as a major deterrent to women's political participation as electoral and political leaders.

To mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence in Sri Lanka, the National Forum Against Gender-based Violence delivered a public campaign titled ‘Elect Her. End Violence’.

As the Chair of the National Forum Against Gender-based Violence, UNFPA led this campaign along with the support of over 50 member organizations of the National Forum.
The campaign brought together all Sri Lankans through a public pledge that called for action in ending violence against women in elections in order for women to have equal access and opportunities for active political participation.

A caravan carrying the pledge travelled around the island during the 16 days, obtaining over 6500 signatures from the public to advocate for a violence-free election environment for women.

#ElectHer

www.gbvforum.lk/16days2017.php
Strengthening the country’s legal system in cases of violent acts on women, is imperative in addressing gender-based violence in Sri Lanka.

UNFPA works closely with the Government of Sri Lanka in strengthening policies and systems to foster a safer environment for women and girls.

The Compendium on Law, Gender-based Violence and Reproductive Rights published in December 2017 was a collaboration between UNFPA, the Human Rights Commission and Professor Savitri Goonesekere.

The Compendium on Law is a useful resource for legal practitioners especially in the judiciary when administering cases of gender-based violence and reproductive rights. It highlights areas of law and policy that need to be incorporated for the advancement of providing a complete and informed decision.

https://bit.ly/2D0yco1
CANADA SUPPORTS UNFPA TO ADDRESS SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Government of Canada provided a grant of CDN$900,000 to UNFPA Sri Lanka for the delivery of the project, 'Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence through Public Institutions', by 31 March 2020.

The purpose of the project is to increase the capacity of the Government of Sri Lanka to advance Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and to effectively respond to sexual and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka. As the lead UN Agency in advocating for universal SRHR, and the Chair of the National Forum Against Gender-based Violence, UNFPA is well placed to ensure delivery of this project.

This CDN$900,000 grant to UNFPA is part of Canada’s CDN$650 million comprehensive approach to address gaps in funding SRHR globally, and is a continuation of Canadian support in Sri Lanka for women’s empowerment, political participation, and ending gender-based violence in line with their Feminist International Assistance Policy.
While young people comprise a significant proportion of the population, many are unable to participate fully in society. Engaging youth is essential for a post-war nation such as Sri Lanka, where young people play an important role in nurturing lasting peace. Youth participation is also critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. When empowered and given the right opportunities, youth can be effective drivers of change.
LOVE & PEACE AT THE CITY OF YOUTH

Yowunpuraya or the City of Youth is a leadership and outward-bound training program organized by the National Youth Services Council (NYSC), of the Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs of Sri Lanka. The event brought together 6,000 young people from all Districts and Provinces, and 100 international youth. The four-day youth camp held in Trincomalee from 29 March to 2 April 2017 consisted of exhibition stalls, competitions, interactive sessions and training programmes. UNFPA joined the youth camp with a learning space on ‘Love and Peace’ – which aimed to increase awareness among youth about their reproductive health, rights and role in peacebuilding.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=nx8F5Mt-BhE  #Yowunpuraya

50% of Sri Lankan male youth claimed they didn’t know about the menstrual cycle

60% of Sri Lankan female youth said they didn’t know about the male reproductive system or physiology

Youth4Youth is a youth led initiative, to provide a platform for young people to foster strategic public-private partnerships and to be active community leaders in nurturing lasting peace. The Youth4Youth programme bridges young people from the Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Central Provinces in Sri Lanka, through a series of regional symposiums that will lead up to a National symposia to take place in 2018.

The programme is delivered by UNFPA in partnership with United Nations Volunteers (UNV), and supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

[Image of people participating in an event]

68.5% of youth in Sri Lanka believed in the right to be treated equally and without discrimination. National Human Development Report (2014)

https://youtu.be/CNepcRJWDOE #Youth4Youth #Youth4Peace
In an effort to promote youth participation in community development, the Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) in partnership with UNFPA, ceremoniously launched iVoice: a digital content platform that promotes evidence-based community driven journalism on social issues.

To take this further, iVoice, supported by the UNFPA Innovation Fund, made a public call to youth around the Island to submit innovative ideas to address social issues in their communities. Over 100 innovative ideas were submitted and 20 ideas were shortlisted through a competitive process. The final stage of the competition comprised of a two-day residency workshop where participants were mentored to further develop their ideas into feasible projects. The iVoice Idea Competition supported 10 young individuals across Sri Lanka by providing seed capital of LKR 100,000 to implement and execute their projects.

4.4 Mn
young people aged between 15-29 years constitute
Sri Lanka's population
https://youtu.be/Ep3zN0a7DcQ (Two-day residency workshop)  https://youtu.be/JNuMjUlMB3w (Learn about the 10 projects)  #iVoice
1. What inspired you to take on the role of an International UNV?
_The Aspiration in contributing for a better society, especially for youth._

Being a young person who is lucky to have had the chance to receive a good education, to be inspired by parents, teachers and peers, I wanted to try my best to inspire other youth to live their life and pursue their dreams to create a better world together.

Having participated in volunteer work over the past few years in Hong Kong, China, Singapore and other parts of the world, I realized my passion and the need to utilize my professional skills and knowledge to create a better world.

Being a professional in Business Management and Information Systems, I am detail-oriented and have good logical thinking skills. I found these skills to be useful during a previous internship as I was able to maximize their work and bring about greater impact for the community.

The UN is an international organization that works towards creating a better, harmonious and humanized world. Hence, apart from working on the ground, I was interested in making a difference by engaging at a policy and decision making level.

2. What has been a highlight of your time at UNFPA Sri Lanka?
_Interaction with youth on my field mission to Jaffna for International Youth Day 2017_

This was the first event I helped to organize at UNFPA in Sri Lanka. Our team organized a panel discussion, linking up community leaders with youth from the Northern Province. While the discussion was mostly in a local language, I could feel the enthusiasm from the young people as they discussed social issues and their role in community leadership.

Learning about the differences between Colombo and other parts of Sri Lanka has given me hands on experience in planning activities for young people that bring value and fit in with the local context.

It has also given me the opportunity to utilize my skills in photography, designing and event management.

During the event, I was responsible for taking voice cuts of young people. I can recall how a young lady teacher was initially hesitant to face the camera but ended up giving a really good voice cut after my encouragement. That moment taught me that youth are capable of doing better when there is opportunity and encouragement. This motivated me to work harder for young people during my stay at UNFPA Sri Lanka.

3. What professional skills have you gained during your time at UNFPA Sri Lanka?
_The importance and value of strategic partnerships_

It’s usually difficult for organizations to create a big impact on society by working alone. Establishing mutual values and forming strategic partnerships with various stakeholders is essential for community work.

For example, prior to the opening of the Youth4Youth symposium, our team discussed the session objectives with the speakers in order to ensure that we share the same values and work together. While each stakeholder may have their own objective, discussions such as these help to facilitate mutual understanding among stakeholders.

_The power of strategic communication_

Media and communication play an important role in tackling social issues by influencing narrative change and lobbying for action.
In Sri Lanka, media coverage on Sexual Harassment in Public Transport successfully raised social awareness on this sensitive issue.

For our projects, we emphasize a lot on creating a positive narrative for young people.

*Mindfulness about sustainability and working towards achieving the SDG’s in daily life*

Working with funding, there is a project cycle and a project end-date. However, as we are working for the community, our work should be continuous.

After Sri Lanka was classified a middle-income country, a number of NGOs and CSOs were unable to continue their work due to withdrawal of funding. It seems that this modality developed a reliance on funding for CSOs and as a result harms the community to some extent.

Learning from this, it is crucial to be mindful about project sustainability. Instead of re-creating a new cycle, it has been great to learn how the UN plays an active role in providing technical support and assistance in order for the community to drive social change.

4. What would you say was the greatest challenge?
*Cultural differences*

Being born and raised in Hong Kong, there are a number of social and cultural differences between my own country and Sri Lanka. My previous experiences in organizing activities for young people may not be applicable because of these differences.

It is challenging to understand the local culture and history in a short period of time and to contribute constructive opinions that fit in with the local context. At the beginning of my assignment, I used to be hesitant to give suggestions or advice. It took time for me to learn the local situation and to build confidence in actively participating in discussions with my team.

5. What advice would you give to people considering a similar career path?

*Be proactive*

Get ready and take action. Don’t hesitate to share your thoughts and experiences which facilitate idea sharing that could create new opportunities.

*Embrace the difference*

Be ready to accept social and cultural differences. Respect every individual and be humble. Try to explore the similarity and difference among people and culture and learn from the differences. This helps to reflect on your own culture which we usually take for granted.

6. What are your future plans?

I will be heading back to Hong Kong. I am looking forward to further developing my professional skills and to pursue my career in the development sector. I was also invited by my university to share my experiences working as an IUNV at UNFPA Sri Lanka. It will be a great opportunity for Hong Kong University students to learn more about the United Nations and UNFPA, as well as how young people can play an active role in contributing to society.
YOUTH POTENTIAL IN RURAL SRI LANKA: DILKI’S STORY

BY TASHIYA DE MEL  This article was originally published by UNFPA Sri Lanka in March 2017.

Sri Lanka: 1 in 4 people are youth.
This means that there are 4.4 million young people between the ages of 15–29 years living in Sri Lanka.

As agents of change, young girls and boys have the ability to create lasting social change in their communities.

This is the story of Dilki—a 21 year old girl challenging stereotypes with her perseverance and community leadership.

Life in rural Sri Lanka
Dilki lives in a remote village in the town of Neluwa, located in the Southern District of Galle. Like most other rural areas, there is a lack of access to quality infrastructure and services here.
The proposal outlined plans to construct a safe and secure bridge that would replace the existing structure.

A few days later they were informed that their proposal was selected.

But there was a small issue—the seed money was minimal and would not be enough to complete the project.

“I was told that a girl can’t make a difference. But I accepted the challenge anyway”—Dilki

Initially disheartened, Dilki soon realized this roadblock was not going to stop her. She began campaigning with her friends, local politicians and government officials to mobilize funding for the project.

As president of the ‘Silver Stars’ Youth Club, Dilki turned to crowd funding, within and outside the club and community.

There was an overwhelming response. The locals of the area were all too familiar with the dangers of the bridge and wanted to finally bring justice to Dilki’s father.

Whether it was serving tea for those working on construction, investing resources or providing manual labour—the entire community came together to help make her dream, a reality.

For most of her life, the only point of access to the next town was by crossing a makeshift bridge. This ‘bridge’ was one most would never dare to cross; an assimilation of cylindrical tree barks strung together horizontally.

To Dilki and the rest of her community—this was a normal commute. Often taken several times a day.

A tragic past
13 years ago when Dilki was just nine years old, she lost her father. Attempting to make his way across the bridge to visit her mother and newborn baby in hospital, her father plunged to his death.

The makeshift bridge still exists as a grim reminder of the past. In the years that passed nothing was done about the unstable bridge—largely due to lack of funds and resources. Although Dilki was forced to move on, she held on closely to the memory of the fatal accident that took the life of her father.

Inspiring Community Leadership
Things turned around in 2016 when Dilki and her friends submitted a proposal for a local competition: ‘Youth Got Talent’.
“We hope our story inspires others and makes them more confident to achieve their goals” — Young community leader, Neluwa.

Three months after the first stone was laid, the bridge was completed.

**An enabling environment**

Youth officer at the National Youth Services Council, Mr. Deepala, reiterated the importance of young community leaders like Dilki.

He explains that Dilki’s story has inspired other young change makers in the country, and also added that a strong community culture is central to facilitating change.

“We are proud to see young people take the lead in our community. After all, they are the future”—Mr. Deepalal.
Fulfilling youth potential

With such a large youth population, it is imperative that comprehensive youth policies are implemented at both National and Provincial-levels in the country. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Sri Lanka, through its Youth Policy Programme works with Provincial Councils to bring together multi-stakeholders and convene the formulation of youth-specific policies.

At UNFPA, we work to ensure that young leaders like Dilki realize their true potential and have an enabling environment that will allow them to pursue their goals.

This is further echoed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—part of a wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that promises to ‘leave no one behind’. And the more recent UN Security Council Resolution 2250—that recognizes (for the first time) that young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of peace.

Onto bigger things

Following the completion of their project, Dilki and her team received a lot of positive feedback.

Most importantly, their efforts were recognized, and they were subsequently awarded first place in ‘Youth Got Talent’. The prize consisted of a large sum of money, which they hope to use to initiate a series of community development projects.

The scope of their work, as a community have also been recognized island-wide thanks to much media coverage, which has elevated them to somewhat celebrity status. But Dilki continues to be as humble as her beginnings, using her fame as a platform to inspire others.

Overcoming adversity is not always easy, but Dilki and her community continue to challenge stereotypes and illustrate the potential of young people in Sri Lanka.
A cautious, young girl is taken across the bridge with her father.
Youth4Youth

This article was originally published on www.iVoice.lk, a trilingual online advocacy platform supported by UNFPA Sri Lanka
To maintain one’s sexual and reproductive health, people need access to accurate information as well as safe, effective, affordable and acceptable contraception methods of their choice. They must be informed and empowered to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and, if and when they decide to have children, women must have access to services that can help them have a fit pregnancy, safe delivery and a healthy baby.
ROAD TO ADULTHOOD

One in four people in Sri Lanka are between the ages of 15 and 29 years. This is a critical period in life for youth to develop accurate knowledge and attitudes on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Recognizing the low awareness among youth on sexual and reproductive health issues, UNFPA together with the University Grants Commission, launched www.roadtoadulthood.lk - Sri Lanka’s first online self-learning tool on reproductive health and rights.

The interactive e-course prepares youth in the transition from adolescence to adulthood – a time when sexuality and relationships are challenging. It consists of six modules:

1) Sexuality and Gender
2) Reproductive System
3) Contraception
4) Sexually Transmitted Infections
5) HIV/AIDS
6) Drug use

In February 2017, the University Grants Commission issued a circular instructing all Universities in Sri Lanka to include Road to Adulthood as an e-module in orientation programmes.

http://www.roadtoadulthood.lk

50% of Sri Lankan youth are unaware about sexual and reproductive health issues
VALENTINE'S DAY: LEARNING ABOUT LOVE & SEX

Valentine’s Day is universally celebrated to express love. To ensure youth in Sri Lanka make informed decisions about their bodies when it comes to love and relationships, UNFPA Sri Lanka joined hands with YAMU to develop a bold, yet informative, video, that was launched on Valentine’s Day.

The video titled ‘10 Things You Should Know Before You Have Sex’ was viewed by thousands of youth around the country. An article that further elaborated the content, was also shared widely on social media platforms, thereby increasing young people’s awareness on their reproductive health and rights.

https://youtu.be/sldQ2vW_9vk
www.yamu.lk/blog/10-things-you-need-to-know-before-you-have-sex

NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME REVIEW

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine and the Family Health Bureau in carrying out the first comprehensive review of the National Family Planning Programme (NFPP) in Sri Lanka.

This review provides a comprehensive analysis of the nature of Family Planning practices over the years. The objectives of the review are to conduct an assessment of existing services, identify current needs, determine the gaps in existing services, and provide recommendations to address these gaps.

In May 2017, one of the worst floods and landslides hit Sri Lanka leaving thousands of women and girls vulnerable. UNFPA supported on the ground with local partners to ensure that reproductive health of women and girls were integrated into emergency responses.

https://youtu.be/zhWX8WVvTDE
https://bit.ly/2Lc7E79
ROHINI, mother of newborn baby
“The trees behind our house fell for the impact of the landslide. Even today when it rains, I feel the same fear,” Rohini says, cradling her third child, who was born prematurely 2 days before the May 2017 landslides destroyed her village. The landslide blocked all access to roads, and left Rohini helpless, as she had to nurse and care for her newborn.

“I had no way of accessing any supplies for my baby. We lost everything.” Rohini is one of the many women who require post-partum care in emergency situations. As a mother of two older teenage daughters, she worries about their hygiene as well.

“The supplies that we received from UNFPA were a huge relief, even in a small way.”

With support from the Central Emergency Response Fund and the UNFPA Emergency Response Fund, UNFPA Sri Lanka distributed 2,000 dignity kits to help women and girls affected by the disaster to maintain their hygiene and health.

We also distributed 500 maternity kits for pregnant women and mothers of infants in support of antenatal, safe delivery, and post-partum care.
Ramyalatha works with a local partner organization "Women In Need". She is deployed to temporary shelters to provide psychological support to women and girls affected by disaster situations.

“When we first came to this camp in Ratnapura, the people were facing massive trauma and depression following the disaster. We conducted both group and individual counselling programmes, and also held sessions to increase awareness on gender-based violence.”

She says that many women and girls were terrified after the disaster, and some were even suicidal. With consistent psychological support and vocational training provided at the campsite, they are now focused on a better tomorrow.

“They want to move forward with their lives now.”

UNFPA Sri Lanka provided 'Women Friendly Spaces' for women and girls to feel physically and emotionally safe. At these safe spaces, UNFPA provided psychological assistance, and conducted programmes to increase awareness on gender-based violence.
CHAMILA, in need of health supplies

“At first I could not find my son. When we did, it took us 10 minutes just to get him out of where he was stuck,” says Chamila, looking at what used to be her home.

As a young mother, Chamila is concerned about her family’s safety and health needs.

Living in the camps means that she has limited access to health services, including family planning. The Reproductive Health Clinics supported by UNFPA has provided her access to doctors and enabled her to question them on sexual reproductive health matters, including family planning. She is vocal about what her family needs, and actively participates in the clinics.

“These clinics help me to make the right decisions about my family and their safety in this crisis situation.”

UNFPA Sri Lanka supported the provision of reproductive health clinics to strengthen sexual and reproductive health services in locations where local systems had been damaged.

These clinics brought much-needed services and supplies, including contraceptives, directly to populations affected by the disaster.
Since 1989, the world has collectively marked World Population Day on 11 July. This day provides a global platform for focused attention on the importance of population issues.

This year, the theme for World Population Day is ‘Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations.’ As Sri Lanka launches the Review of its National Family Planning Program, this is indeed a timely topic. It provides a renewed opportunity for the country to reintegrate family planning into national policies and programs and to further understand its relevance and importance in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But first, why is family planning so important?

**Family planning = human right**
Family planning is a human right. It provides a woman with the right to make an informed decision on whether, when, and how many times to become pregnant.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) marked a paradigm shift in the field of population and development. It replaced a demographically driven approach towards family planning with one that is based on individuals’ and couples’ rights to decide freely and responsibly whether or when to start a family. This rights-based approach towards family planning recognises that people are actors in their own development, not just passive recipients of services.

Despite the recognition of the importance of family planning services, recent statistics show that some 214 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are currently not using safe and effective family planning methods. As a human right, it must be available to all who wish to have it.

**Reaping economic benefits**
Investing in family planning is not only the right thing to do, but also makes economic sense. It can help eradicate poverty and drive sustainable economic progress. When a woman can make a decision about her reproductive life, it gives her more opportunities to seek and keep better jobs. It helps her to contribute to family income, national development, and global prosperity. Clearly, benefit of family planning goes well beyond women’s health and wellbeing. Indeed, family planning is a national development issue.

More specifically, the new Guttmacher Institute research shows that for each dollar spent on contraceptive services, cost of pregnancy-related care is reduced by $2.30 because access to contraceptive services reduces unintended pregnancies.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that world leaders are meeting in London on this year’s World Population Day to discuss ways to expand access to voluntary family planning to 120 million additional women by 2020 – A global partnership called “FP2020”.

The FP2020 recognises the economic and social benefits of investing in family planning. It recognises that it is more economical and holds greater social benefits to invest in planning pregnancies than to invest in consequences of unplanned pregnancies or maternal death. Sri Lanka is also one of the FP2020 focus countries.
Reducing incidents of violence
Family planning is central to gender equality and women’s empowerment, and could contribute to lowering the incidence of sexual violence. Gender-based violence is prevalent in many parts of the world, and despite all the efforts being made by Governments, we have a long way to go to effectively prevent and respond to such violence. Regular access to family planning health care provides an important entry point for screening of partner violence.

In Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Health recently introduced a package for newly married couples, which focuses on prevention of sexual gender-based violence and advice on family planning. Women who access family planning services and information exercise their right to make informed decisions and planned pregnancies. This results in better health outcomes and higher levels of education through informed decisions about their reproductive lives, thereby reducing instances of violence.

Towards global prosperity
Family planning is also part of the larger journey towards a more equitable and sustainable society. In September 2015, the 193 United Nations Member States unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This comprises of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to transform the world by 2030. These goals are designed to eliminate poverty, discrimination, abuse and preventable deaths, address environmental destruction, and usher in an era of development that leaves no one behind.

Family planning is an integral part of the efforts to achieve the SDGs. It helps to achieve Goal 1, to eradicate extreme poverty, by allowing women to expand their options for education and work by planning pregnancies and to assist in leading a healthier life. Family planning supports the realising of Goal 3, for good health and wellbeing, by reducing maternal mortality through increased access to reproductive health services. Family planning also promotes Goal 5, for gender equality, by empowering women with the right to make an informed decision on their reproductive lives.

Family planning in Sri Lanka
In Sri Lanka, the unmet need for family planning is 7.1% (Family Health Bureau, 2014). The contraceptive prevalence rate is 66%, which includes access to traditional and modern methods of contraception. In comparison to the other countries in the region, Sri Lankans have wider access to family planning information and services. However, issues remain. Three key recommendations for Sri Lanka are: 1) dispelling misconceptions; 2) reducing maternal mortality; and 3) ensuring universal sexual and reproductive health services and information.

Recommendation 1: Dispelling misconceptions
A common misconception about family planning in Sri Lanka, and around the world, is that it is all about population control. This is an old concept, and the world has moved away from this demographically driven approach. Access to safe and voluntary family planning is a human right. It empowers a couple and individuals to decide when to have or not have children, and how many children to have or not have. It aims to avoid unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions through access to modern methods of contraception and information relating to traditional methods. Family planning also includes the treatment and prevention of subfertility for women and men.

Another common misconception about family planning is around the side-effects of modern contraceptives. All women must have access to reliable and accurate information on family planning by skilled healthcare workers. This ensures that women live happier and healthier lives, with more choices and opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Saving lives through family planning
In 2015, the Family Health Bureau reported 113 maternal deaths in Sri Lanka. Unmet need of family planning contributed to one in four of these preventable maternal deaths. We must all agree that even one preventable maternal death is too many.

Family planning saves lives. Women who choose family planning face a lower risk of maternal death. Children born to women who space their pregnancies tend to be healthier and face reduced risk of death in their first five years. Without access to family planning
services, women are unable to make informed decisions about their reproductive lives. Unplanned pregnancies and complications can be fatal. Investing in family planning means, therefore, stopping preventable maternal death.

**Recommendation 3: Leaving no one behind**

The success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is in reaching the furthest behind first. In the Sri Lankan context, this includes the need to ensure accessibility of family planning services for widows, unmarried women, divorcees, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, migrants and partners who have been left behind by migrant workers. In addition, youth is an under-served population group for family planning services.

According to the Family Health Bureau, 5% of maternal deaths were among single women who were divorced, unmarried, or widows in Sri Lanka (2015). According to the National Family Planning Program Review, vulnerable women are reluctant to access family planning services due to fear of stigmatisation. This data highlights the need to address the issue of discrimination and stigmatisation, and increase the quality of family planning services.

The need for universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services among youth, including family planning, must be met. According to the National Youth Health Survey 2012-2013, Sri Lankan youth lack a basic level of understanding of sexual and reproductive health. Access to accurate information and equitable services empowers youth to make informed decisions about their bodies. Contrary to the myth that access to sexual and reproductive health information would facilitate early onset of sexual activities, data shows that sexuality education actually helps young people avoid risky behaviours, even delay sexual activities, and avoid being infected with sexually transmitted infections.

**UNFPA’s continued commitment to Sri Lanka**

The launch of Sri Lanka’s National Family Planning Program Review provides a renewed opportunity for the country to reintegrate family planning into national policies and programs and to further understand its relevance and importance in achieving the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. UNFPA is proud to be part of this important and timely review in Sri Lanka. Going forward, we hope that the review helps the Government of Sri Lanka to further improve its policies and programs related to family planning.

UNFPA will continue to work closely with the Government of Sri Lanka and other partners to ensure universal access to family planning services. Family planning and sexual and reproductive health should be one of the strategic national priorities. At this occasion of World Population Day, 11 July, we invite you to deepen your understanding of family planning and its instrumental roles in national development because her future is our future.
Stigma and discrimination are among the foremost barriers to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. This undermines HIV prevention efforts by making people afraid to seek information on HIV services and modalities to reduce their risk of infection and to adopt safer behaviours.

UNFPA supported the Stigma Assessment of People Living with HIV in Sri Lanka 2017 published by the National STI/AIDS Control Programme of the Ministry of Health, Nutrition, and Indigenous Medicine. The publication is an important contribution to ensure that people living with HIV will not be left behind.
We were proud to have marched alongside 1,000 passionate individuals on World AIDS Day, at the Government’s National Parade, on 1 Dec 2017. The walk was organized by the National STD/AIDS Control Programme, and was supported by UNFPA. Rain or shine, we walked!
Sri Lanka, with a free health care system has much to boast in the provision of reproductive health services. The country’s health indicators are often envied among its South Asian counterparts.

This is a result of investing heavily in maternal health since the beginning of the last century, which has reaped positive dividends in lowering the maternal mortality, to the lowest in South Asia?—?an impressive 33 per 100,000 live births.

The skill set of midwives play a crucial role here. Midwives save lives and support healthy families and communities.

Regional disparities
Despite these great advancements, regional disparities in the quality of healthcare still remain. The delivery of reproductive health services is not the same throughout all provinces of Sri Lanka, leading to inequality in health services and delivery in certain regions.

To get a more comprehensive understanding of the situation, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), visited Poonagar, a community in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka?—?located in the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) division of Eachilampattu.

The situation in Eachilampattu
Eachilampattu is located at the intersection of the Eastern and North Central province. Access to the area is not easy, and the scorching heat of the dry zone adds to the difficulty.

Eachilampattu is an area that was directly affected by the 26 year civil conflict in Sri Lanka, and was under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) up until 2007. Today, Eachilampattu is home to around 3,000 families.

Consultant community physician, Dr. S. Arulkumaran, tells us that the health division has made great strides since the liberation from the LTTE.

“Vaccination coverage has increased to almost 100%, and no maternal deaths have been recorded in the past year”, he says.

There are still challenges, however.

Some politicians in the area lobby strongly against family planning programmes, which often interfere with MOH delivery of services.

Dr. Arulkumaran mentions that the Eachilampattu hospital has very basic facilities. Due to this, expecting mothers have to make the arduous, hour long journey (most often by bus) to the closest town, Trincomalee, to deliver their child.
“Due to the distance and isolation, skilled doctors and midwives are not willing to come and work in this area”—Dr. S. Arulkumaran.

Why Midwives Matter
The Public Health Midwives of the area echo other challenges.

“Language is sometimes a barrier” says Thilini, a young midwife working at the local hospital. While the majority of the population in the Eastern Province speak Tamil, the doctors and midwives that have been transferred from other parts of the country are only fluent in Sinhala.

English is not usually spoken in and around the communities.

“It was initially a struggle since we all spoke different languages, but we have now learned the local languages and are better able to communicate with each other, and the community”.

The supervising public health midwife, Arulrajah Gowri, believes that teenage pregnancy and early marriages are the main issues in the community. “Some are given-off in marriage as early as 16 years”, she says.

Gowri shares a story of young 13-year-old girl in her community.

The young girl’s parents were away at work during the day, so she would spend a lot of time at the next house. When the girl suddenly became ill, her parents were shocked to learn that their daughter was pregnant. It was later revealed that the father of the baby was their neighbor—a married man with two children.
When Gowri got news of the incident, she met with the girl and her parents to have a discussion and advise them on their options.

**How Midwives save lives**
This incident created ripples within the community. But there was a silver lining.

Together with other midwives, Gowri has initiated a series of awareness programs on reproductive health in schools and community centers. She mentions that the programs have been received well within the community, with the parents and teachers extending their support.

These anecdotes affirm the critical role midwives play.

Thanks to midwives like Gowri and Thilini, births are made safer and women and girls can exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health services. Often, these midwives are key figures in their small, rural communities, and act as a solid support system for the people living here.

Since its inception in Sri Lanka, UNFPA has been supporting the Ministry of Health to strengthen the capacity and services delivered by midwives around the island. Recently, UNFPA supported the Family Health Bureau in the revision of the public health midwives curriculum, yet another step towards ensuring all women and girls in Sri Lanka have access to quality reproductive health care.

**Challenges and gaps**
The village of Poonagar is a great example of how midwives and health workers are pushing boundaries in their field, despite regional disparities. If Sri Lanka is to move forward and achieve universal success in its health indicators there needs to be an enabling environment for midwives to effectively serve the needs of women and girls.

The need to address these issues is a must in the journey towards achieving the 2030 agenda, while leaving no one behind.

On Midwives Day and every day, let’s honour midwives and their efforts in saving lives in Sri Lanka, and around the world.
 CSRF එක්ක මාත්‍රය යොදා ගන්නා අතර පීබ්බන ගමේවන අතර

Moral Issues

7 වන නවිකයන් වස්තුවක් පවුල්කම් සඟන් වෙළඳී හෝ මෙම පවුල්කම් සඟන් වෙළඳී සේවාවක් ඇති වස්තුවක් වහලින් හෙවත්වේ. 2015 නවම්බරේ පවුල්කම් සඟන් වෙළඳී සේවාවක් වහලින් සඟන් වෙළඳී සේවාවක් වහලින් 7 වන නවිකයන් වස්තුවක් පවුල්කම් සඟන් වෙළඳී ෆීඩි අමාත්‍යයන්.
Population trends play a powerful role in development, and must therefore be factored into planning and policy decisions. Population size and structure impact a country's economy and its potential to provide quality services. As the lead UN Agency on Data for Development in the UN System in Sri Lanka, UNFPA strives to ensure evidence-based policy making for a better Sri Lanka.
Population ageing is accelerating in Sri Lanka at a faster rate than any other country in South Asia.

With such a rapidly ageing population, it is imperative for policy makers to ensure that social and economic institutions in the county are ready to face its implications.

UNFPA works to raise awareness about population ageing and the need to harness its opportunities and challenges. In partnership with the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), UNFPA published a thematic report on the Ageing Population of Sri Lanka. This report provides comprehensive analyses on important aspects of Sri Lanka’s population dynamics.

In addition, UNFPA held its fourth Generation-to-Generation dialogue bringing together three generations to collectively voice opinions on issues relating to Sri Lanka’s socio-economic development.

1 in 5 people will be above the age of 60 years in Sri Lanka by 2030
Department of Census and Statistics (2012)
POPULATION AGEING & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

www.facebook.com/UNFPASriLanka/videos/1642912002407270/php
AGEING IS A TRIUMPH OF DEVELOPMENT

BY RITSU NACKEN

This op-ed was released to the media on 1 October 2017 in commemoration of the International Day for Older Persons. It was translated to local languages, and appeared in a number of English, Sinhala, and Tamil newspapers.

Ageing is an issue close to my heart. I come from the country with the highest percentage of elderly people in the world. By 2050, almost half of the population in Japan will be above the age of 60 years. The lessons we have learned as a country are plenty; and the learning continues.

In Japan, it is customary for the eldest son’s wife to take care of the grandparents. My mother was such a wife. As a working mother herself, she had to travel over 8 hours by train to care for my paternal grandmother who was unfortunately paralyzed. This caused a lot of strain on our family, and as the daughter, I had to juggle the duties at our home when I was 15 years old. This is a common trend in many families in Japan, and such situations often result in abuse, neglect, suicide, or even murder of the elderly, due to societal obligations of keeping with traditions and customs, and lack of affordable care services. This also often hinders opportunities for women to actively contribute to the workforce and to enjoy equal rights to fulfill their potential.

But ageing does not need to be like this. It should not be seen as a burden. Ageing is a triumph of development. It is an indication that people are living longer with better nutrition. It is an indication of better healthcare. And it is an indication of better education and economic well-being.

By 2030, it is projected that one in five people in Sri Lanka will be above the age of 60 years. This is 20 per cent of the population that can play a vital role in society. The elderly can contribute to society as educators, workers, volunteers, caregivers, and as sources of knowledge and historical memory. They are also important leaders; often playing a role in conflict resolution within families, in communities, and even in emergency situations.
AGEING IS A TRIUMPH OF DEVELOPMENT

But they eventually need caregiving, a responsibility that often falls on their families, particularly women. But with declining fertility and increasing urbanization, traditional family support networks may not be the best solution, similar to my situation in Japan. This is why options such as social protection systems through increased Government, private-sector, and community engagement is necessary. Such systems cannot be put in place overnight, and therefore, Sri Lanka must plan now to ensure the right policies are in place to enable such elder care systems that can provide the necessary social protection for the projected 4.7 million elderly people by 2030.

It is important to be prepared to reap the benefits of this demographic shift. And to do so, first and foremost, we need to take a positive approach towards population ageing. Ageing can be an opportunity to envision a society with a new reality and a new mindset. Rapid economic growth may not be a realistic vision as population ageing comes with low fertility and population decrease. But we could shift our focus and work further towards a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable society.

It is also important for Sri Lanka to invest in its youth, now. First, investing in youth is the right thing to do, but moreover, healthy and productive young people are needed to support the current elderly population. Young people need to have access to education and employment opportunities, and also to quality sexual and reproductive health services and information, in order to achieve their fullest potential. This will enable them to actively contribute to the economy and thereby support the dependent population. In addition, when we invest in the current generation of young people, we are investing in the future generation of the elderly. If young people take care of their health, and acquire knowledge, skills, and experience that prepare them well for their retirement age, they would need less support from society. This is why some countries invest in developing personal financial management skills of the younger generation, particularly women, who usually live longer, but are often more at risk of poverty.

It is also crucial to develop and implement policies and programmes, which address the needs of the most vulnerable older persons. This includes the elderly with disabilities, mental health challenges, those living alone, and elderly women that head households. These segments of the elderly population are the most vulnerable, and are often subject to discrimination and abuse.

Experience from other countries shows that it is critical to create an environment where there are many options for affordable care and support for these vulnerable people, including community-based care and elderly homes. Social stigma on institutional care should be eliminated because it is sometimes the only and best option for the elderly and their families. Needless to say, effective regulatory framework and quality of care standards need to be established to avoid potential abuse and neglect in elderly homes.

As Sri Lanka ventures on its journey forward in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda, it is imperative to envision 2030 as a Sri Lanka with an ageing population. It is imperative for the government to set up policies and programmes to effectively prepare for an aged society. And it is imperative to realize that population ageing is not a burden, but a triumph of development.
LEADING DATA WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM IN SRI LANKA

In 2017, The United Nations (UN) and the Government of Sri Lanka signed the 2018-2022 UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF), the agreement which pegs UN assistance to Sri Lanka’s long-term development priorities.

The UNSDF consists of four drivers: 1) Towards improved data, knowledge management and evidence-based policy, 2) Strengthened, innovative public institutions and engagement towards a lasting peace, 3) Human security and socio-economic resilience, 4) Enhancing resilience to climate change and disasters and strengthening environmental management.

UNFPA is the lead United Nations Agency driving Data for strengthened policies and decision-making within the UN system in Sri Lanka.


STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 2017

The 2017 State of World Population titled ‘Worlds Apart: Reproductive Health and Rights in an Age of Inequality’ was globally launched in October 2017. The report highlights that unless inequality is urgently tackled and the poorest women are empowered to make their own decisions about their lives, countries could face unrest and threats to peace and development.

In Sri Lanka, the flagship publication was presented by the UNFPA Representative Ms. Ritsu Nacken, to Deputy Minster Ms. Sudarshini Fernandopulle, and the Director-General of Health Services, Dr. Jayasundera Bandara.

With successful completion of the 8th Country Programme cycle and in line with the new programme cycle from 2018 to 2022, UNFPA will continue to:

Empower Adolescents & Youth
By creating an enabling environment for young people where young people can participate in national development and peacebuilding processes with the knowledge and skills about their sexual and reproductive health and rights

Promote Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
By preventing and addressing gender-based violence through strengthened national policies and systems that advance gender equality and reproductive rights

Advocate for Policies based on Population Data
By strengthening capacity for use of population data for decision-making to address inequalities, and advance the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action