

**NATIONAL
SITUATION
ANALYSIS ON
VOLUNTEERISM
Sri Lanka
April 2022**



National Situation Analysis – Sri Lanka 2022

The overall aim of this report is to provide a brief assessment of the volunteering situation in a given country, from both a legal and practical perspective. The format of this report should be no longer than 2-4 pages.

Country Name: Sri Lanka

Date of Analysis: April 2022

1. Regulatory Frameworks

Sri Lanka has a prolonged history rich with many philanthropic and charity work backed by its culture and traditions of the multi-ethnic community - Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher, nourished by teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. With an estimated population of 21.92 million (Asian Development Bank, 2020), Sri Lanka was ranked number one in the world with the highest rate of volunteering time over a ten-year aggregate by the World Giving Index 2019 of the Charities Aid Foundation, suggesting over seven million volunteers engaged in active volunteerism annually, half of those aged over 15 years.

The Government of Sri Lanka recognizing that volunteerism is an important cross-cutting mechanism that contributes to all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - (Voluntary National Review 2018), states that separate National Policies may align with each of the separate Goals and thus emphasized that a National Policy on Volunteerism would go a long way to support the achievement of the Goals in general and identified this as an essential requirement. Further, the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of 2018 added that the public and volunteers should play a greater role in achieving SDGs noting that volunteerism strengthens civic engagement, safeguards social inclusion, deepens solidarity, and solidifies ownership of development results. The Sustainable Development Council (SDC), the government institution entrusted with the responsibility of coordinating, facilitating, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is established under the Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act, No. 19 of 2017. The volunteerism subject matter is yet to be incorporated into the Draft National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development for a sustainably developed Sri Lanka (2020).

As per the 2014 National Survey on Volunteerism (NSV 2014) the estimated value of volunteer contributions amounted to LKR 154 billion which is 1.79% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With contemporary trends and prospects in volunteering including online volunteering, the immediate value may have developed several folds, though not formally tracked, and calculated.

As per the information available on the website of the Department of Social Services (2022) the first draft of the National Policy on Volunteerism was developed in 2014 in collaboration with the Government and UNV, following multi-stakeholder consultations from the Government, Academia, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), Youth Groups and Corporate / Private Sector. The Ministry of Social Empowerment and Primary Industries of Sri Lanka, which was responsible for volunteering, adopted the Policy in August 2019 after receiving approval from the Cabinet of Ministers. The implementation of the Policy required the establishment of a National Volunteering Secretariat (NVS) to ensure national-level engagement in promoting, coordinating, mobilizing, and establishing organised volunteering in the country, and the NVS which was established under the Ministry was moved to the Department of Social Services (DSS) in September 2020. Additionally, a Volunteer Management System too is being developed by the volunteer undergraduates of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering of the University of Moratuwa with the support of the UNV.

The [National Youth Policy Sri Lanka](#) (2014) of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development encourages the development of the spirit of volunteerism and the establishment of mechanisms for youth to get engaged in community service (National Youth Policy 2014 - 3.1.v). It also highlights the need to build the capacity of young people to meaningfully engage in the national development process.

Additionally, the [National Sports Policy of Sri Lanka](#) (2012) of the Ministry of Sports encourages the mobilization of volunteers to assist the implementation of sporting programmes across the country. The Policy emphasizes the establishment of a system to recruit, retain, and evaluate these volunteers.

Volunteering through social work has also been promoted through curriculum and promotion of specific courses in Sri Lankan universities and higher education institutes. The University of Peradeniya offers a master's programme in Social Work, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura offers a diploma programme in Social Work and the National Institute of Social Development (NISD) offers a range of programmes in Social Work including certificates, diplomas, higher diplomas, bachelors, and masters. Among NISD's programmes, the [Certificate in Social Work](#) incorporates credit for volunteer work in their selection process for admissions.

The [Sri Lanka Peacebuilding Priority Plan](#) (PPP) (2016) includes dedicated support for enhancing the role of civil society and volunteerism in peacebuilding and directs the Secretariat to call upon the support of UNV and their V-Force Volunteers to support the logistical arrangements for the numerous consultation processes and workshops as well as for leveraging volunteer networks for community engagement in various peace building activities within the PPP.

As per the '[Lessons Learned Exercise on UN/UNDP Peacebuilding Efforts in Sri Lanka Final Report October 2018](#)', the UN Volunteers embedded in crucial governmental departments is a successful model demonstrating positive impact and recommended as a useful strategy to be replicated.

The [National Policy on Sustainable Consumption & Production for Sri Lanka](#) (2019) being an overarching and cross cutting policy that applies to all sectors where either consumption or production of a good or service is involved in any form encourages entities to voluntarily enter into agreements with sectors to ensure uncompromised human development and well-being without infringing the rights of future generations and ensuring no one from any segment or strata of the society or any organisation is left behind.

The [National Policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence Sri Lanka](#) (2017) identifies voluntary institutions as vital vehicle to assist CSO on capacity building, provide support to identify national priorities and facilitate engagements in the reconciliation process of Sri Lanka.

In addressing the need for social security schemes, the [National Human Resources and Employment Policy](#) (2012) encourages voluntary initiatives for greater societal benefits, eventually.

To ensure the protection of the forests, the [Forest \(Amendment\) Act, No. 65 of 2009](#) (2009) encourages voluntary assistance in extinguishing any fire occurring within any forest and providing information in relation to any offence under this Ordinance.

Moreover, to address mental health related issues in Sri Lanka, [The Mental Health Policy of Sri Lanka](#) (2005) formulated by the Mental Health Directorate of the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition develops community mental health workforces through already established mental health workers, some of whom are volunteers.

In 1980 the Government enacted the [Voluntary Social Service Organisations \(Registration and Supervision\) Act \(No. 31 of 1980\)](#) which sought to introduce a system of registration and supervision of the activities of

NGOs. Though considerable volunteer engagement by the voluntary service organisations could be tracked no clear provisions are made in the Act to capture and account for volunteer information.

The Department of National Planning as a part of the apex Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs committed to policy development, planning, and implementation to accelerate Sri Lanka's economic growth and social progress provides a national perspective on policies, programmes, and projects, in contrast to the sectoral or regional perspectives of other institutions. However, there is a lack of evidence to confirm whether the department's reporting formats capture the country's volunteering inputs.

The Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) with its mission of contributing to the socio-economic development of the country by providing accurate time statistics, captures information on unpaid family workers through the Labour Force Survey (LFS) but does not capture direct information related to volunteering using appropriate tracking tools. However, some volunteering information has been tracked through the Time Use Survey in 2017. (<https://knowledge.unv.org/country/sri-lanka>).

With this background, Sri Lanka steadily continues its volunteering journey and indirectly contributes to the national development goals in the absence of an accepted mechanism to value and account for such volunteering efforts in the development agenda. The recently concluded UNV50 Country Awards (December 2021) shed light on the country's lesser-known volunteering efforts during the period January 2019 to September 2021 providing indications of broadening prospects and bringing in new vistas in volunteerism in the country.

The Corporate Sector segment of the UNV50 Country Awards recognised Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC, Kelani Valley Plantations PLC (KVPL), and Oxford College of Business (OCB) for promoting the value of volunteerism through citizen engagement. These entities collectively mobilised 23,800 volunteers across 53 projects. While these projects have contributed to all 17 SDGs, most initiatives addressed health (SDG 3), inequality (SDG 10), and sustainability (SDG 11 and SDG 13) related issues. One of the most significant projects implemented by these corporate entities is KVPL's volunteer commitment toward achieving net-zero Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 through the mobilisation of 8,000 volunteers. Another notable volunteer initiative within the corporate sector was OCB's HIV/ AIDS awareness campaign which was successfully concluded with the participation of 1250 individuals.

Media institutions, Power House Limited, Sri Lanka Rupavahini (TV) Corporation, and The Gammadda Movement were recognised for promoting the value of volunteerism through the collective mobilisation of over 14,000 volunteers across 54 projects. While these projects have contributed to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16, the focus of many initiatives was health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4) and environment (SDG 13, 14 and 15). Some of the most notable initiatives were Power House Limited's 'Basayen Anagathayata' (To the Future by Bus) through which 500 volunteers transformed 25 decommissioned Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) buses into modern, fully equipped libraries for students in underprivileged rural schools. The Gammadda Movement's Mahapalugaswewa clean up through which 300 volunteers supported the cleaning of the lake that had been neglected for years, is also a notable initiative. Through this initiative, the volunteers were able to help preserve the cascade system of Sri Lanka and support the surrounding farming communities.

UNV50 Country Awards witnessed the unique contributions by the State Sector and recognised the Inland Revenue Department, Irrigation Department, National Youth Services Council, Sabaragamuwa Provincial Department of Education, and State Ministry of Rural Roads and other Infrastructure for promoting the value of volunteerism through citizen engagement. These entities collectively mobilised an astounding number of over 109,000 volunteers across 62 projects. While these projects have contributed to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17, the focus of most projects was on health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4) and environment

(SDG 13 and 15). One of the most significant projects among these was the 'Interactive Learning Content' project voluntarily initiated by the Provincial Department of Education Sabaragamuwa to provide an opportunity for students across the island to continue their studies online during the extended lockdown situations imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the Tertiary Education Sector, the National Institute of Business Management (NIBM), National School of Business Management (NSBM Green University), and Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA Campus) were recognised for integrating and promoting the value of volunteerism. These institutions have collectively mobilised over 3,400 volunteers across 300 projects. While these projects have contributed to all 17 SDGs, initiatives to address concerns of poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), and education (SDG 4) were the most prominent. Among the most significant projects implemented by these institutions are 2 home renovation projects undertaken by the students of NIBM. Here, 2 groups of 15 volunteers renovated the houses of two underprivileged families to offer remedies to the difficulties faced by them. Another such project was the 'Neoga' organised by 20 student volunteers of NSBM Green University to provide medical services to elders who did not have access to such services. SIBA Campus' counseling programme at the Open Prison Pallakele is also a notable volunteer initiative through which 48 volunteers conducted a lecture on mental health and proceeded to provide an hour of counselling to inmates.

Gamlath and Wijesinghe (2015) point out a considerable number of volunteer projects in the sustainable development agenda focused on three key areas. They are (1) promoting human rights, (2) peacebuilding, and (3) social inclusion of people with disabilities. The immersive approach to fieldwork undertaken, and commitment to participatory engagement, building relationships, and exploring the realities of how Sustainable Development Programmes (SDP) operate, allowed them to interrogate the complex positioning, roles, status, and experiences of volunteers (Giulianotti, et al, 2021). Youth volunteering has indirectly influenced the designing of social policy concerning social harmony and peace. Youth actively engage in policy development and planning processes as well. They ensure active youth participation in policy development and decision-making processes by representing them in discussions and dialogues with relevant policy planners and political representatives of all levels of government (Gamlath, and Wijesinghe, 2015).

In addition to diversified culture and community background, natural and man-made disasters have promoted volunteerism within Sri Lankan social politics. There have been diverse forms of volunteering activities in association with three decades of violent conflict in the Northeast, the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, many other natural disasters (floods, landslides, and droughts), the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and the current social distress led by the economic crisis.

The key factors of Sri Lankan volunteering are international agencies, local non-governmental organisations and the media that have encouraged volunteering among Sri Lankans. Another crucial aspect of Sri Lankan volunteerism is that although Sri Lankan youth of all ethnic groups have been used for extreme violence (riots or terrorist acts in 1971, 1983, 1988 & 2019), the youth have become an oasis of volunteering in Sri Lanka. The present non-violent youth rise or movements against political corruption and economic mismanagement are based on diverse types of political volunteering. This sort of youth non-violent volunteer participation against bribery, corruption, and nepotism is likely to create a new form of political volunteerism in Sri Lanka.

According to the NSV 2014, 81.2% of the researched population has expressed their willingness to volunteer in the future. However, the promotion of volunteerism can be improved if budget allocations were made, to ensure volunteers do not incur expenses to carry out volunteer tasks.

Although individual or community level volunteering was in practice, it was observed that the full force of volunteering was not fully utilised in the fight against COVID-19 compared to other countries (Mahees, 2021).

2. Practical Implementation & Linkage to SDGs

This second section of the report deals with two things: the practical volunteering efforts taking place in the country in question, and their linkages to the SDGs.

2.1 What type of volunteering work has been done in Sri Lanka?

Based on the UNV (2020) typology for volunteer work, following forms of volunteering are undertaken in Sri Lanka

Mutual Aid: Volunteering has been a kind of mutual social action in Sri Lanka. The sense of belonging for volunteers can be enhanced through the engagement in the community and the interaction with the people especially during and after the war. There are mutual levels of a social mixture of volunteer culture, the values of solidarity, reciprocity; mutual trust, and empowerment are rooted within the practice of volunteerism in Sri Lanka. Mutual aid programmes are implemented following the occurrence of natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and droughts. According to the National Survey on Volunteerism (2014), only 20.1% of the volunteers claimed to have received some support such as food, travel expenses, etc. for the volunteer work that they carried out while the balance 79.9% did not receive any such support and 65% of the volunteer activities were formally conducted through an organisation while 35% of the activities took place on an informal basis. Sri Lankan volunteers aged in their late teens or twenties, engaged in educational work might focus on managing relationships with community members, NGOs, donors, national government, and development sector agencies (Giulianotti, et al, 2021).

The COVID-19 response of the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) is an example of volunteering as mutual aid. Over a period of 10 days in May 2021, NYSC mobilised 3335 youth volunteers to build a total of 3424 hospital beds to be donated to COVID-19 care centers to reduce the strain on the healthcare system (SDG 3). To facilitate the safe reopening of schools with the ongoing pandemic, Power House Limited initiated a series of disinfection projects in February 2021 with the support of 10-15 volunteers per project to disinfect multiple schools in order to increase the confidence of communities to send their children back to school to resume regular learning activities (SDGs 3, 4). The mobilization of 150 volunteer farmers in December 2020 by the Irrigation Department to minimise the overflowing impact of the flooding of the Giant's Tank reservoir on the small tanks in the Mannar District is another example of a mutual aid programme in response to a natural disaster (SDGs 1, 2, 13, 17).

Service/Philanthropy: Volunteers contribute to the public good with a more human-oriented vision. Through deeper interpersonal connections, volunteers are able to provide services targeting the “pain point” of a community or the receivers. Volunteering is attached to social values more than economic values in Sri Lankan Society. Sri Lanka is a country having many different forms of philanthropy and charity works based on religion and it has made a significant impact on poor families, education of poor children, and other health requirements (Stirrat, 2020).

Traditional Buddhist norms such as “Vesak and Poson Dansals” promote volunteerism. A ‘Dansala’, which is known as an ‘almsgiving stall’ is a practice of distributing free food items/ drinks/ goods by the street, free of charge for passersby to enjoy. Almsgiving and ‘Shramadhana’ (the practice of giving one’s efforts in kind) are also voluntary actions steeped in religious and traditional backgrounds and in calamities (NSAV, 2018).

Another important volunteering in this sector is funeral or death welfare societies. Both in rural and urban areas many undertaking activities are performed by volunteers considering it as a religious service to the community. For example, the Maligawatta Janaza (Funeral) and Welfare Society (Incorporation) have been enacted by the government Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on February 12, 2009 (Act, No. 5 of 2010). Many such volunteering societies found throughout the country engaged in burying the

bodies of those who passed away after contracting COVID-19 including transporting them from various places to a specific location approved by the government in Batticaloa.

An example of a service/ philanthropy volunteer initiative is the response of the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Department of Education to the harsh impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of students. To address this crucial matter, a guidance and counselling programme 'Sahan Piyasa' (Relief Center) was initiated in March 2020 with the participation of 150 volunteer counsellors and doctors to offer the necessary support to the school communities (SDGs 3, 4). Another example of such a volunteer programme is Kelani Valley Plantations PLC's (KVPL) 'A Home for Every Plantation Worker' CSR initiative launched in 2006 mobilizing over 3500 volunteers up to date addresses 4 key aspects: living environment, health, and nutrition, community capacity building, youth empowerment of the plantation communities across all 25 KVPL estates (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17).

Campaigning: The United Nations Volunteers in Sri Lanka engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka in conducting a national award for recognizing volunteer efforts called "V-Awards" to inspire Sri Lankan volunteers. The award ceremonies were held in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2018. Charismatic volunteer campaign by Pooja Umashankar (actress), Otara Gunewardene (former CEO of ODEL Pvt. Ltd), Jayanthi Kurutumpala (first Sri Lankan to climb Mount Everest), and Dilantha Malagamuwa (Little Hearts Project to support the Sri Lanka College of Pediatricians to gather funds to expedite the construction of Lady Ridgeway Hospitals Cardiac and Critical Care Complex (NSAV, 2018).

Among campaigning volunteer initiatives aimed at amplifying the voices of marginalized groups are The Gammadda Movement's drug awareness campaigns carried out in June 2019 in Peliyagoda (40 volunteers) and Wattala (30 volunteers) with the support of Sri Lanka Police, counsellors, and psychiatric therapists through which free rehabilitation programmes were carried out for individuals suffering from drug addiction. Participants of these campaigns were informed of the negative impacts of the use of drugs and offered psychotherapy and other specialist treatments to aid their recovery (SDG 3). SIBA Campus' awareness programme held in October 2019 at the National Institute of Mental Health, Angoda with the support of 50 volunteers is another such campaign. Through this initiative counselling psychology students were educated on the importance of mental health when considering the subject of health and that awareness should be created among the public for those suffering from a multitude of mental-health-related conditions to be better understood (SDG 3). Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC mobilised 30 volunteers on World Autism Day 2019 who were parents of children with disabilities, officers of the Divisional Secretariat office in Valaichchenai, and members of other disability organisations to raise awareness on issues relevant to Autism such as treatment including early intervention programmes (SDGs 3, 10, 17).

Participation: According to the NSV 2014, 53.1% of the volunteers were males whereas 46.9% of the volunteer were female, it was ascertained that 8.6 million people volunteered in Sri Lanka at least once a year, 81.2% of the volunteers were from the rural sector whereas the balance 16.9% belonged to the urban sector, 65% of the volunteer activities were formally conducted through an organization while 35% of the activities took place on an informal basis. The highest educational level of most of the workers was G.C.E. Advanced Level (30.1%) with 24.9% being G.C.E. Ordinary Level and the remaining 24.9% of the volunteers qualified lower than G.C.E. Ordinary Level.

The study on volunteer participation and youth identifies the discernible gaps in the establishment and implementation of current national policies relating to youth in the context of sustainable peace and preventing violent extremism. Tolerance for diversity and intercultural understanding are also at the heart of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, on building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies" (NSAV, 2018).

An example that displays volunteering time and effort to participate in decision making mechanism is the mobilization of 30 volunteers by the Oxford College of Business in September 2019 to engage in the '[Climate Change Negotiation Training Workshop](#)'. Through this workshop, these volunteer students were given the opportunity to engage with multiple stakeholders to understand the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and actively contribute to the formulation of potential solutions to address related issues.

Leisure: Volunteerism remains as a vital component of sport event and sport organisation which is of utmost importance for running sport event and many sports organisations in Sri Lanka. Sports have a strong subculture; therefore, people often attract to the sport volunteering, and there is a sense of sociability and community that develops from the interaction among the volunteers and staff in Sri Lankan Society (Weerakoon et al; 2021).

Volunteering by elderly or retired persons is a popular practice and it is one of leading leisure activities in Sri Lanka. Retired government officers with vast knowledge and experience are engaged in volunteering at local level mediation committees (samatha mandalaya) with the purpose of solving or minimizing people's conflicts of basin legal issues. This volunteer process has been well established in society and state approved by the [Mediation Board Act No 72 of 1988](#) government Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Under the category of volunteering as leisure, a notable initiative is the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Department of Education's '[Sellam Midula](#)' (Playground) project implemented in June 2021 with the support of 50 volunteer teachers. Through this project, volunteer teachers designed specialized games for elementary graders to be carried out alongside general studies as a means of promoting a balanced school experience for students who had been harshly impacted by the isolation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. '[Christmas Décor Dilmah](#)' is another such leisure volunteering initiative implemented by Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC from November to December 2021 through which 20 volunteer teachers from MJF Centre West Moratuwa created Christmas decorations for the entire Dilmah office using waste and upcycled materials (SDG 12).

2.2 How has this volunteerism work been related to/ contributing to the SDGs?

Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3)

The achievement of SDG 3 on good health and well-being is entwined with the achievement of the other SDGs. Many volunteer organisations and individual volunteers extend their support to promote the health life of people. In terms of communicable diseases, attention is required on eradicating/ reducing emerging and re-emerging diseases such as dengue, rabies, HIV, leprosy, tuberculosis etc. even though they have not posed a threat for now (VNR, 2018). Students of medical faculties and other students frequently are engaged in community awareness volunteer projects and programs at community level. In 2017, student volunteers of the University of Colombo conducted awareness campaigns on Thalassemia, snake bites, oral cancer, and reproductive health in rural areas of the country.

In dealing with the health crisis that followed the COVID-19 outbreak in Sri Lanka, Power House Limited implemented a range of volunteer initiatives to enhance health and social services. '[Smile Within](#)' was one of such initiatives in which 7500 volunteers were mobilised across 50 events to create awareness on the importance of wearing a face mask to contain the spread of the virus and donate one million masks to the public (SDG 3). Another volunteer initiative to address the issues of the pandemic was the [support extended to the frontline workers and the healthcare system](#) through the donation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, medical equipment, and hospital beds (SDG 3). Finally, with the mobilisation of 10 volunteers, [10 dilapidated ambulances previously believed to be unrepairable were restored](#) and handed over to the Ministry of Health (SDG 3).

With the aim of offering relief to expectant mothers from low-income families, the National School of Business Management (NSBM Green University) mobilised 33 student volunteers across 5 projects from 2019 to 2021. 'Pipena Kusum' (Blossoming Flowers) project implemented in December 2019 with the support of 5 volunteers, donated medical equipment to the De Soysa Maternity hospital along with essential items for pregnant mothers (SDGs 1, 3, 4). Project 'Kiri Sihina Wenuwen' (For the Dream of Motherhood) conducted from March to May 2021, identified 20 expectant mothers who were facing financial difficulties in the Gampaha area and donated essential items required for their well-being as well as the well-being of their unborn babies through the mobilisation of 7 volunteers (SDGs 1, 3, 15). Project 'Senhasin' (With Love) carried out from October to November 2021 identified 20 more expectant mothers with financial strains in the Gampaha area and donated essential items with the support of 8 volunteers (SDGs 1, 3, 15). To help pregnant mothers who were facing difficulties because of the pandemic, project 'Mal Pipena Daru Sihina' (Blossoming Dreams) implemented from May to June 2021 with the contributions of 5 volunteers, donated dry rations, and other essentials to 15 pregnant mothers in the Madampe area (SDGs 1, 3). Project 'Mathru' (Motherhood) implemented from August to October 2021 with the support of 8 volunteers too helped expectant mothers who were unable to obtain essential items because of the pandemic and rising cost of living (SDGs 1, 2, 3).

To uplift the lives of employees, the Inland Revenue Department implemented a mobile clinic for the pre-identification of cancer in collaboration with medical doctors from the Apeksha Hospital, Maharagama with the support of 25 volunteers (SDG 3).

Quality Education (SDG 4)

Volunteering has promoted leadership and personality skills among the youth of Sri Lanka with multi-cultural identities. According to Gamlath and Wijesinghe, (2015), Personality development oriented specific activities have been introduced, for example, (1). Counseling sessions at individual level, for those students who manifest personality disorders, (2). Similar sessions through community health camps at group level with professional facilitators, (3). Leadership development-oriented training and workshop programs in Sisu Diriya Samaja (Student Courage Societies), (4). Sisu Diriya Samaja cross-visits.

The education sector of the country is the land of opportunity to cultivate the seeds of volunteerism. The expected result of all the above actions is creating good citizens who love their nation, contributing more to achieving national goals and objectives, they have particularly good awareness about the goals and actions, and supporting to create strongest and powerful nations (Fernando, 2014).

The knowledge on volunteering kept on developing gradually in Sri Lanka specially in the sectors of health and education. The knowledge or awareness-based volunteering is becoming attractive among youth and students in universities. The awareness on spreading of disease, disaster resilience, wildlife, social harmony is particularly important in contemporary Sri Lankan volunteering. The 2016 inter-university volunteering project of the University of Colombo along with the universities of Ruhuna and Jaffna became a greater opportunity for these universities to build up cordial relationships with people. It was witnessed in the evaluation of all three community activities that volunteer activities of university students laid a foundation for good-will between university and community.

Offering solutions to issues that disrupted educational activities of students across the country because of COVID-19 and the recurring lockdown/ curfew situations, the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Department of Education since March 2020, implemented an initiative with the participation of 32 volunteer teachers to create 228 pre-recorded lessons in Sinhala, Tamil, and English mediums to be freely distributed among students (SDG 4).

To uplift communities and give access to technology to children in rural areas, the Oxford College of Business (OCB) conducted a series of technology related volunteer initiatives from 2019 to 2021 with the participation

of 100 volunteers. Through the fourth and fifth phases of the CSR initiative 'Out of the Darkness' held in August 2019 with the involvement of 31 volunteers and in May 2021 with the involvement of 18 volunteers respectively, supported by the OCB Alumni, solar panels were installed in Mahavilachchiya to provide electricity to 55 underprivileged families to enable a comfortable environment for children to study and enhance the infrastructure of the area (SDGs 3, 4, 7, 11). In October 2021, 2 more projects mobilising 18 volunteers each addressed the needs of over 300 students. A fully-fledged IT laboratory consisting of 10 computers was donated to Wijayapura Kanishta Vidyalaya, Puttalam and 16 tabs were donated to well-deserving students in the Thanthirimale region who are set to take their G. C. E. Advanced Level examination in 2022 but were facing difficulties in accessing online education (SDGs 4, 9, 10).

To promote the importance of education in alleviating poverty, Power House Limited actively engaged in a range of volunteer initiatives mobilizing 350 volunteers from 2019 to 2021. 'Sipsal Pubuduwa' (Skill Revival) school development programme with the support of 300 volunteers, conducted a series of 16 awareness programmes from January 2019 to March 2020 in rural and low-income segments of the country to discourage school dropouts and encourage teachers and the communities to ensure that all children attend school without fail (SDGs 1, 2, 4, 8). To increase access to technology and new modes of education, in July 2021, 20 volunteers facilitated the provision of E-learning centers with computers and smart classrooms to multiple schools across the island (SDG 4). Remote learning as a measure of adopting to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic posed serious restrictions to students who did not have adequate internet facilities. To address this issue with the mobilization of 25 volunteers 'Nena Diri' (Wisdom and Courage) data scholarships were awarded to 100,000 students of rural and low-income families to support their education (SDG 4).

Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Although there is a better situation of gender equality in Sri Lanka compared to other countries in South Asia, many efforts are made to minimize gender-related issues through volunteer activities with the support of National, regional, and local level organizations. These volunteering activities are carried out in the fields such as eliminating gender violence, more awareness building of existing legislation, proper enforcement of laws, and provision of adequate support services for victims such as crisis shelters, legal aid, and counselling. The availability of national-level prevalence data will further strengthen and streamline responses and prevent gender violence (VNR, 2018).

Volunteering has become an integral part of youth, especially in state and private universities. According to the lessons learned from the study conducted among the universities of Colombo, Ruhuna, and Jaffna, many university-level volunteers are interested in volunteering alongside their academic work (University Volunteering Project, 2016). In these university volunteer projects; female undergraduates played a crucial role in acquiring leadership in the university community including positions in student unions. These Colombo University Volunteer projects (2016) fully supported by UNV always attempted to empower female participation in social and academic activities. Female undergraduate volunteers played a key role in many university clubs such as Rotaract, Leo, Gavel, and Green societies and they encouraged equal gender participation in university activities including sports, art, and students' politics (Perusinghe & Mahees, 2018).

To support the upliftment of women, SIBA Campus conducted 2 initiatives to mark International Women's Day in 2019 and 2020 by focusing their attention on the female inmates at the Bogambara Prison at Pallakele. 3 volunteers conducted an extensive programme through which the inmates were educated on a multitude of topics and advised on how they can successfully rehabilitate their lives. Additionally, a soft skills development workshop was conducted to equip the inmates with skills they could potentially capitalise on in the future (SDG 5). With the aim of empowering young girls at the Wattedagama Balika Nivasaya - Child Development Center home for girls, 35 volunteers conducted a programme to educate the girls on topics such as motivation and leadership and other related issues that would be beneficial in the future (SDG 5).

In ensuring that university students gain an understanding of a prevalent issue in society the Oxford College of Business conducted a workshop with the involvement of 35 volunteers in May 2020. This [workshop addressed issues of gender-based violence and child abuse](#) and educated the participants on their responsibilities of working to actively participate in the elimination of discrimination based on gender as well as child abuse (SDGs 3, 5).

Climate Action, Life Below Water & Life on Land (SDG 13, 14 & 15)

There were many forms of volunteering in Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004 ([Silva, 2009](#)) and the Welfare camp at Chettikulam Men Farm, Vavuniya in 2009 ([Mahees, 2019](#) & UNCHR, 2009). Volunteers contribute towards disaster risk reduction or providing disaster aid and emergency support and towards peacebuilding. In Sri Lanka, many private organisations, NGOs, and INGOs engage in providing disaster relief and emergency support at times of crisis. There is also a significant involvement of volunteers in reconciliation and trust-building efforts through their direct communication channels with grassroots-level communities and organisations (NSAV, 2018).

During the 'Yala' cultivation season, water scarcity as a result of hot temperatures and less rainfall, threatens the livelihood of farmers. To [minimise the loss of water of the Giant's Tank reservoir](#) through the improvement of the efficiency of the 10 main canals, the Irrigation Department mobilized 500 volunteer farmers in January 2020 to clear 2 of the canals and alleviate the risk of drought (SDGs 1, 2, 13, 17).

With the goal of conserving existing forests and sensitive areas to protect watersheds, water resources, and valuable biodiversity resources, Kelani Valley Plantations PLC (KVPL) mobilised over 1250 volunteers in September 2019 to conduct the project '[Plant Trees, Plant Life](#)' through which 11,00 native tree species were planted in the Urumiwela Estate, Bulathkohupitiya (SDGs 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17). KVPL conducted a [Kumbuk tree planting programme](#) later that year in December with the support of over 500 volunteers through which 2000 Kumbuk trees were planted in Yatiyantota, Bulathkohupitiya to conserve the water catchment areas of the Kelani River basin (SDGs 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17).

To mark World Wetlands Day in 2020 Dilmah Ceylon Tea Company PLC (Dilmah) mobilised 30 volunteers to conduct a [clean-up of the wetland ecosystems of Colombo](#) (SDGs 11, 13, 17). Prior to this in August 2019, Dilmah, with the participation of 15 volunteers, implemented a [clean-up at Panadura beach](#) clearing over 148 kilograms of plastic and polythene debris (SDGs 11, 13).

Aiming to encourage the youth to take steps to protect the environment for the future by protecting the endangered flora and fauna, in May 2021 the National Youth Services Council implemented a vast [tree-planting campaign](#) with the mobilization of 63310 volunteers across the country (SDG 15).

Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)

Volunteerism has continued to evolve and emerge as a crucial factor in economic and social development of the country, for example John Keells monitors and recognizes volunteers, and have a volunteer mobile app for employees. There is an annual recognition system in place, awarding platinum, gold, silver awards to volunteers based on their volunteerism. Not all volunteers are recognized at All-Island events. Certain banks such as HSBC, Standard Chartered, Citi Bank evaluate volunteer work of employees in their performance review (NSAV, 2018).

Youth volunteering in Sri Lanka goes beyond the focus of social welfare. Volunteerism addresses the inequities, barriers and injustices that exist in society and enhances people's well-being. These youth volunteers are more concerned about volunteering based on social equality, peacebuilding, sports, environmental protection, and post disaster management. Motivation in volunteers comes from within Young Sri Lankans based on their personal interest for example, Sarvodaya, Foundation of Goodness, National Youth

Volunteer Secretariat, Rotaract movement, Scouts Association, YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association), YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), and YMMA (Young Men's Muslim Association).

Sri Lanka volunteering is also concerned about the poverty and urban community development. As [Lakshman and Cooray, \(2005\)](#) explain many foreign aid lead volunteering attempt to improve living standards of the poor people in selected urban areas of Sri Lanka, for example Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) members are working among deprived sections of Sri Lanka's urban poor. Of a low level of education, these people do not have access to good public utilities. They are neglected by the rest of the community. The main strategies used by the JOCV programmes/projects to improve their economic conditions included measures to improve their incomes and employability, to improve the target communities' access to publicly provided services, to empower them and to enhance their social standing.

Skills necessary to secure employment most often exceed the subject matter taught within classrooms. To address this crucial issue pertaining to youth the National Institute of Business Management (NIBM) together with multiple stakeholders initiated a range of volunteer-involving projects. In October 2019, NIBM hosted '[Developing Youth in Technological Era](#)' with the support of 25 volunteers. This programme was a seminar for 220 Ordinary Level and Advanced Level students on topics such as e-commerce and cryptocurrency (SDG 4). '[Emerging Entrepreneur 2.0](#)' is another such initiative in which 33 volunteers were mobilized from August to December 2021 to practically utilize their skills in business analysis and consultancy (SDGs 9, 11).

To upskill the young labour force, provide high-quality learning experiences and knowledge transfer, and improve access to educational opportunities to enhance employability and entrepreneurship, the Oxford College of Business implemented a [career guidance, vocational training, and soft skills development programme](#) in January 2020 with the support of 18 volunteers. This initiative reached 978 participants who were given the opportunity to engage themselves in a fruitful manner and acquire valuable skills (SDGs 4, 8).

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

A project named '[Participation of Youth and Women in the Peace building process](#)' was launched as a collaborative effort by UNFPA (Lead), UNV and UN Women in 2017. Project aimed at empowering women and youth in participating and understanding peace building process, encourage them in decision –making processes and responses related to sustaining peace was addressed. UNFPA worked with the government and other partners in promoting equitable enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights by all Sri Lankan (particularly among vulnerable women and young people). A project was introduced by Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in advance peacebuilding and transitional justice process in Sri Lanka, aiming three main areas of focus including Peacebuilding Priority Plan (PPP) Transitional Justice and Independent Commissions.

The research study commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) on '[The Potential Role of Young Leaders and Volunteers in Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka](#)', reveals that volunteerism has a crucial role to play in mobilizing the youth in PVE. In order to do that, research recommends that a national strategic plan which identifies areas where youth volunteerism is utilized in PVE is essential. Further, it elaborates how volunteerism could give the youth the recognition they crave and increase their self-esteem. By coordinating and mobilizing the youth volunteers scattered all over the island with a well-planned national plan, a youth bulwark against VE can be formed. It further recommends rediscovering the traditions and ethos of volunteerism ingrained in the Sri Lankan culture and integrating them with modern structures and processes to promote volunteerism among the youth, while giving due attention to the interests of the youth and expanding the scope of volunteerism to address national priorities.

According to a survey conducted by the UN Volunteers and the National Youth Service Council on [Survey on Youth Perception on Online Hate Speech and Peace-building](#), youth perceive that young people and volunteers would have a much greater scope and potential in being involved in preventing hate threats, especially on online social networks. The engagement of youth in peacebuilding on social media is limited. But they perceive that a larger number of youths are engaged in peacebuilding at some level in their communities. There is limited exposure to peace education in society, and this was identified as a key challenge in peacebuilding. Volunteering has addressed youth-based grievances by giving them priority, mobilizing faith leaders, and promoting role models for youth identifying pathways from radicalisation to de-politicisation of youth programmes.

Volunteering has been key ground for the trust and peace building in Sri Lanka ([Wijesinghe, 2015](#)). Many individuals, priests, and organizations such as National Peace Council, The Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Sarvodaya and Shanthi Sena are involved in many volunteer works based on promoting peace and security of Sri Lankans. According to [Silva et al \(2020\)](#), many volunteer groups such as religious leaders, trade associations and youth have committed to reestablish social harmony in the society after the Easter attack in Sri Lanka.

To support the lengthy post-conflict reconciliation process in Sri Lanka, the National Institute of Business Management implemented 'Wandana' (Pilgrimage) an awareness campaign over a period of 5 months (January to May 2021) with the support of 3 volunteers. This programme placed an emphasis on the diverse belief and norms relevant to the various religions in Sri Lanka and enabled the participants to gain a broader understanding of each religion and the importance of respect and coexistence (SDG 16).

3. Brief Assessment

Whereas the first two sections of the report are primarily descriptive, the third section is of a more analytical character. It analyses the respective country's positive developments and challenges related to volunteering and thus the 'enabling environment' volunteering takes place in.

Positive Developments

According to Sri Lanka Voluntary National Review on the Status of Implementing Sustainable Development Goals (2018), Sri Lanka is ranked under the category of countries with high human development, recording a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.766 (Rank 73) in 2015. This signifies the country's strong basis in terms of social development. Volunteering crosscuts across all Sustainable Development Goals and contributes toward the achievement of all 17 SDGs. However, SDG 17 is significant and volunteering builds bridges between many groups and organisations of people from diverse backgrounds and sectors to achieve a common goal. These types of partnerships and collaborations result in a collective engagement towards contributing to the SDGs (NSAV, 2018).

Volunteering in Sri Lanka always integrates different fields of sustainable development. Economic growth, social development, psychological satisfaction, and ecological conservation are incorporated into sustainability by volunteering. According to Giulianotti, et al 2021, for SDP (Support for Development and Peace) volunteers, this necessitated a commitment to empowerment at personal, social, and societal levels through, for example, enhancing personal skills (e.g., decision-making, leadership) and education; assisting disadvantaged young people in their local communities; and strengthening developmental goals. For example, volunteering has become a common ground for youth to integrate irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, gender, and social classes. Volunteering has become a common platform for social democracy, cultural diversity, and environmental conservationism. According to Next Generation Pulse Survey (2020), an overwhelming number 92.7% of youth stated they prefer to play an active role in strengthening social harmony in Sri Lanka. This is like the [Next Generation Sri Lanka 2019](#) study findings in which 85% of young Sri Lankans thought the next generation is ready to play an active role in peace and reconciliation. Thus, the

findings reflect that youth from all ethnic communities value the prospects of national unity and social harmony within their society. Volunteerism has encouraged the youth integration of Sri Lanka (Kumari, 2015).

Women's equal participation in all aspects of life. the understanding of youth as a driving force for the country's economic, social and cultural development as well as peacebuilding, UNFPA and UNV have focused on localising by leading discussions with multiple partners and stakeholders, developing digital mechanisms for youth and adolescents to access information on reproductive health and rights easily, and advocating for evidence-based policies to ensure that "young people achieve their fullest potential through comprehensive understanding of their health and rights". As De Mel (2016), states that an important lesson from this 19th century history of women's volunteering, therefore, is of how it not only fostered self-growth amongst the volunteers, but also led to the empowerment of a critical mass of other women by enabling them access to education, the workforce, the vote, and property rights etc.

According to Osella et al (2016), philanthropic and charitable acts are seen as being opposed to self-interest and promote the social development of socially marginalized people. It has been clearly proved that whenever there are disasters or any other urgency, it is the people through charity or philanthropy who are engaged in providing relief to victims in Sri Lanka.

As evident in the UNV Golden Anniversary celebrations in December 2021, volunteerism is prevalent across major sectors including the corporate sector, state sector, tertiary education sector and the media sector with many entities engaging in volunteerism while also mobilizing volunteers both individually and collectively. Accordingly, at the UNV50 Country Awards, 3 corporate entities, 5 state entities, 3 tertiary education institutions and 3 media institutions were recognized for their notable contributions to promoting volunteerism through citizen engagement. The scope of volunteerism in Sri Lanka extends across all aspects of society, acting as a powerful means of addressing crucial issues of the country and this was noted by the Government of Sri Lanka in the VNR 2018 through its recognition of volunteerism as an important cross-cutting mechanism in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. To further establish volunteerism as an accepted and valid tool in the road to sustainable development, two policies are currently in place: the National Policy on Volunteerism and the National Youth Policy which specifically encourages volunteerism among the youth.

Challenges

The strategic framework employed by UNV has been to facilitate achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030 through volunteerism in Sri Lanka. A more operationalized policy package is needed to improve the interactions, behaviors, civic skills, and volunteerism among the multiethnic youth in the process of country's social and economic development (Kumari, 2021). Accountability, sustainability, empowerment, and participation have become currency in the language of both formal and informal local charitable organisations (Osella, et al, 2015). Though the National Volunteering Secretariat has been established under the Department of Social Services since September 2020 it lacks any evidence of operations and volunteer placements.

In promoting volunteerism as a powerful means of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, The Strategic Framework of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, 2022-2025 builds on the previous framework for 2018-2021 was introduced aiming main three areas of outcomes. Contributing to a people-centered United Nations, Serving the United Nations System and Promoting Volunteerism.

The prevailing public administrative or its bureaucracy at grass roots level creates some barriers for volunteering in Sri Lanka. Even poor understanding about volunteering by some local government officers creates many constraints in implementing volunteering projects. There were many inconsistencies and bureaucratic issues in the public administration system, for example in the volunteering project of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) in Urban Poverty Alleviation in Sri Lanka, the Grama-seva officer,

Samurdhi Niyamaka, the Assistant Government Agent (AGA) and the Divisional Secretary (DS) had poor coordination and understanding about the project. These officers often complain that they have no clear idea about what the JOCV members are doing in their areas. Technical delays, red tape, and influence of informal function in the public administration always negatively affected the volunteer projects and without their cooperation, the JOCV members would find it difficult to achieve some of their project objectives. The absence of adequate institutional adjustment has been responsible for many of the failures of the JOCV programme, despite the high level of commitment of most young volunteers involved (Lakshman, and Cooray, 2005).

There are many methodological challenges in measuring volunteer work in Sri Lanka. These volunteer epistemological challenges have prevented real outcomes of volunteering in Sri Lanka. According to the report 'The Potential Role of Young Leaders and Volunteers in Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka' (2019), the researchers faced certain context-driven challenges of collecting qualitative and quantitative data. It is also pertinent to note that currently youth organisations face four main challenges: limited funds; constant changes in the membership base; lack of proper guidance and specialized expertise; and financial constraints. Networking has also presented some notable challenges to volunteering organizations in Sri Lanka (Haputhanthri, 2018).

Way Forward and Recommendations

As per the analysis on volunteerism conducted for the NSA (National Situation Analysis), Sri Lanka continues its strong roles where all can collectively join without any socio-political conflict among themselves (ex: UNV50) despite challenges and setbacks with new actors seen emerging, confirming beyond doubt that volunteerism is embedded in the Sri Lankan culture. UNV and country authorities should make maximum use of this volunteering culture to passionately contribute to the development agenda of the country.

Government ownership of the 'volunteerism subject' in the country is vital to provide smoother paths for active volunteering in all sectors and command greater productive engagement. This is proposed to be supported by a national coordinating mechanism and a budget allocation to support the coordinating efforts.

Sustainable Development Council (SDC), as the nodal government institution with the responsibility of coordinating, facilitating, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Sri Lanka, the respective subject Ministry, and the Department of National Planning could play a key role in mainstreaming volunteerism in the country. One possible strategy could be to incorporate volunteerism in the National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development for a sustainably developed Sri Lanka 2020 (Draft) and promote volunteerism as an important cross-cutting aspect that contributes to all seventeen of the SDGs. The possibilities of establishing the National Volunteering Secretariat and a Volunteer Management System within SDC could be explored and be viewed as a strategic move to increase volunteer contributions to attaining the 2030 Agenda.

Further, the SDC, using its linkages to the Department of Census and Statistics could embark on a plan of measuring volunteer work, collecting data and determine a methodology of valuing volunteer contributions, its appropriate expression possibly expressing the total volunteering value as a percent of the GDP.

In addition, the SDC and Department of National Planning could collaborate to introduce reporting systems to capture volunteering data and information across all sectors and reporting of such information in appropriate national reporting networks.

The authorities need to establish a system where volunteerism is ingrained in the lifestyle and upbringing of individuals from home to school education, higher education and onward to careers making volunteerism a pre-requisite when hiring youth for jobs. Additionally, all volunteers should be recognised at national as well

as regional levels. Institutions that engage in volunteering activities should take necessary steps to recognise their volunteers, encouraging increased engagement in volunteering activities.

4. Data Sources

Data sources consulted can be diverse, and can include both non-academic sources (government documents, published VIO reports.) and academic publications.

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Annex 1

National Policies/ Legislation Reviewed

Policy/ Legislation	Year of Publication	Mention of Volunteering/ Volunteerism/ Volunteer/ Voluntary/ Voluntarily
National Policy on Environmentally Sensitive Areas in Sri Lanka (Draft)	2021	0
National Agriculture Policy	2021	0
National Policy on Sustainable Consumption & Production for Sri Lanka	2019	1
National Policy on Preschool Education	2019	0
National Policy on Volunteerism	2019	171
National Policy, Strategies and Institutional Framework for Water Resources Development, Conservation and Management	2019	0
National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education	2018	0
Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act. No. 19 of 2017	2017	0
National Policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence Sri Lanka	2017	1
Sri Lanka Peacebuilding Priority Plan	2016	3
National Youth Policy Sri Lanka	2014	2
National Sports Policy of Sri Lanka	2012	3
National Human Resources and Employment Policy	2012	4
National Nutrition Policy of Sri Lanka	2010	0
Maligawatta Janaza and Welfare Society (Incorporation) Act No.5 of 2010	2010	0
Forest (Amendment) Act, No. 65 of 2009	2009	2
The Mental Health Policy of Sri Lanka	2005	1
National Policy for Disability for Sri Lanka	2003	0
National Environmental Policy and Strategies	2003	0
National Policy for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector	2001	0
Mediation Board Act No 72 of 1988	1988	0
Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Supervision) Act (No. 31 of 1980)	1980	22

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