

Common Country Analysis

Sri Lanka 2016

United Nations Country Team

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

A/L	Advanced Level
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CCS	Climate Change Secretariat
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DaO	Delivering as One
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU-SDDP	European Union Support to District Development Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LEED	Local Empowerment Through Economic Development
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIC	Middle Income Country
MTR	Mid Term Review
NAMA	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ONUR	Office of National Unity and Reconciliation
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment

PEFA	Public Expenditure Finance and Management
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
SCRM	Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SLR	Sri Lanka Rupee
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
TID	Terrorism Investigation Division
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSDF	United Nations Sustainable Development Framework
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
VAW	Violence Against Women
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

The Common Country Analysis (CCA), as the prelude to the formulation of a new United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) 2018-2022, takes stock of various economic, political, social, cultural and environmental realities in Sri Lanka and their impact on the population in terms of human development. In so doing, it robustly analyses the different types of vulnerabilities faced by the people – particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – in terms of their ability to expand their human capabilities, widen their choices, enhance their personal freedoms and fulfil their human rights. It explores the structural and systemic causes of persistent development challenges, as well as reviews the roles, accountabilities and capacities of different actors at local, sub-national and national levels.

Within the overarching framework of the global Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the CCA also is guided by the Government's political manifesto and related policy statements; the Memorandum of Understanding for the formation of a national unity Government; and the nascent national Vision 2030 and national public investment programme, both under development. Critically, the UNCT has agreed to move toward a more explicit "One UN" approach under the upcoming UNSDF, so as to help the country respond effectively to increasingly interlinked and complex development challenges under the SDGs.

Based on the analysis of the CCA, it is clear that many of the development challenges that continue to face Sri Lanka arise from the same or similar causes. In turn, constraints to realization of the full spectrum of human rights among all of Sri Lanka's people remain profound. The key causes common to most of the challenges highlighted throughout the CCA particularly relate to (1) institutional and governance causes, focused on key gaps in the policy and legislative framework as well as an acute need for systems and institutional strengthening, at national and sub-national levels alike; (2) persistent inequities arising from economic and socio-cultural causes, including significant challenges with regard to gender despite notable progress; (3) environmental and geographic causes, including the country's extreme heightened vulnerability to disaster and the negative impacts of climate change; and (4) the acute need to strengthen Sri Lanka's capacities related to data generation, collection and effective analysis, all of which could be used for evidence-based policymaking. The latter, including potential innovative use of "big data," is particularly crucial given both the need to ensure high-quality SDG and UNSDF monitoring, and the current and future politically complex situations such as reconciliation that will be predominant in the country in the coming years. In turn, all this suggests that an integrated approach to Sri Lanka's development needs would best serve the country in many cases.

In the context of a national environment that aspires to become upper-middle-income and even high-income, the United Nations offers numerous broad comparative advantages to further national development that is sustainable. Overall, the United Nations is appreciated as a collaborative, neutral, responsive and valued partner that should increasingly focus on high-level policy advisory services; capacity development, at both national and sub-national levels, along with programme sustainability; and building consensus with national and international partners, including on sensitive issues.

At the Mid Term Review of the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2013-2017, the United Nations' broad comparative advantages were identified as including (1) convening power among partners; (2) policy advocacy; (3) technical and policy advice; and (4) capacity development.

All these can be effectively harnessed in favour of mainstreaming the SDGs, human rights instruments and international norms and standards in Sri Lanka, while simultaneously supporting national policies processes and systems. This can be achieved through: (1) a deepened focus on the United Nations' normative framework; (2) strengthening of political commitment for the SDGs and their localization, along with existing legally binding human rights commitments; (3) clarifying central/local responsibility for SDG prioritizing, financing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation; (4) defining sub-national local priorities and indicators, and building on the "unfinished business" of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); (5) integrating SDGs in sub-national/local development plans and budgets; (6) mapping of local financing opportunities and enhancing local fiscal administration, including anti-corruption measures; and (7) building partnerships and social monitoring.

Further United Nations comparative advantages exist in terms of:

- Ability to enable the Government to better strategize and then scale up national and local initiatives that directly relate to the priority development challenges identified within this CCA. This again implies creating a more "knowledge-centric" United Nations tailored around Sri Lanka's

national priorities while also providing direct implementation and operational support in scaled-down circumstances

- Effective social and geographical targeting to reduce inequities and inequalities in numerous development areas among vulnerable groups, helping to ensure that principles of equity, inclusivity, accountability, empowerment and participation are considered in development plans, policies and processes
- Strengthening national capacities at all levels, underpinned by and leading to national ownership. The United Nations particularly offers comparative advantages in the technical, institutional and managerial realms, all of which can contribute to effective systems reforms.
- Fostering of critical partnerships and dialogue, including through inter-generational exchanges, and showcasing of best practices, including those of Sri Lanka itself as it again becomes a dynamic participant in the regional and global arenas. The country has accumulated a wealth of experience, technical knowledge, expertise and best practices that can be an important contribution to global partnership platforms, including through South-South cooperation
- An emphasis on results orientation, as well as objective reporting and monitoring of the national development framework, including on sensitive issues

Identified priorities for consideration in the UNSDF 2018-2022 thus include:

- **Strengthened, Innovative Public Institutions and Engagement Toward a Lasting Peace**
- **Enhancing Human Security and Socioeconomic Resilience**
- **Underscoring Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster, and Strengthening Environmental Management**
- **Improving Data, Knowledge Management and Evidence-Based Policymaking**

The concept of “do no harm” – understanding how international assistance interacts with local conflict dynamics in the context of reconciliation – will be central. This will entail an increasingly sophisticated understanding of political processes, patterns of State-society relations, sources of legitimacy in Sri Lanka, and the expectations that society has of the Government – and the United Nations – as well as the Government’s capacities to perform its basic functions.

At the same time, more strategic focus across all priorities will need to be given to crosscutting issues of developing human capital, such as gender, youth, disability, and ageing, as well as key emerging issues, including urbanization. It will be critical to ensure that these crosscutting issues likewise are reflected in the UNSDF.

It also is important to note that it is not that the structure, systems or legal provisions of Sri Lanka are not changing; they are, some even quite dramatically. What is at issue, however, is the very embeddedness of the analysed structural causes in everyday life, which still constricts social, economic, cultural and governance opportunities for significant numbers of people in the country.

Yet the United Nations in Sri Lanka cannot tackle these embedded issues on its own: they require the full engagement of the Government, international partners, national partners, and the broader civil society. In addition, to address these broad areas it will be necessary to highlight again the importance of context-responsive strategies that are tailored specifically to local realities as well as to disparities among and within Sri Lanka. In so doing, however, the UNSDF 2018-2022 can help to ensure that the well-being of all people in Sri Lanka, particularly those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, is enhanced to the maximum.

I. Introduction and Overview

1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Common Country Analysis

Embarking on a robust, rights-based, risk-informed and integrated Common Country Analysis (CCA) is the first step undertaken by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Sri Lanka to prepare for its forthcoming programming cycle 2018-2022. It takes stock of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental realities in the country and their impact on the population – particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – in terms of human development. In turn, these have been influenced by the major shift in the political context in Sri Lanka since 2015, and the corresponding shift in national development priorities, as well as by recurrent natural disasters.

These will be further addressed in the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) 2018-2022, which as the next step in the process will outline strategic priority areas of work for the years ahead to improve overall human well-being. Future United Nations initiatives then can focus particularly on the key issues identified and contribute to transformational change in national development patterns.

Critically, the CCA is predicated on the priorities emphasized in the new global development Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals, for which Sri Lanka has committed to be a global “champion,” aim to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions and pledge to “leave no one behind,” ensuring that all women and men, girls and boys, youth and future generations fulfil their potential in dignity, and in a healthy environment (see also Section 1.3.2).¹ In this regard, availability of disaggregated data will be imperative not only for the identification of patterns of exclusion, but also for monitoring SDG and UNSDF progress.

The CCA also is guided by the political manifesto “Maithri: A Stable Country,” the current overarching development strategy of the Government, and related policy statements; the Memorandum of Understanding for formation of a national unity Government in 2015, which is now in force until elections in 2020;² and the nascent national Vision 2030 as well as the Government’s public investment programme, both under development. It also takes into account the profound traumas of the nearly 30-year armed conflict, although officially ended in 2009, and the 2004 tsunami, which still command deep impact on the national psychology.

Further, the CCA also draws upon the findings of the Mid Term Review (MTR) of the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). By its midpoint in 2015, the UNDAF had been overtaken by evolving political and socioeconomic developments in a markedly different context to its formulation in 2012, such that the MTR concluded it was no longer “fit for purpose.”

In response, the UNCT has agreed to move toward a more explicit “One UN” approach, also known as Delivering as One (DaO), under the upcoming UNSDF, so as to help the country respond effectively to increasingly interlinked and complex development challenges under the SDGs. As an important part of this shift, the UNCT also has agreed to move strategically toward more upstream policy work convergent with Sri Lanka’s deepening middle-income status, while balancing both the priorities of the Government and the people.

Moreover, the UNCT will build on core programming principles that recognize the inter-linkages between the SDGs and their normative foundation in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These interconnected principles, which will inform all United Nations programming at country level, are: (1) human rights and addressing inequalities and discrimination, including with regard to gender

¹ Further, the CCA and the UNSDF are vital in meeting the request of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2012 (GA/RES/67/226, para. 58) that “encourages the United Nations System to promote sustainable development outcomes through strengthening normative and operational linkages within the United Nations System and, in this regard, to direct particular efforts to supporting programme countries, at their request, in building national capacity for inclusive, equitable, participatory, transparent and accountable national development processes in order to target and empower the poor and people in vulnerable situations.”

² Available at <http://newsfirst.lk/english/2015/08/unp-and-slfp-reach-a-two-year-agreement/107750>.

equality; (2) sustainability, including reducing environmental risks, addressing climate change and increasing resilience; and (3) accountability, underpinned by answerability and enforcement, as well as strengthened national capacities, robust data, and results-based management. These are complemented by overall and specific comparative advantages of the United Nations (see also Sections 1.3.6, 2.2.4, 2.3.4, 2.4.4 and 2.5.4).

1.2 Methodology of the Common Country Analysis

To carry out a comprehensive CCA, more than 90 primary and secondary data sources were used to better understand the development context, including the immediate, underlying and structural causes preventing the realization of people's rights (see also Annex 1). In addition, nearly 30 interviews with UNCT members and civil society, complemented by valuable inputs from Government representatives during a UNSDF Steering Committee meeting, have helped to contextualize secondary data, and to contribute to the analysis of capacity gaps among duty bearers and rights holders alike (see also Annex 2).

1.3 Sri Lanka's Country Context

1.3.1 Demographic Profile and Trends

Sri Lanka is going through intense demographic change and rapidly becoming an ageing middle-income country, like China or Thailand. It appears to be in its last stages of the "demographic dividend," and is expected to reach its maximum numbers of working-age people soon after 2030.³ With about 20.4 million people in 2011,⁴ Sri Lanka's population is expected to stabilize at some 23 million by 2025. In addition to its traditional multi-ethnic composition, all of which is witnessing increased migration to the more developed Western Province, Sri Lanka is facing new migration waves of semi-skilled workers (e.g., from China) as well as small but increasing numbers of asylum seekers (e.g., refugees from Afghanistan and Myanmar). At the same time, huge numbers of out-migration create an outlet that masks levels of unemployment within the country, but also brings in remittances that serve to protect the poor from the worst of economic shocks, and that contribute up to 10 percent of GDP. The country's population density of 333 persons per sq.km. – one of the highest in the world – has already exerted tremendous pressure on its natural environment, and is likely to do so more in the coming years (see also Section 2.4).

Because of the end of the demographic dividend, an increasingly higher proportion of people will be elderly (see also Section 1.3.5). Life expectancy is increasing, especially for women, and fertility rates have generally fallen steadily until recent years. The proportion of persons aged 60 years and above is expected to double by 2021, and to reach a proportion of 29.2 percent of the people by 2050.⁵ At the same time, today's youth and children (see also Section 1.3.5) will form the base of the future working population, which will have an important role as dependency rates grow significantly based on the ageing population structure.

1.3.2 Development Achievements and Shortfalls Influencing the National Agenda Toward 2030

Sri Lanka has long been notable for its impressive human development indicators, and in 2015 had a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.757, which put the country in the "high human development" category and positioned it at 73rd out of 188 countries and territories.⁶ A long tradition of investment in education, health and poverty alleviation programmes is largely responsible for these positive development outcomes.

This is complemented by the country's graduation to MIC status following the end of its nearly 30-year conflict in 2009. It achieved the overarching Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving poverty at the national level seven years before the 2015 MDG deadline, and between 2002 and 2012-2013 alone reduced

³ UNDP. *Shaping the Future: How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development – Asia-Pacific Human Development Report*. New York, 2016.

⁴ UNFPA Sri Lanka. *20.4 Million: Sri Lanka's Population at a Glance* (hereafter 20.4 Million). Colombo, 2015.

⁵ UNFPA Sri Lanka and Institute of Policy Studies. *Investing in the Demographic Dividend: Successes, Challenges and Way Forward for Sri Lanka*. Colombo, 2015 (hereafter Demographic Dividend).

⁶ UNDP. *Sri Lanka Briefing Note on the Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development*. New York, 2015 (hereafter HDR 2015 Briefing Note).

poverty from 13.2 to 3.2 percent of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day,⁷ mostly as a result of increased incomes and earnings.⁸ Moreover, its human development losses due to inequality, at 11.6 percent, are far less than those recorded for South Asia as a whole (28.7 percent) or for high HDI countries (19.4 percent).

Nonetheless, Sri Lanka has a considerable “unfinished agenda” from the MDGs, which if unaddressed will affect progress toward nearly all SDGs as well. Nutrition is one such area (see also Section 2.3), with more than 23 percent of under-5 children found to be underweight in 2012⁹ Another is gender equality, where despite strong health and education results, Sri Lanka struggles to provide equality to women in employment and political representation (see also Section 1.3.5). As indicated above, a particularly critical challenge in implementation of the SDGs at national level will relate to ensuring accurate and timely data, strengthened technical capacities in the area of participatory forms of monitoring, and supporting efforts to have effective data systems in place. Further, the country’s implementation capacities also pose a huge challenge to move from proposing policies and programmes to effectively implementing them.

Despite Sri Lanka’s middle-income status, significant disparities persist in income, infrastructure and access to quality basic services across the country. Notwithstanding the improvement in poverty ratios highlighted above, a large proportion of people live just above the poverty line, and at risk of economic or climatic shock, with nearly 1 in 4 living on less than US\$2.50 a day in 2012-2013.¹⁰ Moreover, while new data suggest recovery in many of the social sectors in the conflict-affected North and East, the proportion of employed people living below the poverty line in these areas remains high in some districts, suggesting a need for sustained attention to livelihood promotion and market development.¹¹

High poverty head counts are associated with lack of employment opportunities, particularly among youth and educated women, as well as across ethnicity and religion. The completion of the unfinished MDG agenda may involve reducing income inequalities through regional economic development, with special attention to assisting the most vulnerable/disadvantaged groups; creating productive employment and decent work; and reducing the proportion of wasting and stunting in children under 5, along with micronutrient deficiencies among women. In all cases, special focus will need to be given to the estate sector, where poverty rates, although declining, remain far higher than among the urban or rural sectors (10.9 percent, vs. 2.1 and 7.6 percent respectively).¹² Quality of education, including fitness for the labour market, likewise will require increasing attention, as well as education outcomes at secondary and tertiary levels, while the low share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and in political participation calls for measures to encourage a substantial increase.

In all, sustainability of Sri Lanka’s development will require keeping the momentum toward reconciliation and successful completion of institutional reforms alike, in alignment with SDG16 (see also Section 2.2). Other key concerns are inequitable access to key preventive and curative health and nutrition services, including for mental health and for adolescent sexual and reproductive health; emerging concerns related to increasing levels of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and overweight/obesity; pockets of unacceptable neonatal, infant and under-5 mortality; and a continuing high level of violence and abuse perpetrated against women and children (see also Sections 2.3 and 1.3.5).

Also calling for heightened attention are the environmental risks from the long-term impacts of climate change – which may result in losses of 1.2 percent of GDP per year by 2050¹³ – as well as from recurrent natural disasters (see also Section 2.4), all of which are likely to strongly affect public health, human settlements, availability of drinking water, agriculture and aquaculture, hydropower generation, and tourism, among others.

⁷ United Nations in Sri Lanka and Government of Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Peacebuilding Priority Plan*. Colombo, 2016 (hereafter PPP).

⁸ World Bank. *Sri Lanka: Ending Poverty and Promoting Shared Prosperity – A Systematic Country Diagnostic*. Washington, D.C., 2015.

⁹ Ministry of Health and UNICEF. *National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey*. Colombo, 2012.

¹⁰ World Bank, op.cit.

¹¹ United Nations in Sri Lanka. *Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2014*. Colombo, 2014 (hereafter MDGR 2014).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ World Bank, op.cit.

Immediate and underlying causes of many of these challenges to sustainable development (see also Section 2.1) arise from ongoing vulnerability to multidimensional poverty in all provinces and districts of the country, and in both rural and urban areas; the potential for environmental and economic shocks; inefficiencies in the provision of quality social protection services; declining social sector expenditures; and inadequate investments in the evidence-based social policy – and effective policy implementation – urgently needed to redress inequities. Also impeding progress is a lack of disaggregated and up-to-date data in some cases, as well as strengthened and effective data analysis and sharing across the board, to support planning and implementation at national, provincial and district levels.

All this is occurring amid another paradigm shift for Sri Lanka, as the new coalition Government, in power since early 2015, attempts to move the country forward on its platform of more rights-based and transparent governance. Yet it is grappling with a “two-headed” power structure; this encompasses the President and the Prime Minister, with the former generally considered more protectionist and centred on State and local concerns, including the environment, and the latter seen as export-driven and market-centred. As a result, the Government is struggling to build public confidence that the promises of its electoral platform are bearing tangible benefits despite persistent institutional challenges (see also Section 2.2).

Importantly, the Constitution was amended in 2015 to overhaul the structure of government by reducing the power of the presidency and providing for more internal checks and accountability mechanisms. A constitutional guarantee of citizens’ right to information also now exists, albeit with restrictions with regard to national security issues, among others. At the same time, perceived corruption is likely to become an increasingly important factor.

Turning to the Sri Lankan economic reform agenda, the situation is equally challenging. Although the country’s real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew 43 percent in the first five post-war years (2009-2014), the top four economic sectors, accounting for half of total growth, are all non-tradable (construction, transport, domestic trade, and banking, insurance and real estate). In 2014, amid surging imports, exports contributed only half the amount to GDP in 2014 that they did in 2000. Moreover, the country faces persistent Government budget deficits and a high debt-to-GDP ratio, which stood at 74 percent the same year. Further, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been tepid, remaining below 2 percent of GDP and comparing unfavourably with much higher levels in other regional MICs such as Viet Nam and Cambodia.¹⁴

At the same time, Sri Lanka’s low tax revenues – one of the lowest tax revenue-to-GDP ratios in the world– have contributed to a budget leaving little room for spending on quality health, education and social protection services. Although the total amount of transfers has increased in absolute terms during the past 10 years, it has not kept pace with GDP growth. New cash transfer programs for the elderly and the disabled have been introduced, but these amounted to only 0.03 percent of GDP in 2013. Meanwhile, less than 30 percent of the population over 65 drew a pension in 2013, while a substantial number of Sri Lankans living below the poverty line receive no benefits from existing social assistance or social welfare programmes, although they may receive free education or health care.¹⁵

1.3.3 National Priorities and Key Partners in Development

Sri Lanka is still finalizing its national Vision 2030, as noted above, but it is known that the Government aims to transform the nation into a high-income country, a services hub and a niche manufacturing destination within 15 years. This is to be achieved through special focus on the promotion of reconciliation and the bolstering of democracy, including reasserting the independence of the judiciary.¹⁶ Vision 2030 also offers an important opportunity to ensure integration of the social and environmental aspects of the SDGs into the long-term national sustainable development agenda. Priority areas reported to be highlighted in this regard in early drafts of the document include (1) meeting the basic needs of all persons, especially the poor and vulnerable, while

¹⁴ World Bank, op.cit.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/33284/sri-lanka-has-to-become-a-high-income-country-by-2030-pm>; also <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-future-of-sri-lanka-s-economy/>

ensuring peace, harmony, social justice and security; and (2) respecting nature and containing Sri Lanka's resource use to within the sustainable capacity of the country.¹⁷

The current Government Manifesto, meanwhile, was predicated on a pledge of good governance, particularly including a Constitutional Amendment reducing the powers of the presidency and "guaranteeing democracy," which was among the first major pieces of legislation adopted following the 2015 election (19th Amendment). The Manifesto also envisions (1) a development economy; (2) a moral society; (3) food security and sustainable agriculture; (4) health care for all; (5) free education to overcome new challenges; (6) international relations that defend the country; (7) industry and services to eradicate unemployment; (8) an advanced and responsible public sector; (9) an energy-secure Sri Lanka; and (10) meaningful and substantial media freedom.

Specifically, the goal is to generate 1 million job opportunities within five years, including higher participation in the global economy, attracting foreign investment, and digitizing the economy, according to the Prime Minister's economic policy statement of November 2015.¹⁸ This is to be complemented by the enhancement of income levels; creation of a strong middle class; development of rural economies, including establishment of 2,500 State rural development centres; and ensuring land ownership to the rural and estate sectors, as well as to the middle class and Government employees. A foreign exchange policy to encourage exports also is being promoted.

Nonetheless, the complexity of the multiple layers of Government poses daunting challenges. The existence of some 50 Ministries, for example, is particularly complicated by a need for better-articulated relationships between central-, provincial-, district- and village-level bureaucracies. Currently, some issues are decentralized and other not, meaning that simultaneous work at different levels, even within similar areas of concern, is necessary to ensure change. Moreover, parallel areas of work have been set up to suit previous political agendas, resulting in a need for clarity with regard to focal points. Lastly, personalities and patronage often take centre stage in how, or whether, progress is made locally.

The United Nations is experiencing a more cordial engagement with the Government, moving from engagement on a sectoral level to engagement at national level on a range of political and socioeconomic issues. It has established specific high-level strategic partnerships with the Government, on issues such as peacebuilding, reconciliation and resettlement. Attracting Government co-financing will be a key element in future cooperation with the Government. At the same time, the United Nations will benefit from expanding and deepening strategic partnerships with civil society, private sector and other stakeholders, which will be crucial in the coming years, in alignment with SDGs16 and 17. This will not only help to mainstream the SDGs overall in the national agenda, but also to enhance the quality of Sri Lanka's human resources and to create a conducive climate for innovation, research and development.

1.3.4 Assessment of Sri Lanka in the International Normative Framework

International Commitments of Sri Lanka to a Just, Rights-Based Society

In many ways, a new era of human rights engagement in Sri Lanka has begun, although numerous serious challenges remain. Most importantly, after many years of contention over human rights issues during the armed conflict, the country since 2015 has prioritized implementation of Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 30/1, which it co-sponsored as part of its peacebuilding and reconciliation strategy under the new Government (see also Section 2.2). Overall, Sri Lanka is a State Party to a number of international human rights Conventions¹⁹ and also is preparing a new National Human Rights Action Plan 2017-2021 to fulfil its obligation to protect and promote human rights; however, it has ratified only 30 out of 177 technical Conventions of the International Labour Organization. It will submit its report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

¹⁷ Based on interviews conducted for the CCA.

¹⁸ *Economic Policy Statement Made by Hon. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Parliament on 5 November 2015.*

¹⁹ These include, most recently, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in February 2016, and of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons From Enforced Disappearance, in May 2016.

(ICCPR) in October 2017, which is an important opportunity for the United Nations to become involved in the process and use it to dialogue on civil and political rights issues in a number of sectoral development priorities.

The HRC Resolution commits the country to implement recommendations of the 2015 report on Sri Lanka by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), including “the establishment of a hybrid special court to try war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed by all parties to the armed conflict” (A/HRC/30/61).

Further, the Government has committed to undertake broad national consultations on transitional justice processes; establish a commission for truth, justice, reconciliation and non-recurrence; create a permanent office of missing persons; establish an office of reparations; set up a judicial mechanism with a special counsel; and appoint “impartial individuals with integrity” to lead judicial and prosecutorial institutions.

Cooperation between the Government and special procedures mandate holders likewise is mandated. Such engagement has already begun with the joint visit to Sri Lanka in April-May 2016 of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers (see also Section 2.2); in October 2016, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues also visited.

The May 2016 visit resulted in Preliminary Observations and Recommendations that indicate the extent of progress that still needs to be achieved on numerous rights issues, with the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment declaring in his Preliminary Observations and Recommendations that “Sri Lankan citizens continue to live without minimal guarantees against the power of the State.”

Preliminary findings of the Special Rapporteur indicated that, although less frequently employed than during the armed conflict period, “torture remains a common practice carried out in relation to regular criminal investigations in a large majority of cases.”

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Sri Lanka also has committed to other international frameworks, particularly in relation to climate change, including the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and a pledge submitted by Sri Lanka to fight climate change through the President depositing the country’s ratification of the Paris Agreement at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in September 2016.

Previous recommendations by the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), along with Concluding Observations by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee), are all several years old.

For the CRC Committee in 2010, it commended adoption of the National Plan of Action for Children 2010-2015, but expressed serious concern on a number of issues, including: (1) Persistent discrimination against children belonging to the Veddha, Muslim and Tamil communities, among whom those living in tea plantations are in a particularly disadvantaged situation. (2) The Convention’s lack of full domestication in national legislation and the continuing application of personal laws; (3) A need for strengthened coordination of implementation of the Convention; (4) Insufficient information to allow proper assessment of the allocation of overall resources for children; (5) The lack of a comprehensive data collection system covering all areas of the Convention; (6) Inconsistent application of the principle of the best interests of the child in legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings, as well as in policies and programmes relating to children; (7) Widespread and growing child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse in the home and the community, along with child sex tourism; and (8) Limited knowledge among adolescents about reproductive health, persistent issues of youth suicides, and alcohol, drug and tobacco use.²¹

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, 55th Session. *Concluding Observations of the Committee – Sri Lanka*. Geneva, 19 October 2010.

1.3.5 Crosscutting Key Development Challenges

Ensuring Equity, Equality and Non-Discrimination

As this CCA highlights throughout, one of Sri Lanka's key development challenges today is the trend toward increased inequality, despite a relatively strong economy. This is particularly a concern because inequalities in a democratic, multi-ethnic society can feed discontent and be incompatible with peace, as the country's past has demonstrated.²² Vulnerable/disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, the elderly, and persons with disabilities have the lowest levels of access to basic services, including health, education and access to productive assets as land, adding to their vulnerability. Sri Lankan Tamils had the highest rates of poverty among ethnic groups in 2012-2013, while poverty declined fastest for Sri Lankan Moors (Muslims).²³ Inequalities and discrimination based on income, location, disability and ethnicity often intersect with gender and are mutually reinforcing (see also Gender sub-section below). Other multidimensional measures also show inequality in outcomes, with attainment of higher education, for example, remaining strictly correlated to the well-being of households; educational attainment among the poor is almost half that of the non-poor.²⁴ Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) have yet to secure durable solutions, particularly in the area of livelihoods (see also Section 2.2), due partly to the continued military occupation of some private land; at the same time, the search for durable solutions for these IDPs and refugee returnees is both a human rights imperative and a critical step toward national reconciliation and consolidation of peace.

Environmental issues are also exacerbated by inequality. With regard to key disparities related to disasters such as floods and drought, the Vulnerability Programme Assessment 2015 found that nearly 53 percent of households surveyed in nine disaster-prone districts were categorized as "highly vulnerable." All districts surveyed also were found vulnerable to reduced income levels because of loss of agricultural production.²⁵

Again, this will require a plethora of interventions: Macroeconomic policies to ensure that sufficient, productive and decent employment is created; legislative reform and its implementation to address both citizen-State mistrust and exclusionary practices, as well as effective recourse mechanisms for disadvantaged groups and individuals to claim their rights, including in justice and security institutions; widely accessible and good-quality basic services that are "fit for purpose" to provide improvements in the quality of life as well as the capacity of rights holders to claim their rights; and well-targeted social protection programmes to protect not only against sharp declines in income but also persistently low incomes and their structural causes. Also needed will be addressing the causes of political patronage systems from centre to local levels, as well as strengthening local-level decision making; access to information and knowledge; reductions in the unpaid care work disproportionately undertaken by women and girls; wealth/income redistribution through land reform, gender- and child-responsive budgeting; and pro-poor fiscal and trade policies.

Developing Human Capital: Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Empowering Women

For several decades, relevant State authorities have given sustained recognition to the close link that exists between the universal needs and rights of health and education for all children, both girls and boys. This has led to the favourable indicators of consistent declines in infant and under-5 mortality and morbidity with minimal gender differences. This also includes equality in school enrolment and in access to free schooling at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. A number of national policies also exist to promote gender equality.

Yet the demographic changes taking place, such as rising life expectancy of females compared with that of males, changing dependency ratios, and mismatches in employability and access to education for females, all have far-reaching implications for Sri Lankan society and its future trajectory, especially in providing gender equality.

²² The country suffered two uprisings led by a Marxist-oriented political party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), in 1971 and 1987-89. It drew support primarily from rural youth as a result of endemic youth unemployment, primarily among educated youth. In particular, the socio-political tensions that led to the uprising of the late 1980s were fuelled by perceptions among the rural poor and urban working classes that the dynamics of early economic liberalization had effectively bypassed them.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Edirisinghe, J. et al. *Vulnerability Programme Assessment 2015*. Colombo, 2015.

Educating potential women leaders will be critical, both as a right in itself as well as for the job market, and will need to employ a rights-based approach in consonance with CEDAW. Currently, Sri Lankan women account for nearly 60 percent of students enrolled in universities.²⁶ However, their total labour force participation has remained relatively unchanged over the past quarter-century, at only around 30 percent, while the equivalent ratio for males stands at more than 70 percent²⁷ (see also Section 2.3); moreover, as of 2013, there were 2.6 million more men than women employed.²⁸

Labour migration poses particular challenges of inclusion. While the share of women in departures for foreign employment has declined overall since the mid-1990s, women still constituted 49 percent of departures in 2012, with the overwhelming majority to be employed as housemaids. At the same time, women's migration has impacts on the family that is left behind, most notably, on the children in the household. With the primary caregiver absent, children are sometimes found to be more exposed to abuse, including sexual abuse; child care practices also may be affected, exacerbating the risk of poor nutrition and childhood development.

In terms of health, it is projected that by 2021, male life expectancy will reach 71.7 years, while female life expectancy will reach 81.7 years. Male mortality is traditionally higher in most countries, but in Sri Lanka the gap of a decade is unusually high, suggesting serious issues in men's health and other external risks. In addition to three decades of armed conflict, in which mostly men died, NCDs among men arising from their alcohol, drug and food habits may be a contributing factor. It will be increasingly necessary for the State to identify strategies for supporting older females, especially those who have never been married and those without family members to care for them. Overall, only 35 percent of female heads of households are employed, except in the estate sector, where 52 percent are employed in precarious work.²⁹

At the same time, many female-headed households, particularly in the North, face discriminatory laws and practices in land inheritance that both disadvantage women and hinder economic productivity, as also highlighted in the CEDAW Concluding Observations. violence against women, participation in political and public life, and a low number of convictions for human trafficking. It highlighted the limited availability of data disaggregated by sex, ethnic group and rural-urban location in numerous areas

Turning to female participation and representation in politics and political Institutions, the proportion of seats held by women in the national Parliament remains very low, below the global average as well as most other regional figures.³⁰ From 1989 to 1994, women comprised only 5.8 percent of parliamentarians; the proportion had increased only marginally, to 6.8 percent, by 2014.³¹

The prevalence of violence against women in Sri Lanka is high and has been particularly noted in the CEDAW Concluding Observations, despite Sri Lanka's commitments to major international instruments that have relevance to gender-based violence (GBV) and the recent adoption of the National Policy Framework and National Action Plan to Address Sexual and Gender Based Violence 2016. Rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, forced prostitution, and trafficking are the most prevalent types of violence against women, according to the Gender Based Violence Forum in Sri Lanka. Marital rape continues to be excluded as a crime in Sri Lanka's substantive and procedural laws alike. It is observed that 83 per cent of females in the estate sector are victims of GBV; 57 per cent of female garment workers experience sexual harassment at the workplace, as do 62 percent of female employees in the industrial sector; and 11 percent of returnee migrant women were sexually abused.³²

²⁶ UNFPA Sri Lanka. *Investing in Women as Game Changers for Sri Lanka's Future Development: What Does It Take for Women to Fulfil Their Potential as Leaders? G2G Voices: UNFPA Inter-Generational Dialogues*. Colombo, 2016 (hereafter G2G Gender).

²⁷ MDGR 2014, op.cit.

²⁸ G2G Gender, op.cit.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Demographic Dividend, op.cit.

³¹ MDGR 2014, op.cit.

³² Demographic Dividend, op.cit.

Across the North and East, community consultations also suggest that security remains a primary concern for all women, combined with high levels of violence against women and girls (VAWG), often linked to a militarized environment, gender inequality, restrictive and patriarchal social mores, and psychological impact of the armed conflict.³³

Developing Human Capital: Unlocking the Potential of Adolescents and Youth, including Volunteerism

Sri Lankan adolescents and youth have already demonstrated their enormous potential, being active in international dialogues, including the SDGs and Agenda 2030, and contributing substantively to inter-generational dialogue within the country. Building on a December 2015 UN Security Council Resolution (SCR 2250) that recognizes the positive role of young women and men in the maintenance of international peace and security, it will be necessary to proactively advocate for youth to contribute to justice and reconciliation.

Adolescents and youth aged 15-34 also comprise more than 40 percent of volunteers,³⁴ an area in which Sri Lanka ranks highly worldwide. The country also ranked 10th on the World Giving Index in 2013,³⁵ in which the proportion of Sri Lankans volunteering (56.8 percent) was combined with the proportion who “help a stranger” (54 percent) and the proportion who donate money to charity in a typical month (45 percent). In all, volunteers have contributed an estimated US\$1.79 billion to the economy in a year, or just under 2 percent of GDP.³⁶

Sri Lanka has a solid policy landscape in place for youth, however, one of the most significant issues that Sri Lankan adolescents and youth face is the uneven quality of and access to education, linked to their eventual employability and their ability to play a positive role in determining the country’s middle-income status. Well-resourced schools are concentrated in the Western Province, while facilities are fewer and often of poor quality in rural areas.

The country has been grappling with the issue of youth employment for several decades; unemployment for people aged 20-24 years stood at around 40 percent for more than a decade, with only a slight decline, to 36 percent, in 2013.³⁷ Youth unemployment stems from a range of factors, such as mismatched skills, limited employment creation in the formal private sector, youth aspirations misaligned with actual job opportunities, a lack of entrepreneurship, and deeply entrenched social factors of class, ethnicity and caste. Sharp regional disparities are found. Lack of employment opportunities also contributes to “push” factors for migration through irregular and undocumented channels, which is a particular issue in the North and East of the country.

To address these challenges will require a mix of approaches to emphasize the importance of maximizing adolescent and youth potential while the demographic dividend lasts. In education reform, these may include more job-oriented education curricula, including the development of critical thinking skills for higher-quality learning; strengthened entrepreneurship education, with an emphasis on innovation and social change; and “soft” skills development programmes (e.g., values education, negotiation/conflict resolution skills) to promote professionalism in the workforce. In addition, more prominent inclusion of peace education and social cohesion components in secondary education will need be complemented by a clarified concept and institutionalization of adolescent-friendly schools.

A conducive policy environment also is needed in the manufacturing and service sectors in the country to maximize the demographic dividend and sustain economic growth. In particular, young female entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka face a lack of access to finance and business networks; negative norms and attitudes toward entrepreneurship as a career option; sometimes-limited mobility; overburden of family responsibilities; and lack of maternity protection that constrains business activities during pregnancy and early childhood care.

³³ PPP, op.cit.

³⁴ National Volunteer Survey 2014. National Volunteering Secretariat. *National Survey on Volunteerism, Sri Lanka 2014*. Colombo, 2014.

³⁵ UNV. *Sri Lankan Youth: Volunteering to Make a Difference*. Colombo, 2014.

³⁶ National Volunteer Survey 2014, op.cit.

³⁷ UNDP Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Human Development Report 2014: Youth and Development*. Colombo, 2014 (hereafter Youth NHDR).

At the same time, adolescents and youth face a number of barriers to accessing health care, particularly cost. Around 80 percent of National Youth Survey 2013 respondents had knowledge of nearby general health care services, but knowledge of available sexual and reproductive health and mental health services was poor, at 55 and 59 percent respectively. Shame and legal barriers were among the major obstacles preventing youth from accessing such services.

Adolescent pregnancies also are becoming an issue for concern in Sri Lanka, with 6.4 percent of the total pregnancies registered during 2006-2007 being among girls aged 15-19 (latest figures available), with vast district variations; this underscores the issues highlighted by the CRC Concluding Observations.³⁸ Nevertheless, child marriage figures appear to be low, although data are similarly scarce and anecdotal evidence indicates the marriage of some young girls during the conflict to “protect” them.³⁹

Critically, high rates of suicide and self-harm have been recognized as major causes of death among Sri Lankan youth, and are pointed out as a special concern in the CRC Concluding Observations. Young people comprised nearly 1 in 3 (30.9 percent) of the 3,770 suicides recorded during 2011, encompassing 399 adolescents (209 females, 109 males) and 765 young people aged 21-30 (231 females, 534 males). This indicates high levels of psychosocial stress, and calls for urgent measures to address serious mental health issues (see also Section 2.3).

Meanwhile, youth participation in politics is becoming increasingly important for Sri Lanka due to its current large youth population; greater participation of young people in politics also would reflect in youth-sensitive policy formulation in the country. Yet apart from exercising their right to vote, very few youth take part in political decision making; young women are particularly marginalized politically (see also Gender sub-section above).⁴⁰

Lastly, Sri Lanka aims to digitize Government services and encourage youth skills for the ICT sector, capitalizing on the country’s 5.5 million Internet users (26 percent of the population), many of whom are young, and 21.7 million mobile connections.⁴¹ Yet at the same time, the Internet is exposing adolescents and children to ever-evolving risks, such that protecting children from online abuse and misuse of online content/services has become a priority emerging global issue.⁴² Coordination of datasets and response protocols among authorities will improve response to abuse reporting. Where possible, data collection should include online categories and be disaggregated by age, gender and geography, which will aid in informing future evidence-based policy.

Developing Human Capital: Highlighting the Needs of Persons with Disabilities, Including Psychosocial Disabilities

Persons with disabilities have much to offer Sri Lankan society. For example, nearly 1 in 10 volunteers have a disability or chronic illness, illustrating that a poor health condition is not a barrier to participation in this powerful means of contributing to development and strengthening society at large.⁴³ Yet only a very small proportion of these persons are employed, making most highly economically dependent on their families. Many require better quality of social protection, as well as access to quality education and health care. The Census 2012 also revealed a positive correlation between age and disabilities. As a result, greater focus is needed on not only disability services and care, but also on geriatric care (see also Elderly sub-section below). Sri Lanka recently ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); a process also is under way to draft a National Disability Policy, although this has not been subject to wide consultations yet.

³⁸ Demographic Dividend, op.cit.

³⁹ UNICEF Sri Lanka. *Child Marriage Baseline Estimation*. Colombo, 2015.

⁴⁰ NHDR 2014, op.cit.

⁴¹ Asian Development Bank 2016 figures.

⁴² UNICEF Sri Lanka. *Keeping Children in Sri Lanka Safe but Empowered Online* (draft). Colombo, 2015 (hereafter Digital Landscape).

⁴³ National Volunteer Survey 2014, op.cit.

Among children with disabilities aged 5-14 years, more than 1 in 3 (35 percent) have cognitive disabilities. Despite near-universal primary school enrolment rates, nearly 1 in 4 children with disability aged 5-14 years are still excluded from education,⁴⁴ and their educational attrition rates remain high.

Critically, mental health is a crucial aspect of being healthy, yet about 3 percent of Sri Lankans face psychosocial disability⁴⁵ (see also Section 2.3). More than 20 categories of groups with mental health issues in Sri Lanka, with a diversity of issues and needs, have been identified during community consultations in conflict-affected areas alone.⁴⁶ Sri Lanka also has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, including among adolescents and youth (see also Adolescents and Youth sub-section above), at 44.6 per 100,000 males and 16.8 per 100,000 females.⁴⁷ Three decades of prolonged conflict in the country, the widespread destruction caused by the 2004 tsunami, and social issues such as alcoholism and unemployment represent some of the underlying reasons for this high prevalence of mental disorders.

Efforts are under way to draft a new Mental Health Policy, replacing one that expired in 2015, and a new Mental Health Act; however, drafts of both the Policy and the Act reportedly are not yet consistent with the CRPD, which has direct bearing on laws, policies and provisioning for persons with psychosocial as well as physical and cognitive disabilities.⁴⁸ At the same time, the allocation of resources and funding, as well as the emphasis given to mental health, has traditionally been low.

Developing Human Capital: Advancing Well-Being for Older Persons

Because Sri Lanka is in the latter stages of its demographic dividend (see also Section 1.3.1), it needs to urgently brace for the accelerated onset of economic and social implications of population ageing. The population above age 60 stood at 2.5 million in 2012, which was 12.5 percent of the total population. However, projections show that by 2041, 1 in 4 persons will be elderly (5.3 million), representing a doubling of the older population in just three decades.

In this context, there will be the potential for a strain on public financing: As a greater proportion of the population reaches retirement age, more people will be drawing from public funded pension schemes, which could absorb a greater proportion of future national expenditures. Even so, most older persons are not covered by social security support, in part because of the large informal sector (see also Section 1.2.1), making them at high risk of poverty. As a result, reforming pensions schemes is essential to support older persons to live their retirement life free of financial burdens.

The ageing population is particularly expected to put significant pressure on the national health system and the health care budget (see also Section 2.3). Hence, national health policies will need to prioritize emerging health care needs of older persons, and early detection will be needed along with awareness raising.

A Priority Emerging Issue: Effectively Tackling Urbanization and Its Challenges

According to official estimates, only 15.7 percent of Sri Lanka's population lives in urban areas, making it the least urbanized country in South Asia. This is due to the country's conservative definition of urban as population living in "town" and "municipal" administration units last demarcated in the 1980s. However, this does not capture Sri Lanka's true level of urbanization; for example, a 2010 World Bank study calculated that Sri Lanka has a 47 percent rate of "agglomeration." Overall, issues of urban migration, impact on family structures, and law and order issues, as well as overall urban governance, are increasingly critical, and have particular impact on basic services for women and children, especially those in informal settlements.

To achieve the status of a high-income country, the Government is giving new priority to an ambitious, US\$40 billion redevelopment plan of the country's capital and its surrounding districts by 2030, known as the Western Region Megapolis Planning Project.

⁴⁴ Institute of Policy Studies. *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*. Colombo, 2014 (hereafter Children With Learning Disabilities).

⁴⁵ Demographic Dividend, op.cit.

⁴⁶ Galappatti A. *Oral Submission to the Consultation Task Force on Mental Health and Psycho-Social Issues in Relation to Transitional Justice and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka* (PowerPoint). Colombo, 2016 (hereafter MHPSS).

⁴⁷ Demographic Dividend, op.cit.

⁴⁸ Reported in interviews conducted for the CCA with persons who have seen these drafts.

The Government says the project also will improve living conditions for 70,000 families living in unregulated settlements in Colombo alone. By 2030, the Megapolis is expected to have a population of 8.5 million people and per-capita income of US\$30,000, compared with today's national per-capita income of US\$3,800.⁴⁹

Yet many observers have expressed reasons for concern, with the 15-year timeframe of the sweeping project, the absence of firm financing arrangements, the country's continuing political vulnerability, and a poor record of project completion all raising questions about the Megapolis' viability.

All this indicates the need to urgently ensure improved governance systems in urban development, including rule of law and access to justice in case of rights violations connected with this and other types of large-scale development projects. More specifically, it will be necessary to ensure that Megapolis "middlemen" or job recruiters are regulated so as to mitigate the potential for increased internal human trafficking as well as exposure to mobility-related health issues (e.g., HIV). In particular, Sri Lanka's solid waste management challenge is linked to the rapid pace of urbanization. Collection rates average only 31 percent, whereas other MICs have average collection rates more than two times higher, at 68 percent.⁵⁰ Poor management of solid wastes in the country is a direct consequence of underinvestment and corresponding policies (see also Section 2.4).

1.3.6 Overall Comparative Advantages of and Opportunities/Risks for the United Nations in Sri Lanka

In the context of a national environment that aspires to become upper-middle-income and even high-income, the United Nations offers numerous broad comparative advantages to further national development. These comparative advantages are based, in part, on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified in the 2015 Mid Term Review of the current UNDAF 2013-2017; at the UNCT 2016 retreat; and during individual and group interviews in Colombo. However, the press of time did not allow for additional relevant surveys to serve directly as part of the CCA.

United Nations comparative advantages exist in terms of:

- Ability to enable the Government to better strategize and then scale up national and local initiatives that directly relate to the priority development challenges identified within this CCA. Again, this implies creating a more "knowledge-centric" United Nations tailored around Sri Lanka's national priorities while also providing direct implementation and operational support in scaled-down circumstances
- Effective social and geographical targeting to reduce inequities and inequalities in numerous development areas among vulnerable groups, helping to ensure that principles of equity, inclusivity, accountability, empowerment and participation are considered in development plans, policies and processes
- Strengthening national capacities at all levels, underpinned by and leading to national ownership. The United Nations particularly offers comparative advantages in the technical, institutional and managerial realms, all of which can contribute to effective systems reforms.
- Fostering of critical partnerships and dialogue, including through inter-generational exchanges, and showcasing of best practices, including those of Sri Lanka itself as it again becomes a dynamic participant in the regional and global arenas. The country has accumulated a wealth of experience, technical knowledge, expertise and best practices that can be an important contribution to global partnership platforms, including through South-South cooperation
- An emphasis on results orientation, as well as objective reporting and monitoring of the national development framework, including on sensitive issues

II. Analysis of Key National Development Issues

2.1 Common Structural and Underlying Barriers to Development Progress

The analysis in the CCA makes clear that many of the development challenges that continue to face Sri Lanka arise from the same or similar structural and underlying causes, and that constraints to realization of the full

⁴⁹ Speech by Prim Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to the World Economic Forum, op.cit.

⁵⁰ World Bank, op.cit.

spectrum of rights among all of the country's people remain profound, albeit improving. Based upon the analysis, the CCA concludes that key structural and underlying causes of major constraints and disparities include, among others:

■ **Economic Causes**

- A need to strengthen export- and market-oriented economic and trade policies
- High dependence on the garments and tea sectors and reduced opportunities for alternative sources of growth
- A need for strengthened decent work opportunities and appropriate functional and technical skills, along with a need for more sufficient decent jobs to absorb newcomers to the labour force, particularly among youth and women
- Massive displacement in recent years, which put hundreds of thousands of people under major social stress that lingers even post-conflict
- The persistence of poverty, including in former conflict-affected areas, despite national economic progress, and linked to a lack of resources needed to invest in improving education, skills and health and nutrition status as well as to participate meaningfully in the broader community or society
- A need for higher investment in service delivery and private sector expansion, which has led to reduced access to financial services, capital and credit
- A need for more equitable distribution of resources such as landholdings, along with a need for secure property ownership
- A need for strengthened capacity to effectively manage natural resources, along with adverse environmental and climate conditions, all of which can lower agricultural productivity
- A large number of Internally Displaced Persons still living in welfare centres in areas of high poverty and food/nutrition insecurity, and requiring resettlement

■ **Institutional and Governance Causes**

- Key gaps in the policy and legislative framework, which also may end up institutionalizing negative socio-cultural norms and practices
- A need for systems/institutional strengthening, at both national and sub-national levels, to address insufficient capacities for equity-based planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring. This particularly includes a need for strengthening overall institutional capacities (human resources, financing, technical expertise), representing the ability of the State to initiate policies and programmes and deliver them to support or benefit intended groups.
- A legacy of centralization in planning, including insufficient devolution of power to Provincial Councils, and a need for strengthened delivery at local level, combined with a need for wider representation of the people in the power structure
- Persistently widespread perceptions of corruption and mismanagement/lack of accountability, transparency and information sharing among public services
- Erosion of trust between citizens and the State, particularly regarding the effectiveness of justice and security institutions in protecting the rights of women, children and vulnerable/disadvantaged groups
- A need for strengthened, reliable and effectively analysed data disaggregated by gender, geographic location, disability and other factors
- A need to direct more substantive attention to quality services in disadvantaged areas lagging in human development, including urban slums and hard-to-reach areas
- A need for strengthened budgetary allocations to essential social services
- Under-representation of women and vulnerable groups in the political environment and policy processes

■ **Socio-Cultural Causes**

- Disadvantages and discrimination that result from social hierarchies, traditions, norms and practices that define groups unequally based on their gender, ethnicity, language, religion or other identity
- Traditional lack of civil society and private sector participation in public decision making for many years

- In turn, these underlie such issues as lack of education and awareness on good development practices and their benefits, weak capacity and confidence, and low socioeconomic status, which create disparities on numerous fronts, including economic resources, human development, and protection
- **Environmental and Geographic Causes**
 - Sri Lanka's heightened vulnerability to effects of climate change and disaster, as well as ensuing emergencies, with increasing areas of the country prone to floods and drought
 - Poor natural resource endowments and depletion of natural resources, with a need for strengthened agricultural productivity and heightened food and nutrition security
 - Lack of modern agricultural systems, technologies and techniques, and a need for higher-quality inputs
 - Poor infrastructure, rural public transportation, and accessibility challenges

2.2 Toward Strengthened, Innovative Public Institutions and Engagement Supporting a Lasting Peace

Although systems strengthening underlies all SDGs, progress toward SDG5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), SDG10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and SDG 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, inclusive and accountable institutions at all levels) can particularly be emphasized.

2.2.1 The Situation in Sri Lanka

All SDGs can be better implemented when governance is woven into each issue through policy discourse and process, as well as empowerment of citizens to engage in the planning, implementing and monitoring of the Goals. Three aspects of governance need to be considered:⁵¹ (1) good governance, comprising processes of decision making and their institutional foundations); (2) effective governance, or capacity of countries to pursue sustainable development; and (3) equitable governance, or distributive outcomes.

SDG16 also deals with peace, inclusion and social justice, essential components that all will have an impact on all aspects of governance, particularly in Sri Lanka. Indeed, sustaining a “positive peace” in the country necessitates deep governance and institutional reforms.⁵² Decades of politicization and de-professionalization have eroded Sri Lanka's governance institutions, including many that are to render key Constitutional reforms into reality on the ground. Hence, governance reforms form a vital component of peacebuilding and reconciliation for the country; they are crucial not only in both preventing ethnic-linked dissatisfaction with the State, but also in creating the institutional depth necessary to meaningfully implement a political resolution.

At the same time, well over 1 million Sri Lankans were displaced by the war, both internally and externally to other countries. Most of those displaced have returned to their places of origin or relocated in other areas of Sri Lanka. While most have received some assistance to return, relocate or locally integrate, many still await the assistance and protection to which they are entitled. Uprooted from their homes and deprived of the normal protection of community services and structures, those still displaced continue to require assistance to address their vulnerabilities, and to remedy and repair the damage and loss inflicted by long-standing – and in many cases, multiple and protracted – displacement. Even among populations who have returned, there are those who have not found a durable solution and continue to be vulnerable as a result of their displacement.

Overall, significant progress has been made since January 2015, when the new Government came to power. Some of the important steps undertaken in both strengthening democratic institutions and advancing reconciliation include:⁵³

⁵¹ MIND, Annex 1, op.cit.

⁵² de Mel, N. (Verite Research) and Venugopal, R. (London School of Economics and Politics). *Peacebuilding Context Assessment, Sri Lanka 2016*. Colombo, 2016 (hereafter Peacebuilding Context Assessment 2016).

⁵³ PPP, op.cit.

- Passing the 19th Amendment to the Constitution (see also Section 1.3.2), which consolidated democratic institutions by introducing reforms to (1) scale back powers of the President through re-imposing a two-term limit; (2) bringing in the right to information as a fundamental right; and (3) strengthening 11 oversight bodies through appointments of commissioners and chairpersons based on recommendations of the Constitutional Council, which consists of representatives selected by both the Government and the opposition.
- Constitutional reforms led by a 21-member Steering Committee to the Constitutional Assembly, with representation from all political parties. The Steering Committee remains dialogue to discuss electoral reforms and devolution of powers to Provincial Councils. In May 2016, a report was published on public consultations on constitutional reform.
- The passing of a mandatory 25 percent quota for women in local government bodies.
- Continued transfer of counterterrorism functions from the military to the civilian police, although yet to be fully materialized.
- Taking of immediate actions to address core grievances of minorities and Internally Displaced Persons, including releasing 3,281 acres of land occupied by the military or reserved as a Special Economic Zone; appointing civilian governors in the North and East; strengthening civilian administration; maintaining the tradition of singing the national anthem in Sinhala and Tamil; and changing May 19, marked as “Victory Day” since 2009, to Remembrance Day to commemorate all who died in the conflict.

Moving forward, broad issues of governance and systems/institution building to address include effectiveness, de-politicization, inclusion and accountability, as well as devolution of power.

A prominent way in which governance currently acts as a constraint is in how the State carries out regulatory functions for the economy.⁵⁴ Policies that orient the economy inward, such as the complex tax system, restrictive land and labour market regulation, and inefficient subsidies – and the related quality of the administration of these – all reflect areas of constraint. This burden of Government regulation has led to a large informal sector (see also Section 1.3.2), which negatively affects improved productivity. Human resource management of the public service also is complex, with limited controls on the expansion of the civil service. Politically important Ministries have demonstrated an ability to increase their staffing complement in recent years. From 2005 to 2014, the Government explicitly sought to increase public-sector employment, particularly with recent graduates. While recruitment is carried out by an objective process of examination via the Public Service Commission, the higher echelons of public service reportedly have been subject to political influence. New constitutional amendments are expected to provide for more autonomy of the civil service through a more independent Public Service Commission.

A public expenditure finance and management (PEFA) assessment in 2013 further underscores how far Sri Lanka has to go on strengthening governance systems and institutions. It noted the country’s relative strengths in terms of budget process, quality of annual financial statements, legislative scrutiny, and timeliness and quality of follow-up on audit findings. At the same time, Sri Lanka scored below lower-middle-income-country averages on several PEFA indicators, including (1) monitoring and reducing payment arrears; (2) oversight on aggregate fiscal risk; (3) public access to key fiscal information; (4) taxpayer registration and tax collections; (5) internal audit and payroll controls; (6) procurement procedures and transparency; and (7) predictability in the availability of funds.⁵⁵ A weak procurement environment remains a particular concern.

Meanwhile, the judiciary has a fundamental role to play in a democratic society based on the rule of law; therefore, it should be robust and efficient. However, the justice system in Sri Lanka presents a special set of development challenges, as detailed by the numerous Preliminary Observations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, who visited the country along with the Special Rapporteur on torture in April-May 2016 (see also Section 1.3.4).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ World Bank, op.cit.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19942&LangID=PreIminaryobservationsandrecommendations>

The Special Rapporteur particularly drew attention to the need for more transparent, decentralized and democratic administration of justice, including the introduction of criteria for the appointment of judges and the causes of their removal through disciplinary proceedings.

As highlighted throughout this CCA, reconciliation holds a central role for Sri Lanka over the coming years. The Peacebuilding Priority Plan for the country encompasses four priorities: transitional justice, reconciliation, good governance, and resettlement/durable solutions. At the same time, reconciliation involves three broad areas of consideration: (1) addressing the underlying structural and societal drivers of conflict; (2) coming to terms with the past, through ensuring accountability; and (3) rebuilding community-level social support structures and institutions, so that violence does not recur.⁵⁷

The Peacebuilding Context Assessment 2016 notes the large and multifaceted task ahead, which requires transforming the “negative peace” of the early post conflict years into a “positive peace.” Both “horizontal” (inter-elite) consensus and “vertical” (deeper social) consensus are necessary prerequisites for a robust peacebuilding and reconciliation agenda. However, the depth of support and legitimacy that comes from a vertical consensus (between political elites and the people) on vital issues of State reform and reconciliation remains weak, which can make the horizontal consensus vulnerable, and can undermine any political solution arising from elite-level negotiations.

In terms of security, there is room for further normalization in four key areas:⁵⁸ (1) land return, given that military appropriate of land, both during and after the conflict, continues to be a major source of resentment; (2) de-concentration of troop strength and visibility in the North and East; (3) de-proliferation of the military into non-military spheres of public life, including civilian governance and commercial activities that place it in competition with the local population; and (4) re-orientation of the military from a war footing to that of a peacetime force.

Turning to resettlement and durable solutions, Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1 (see also Section 1.3.2) called upon the international community, particularly including the United Nations, to support the Government in its efforts to deliver durable solutions for a small group of remaining Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), as well as more than 700,000 persons who have been resettled. The Government has since 2015 made its intention clear that the widespread displacement relating to the armed conflict needs to be urgently addressed, and in March 2016 adopted the National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement after wide-ranging consultations with key stakeholders, both in conflict-affected areas and the centre.

Many of these IDP and returnee households face acute challenges, particularly with regard to accessing livelihood services and to food security and nutrition; for example, nearly half of returnee families have adopted coping strategies to access food, heavily oriented toward borrowing food or money. At the same time, a low number of households with people with disabilities are provided with counselling services or housing assistance.⁵⁹ In all, IDPs and refugee returnees, along with rejected Sri Lankan asylum seekers, can only be truly reintegrated with their own communities if their future is supported by local-level decision making and empowerment through equal access to socioeconomic opportunities and support networks.

2.2.2 Policy and Governance Environment

The three-year, comprehensive Peacebuilding Priority Plan supports the Government to implement its reconciliation and accountability/transitional justice commitments to the people as part of the peacebuilding agenda. It builds on the Government’s ongoing political reforms and Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1, which Sri Lanka co-sponsored in September 2015. The restorative framework is geared to at least four segments of conflict-affected people in Sri Lanka: (1) people of all communities who have suffered in the main theatre of conflict; (2) soldiers and families of soldiers; (3) victims of LTTE atrocities outside the theatre of conflict; and (4) those displaced from their homes and forced outside the theatre of war. Specific attention in all segments is being accorded to the needs and experiences of women, children and people with disabilities.

⁵⁷ Peacebuilding Context Assessment 2016, op.cit.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province, and the United Nations Humanitarian Country Team. *Sri Lanka Joint Needs Assessment Final Report*. Colombo, 2015.

In his statement to the Human Rights Council on 14 September 2015, Sri Lanka's Minister for Foreign Affairs promised to establish "independent, credible and empowered mechanisms for truth seeking, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence within the framework of the Constitution." The Government has proposed a Commission for Truth, an Office on Missing Persons, an Office for Reparations, and a judicial mechanism with a special counsel to investigate grave rights violations. Further, it has established three Ministries with complementary functions, including the Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation, which operates under the leadership of the President and includes the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) in its structure; ONUR is an ad hoc body created to specifically focus on strengthening inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships.

In addition, the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs and the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages are responsible for resettlement of IDPs, refugees and returnees, rehabilitation of combatants, and implementation of the official language policy. Likewise, the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM) has been established within the Prime Minister's Office to oversee reconciliation and transitional justice processes, through coordination with relevant Ministries, task forces, Provincial Councils and other bodies.

The Government also committed to a number of other legislative reforms and safeguards to guarantee non-recurrence, for example, such as strengthening the National Human Rights Commission in line with the Paris Principles. Many of these commitments have subsequently been included in Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1. In March 2015, an Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act was adopted, followed in January 2016 by establishment of a National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated engagement with the Sri Lankan diaspora, with initial dialogues held with several groups in the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia and the United States.

To progress transitional justice specifically, the Prime Ministerial Action Group (PMAG), chaired by the Prime Minister, is guide the process of reconciliation and accountability, while the Steering Committee on International Commitments, chaired by the Foreign Minister, and the technical working groups of the Steering Committee are developing a coordinated plan for mechanisms envisaged for truth-seeking, justice and reparations. Dialogue has been strengthened with security and law enforcement agencies, including on transitional justice issues, and a comprehensive review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been initiated.

2.2.3 Stakeholder and Capacity Gaps

In addition to the overall governance and reconciliation gaps already detailed in Section 2.2.1, the highly complex political economy and poor implementation of policies often lead to the derailment of initiatives. In terms of public service reform, as highlighted above, challenges particularly occur at two levels: (1) strengthening of political will; and (2) bureaucratic incapacity/corruption. Uneven and parallel governance systems complicate "doing business" in this sector, as does the lack of full and effective implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution devolving powers to the provinces.

With regard to reconciliation, a need exists for strong coordination in the sector of the high number of partners engaged in supporting downstream people-to-people interventions. A need also exists for wider support in areas outside of the North and East, considering that familiarity with, and acceptance of, the peacebuilding agenda may be weakest among these communities. Similarly, greater attention could be given to the roles of women, youth and religious leaders in reconciliation, since support is currently relatively small scale given the challenges. An opportunity further exists to work on consensus building among political leaders at central, provincial and local levels. For transitional justice, implementation of different mechanisms may require longer-term and comprehensive support, while significant gaps exist in support of resettlement and durable solutions.

2.2.4 Specific United Nations Comparative Advantages

The United Nations offers specific comparative advantages in terms of promotion and protection of human rights, building on already-existing partnerships. It also has a comparative advantage related to long-term engagement to strengthen governance systems and institutions, including with regard to assessing human resource capabilities and promoting the development of more strategic thinking among the bureaucratic elite. It can particularly work effectively to support the strengthening of decentralized policies (e.g., improved tax collection at provincial levels) and local governance, building on its extensive successful experience, for example, under the European Union Support to District Development Programme (EU-SDDP). Further, the United Nations

can support important linkages between international treaties and normative national legal frameworks. It also could lead the way in linking resources from multiple budget lines across sectors (e.g., early childhood development, adolescents) to provide better, more targeted funding for children.

The United Nations also offers comparative advantages in parliamentary/Constitutional reform, including with regard to Parliament's representative, legislative and oversight functions; public administration reform; acceleration of the right to information process; mapping of issues associated with Sri Lanka's profound demographic changes; and creation of an enabling environment for strengthening overall democratic processes, positioned around issues of inequality and exclusion. Overall, it can preserve and support democratic change, human rights, gender equality and social inclusion at both national and grassroots levels. In terms of reconciliation and peacebuilding, the United Nations has been tasked to play a key role in implementation of the Peacebuilding Priority Plan, which also is serving as a key tool for coordinating development partners' support to peacebuilding. It can support a whole-of-Government approach toward development of a national policy framework on reconciliation that brings together work across the social, cultural, political and economic fields, while also supporting the institutionalization of peace education within schools and other learning establishments.

At the same time, the United Nations can make a significant difference through bringing various Agencies together in a coordinated manner, resulting in a comprehensive package of support, synergies, and effective and efficient targeting of resources. Critically, it also can facilitate dialogue with political parties and key societal groups, with a view toward building horizontal and vertical consensus on key issues of reconciliation.

The United Nations can be catalytic through its ability to support the Government to "break the ice" on some of the most politically sensitive issues – not only reconciliation, but also transitional justice, and police/security sector transformation. It further offers extensive experience in facilitating overall access to justice. Notably, the United Nations offers specialized assistance in developing counterterrorism legislation that is up-to-date and consistent with international legal counterterrorism instruments and other relevant international obligations and standards, thereby replacing the PTA.

The credibility of the United Nations also has been established by the field presence that some of the United Nations Agencies have within Sri Lanka, enabling it to share lessons from the field with the Government for further scaling up.

2.3 Toward Human Security and Socioeconomic Resilience

For improved social inclusion and equity, interlinked strategic challenges will need to be addressed, including access, availability and systemic/administrative barriers. In turn, this will directly further progress toward numerous SDGs, including SDG1 (End poverty in all its forms, everywhere); SDG2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture); SDG3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages); SDG4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all); SDG5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); SDG6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all); SDG8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all); SDG9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation); SDG10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries); SDG12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns); and SDG16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels)

2.3.1 The Situation in Sri Lanka

Human security⁶⁰ and socioeconomic resilience⁶¹ are fragile for many Sri Lankans, including the poor but also the high proportion of people who live at subsistence level just about the poverty line. Developing socioeconomic resilience is about transforming this pattern. Investing in overall quality education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for youth and women is one critical policy measure to better utilize the demographic dividend of Sri Lanka, strengthen the labour market, and ensure human security (see also Sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.5). Yet primary education in the country has been chronically underfunded, which in part explains the quality and equity issues to be faced despite achievements in universal primary enrolment. Although the Government is planning substantial increases in the education budget – up to 6 percent of GDP by 2020 – it is starting from a low base: The share of GDP allocated to education in 2012, for example, was only 1.7 percent, the lowest among countries in the region and among lower-middle-income countries surveyed.⁶²

In all, firms have difficulty accessing the skills they need, including English language, computer skills and, critically, the “soft” skills that underpin positive work habits, creative and critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, commitment, and emotional stability. Use of cognitive skills has been reported as low as 52 percent among those with secondary education.⁶³ In the TVET system in particular, weaknesses include low levels of organization and management effectiveness; issues of access and equity; internal efficiency and effectiveness; relevance; outdated training standards and curricula; shortage of qualified instructors; and need for strengthened quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation. Involvement of the private sector in skills development also requires further strengthening, again pointing to the need for more integrated approaches and disaggregated data on labour market needs.⁶⁴

Women’s participation in the labour market, already low (see also Section 1.3.5), has not only been static for decades but has even slightly declined over the last decade, and remain constrained by social norms related to women’s role in the household, gender wage gaps, and occupational segregation.⁶⁵ At the same time, the formal legal framework for labour prevents women from taking up night work or part-time work in the growing service sector, and the laws governing maternity benefits make employers bear the entire cost, potentially deterring them from hiring women. Further, vulnerable employment comprises 43.1 percent of all work in Sri Lanka.⁶⁶ Indicating the extent of challenges linked to social protection as well, no unemployed persons in the country (aged 15-64) were reported to be receiving unemployment benefits, compared to 2.5 percent in other developing countries.⁶⁷

Climate risk in particular is one of the key challenges to ensuring food and nutrition security, through a combination of decreasing crop production, decreasing resource availability, higher magnitude of disasters, and unpredictable weather. Yet despite progress, vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity, as well as low resilience to climate variability, persist across Sri Lanka, mostly affecting the poorest households; more than 40 percent of the population in the North and East have been identified as food-insecure.⁶⁸

Poorer resilience occurs not only in the North and East, but also in the south-eastern parts of the country, with the latter particularly dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Households that depend on fisheries in the North have poor resilience because they have limited livelihood diversity and are often hit by storms and cyclones which

⁶⁰ In policy terms, the United Nations defines human security as “integrated, sustainable, comprehensive security from fear, conflict, ignorance, poverty, social and cultural deprivation, and hunger, resting upon positive and negative freedoms” (UNDP Human Development Report 1994).

⁶¹ Resilience refers to the capacity of livelihood groups, households, communities and individuals to manage stressors and shocks with no long-lasting adverse effects on development. Many of these stressors and shocks also are related to environmental resilience (see also Section 2.4).

⁶² UNICEF Sri Lanka. *Child Friendly Approach (CFA) Evaluation*. Colombo, 2016.

⁶³ ILO Sri Lanka. *The Skills Gap in Four Industrial Sectors in Sri Lanka*. Colombo, 2015 (hereafter Skills in Four Sectors).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ World Bank, op.cit.

⁶⁶ HDR 2015 Global Explanatory Note, op.cit.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ PPP, op.cit.

significantly affect their catch. In addition, the poorest households in the tea estates also have low resilience due to chronic poverty and very limited diversity of livelihoods.

This widespread lack of resilience also challenges the centrality given to nutrition under the SDGs; malnutrition still remains a major challenge in the country, indicating the acute need for quality services. Rates of acute malnutrition (wasting) are exceptionally high, at 19.6 percent overall, with the highest prevalence found in the East and North (e.g., Kilinochchi, 34 percent). By contrast, chronic malnutrition (stunting) is low compared to prevalence rates seen around the region;⁶⁹ in 2015, stunting affected an estimated 13 percent of under-5 children.

In a 2016 national hunger index, Sri Lanka scored 25.5, standing at the “serious” level, and on par with Nigeria and Swaziland.⁷⁰ Information on nutritional status in Sri Lanka indicates that micronutrient deficiencies may be a more serious issue than energy deficiency per se.⁷¹ According to the National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey 2012, the national prevalence of anaemia among children aged 6-23 months was 26.5 percent, considered a moderate public health problem; overall anaemia presence for children under 5 years stood at 15.1 percent.⁷² Among women, meanwhile, the prevalence of anaemia in those who are pregnant stood at 31.8 percent, according to preliminary findings of the 2016 National Nutrition Survey, indicating a public health issue; further, 30 percent of households in which pregnant women live were found to be food-insecure.

Although nutritious food is widely available across the country, access to it is limited due to economic constraints. The cost of a nutritious diet increases from 2 to 16 percent between planting and harvesting seasons, with the highest increase recorded in poverty-stricken Uva Province.⁷³

With the right policies in place, Sri Lanka is well-placed to develop a system of health care on a par with the best in the world, thereby enhancing human security and socioeconomic resilience.⁷⁴ A new National Health Strategic Master Plan 2016-2025 has been developed by the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine.

However, significant risks exist in the current health sector. At national level, Sri Lanka is affected by major epidemiological and demographic changes: an ageing population (see also Section 1.3.1); a rapidly increasing burden of NCDs, which raises large health as well as economic implications; emerging infectious diseases; concerns about mental health and suicide, including among youth (see also Section 1.3.5); and road traffic accidents. Without a more evidence-based approach to setting priorities, the increases in health spending risk being driven by individual or institutional ambition, which could exacerbate growing inequities; in particular, quality health services are needed that can more fully predict the trajectory of such key trends as an ageing population and NCDs, as well as anticipate effective responses.

According to Ministry of Health estimates, NCDs (heart disease, stroke, cardiovascular risk, diabetes, cancer, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) account for almost two-thirds of all deaths in Sri Lanka. In addition, NCDs have become the largest contributor to the disease burden in Sri Lanka, accounting for 85 percent of all ill health, disability and early death.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid. By international definition, wasting rates above 15 percent are considered a serious public health issue.

⁷⁰ Available at <http://ghi.ifpri.org/>

⁷¹ Senarath, Dr. U., Jayatissa Dr. R, and Siriwardena, I. *Evaluation of Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation Programme in Sri Lanka 2009-2012*. Colombo, 2014.

⁷² Ministry of Health and UNICEF Sri Lanka. *National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey, Part I: Anaemia Among Children Aged 6-59 Months and Nutritional Status of Children and Adults*. Colombo, 2013. Also Ministry of Health and UNICEF Sri Lanka. *National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey, Part II: Iron, Zinc and Calcium Deficiency Among Children Aged 6-59 Months*. Colombo, 2014.

⁷³ WFP, HARTI and Ministry of Health. *Minimum Cost of Nutritious Diet: Sri Lanka, October 2013-September 2014*. Colombo, 2014.

⁷⁴ WHO. *A Road Map for Health Policy, Strategy and Planning in Sri Lanka*. Colombo, 2016 (hereafter WHO, A Road Map).

⁷⁵ WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. *Tackling Non-Communicable Diseases: Sri Lanka's Biggest Killer*. Health Partnership Case Study. New Delhi, 2015.

The strategic policy framework for health development should guide the future development of the health sector in Sri Lanka and may include the following issues:

- -- Reform of health care and priority setting to address changing disease burden: Sri Lanka spends only 5 percent of current resources on preventive care.⁷⁶ Management of the human resources for health in a changing health system is a challenge. Forecasting the future needs and task shifting among the present will be vital to reach health targets.
- -- Financial risk protection is a key element of Universal Health Coverage. However, the proportion of out-of-pocket health expenditure is high (41 per cent) and likely to increase in the coming years.⁷⁷ The strategy should link to long-term social care and have a critical interface with other aspects of social and environmental policies.

With regard to mental health and psychosocial services, a particularly critical issue in Sri Lanka (see also Section 1.3.5), the health system challenges are especially daunting. In the public sector, these include an uneven geographic pattern of deployment; mismatches between resourcing and level of needs, with a fragmentation of efforts; and lack of logistical support for personnel to conduct community work, leading to serious gaps in coverage. Only about 50 to 75 psychiatrists are found for the country's more than 20 million people, mostly in the Western Province; the Ministry of Social Welfare has about 100 to 150 counselling assistants, according to a 2013 mapping, with about 200 counselling assistants working under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs; and about 1,400 guidance and counselling teachers are found in the education system.⁷⁸ At the same time, ongoing training and technical supervision of personnel in the field is limited and often non-existent, while pre-service training may not be practically oriented.

All this requires multiple approaches to intervention and support provision, involving diverse actors such as Government service providers, non-Government service providers, and community/informal supports (e.g., faith institutions, traditional healers, community groups, families).

In addition to the broader social protection challenges noted throughout the CCA (e.g., issues of pension reform, social security, Universal Health Coverage), the child protection system faces specific concerns.⁷⁹ For legal and regulatory purposes, critical gaps include a need for strengthened enforcement of corporal punishment laws in schools; recognition of child rights in the Constitution; and amending the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, the principal legislation regarding juvenile justice, to address the age gap in service delivery for juveniles between 16 and 18, as well as shifting toward making frontline child protection officers the primary point of first contact for children in contact with the law. The fact that children younger than age 8 also can be charged with a "scheduled" offence also is worthy of review.

2.3.2 Policy and Governance Environment

From a human security angle, advances and remaining challenges made in the areas of human rights and good governance are all critical, including with regard to strengthening the role of parliamentarians in defending human security, particularly of women, children, and vulnerable/disadvantaged groups (see also Section 2.2).

In addition to the numerous socioeconomic policies already noted in this CCA, other relevant policies and programmes include the Divineguma programme, a major poverty alleviation scheme with a cash grant programme for livelihood development. Gama Neguma is a large rural development programme, with a principal focus on infrastructure development, development of small/cottage industries, and management of forest resources. In addition, the New Life for Plantation Areas policy focuses on the welfare of the plantation community. While other key policies exist, as indicated in Section 2.2, effective implementation of policies requires strengthening, as well as attention to particularly vulnerable groups and reduction of disparities.

⁷⁶ WHO, A Road Map, op.cit.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Based on interviews conducted for the CCA.

⁷⁹ UNICEF Sri Lanka. *Child Protection Systems Mapping Report* (draft). Colombo, 2016.

2.3.3 Stakeholder and Capacity Gaps

Numerous gaps have been detailed above in all key areas related to human security and socioeconomic resilience, even as other major gaps remain to be filled. For example, in the next decade of health sector development in Sri Lanka, the following three processes may need to be prioritized, with high-level political and policy commitment and close monitoring:⁸⁰ (1) Development of a series of strategic policy papers with five- to 10-year perspectives, starting with those that are considered most critical to mitigating key risks in the sector; (2) Institutionalization of a process for shifting the focus from inputs to outputs/outcomes in all areas of the health service, and assessing them using a performance assessment framework that has already been initiated; (3) Conducting a high-level policy appraisal that brings in international perspective on ways that Sri Lanka can handle priority health risks, with a focus on adapting the health care delivery system to meet changing health needs. This could be achieved through having a small group of high-level international policy analysts and policymakers work with national policy experts to review the country's current achievements, challenges and emerging models of service delivery, and draw on international evidence and experience.

2.3.4 United Nations Comparative Advantages

As with the strengthening of systems and institutions for a lasting peace (see also Section 2.2), the United Nations offers numerous comparative advantages with regard to strengthening human security and socioeconomic resilience. For example, it can work closely with Parliament to support parliamentarians in performing the role of defenders of human security for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. In terms of sustainable livelihoods, decent work and employability, United Nations comparative advantages include the ability to provide greater focus on programmes targeting youth employment; reintegration of returnees and IDPs, focusing on key barriers such as access to education and acknowledgement of prior qualifications; and mapping of social protection floors. The United Nations also can help to bridge the inequality gap in quality services (North/South, rural/urban et al.), while also recognizing the hidden costs for basic social services that deter public access. In turn, it can support improved coordination and delivery of services at national and sub-national levels alike, and can address issues associated with an increase in violence (e.g., GBV).

The United Nations brings multifaceted strengths to the strong challenges of the multi-sectoral nature of nutrition. In light of the critical gaps noted above, the United Nations can particularly engage in the development and coordination of a multi-sectoral nutrition system – encompassing both nutrition-specific and -sensitive interventions (e.g., food fortification, improved locally fortified foods) – to ensure effective policies and address continuing wide disparities, including through its global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) network. It also can serve as the catalyst for public-private partnerships, which are fundamental to sustainable improvement in nutrition status.

Critically, the United Nations' comparative advantages on related issues such as public administration reform and local empowerment offer crosscutting relevance; also related are its comparative advantages in environmental sustainability, health and economic growth. For example, the United Nations can help to integrate the principles of sustainable natural resource use into policymaking, legislation and institutions, which in turn will help to allow the country to ensure food security for poor and vulnerable groups in particular.

The policy and normative role of the United Nations makes it well-positioned to provide guidance on reducing malnutrition among children and women alike, both in the formulation of relevant strategies and in leveraging of financial resources and partnerships. Technical support and implementation give it a comparative advantage in supporting innovation in rural institutions; likewise, it can enhance participation, entrepreneurship and leadership of rural producers' organizations, including by providing alternative models for engagement between Government, producer organizations and other stakeholders.

Likewise, in health, the United Nations' mandate with regard to the SDGs again offers it a substantial comparative advantage in supporting the Government to achieve higher levels of human development. The national capacity development paradigm that comprises the heart of the United Nations' mandate also represents a particular comparative advantage in response to remaining inefficiencies, inequalities and quality issues in the sector. For example, the United Nations can support the Government's capacity to develop sound policies and budget allocations and can promote the right to health, gender equality, the rights of children, and

⁸⁰ WHO, A Road Map, op.cit.

the rights of persons with disabilities, including psychosocial disabilities.

Based on the analysis across the CCA, the United Nations offers key comparative advantages in social protection system strengthening; upstream policy interventions in favour of the poor and vulnerable groups; and support to reporting on Sri Lanka's international obligations and adherence to international norms. The United Nations also offers comparative advantages in such areas as supporting the enhancement of the social protection system based on a social protection floor and woman- and child-sensitive protection initiatives.

2.4 Enhancing Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster, and Strengthening Environmental Management: Toward a More Sustainable Present and Future

Numerous SDGs will be supported, including SDG1 (End poverty in all its forms, everywhere); SDG2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture); SDG5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); SDG7 (Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all); SDG10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries); SDG12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns); SDG13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts); SDG15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss); and SDG16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, inclusive and accountable institutions at all levels)

2.4.1 The Situation in Sri Lanka

Living and coping with uncertain impacts of climate change is no longer a choice, but an imperative. Overall, Sri Lanka is a negligible contributor to global warming, although the transport and electricity sectors are both carbon-intensive. In 2015, the country submitted a plan to cut emissions against the 2010 baseline by as much as 30 percent.

However, Sri Lanka also is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which include: (1) increases in the frequency and intensity of disasters such as droughts, floods, landslides and cyclones; (2) variability and unpredictability of rainfall patterns, particularly during the north-eastern monsoon, such that a continuation of this trend over the next several decades would render rain-fed agriculture unsustainable and potentially reduce both rice and tea production;⁸¹ (3) increases in temperature, with a gradual but unabated warming trend of around 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade, or 0.025 degrees Celsius a year;⁸² (4) sea level rise, which is expected to increase the magnitude of coastal flooding, exacerbate coastal erosion, increase salinization of estuaries and freshwater aquifers, and exacerbate storm surges; and (5) climate change-induced internal migration. Climate change vulnerabilities cut across many sectors in the economy, and threaten to compromise the significant development achievements the country has recorded in a wide range of areas, including agriculture, fisheries, housing, irrigation and water supply, health, and roads.

Issues of environmental degradation and pollution also impact across the board, but poor or vulnerable/disadvantaged groups and communities (e.g., estate communities living in landslide-prone areas) tend to feel the impacts most. Large industries may be allowed to pollute or extract natural resources with impunity, with poor communities rarely compensated for their losses. This also is strongly linked to the need for enhanced human security and socioeconomic resilience (see also Section 2.3).

⁸¹ Food Security Atlas, op.cit.

⁸² Department of Agriculture, UNDP and Global Environment Facility (GEF). *Spatial Variation of Climate Change-Induced Vulnerability in Sri Lanka: An Analysis of the Components of Vulnerability at District Level*. Peradeniya, 2013.

In all, extreme climate events can have detrimental effects on livelihoods, for example, through destruction of livelihood assets (farming tools, fishing boats, water tanks for irrigation), and destruction of agricultural land, which may take several months or years to recover. To cope with climate risk, households may diversify their livelihoods (see also Section 2.3). Historical trends suggest that the number of people being affected by climate-related hazards is increasing, from an average of approximately 400,000 people affected every year between 1980 and 1990 to an average of 750,000 annually between 2000 and 2013.⁸³ Most of the affected population is exposed to drought, or flood, both of which are linked to failure or high intensity of the monsoon rains respectively; the latter also increasingly causes destructive landslides in the central mountains. The recent disastrous floods in May 2016 highlighted a series of shortfalls in disaster risk management in the country, which must be addressed moving forward (see also Section 2.4.3) to further strengthen implementation of the National Emergency Operations Plan and national/provincial/district disaster preparedness and response plans.

Climate change impacts are expected to threaten key natural resources and biodiversity, which are important to livelihoods and quality of life. These include impacts on water availability (both groundwater and surface water), land degradation, degradation of vegetation in watersheds, and changes in terrestrial, inland wetland and coastal systems, as well as in marine systems, along with their species and ecosystem services. Development projects, industry, urban spread and expanded infrastructure also are responsible for key issues of deforestation, wetland degradation and species loss. All this is particularly of concern because Sri Lanka is among the most biologically diverse countries in the world.

Priority areas for action will need to include ensuring Sri Lanka's ability to meet food production and nutrition demands, despite fluctuations in agricultural, livestock and fisheries production volumes and pricing, which can be expected as a result of climate change impacts.

Contamination of water represents a rapidly emerging serious health challenge, particularly in the north-central part of the country, as well as in border villages near former conflict-affected areas in the North and East. The World Health Organization identifies excessive levels of cadmium and agricultural pesticides in water as a fundamental cause of a rising number of cases of chronic kidney disease of unknown etiology (CKDu), particularly among farmers in water-stressed areas and their families. High levels of arsenic also have been found in water. At the same time, ensuring adequate water availability for agriculture, human well-being and ecosystem services, as well as for human settlements, despite climate change is a key challenge in ensuring food security. Adoption and promotion of the principles of integrated water resources management (IWRM) will be critical, as will promoting water-efficient farming methods and crops or water-saving techniques such as rainwater harvesting.

Haphazard solid waste disposal in urban areas also has been identified as a major cause for environmental degradation. The National Policy on Solid Waste Management 2007 prioritized municipal solid waste management, however, open dumping remains the most common method of municipal solid waste disposal (see also Section 1.3.5). Local authorities have insufficient capacity to address this issue and, as such, only 40 per cent of waste generated is handled by local authorities. As a result, municipal solid waste has created severe social and environmental challenges in urban areas.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka is ranked 56th out of 191 countries regarding disaster by the risk assessment platform INFORM, a collaboration of the Task Team for Preparedness and Resilience under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the primary mechanism for coordination of humanitarian assistance, and the European Commission.⁸⁴ Similarly, the World Risk Index 2016 also ranks Sri Lanka 63rd out of 171 countries.⁸⁵ While Sri Lanka has largely recovered from the 2004 tsunami, by far its biggest disaster, it still faces multiple disasters nearly every year – often in cycles of floods/landslides followed by severe drought in the same areas – that illustrate the country's acute vulnerability and challenge development gains.

2.4.2 Policy and Governance Environment

Sri Lanka has taken positive steps by introducing national policies, strategies and actions to address climate change-induced impacts, among which are the National Climate Change Policy; National Climate Change

⁸³ Livelihoods and Resilience, op.cit.

⁸⁴ <http://www.inform-index.org/Countries/Country-profiles/iso3/LKA>

⁸⁵ <http://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:5763>

Adaptation Strategy 2011-2016; Climate Change Vulnerability Profiles 2010, in water, health, agriculture and fisheries, urban development, human settlements, and economic infrastructure; the Technology Needs Assessment and Technology Action Plans for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in 2014; the National Action Plan for the Haritha Lanka Programme 2009; and the Urban Transport Master Plan 2032, based on the National Transport Policy 2009.

To ensure that climate change commitments are being pursued, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) on Energy Generation and End Use Sectors are being implemented, and NAMAs on Waste Management and on Transportation are being prepared. In addition, the Long Term Electricity Generation Expansion Plan 2015-2032 and the National Solid Waste Management Strategy 2000, the Corporate Plan 2014-2018 by the Central Environmental Authority, and various legal amendments related to environment also are being implemented. Further, Sri Lanka has submitted two national communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2000 and 2011), and the Climate Change Secretariat (CCS), under the Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, has a mandate to coordinate climate change-related activity across the country.

Even so, strengthening environmental governance remains a serious issue, with effective implementation and close monitoring of existing policies requiring further strengthening. In addition, many natural resources are managed centrally (e.g., forests, irrigation, land), making it difficult for provinces to craft local solutions to resource depletion, pollution, and issues such as human-animal conflict.. Availability of financing for climate change adaptation is limited, and a key factor for the fatigue and frustration expressed by many stakeholders participating in climate change initiatives; institutional mechanisms to effectively allocate, manage and monitor such financing likewise need to be established.⁸⁶

2.4.3 Stakeholder and Capacity Gaps

Climate change adaptation planning capacity, such as in the annual budget, is very limited and fragmented; this is primarily due to a need for well-founded climate change research in the country and rationally interpreted information. No focal point or unit is responsible for ensuring climate resilience criteria are considered in national-level planning initiatives. CCS capacity to execute on its coordination mandate is constrained on many fronts, while technical capacity to effectively deal with climate change is lacking across key sectoral agencies as well. In addition, no local training institutions or programmes are targeted at building the required technical skills base for effective long-term management of climate change risks. A pool of experts and future leaders in this space will need to be developed and nurtured.

While knowledge of the concept of climate change seems widespread, awareness about what can and should be done to adapt is still very limited, with adequate guidelines and safeguards are lacking. The EIA and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guidelines, for example, do not specifically include any climate change considerations. Often these are the only environmental checks on major investments, however.

At the same time, the education system, media and other information “multipliers” are at this point not effectively engaged in disseminating information on climate change, nor are existing local government mechanisms (e.g., District Coordinating Committees) geared toward ensuring local-level engagement for climate change adaptation. Climate change-related health concerns in the Sri Lankan context also are not fully understood, although clear links between changing climate and the rapid spread of mosquito-, rodent- and water-borne diseases, as well as respiratory diseases, are widely acknowledged. The spread of such climate change-linked communicable diseases (e.g., dengue) is exacerbated due to haphazard development patterns and the associated degradation of environmental conditions.

Lastly, as also highlighted in Section 2.4.1, the 2016 flood/landslide disaster affecting nearly all of Sri Lanka has starkly illustrated remaining shortfalls in disaster risk management in the country, particularly since the closure of the United Nations’ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Colombo in December 2015. These include continued needs for strengthened “last mile” early warning dissemination, disaster response at

⁸⁶ Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment. *Intended Nationally Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Colombo , 2015.

local level, community preparedness in urban areas and, critically, information management and coordination among stakeholders. More attention also is required to pre-positioning of disaster relief materials.

2.4.4 United Nations Comparative Advantages

The United Nations can help to ensure better coordination among several evolving Government initiatives to establish new entities and develop national policy documents and legislation for sustainable development. This will help facilitate the implementation process. For example, the Presidential Secretariat has set up a new Office of Strategic Development Evaluation, which will assess Sri Lanka's development performance and provide the President with key information on development status and prospects. The SDG indicators and targets that are emerging will provide a useful framework for carrying out this task.

Further, the Ministry of Policy and Planning, including the National Planning Department, is prepared to play a role in operationalizing and integrating the SDGs into national sustainable development planning, especially the economic aspects. The new Ministry of Wildlife and Sustainable Development also is gearing up; it has set up a Sustainable Development Division, and is in the process of defining its mandate and strengthening its capabilities to meet the challenge. The Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment also covers significant areas of the SDG and is setting up a Blue-Green Centre with a focus on the SDGs. For all these entities, the United Nations can offer substantive support.

Lastly, the United Nations also can help to ensure risk minimization and disaster management are approached in a more holistic and systematic manner, particularly through a move toward upstream disaster risk management. It can specifically support the Government to work more closely with the humanitarian community on implementation of a national emergency operations plan, assisting the Ministry of Disaster Management to operationalize such a plan. It also can help to identify where disaster-related programming should be anchored in Government so that such initiatives have greater influence and capacity for dissemination.

2.5 A Special Concern: Toward Improved Data, Knowledge Management and Evidence-Based Policy

This area offers great potential for innovation and supports all 17 SDGs.

2.5.1 The Situation in Sri Lanka

The data revolution is key to supporting a transformative response to sustainable development issues, such that improving data effective serves as a 2030 agenda in its own right. Yet while the world is entering the era of the so-called "data deluge," Sri Lanka is lagging significantly behind and facing many challenges related to data generation, collection and analysis that could be used for evidence-based policy making. To cite just one example, the country appears to have little or no basic data available on urban poverty.

To be sure, traditional sources of data remain important. For example, Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, although the latter has not been conducted in Sri Lanka for several years, can document the lives of women and children to improve programmes that address malnutrition, childhood diseases, and GBV. Censuses, surveys, civil registrations, and government administrative records are all important source of data waiting to be put to use to improve people's lives.

Current and future politically complex situations in Sri Lanka such as reconciliation additionally call for United Nations Agencies to support national institutions in establishing more effective monitoring and data collection initiatives for the most critical issues. Critical gaps in existing data, as well as in effective analysis of data, still need to be identified; once these have been identified, the United Nations can then help to strengthen national statistical frameworks. At the same time, governments around the world are increasingly recognizing that few contemporary challenges can be confined to one policy area and that a single-issue focus is in many instances insufficient.

Leadership and coordination will be necessary to enable the data revolution to play its full role in the realization of sustainable development. In all, both Sri Lanka and the United Nations Agencies can benefit from engaging in new ways of generation and analysis of data to ensure high-quality SDG and UNSDF monitoring. This can involve

several innovative data generation and analysis methodologies, including, e.g., the introduction of “big data” proxy indicators that will ensure data collection and analysis reliability.

Within the context of the UNSDF, big-data monitoring could be used to potentially: (1) enable the United Nations to explore establishing baselines for indicators that are missing; (2) enable opportunities for real-time feedback loops on activities, for better targeting and maximized impact of United Nations action; (3) create a pool of local data experts who would be able to analyze institutions’ databases and utilize those data for better evidence-based policymaking and service design; and (4) ensure that Government and United Nations Agencies alike understand what real-time feedback loops mean for agile programme design and implementation. Real-time awareness of the status of the population, and real-time feedback on the effectiveness of policy actions, should in turn lead to a more adaptive approach to development, and ultimately, to greater resilience and better outcomes. In addition, the United Nations also can encourage the use of “small” data, yet innovative, alternative sources that are close to people on the ground (e.g., community groups, in-person exchange), including those left furthest behind.

In addition, Sri Lanka has yet to optimize the potential benefits of engaging in a foresight approach to development. Foresight refers to processes of anticipation that identify opportunities and threats that may arise in mid- to long-term versions of the future. As a way of thinking, foresight also encourages innovation, entrepreneurship, strategic evaluation and social change.⁸⁷ Where traditional planning has sought to prevent failure, strategic foresight also prioritizes resilience, namely, early detection and fast recovery, and considers plausible, possible, probably and preferred futures equally. Forward-looking, adaptive and resilient policies will allow the public administration to engage with and shape events to the best advantage of Sri Lanka’s citizens.

2.5.2 Policy and Governance Environment

The Department of Census and Statistics is the central statistical agency of Sri Lanka, responsible for collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of official Government data. Apart from its responsibility of collecting and supplying data on the various sectors of the socioeconomic conditions of the country, it is required to recruit, train and place professional staff to all Government agencies requiring statistical service. In addition, it provides statistical consultancy services to agencies that require assistance on statistical matters, through its technical divisions. Thus, the Department serves as a focal point as well as performing the services of a central statistical agency. Many of its units deal with specific subject matter, such as agricultural statistics, household surveys, and national accounts.

2.5.3 Stakeholder and Capacity Gaps

The extent of the current capacity gaps in Sri Lanka has been detailed in Section 2.5.1, necessitating major investments in strengthened data collection and analysis, including disaggregated by gender, location, rural/urban status, age, disability, and other factors. Moreover, disaggregated data generation, collection, analysis and use is not a choice, but rather, stipulated by international human rights commitments, where governments are held not to discriminate against parts of the population, which requires appropriate data.

At the same time, for traditional government organizations such as Sri Lanka’s, moving toward effective use of big data and foresight not only will require a paradigm shift about how to think about the future, but also a cultural shift toward creating learning organizations (see also Section 2.2). In the Government, this may mean encouraging civil servants to capture knowledge, share information, and practice anticipatory thinking at every level of public administration, from frontline service delivery to top-level decision making – moving toward adaptability instead of control, and emergence instead of predictability. Other stakeholders also can provide important, neutral socioeconomic data, and in particular, nuanced analysis for policymaking.

2.5.4 United Nations Comparative Advantages

⁸⁷ UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence. *Foresight as a Strategic Long-Term Planning Tool for Developing Countries*. Singapore, 2014.

As has been made clear throughout this CCA, the United Nations will have a strong role to play to identify the critical data that will need to be mobilized at country level within the new SDG framework. These data will need to support a deeper analysis of inequalities and vulnerabilities, as well as to help capture the interconnectedness of the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic, environmental). Upfront and integrated work by the UNCT will be needed to identify critical data gaps, such as through supporting a full data inventory covering existing databases from different sources and sectors, and to undertake the necessary actions to fill these gaps, with the Department of Census and Statistics in a leading and accountable role. In particular, the United Nations can help to identify a range of national stakeholders (e.g., community groups, national civil society coalitions, academia, think tanks) who may have data that national statistical offices or other national institutions do not have. In supporting such alternative data production analysis, including by critical voices, it also can advocate for its use by national policymakers in gap/impact analysis, thereby strengthening accountability and participation. It can convene stakeholder meetings on the SDG database and knowledge management platform to build data capability.

III. Priority Development Opportunities: Moving Forward with the UNSDF

To deliver on the SDGs, the UNSDF will need to provide the necessary agility the United Nations needs to rapidly move together within the scope of its comparative advantages to address inequities and inequalities. In so doing, the UNCT can achieve the difference between reach and presence.

The potential priorities for development action under the UNSDF, detailed below, are drawn not only from the SDGs and this CCA, but also are aligned with the Government's overarching priorities and the recommendations of the UNDAF MTR. Likewise, they are congruent with the identified comparative advantages of the United Nations in Sri Lanka highlighted throughout the analysis, while drawing upon development lessons of the past. While each United Nations Agency in the country retains its distinct mandate, the strategic goals and shared values consistent with global and national development agendas complement one another – and thus incorporate the roots of collaboration.

Combining these considerations has yielded the following four broad areas in which support for Sri Lanka can be focused. These are:

- **Strengthened, Innovative Public Institutions and Engagement Toward a Lasting Peace**
- **Enhancing Human Security and Socioeconomic Resilience**
- **Underscoring Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster, and Strengthening Environmental Management**
- **Improving Data, Knowledge Management and Evidence-Based Policymaking**

Overall, the objective will be the full realization of human rights in Sri Lanka; as such, priority will be given to the poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups, and victims of discrimination, including in remote areas. Other core United Nations principles related to sustainability and accountability (see also Section 1.1) will be equally important. As highlighted above, all thematic priority areas will need to reinforce each other, with an emphasis on equity, equality and non-discrimination – in other words, on the normative agenda – as well as on strategies of more effective national and sub-national engagement.

In this regard, the concept of “do no harm” – understanding how international assistance interacts with local conflict dynamics in the context of reconciliation – will be central. This will entail an increasingly sophisticated understanding of political processes, patterns of State-society relations, sources of legitimacy in Sri Lanka, and the expectations that society has of the Government – and the United Nations – as well as the Government's capacities to perform its basic functions (see also Section 2.2).

At the same time, more strategic focus across all priorities will need to be given to crosscutting issues of developing human capital, such as gender, youth, disability, and ageing, as well as key emerging issues, including urbanization. It will be critical to ensure that these crosscutting issues likewise are reflected in the UNSDF.

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Annex 2: List of Persons Interviewed

Nina Brandstrup, Representative, FAO

Paula Bulancea, Representative, UNICEF

Civil Society Representatives (8 together)

Giuseppe Crocetti, Chief of Mission, IOM

Nishan de Mel, Executive Director, Verite Research

Varuna Dharmaratna, Joint Programme Manager, European Union-Support to District Development Programme (EU-SDDP)

Tanuka Dissanayake, UNDP Policy Advisor

Juan Fernandez-Jardon, Senior Human Rights Advisor, OHCHR

Field Colleagues from United Nations Agencies in the North

Field Colleagues from United Nations Agencies in the East

Bhavani Fonseka, Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Alternatives

Ananda Galappatti, Director (Strategy), the Good Practice Group

Dr. Mario Gomez, Executive Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies

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