

A civil society review of progress
towards the Millennium Development
Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report:

Sri Lanka



Commonwealth
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A civil society review of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Commonwealth countries

National Report: **Sri Lanka**

This project aims to encourage and articulate civil society analysis of: progress towards the MDGs; the usefulness of the MDG framework for civil society; the contribution of civil society to the attainment of the MDGs; issues for a post-2015 agenda to consider.

This report documents the outputs of a two-stage process: desk research to review UN, government, civil society and other multilateral reports on national progress towards achieving the MDGs; and a national consultation workshop with civil society, which tested the findings of the desk research and enabled a deeper discussion on MDG progress, utility and post-2015 agenda setting.

This project was undertaken as part of a programme with the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC), which supported country-level research by civil society organisations in 20 countries.

The Commonwealth Foundation led this process for the following 14 countries: Cameroon, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi, New Zealand, Pakistan, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zambia. The UNMC led in the following six countries: India, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines and The Gambia.

Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach, uniquely situated at the interface between government and civil society. We develop the capacity of civil society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives. We strive for more effective, responsive and accountable governance with civil society participation, which contributes to improved development outcomes.

UN Millennium Campaign

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by the UN Secretary General in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from rich and poor countries, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.

Executive Summary

Project rationale and process

This summary presents perspectives from civil society in Sri Lanka on progress made and challenges experienced in relation to the national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Sri Lankan civil society organisations (CSOs) made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks.

Alliance Lanka undertook an initial analysis of existing documentation on the MDGs and held focus group discussions, consultations and interviews with representatives of CSOs, government, UN agencies and donors in the first half of 2012. Alliance Lanka then worked with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation to convene a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and enhance the research findings and make additional recommendations.

Civil society review of the MDGs in Sri Lanka

CSOs assess that Goals 2 and 5 are achievable by 2015, as is Goal 4 with additional efforts, along with portions of Goals 3 and 6. However, they consider that Goal 1 is not achievable by 2015 and Goals 7 and 8 are off track. While Sri Lanka has made impressive progress on poverty since 2000, CSOs see that hunger remains a problem, perpetuated by rising food prices, and call attention to youth unemployment and underemployment. CSOs further suggest that it is not possible to live on the poverty line amount of US\$1.25 a day.

Sri Lanka is a recent post-conflict country, and CSOs called for further progress regarding the restoration of law and order and the judicial system, the development of a more inclusive and democratic political process, reconstruction of infrastructure in areas most affected by conflict, and integration of former combatants and people who were internally displaced. In addition, Sri Lanka was severely hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Different parts of the country were affected in different ways by the war and the tsunami, resulting in marked inequalities between regions, for example in income, employment and access to services.

CSOs suggest that limited progress has been made towards some MDGs because of weaknesses in service delivery systems and the inadequate involvement of civil society during planning and implementation. Other challenges identified include data gaps, particularly in the most conflict-

affected areas in east and north Sri Lanka, an absence of disaggregated data and inadequate knowledge of the MDGs among key government and civil society personnel. A further barrier is the environment for civil society, which CSOs believe is not sufficiently enabling, particularly in conflict-affected areas, where strict regulations and approval procedures remain. Further, CSOs working with some vulnerable groups, such as sex workers and men who have sex with men, report that laws criminalising the behaviour of these groups have hindered initiatives such as HIV prevention.

By including the MDGs in its 2006 – 16 development framework, the government has recognised their importance. CSOs, however, believe there is still too much working in isolation, with insufficient attempts to involve civil society and the private sector. CSOs feel that their expertise from engagement on the ground is not sufficiently tapped into as a source of development intelligence.

Over time, CSOs believe they have made some inroads into challenging this fragmentation, partly as a result of the support of donors, which show interest in facilitating closer joint working. Some CSOs now participate in national level development forums alongside their government counterparts. In general, donors have adopted the MDGs as essential components of their development frameworks, which has helped drive civil society engagement with the MDGs.

CSOs acknowledge that the MDGs have presented new opportunities and enhanced clarity on how and where interventions can best be made. They believe that their engagement with the MDG agenda has increased since the previous review in 2005. CSOs report that the MDGs have been used as a tool for setting operational objectives and measuring performance. Many CSOs report that they have incorporated the MDGs into strategic frameworks and goals. However, there are also many CSOs that work on MDG-related issues, such as poverty reduction, health and the overarching theme of governance, without explicitly using the MDG terminology.

CSO activities on the MDGs usually depend on funding availability; challenges identified include delays in obtaining approvals, government bureaucracy, and taxes and tariffs. A related concern expressed is the influence of current donor priorities in shaping CSO programmes, which may mean that important issues are overlooked.

Among priorities identified for future development frameworks are the mainstreaming of climate change and 'green growth' initiatives, and addressing social exclusion. Projects to address skills gaps, water scarcity, energy inefficiency, poor transport connectivity, and resettlement and reintegration in conflict-affected areas are suggested, along with more emphasis on peace-building and post conflict matters. CSOs believe a special focus is needed on young people.

Recommendations

Recommendations made by CSOs to accelerate progress on existing MDGs include:

- A national level co-ordinating body for development programming, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation should be established as a separate unit within government; it should involve civil society, the private sector and donors to ensure that goals, targets and indicators are framed with reference to community priorities.
- The government should ensure that the legislation and regulations on development administration and finance are accountable and transparent.

Recommendations made by CSOs to improve future development frameworks include the following:

- Any new framework must place emphasis on communication and co-ordination between different stakeholders.
- New development frameworks should address governance issues. Links should be made with international treaties and other national development processes, rather than attempting to achieve development goals in isolation.
- Development policies should allow for sub-national specification.
- Goals, targets and indicators should be gender sensitive, and take into account the causes and consequences of marginalisation and discrimination.
- Data should be disaggregated, easy to access and kept up-to-date.
- Development frameworks should address subject areas that are relevant to people's needs, such as sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods, and the role of young people.
- Goals in Sri Lanka should encompass peace-building and conflict transformation.

1. Introduction

This report presents perspectives from civil society in Sri Lanka on progress made and challenges experienced with the MDGs, and the extent to which MDG processes have provided opportunities to enhance participatory governance and civil society relations with government. Based on their reflections, Sri Lankan CSOs made a number of recommendations to accelerate progress on the MDGs and improve future development frameworks. Alliance Lanka undertook an initial analysis of existing documentation on the MDGs and held focus group discussions, consultations and interviews with representatives of CSOs, government, UN agencies and donors in the first half of 2012. Alliance Lanka then worked with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation to convene a national consultation in December 2012 to verify and enhance the research findings and make additional recommendations.

Sri Lanka is presently identified as a middle-income country,¹ and from a development point of view is recognised as having achieved some success in attaining high levels of school enrolment and health outcomes. It has seen recent economic growth and a decline in unemployment,² but also recent rising inflation, with higher prices of imported food and fuel.³

The government's development framework, Mahinda Chinthana: Idiri Dekma (Vision for the Future) (2006 to 2016), aims at accelerating growth, with particular emphasis on equitable development, recognising that there are long-running income disparities, both between different income groups and different regions of Sri Lanka. It focuses on three main areas: (i) achieving more equitable development through accelerated rural development; (ii) accelerating growth through increased investment in infrastructure; and (iii) strengthening public service delivery. By including the MDGs in the Mahinda Chinthana, the government can be seen to have accorded a high priority to achieving them.

Sri Lanka is a recent post-conflict country, and work remains to be done, with major post-conflict tasks including the restoration of law and order and the judicial system, the development of a more inclusive and democratic political process, and the reconstruction of infrastructure in the areas most affected by the conflict. Another task is the reintegration of former combatants and people who were internally displaced into economic and social life, a process in which civil society is playing a part. International humanitarian CSOs such as Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, Care, World University Service of Canada, together with UN agencies and the Asian Development Bank, and some local CSOs, such as the Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies and Sewalanka, are working in northern Sri Lanka on post-conflict programmes and projects. Civil society post-conflict activities include medical outreach, economic empowerment, water and sanitation, resettlement and infrastructure development like the construction of hospitals and shelter.

1 The World Bank currently classifies Sri Lanka as a lower-middle-income country. See <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups>

2 According to official figures, economic growth was 8.3 per cent in 2011, per capita annual income grew by US\$436 from the previous year to US\$2,836 and unemployment fell to 4.2 per cent, Central Bank of Sri Lanka Annual Report, 2011

3 Inflation stood at 8.1 per cent in January 2013 (estimated annual average), having risen for the eighth successive month. See table: Sri Lanka y/y inflation, Reuters, 31 January 2013, <http://reuters/YGawhQ>. Inflation has also been highly volatile in recent years. See Nombulelo Duma, 'Pass-Through of External Shocks to Inflation in Sri Lanka', International Monetary Fund Working Paper, March 2008. See also Nimal Sanderatne, 'Declining Economic Growth, Rising Inflation and Widening Trade and Fiscal Deficits', *Sunday Times*, 8 July 2012, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/120708/columns/declining-economic-growth-rising-inflation-and-widening-trade-and-fiscal-deficits-5402.html>

2. Civil society perspectives on progress towards the MDGs

Table 1: Civil society assessment of progress towards the MDGs

Goals, targets and indicators ⁴	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:</p> <p>1a. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day</p> <p>1b. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people</p> <p>1c. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger</p>	Will not be achieved by 2015	Mostly on track, but off track to reduce hunger by half	<p>While Sri Lanka has made impressive progress on poverty since 2000, and may be on track to halve extreme poverty, hunger remains a problem, made worse by rising food prices. Poverty in Sri Lanka declined from 26 per cent in 1990/91 to 15 per cent in 2006/07, although there are regional disparities across districts and sectors, including urban/rural disparities and between the north and east parts of Sri Lanka and other regions. For example, GDP per capita in Western Province is more than twice that in all other provinces, as the majority of economic activities and over 60 per cent of the population are concentrated there. Rural poverty reduction was initially slow, but increased dramatically from 2002, to nearly 10 per cent per annum, primarily due to improvements in agriculture and targeted rural development programmes.</p> <p>Worryingly, the proportion of people consuming less than the minimum number of recommended daily calories has remained static since 1990/91, as reported in the 2008/09 progress report. In 2009/10, the proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption was a high 52.3 per cent,⁵ up from 50.7 per cent in 2006/07. This is far from the target of 25 per cent. Although the poverty line is set at US\$1.25 per day, CSOs state that it is not possible for a person to live on this amount. They also call attention to youth unemployment and underemployment.</p>
<p>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education:</p> <p>2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</p>	Achievable by 2015	On track	<p>Sri Lanka has had free education for decades, and has almost achieved the universal primary education target, with a net enrolment rate of 98 per cent in 2010 for both males and females. Sri Lanka has also successfully tackled literacy; 98.3 per cent of the 15–24-year-old population are literate.⁶</p> <p>This section is continued overleaf</p>

⁴ Unless otherwise stated, government assessments, targets, indicators and quantitative data in this table are drawn from Sri Lanka: Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2008/09, prepared by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) for the National Council for Economic Development, 2010. Unless otherwise stated, the deadline for targets to be achieved is 2015

⁵ Sri Lanka Millennium Development Goals Census data, 2009–2010

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 2. Achieve universal primary education:</p> <p>2a. Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</p>	Achievable by 2015	On track	<p>From the civil society perspective, however, it is important to pay attention to school drop-outs, observed most in the estate sector,⁷ coastal areas, slums and conflict affected areas, where causes of drop-out include children starting work early, having to care for younger family members and teen marriages. CSOs also raise the issue of the quality of education.</p>
<p>Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women:</p> <p>3a. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015</p>	Most targets achievable by 2015	On track, but will not meet target on equalising literacy rates	<p>Sri Lanka has almost reached gender parity in primary education, with the ratio of girls to boys in primary education at 99 per cent in 2010. In secondary and tertiary education, more girls are enrolled than boys. There has, however, been an apparent regression on the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector. This rose from 30.8 per cent in 1993 to 32.2 per cent in 2006/07, but is reported on more recent figures as standing at only 21 per cent in 2009/10.⁸ CSOs also consider underemployment to be an issue with working women.</p> <p>The proportion of women members in the national Parliament is very low compared to other South Asian countries: it has increased from 3 per cent in 1947 to only 5.8 per cent following the 2010 election,⁹ and this is mirrored by poor representation of women in local government structures. CSOs have critiqued approaches on this MDG as being characterised by a welfare philosophy, and call for a rights based approach.</p>
<p>Goal 4. Reduce child mortality:</p> <p>4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</p>	Achievable by 2015 if there is additional effort	On track overall, but will not meet target to reduce infant mortality	<p>Sri Lanka has made strides in reducing child mortality. According to UNICEF statistics, infant mortality rates have decreased from 26 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, to 14 per 1,000 in 2010.¹⁰ This rate is impressive when compared to countries wealthier than Sri Lanka.¹¹ There has been a similar fall in the under fives mortality rate, from 32 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 17 per 1,000 in 2010.¹² However, Sri Lanka still needs to make efforts to achieve the MDG infant mortality target of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2015.</p> <p style="color: red;">This section is continued opposite</p>

6 Ibid

7 The estate sector population is mostly made up of Sri Lankan Tamils, whose families were brought from India in the nineteenth century. Most of them live and work on tea and rubber estates and are recognised to be 'trapped in generational, long-term poverty'. Quote from 'Sri Lanka Human Development Report 2012: Bridging Regional Disparities for Human Development', 2012, United Nations Development Programme, http://hdr.undp.org/es/informes/nacional/asiapacifico/srilanka/Sri%20Lanka_2012.pdf

8 Sri Lanka MDG Census data, 2009-2010, op. cit

9 The percentage of seats held by women in parliaments or lower houses of parliaments in selected South Asian countries as of February 2013 is: Nepal, 33.2 per cent; Pakistan, 22.5 per cent; Bangladesh, 19.7 per cent; India, 11 per cent; Maldives, 6.5 per cent. These countries are all performing better on this target than Sri Lanka. Source: International Parliamentary Union Women in National Parliaments database, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

10 Sri Lanka statistics, UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri_lanka_statistics.html. There are other measures of child mortality, which produce varying results. The UNICEF figures have been used here as they were the most up-to-date available, and so considered likelier to reflect the post-conflict situation

11 Angola, for example, is categorised by the World Bank as an upper-middle-income country, compared to Sri Lanka's lower-middle-income ranking, and has a similar population, but a much higher infant mortality rate, of 98 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2010. See Angola Statistics, UNICEF, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/angola_statistics.html. Further, according to World Bank data, 2005, Sri Lanka's infant mortality rate is unusually low compared to countries such as Argentina, Russia and Ukraine, that are considerably wealthier than Sri Lanka

12 Sri Lanka statistics, UNICEF, op. cit

Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 4. Reduce child mortality:</p> <p>4a. Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate</p>	<p>Achievable by 2015 if there is additional effort</p>	<p>On track overall, but will not meet target to reduce infant mortality</p>	<p>20 per cent of children under five years old are malnourished. Quality of parents' education, poverty, teen marriages and lack of empowerment for mothers are suggested by CSOs as factors that affect the achievement of this target.</p> <p>The immunisation programme is considered by civil society as well run, with a decentralised structure that links central and provincial government hospitals and clinics to local government institutes such as <i>pradeshiya sabhas</i> (divisional councils) and municipal councils. As a result of this, 97 per cent of children aged between 12 and 23 months have been fully vaccinated against diphtheria, measles, polio, tuberculosis (TB) and whooping cough.</p>
<p>Goal 5. Improve maternal health:</p> <p>5a. Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio</p> <p>5b. Achieve universal access to reproductive health</p>	<p>Achievable by 2015</p>	<p>On track</p>	<p>There is near universal access to healthcare, and 98 per cent of deliveries take place in health institutions. According to the UN's MDG indicators, trends in maternal mortality rates are estimated to have decreased from 85 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 35 per 100,000 in 2010.¹³</p> <p>CSOs state that key factors in maternal health include nutrition and education. There are many CSOs that are actively engaged at the community level in educating women on the importance of nutrition and reproductive health.</p>
<p>Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:</p> <p>6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</p> <p>6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it</p> <p>6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</p>	<p>Some targets achievable by 2015</p>	<p>No assessment registered on HIV/AIDS. On track for malaria, but will not meet the target for tuberculosis control.</p>	<p>The use of bed nets against malaria is now widespread, with 64 per cent of children below five years of age reported to sleep under one. The National Programme for Tuberculosis Control and Chest Diseases reports a significant decline in TB incidence. The proportion of the population with advanced HIV infection who have access to antiretroviral drugs is, however, only 40.6 per cent, far short of the target of 90 per cent. Part of the challenge, CSOs report, is that many people do not come forward for HIV testing, and so are late in starting treatment. CSOs also assess HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns as insufficient.</p> <p>From a civil society point of view, in addition to HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, Sri Lanka should now focus on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), as over 70 per cent of deaths reported by hospitals are caused by these. A large percentage of NCDs are preventable through the reduction of the four main</p> <p>This section is continued overleaf</p>

¹³ Information on this data source is modelled, because the country lacks complete registration. Again, this data source has been used here as it is considered more up-to-date. Sri Lanka: Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births, United Nations Millennium Development Goals Indicators, <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=553&crd=144>

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Goals, targets and indicators	Civil society assessment of progress	Government assessment of progress	Civil society perspectives on challenges
<p>Goal 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases:</p> <p>6a. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS</p> <p>6b. Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it</p> <p>6c. Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases</p>	Some targets achievable by 2015	No assessment registered on HIV/AIDS. On track for malaria, but will not meet the target for tuberculosis control.	behavioural risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diet. A further health issue observed is that a substantial number of people experience mental health problems, including post-conflict trauma. ¹⁴
<p>Goal 7. Ensure environmental sustainability:</p> <p>7a. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources</p> <p>7b. Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss</p> <p>7c. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation</p> <p>7d. Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers</p>	Off track	Will not meet the target for reversing loss of environmental resources. Targets for reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, drinking water and sanitation have already been met.	<p>There is limited data available on deforestation, but according to the most recent MDG progress report, forest coverage has decreased, from 33.8 per cent of total land area in 1992 to 29.9 per cent in 2005, an average annual deforestation rate of 14,600 hectares. Parts of Sri Lanka have experienced drought, understood to be a result of climate change. CSOs also believe land degradation and depletion of natural resources are neglected issues.</p> <p>Overall, nearly 85 per cent of households had access to an improved drinking water source in 2006/07, rising to 87.7 per cent in 2009/10. The proportion of the population using improved sanitation facilities was 96.1 per cent in 2009/10, a successful achievement.¹⁵ However, as is common with many indicators, there are large differences between rural and urban areas. Water access is seen by civil society as a particular problem in the estate sector. CSOs call for adequate polices backed by action plans to be set and implemented, to bring about an improvement in these areas.</p>
<p>Goal 8. Develop a global partnership for development</p> <p>8a. Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system</p> <p>8b. Address the special needs of least developed countries</p> <p>8c. Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island developing states</p> <p>8d. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries</p> <p>8e. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p> <p>8f. In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications</p>	Off track	No assessment is given	<p>Several developed countries have imposed harsh trade terms and tariffs on Sri Lanka. This has contributed to a reduction in Sri Lanka's exports to developed countries from 91.7 per cent in 1992 to 68.7 per cent in 2006. India, Iran and Malaysia have become Sri Lanka's major trading partners. Net official development assistance (ODA) dropped sharply from US\$731 million in 2008 to US\$581 million in 2010, contributing only 1.2 of gross national income (GNI) in 2010.¹⁶ Non-traditional bilateral partners such as India, Iran and Japan have become more important.</p> <p>Access to and usage of technology remains low, with only 17 per cent of the population having access to telephones and 29.8 per cent being cellular subscribers as of 2009/10.¹⁷</p>

¹⁴ For example, according to a 2011 study by the American Medical Association on mental health and displacement in the Jaffna district, there is a 7 per cent prevalence of post-trauma stress disorder (PTSD) and recently resettled residents were more likely to report symptoms of PTSD than long-term residents. The report states: 'Among residents of Jaffna district in Sri Lanka, prevalence of symptoms of war related mental health conditions was substantial and significantly associated with displacement status and underlying trauma exposure.'

¹⁵ Sri Lanka MDG Census data, 2009–2010, op. cit

¹⁶ Sri Lanka Statistics, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/LKA.gif>

¹⁷ Sri Lanka MDG Census data, 2009–2010, op. cit

It should be noted that Sri Lanka is a country that has only recently emerged from conflict, with a 25-year civil conflict having come to an end in 2009. In addition, the country experienced severe impacts from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Different parts of the country were affected to different extents by these traumatic events; there are therefore severe inequalities, for example in access to services and income and employment, and it is difficult, and perhaps unhelpful, to generalise about progress. There is therefore a need to encourage a localised approach to analysis and initiatives beyond the headline national figures.

The government initially created a separate unit to monitor the performance of the MDGs, but currently the Department of National Planning under the Ministry of Finance and Planning is the agency responsible for this. It maintains data collected from nine relevant ministries and institutions. According to the Department of National Planning, Sri Lanka has almost achieved, or is on track to achieve, most indicators by 2015, with only a few lagging indicators requiring the urgent attention of policy-makers and planners. CSOs involved in this review, as Table 1 shows, assess progress on Goals 1 and 7 less optimistically, and believe that on most other goals there are still questions of detail that need more attention. CSOs also attribute shortfalls on targets to weaknesses in service delivery systems and inadequate involvement of civil society during the planning and implementation phases, as well as regional and rural/urban imbalances.

For a full list of the MDGs, along with the targets and indicators, see: <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>

3. Usefulness and challenges of the MDG framework to civil society

It seems clear that the government is taking the MDGs seriously. They can be seen as being promoted, at least partly, as a rallying point for national unity and as a way of seeking international recognition for mostly strong performance, as part of a drive to change the international image of post-conflict Sri Lanka. However, CSOs consulted believe the government could do more to improve the involvement of civil society and the private sector. The current situation is one of isolation, with insufficient apparent understanding of the benefits of joint working and the value that civil society and the private sector can bring to the table.

CSOs acknowledged that the MDGs had presented new opportunities for civil society. For example, the MDGs had enhanced clarity on how and where interventions could be made that could link better to national programmes on a particular area of development. CSOs engaged in development activities have found the MDGs a useful tool for setting their operational objectives, earning credibility for their activities and measuring performance. Most CSOs reported that they have incorporated MDGs in some way in their strategic frameworks for defining short- or medium-term goals.

CSOs also felt that the MDGs provided a working framework for community level operations for civil society, and could potentially facilitate better partnership working with the government and the private sector.

Over time, CSOs believe they have made some progress in overcoming challenges, such as bureaucracy from government officials and competition for project funding, that hindered their closer involvement, partly with the support of bilateral and multilateral donors, which have shown interest in facilitating closer joint working. As a result, some CSOs have participated in national level development forums alongside their government counterparts.

One of these forums is the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The CCM was established as a partnership between the government, civil society and the private sector in 2002 to co-ordinate, develop and submit proposals to the Global Fund, and monitor Global Fund projects in Sri Lanka. This, it was suggested, has been a step forward in implementing better governance practices over funding decisions, and has influenced fund recipients to make project interventions based on a performance-based funding framework and a comprehensive monitoring mechanism, bringing greater accountability and effectiveness. However, CSOs consider that the modalities and approaches of partners who receive funding directly from the Global Fund still need to be improved to enhance transparency and to ensure the delivery of project benefits to the communities that are supposed to benefit.¹⁸

CSOs consulted consider that bilateral and multilateral donors active in Sri Lanka have adopted the MDGs as essential components of their development frameworks. This has been another driver of civil society engagement with the MDGs. CSOs involved in this review offered the following as examples of international organisations and agencies they have worked with through receiving project funding and technical support and undertaking consultancy work: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

More problematically, many CSOs are seen to be targeting their programmes based on the availability of donor funding at present, which may mean they are not addressing the greatest needs or most important issues. CSOs in this review asserted that goals, indicators and targets need to be framed with relevance to community needs and priorities.

As for national planning processes, CSOs consider that they have rarely been involved in development programmes at the planning stage, with the exception of some village development plans. They believe that the environment for civil society is not sufficiently enabling, particularly in conflict-affected areas, where there are still strict regulations and approval procedures. Further, CSOs working with some vulnerable groups, notably drug users, sex workers and men who

¹⁸ For more on the Country Coordinating Mechanism Sri Lanka (CCMSL) visit <http://ccmsl.lk/?lang=en>

have sex with men, report that laws criminalising the behaviour of these groups has hindered their work in carrying out initiatives such as HIV prevention.

Another challenge that hinders engagement with the MDG framework is that there are still significant gaps in the data, as national data were not initially aligned to the measurement of the MDGs. Missing data series make it hard to track trends over time. There is also a lack of data for lower administrative divisions and an absence of disaggregated data, eg by age, sex and ethnicity. The lack of data is particularly a challenge for the parts of Sri Lanka, in the north and east, most affected by conflict, and as a result they may not be adequately reflected in national average data.

A further hindering issue raised in the review is continuing inadequate knowledge on the MDGs and targets among key government officials and civil society personnel.

4. Contribution of CSOs to the MDGs and their delivery

CSOs believe that their engagement with the MDG agenda has changed for the better since the last review was conducted in 2005. They see increased participation of CSOs in the MDGs.

However, while many CSOs are working on issues contained in the MDGs, such as poverty reduction, health, environment and the overarching issue of governance, the terminology of the MDGs per se does not appear in many work programmes.

Examples of service delivery activities being offered by CSOs that relate to the MDGs, as identified in this review, include savings and credit schemes, small enterprise development, education on household expenditure management, non-formal education, pre-school activities, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS services and small-scale energy interventions. Many of these initiatives have included a gender focus.

‘Civil society provides a considerable contribution towards the achievement of the MDGs without even knowing that they are working towards MDG achievement. For example, poverty reduction programmes that cover savings, credit, and training programmes, including subsidies; environment conservation programmes related to tree planting, and prevention of deforestation; programmes on HIV, TB, malaria and other diseases that include behaviour change focused interventions and condom demonstration and distribution; and empowering women for leadership in relation to promote gender equality. However, due to constraints in accessing continuous project funding, CSOs tend to work in isolation addressing only a single issue at a time while working indirectly towards achievement of MDGs.’

Premabandu Jayatillake, Tissajaya Foundation, 2012

As education and health are being comprehensively addressed by the government, through the national education system and health infrastructure, including government-run hospitals, there is not the same level of civil society

activity towards targets on education and health as in other countries involved in this review. There are, however, CSOs such as Sewalanka that have conducted activities that aim to increase school attendance in areas where this is a particular problem, such as in the estate sector and in north and east Sri Lanka, by providing books, stationery and uniforms, operating day care centres for young children so that older children do not have to look after their siblings, and educating parents on the benefits of their children completing education.

There are many CSOs working on HIV/AIDS issues, and their work has seen a gradual shift from awareness raising to interventions that seek to encourage behaviour change – including peer-led interventions, targeted communications programmes, promotion of condom use and some work on tackling stigma.

CSOs also reported engaging in advocacy on subjects such as gender equality, the need to mobilise resources to help combat HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases, and governance issues. In one such activity, CSO staff were trained to use an advocacy toolkit for lobbying government during national strategic planning processes.

One example of advocacy on HIV/AIDS saw a group of local and international organisations that work on HIV/AIDS and other sexual and reproductive rights issues come together in 2009 to form the ‘Together We Are the Solution’ advocacy campaign. The campaign focused on increasing youth awareness of the pandemic and on challenging the stigma surrounding talking about HIV. Partners included the National Youth Coalition of Sri Lanka (NYCSL), Save Lanka Kids, World Vision and the Women’s Support Group.¹⁹ Meanwhile the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) launched a national advocacy campaign for the right to information in 2003, to bring awareness to different actors, from government to civil society, on the underpinning importance of people’s right to information.

Some CSOs have successfully leveraged funding for donors from activities related to Goal 1. For example, the Vavuniya District Thrift and Credit Co-operative Societies Union Limited (SANASA) received support from the UNDP and Australia’s bilateral donor AusAID to improve its community outreach. From 2002 to 2006, the number of credit societies established by SANASA grew from 30 to 154, while the number of participating families increased from 414 to 7,800.²⁰ In addition, the Positive Women’s Network (PWN+), an organisation that raises awareness about HIV prevention in Sri Lanka, worked closely with the UNAIDS country office to campaign for the inclusion of women and girls in Sri Lanka’s national AIDS response.²¹

Such CSO activities, however, usually depend on funding availability. Here, CSO representatives noted that challenges include delays in obtaining required approvals, government bureaucracy, taxes and tariffs imposed by the government, and high staff turnover as a result of volatile funding.

In the face of such challenges, and to improve effectiveness and enhance civil society, coalitions of CSOs have been formed. Examples of coalitions include the Sri Lanka Women’s NGO Forum (SLWNGOF), a long-standing coalition that brings together women’s CSOs to address gender concerns in Sri Lanka. The network of

19 ‘Sri Lanka launches its first campaign for a better SHR response’, 2009, http://amplifyyourvoice.org/w/milinda_rajapaksha/2009/07/13/sri-lanka-launch-it-first-campaign-for-a-better-srhr-response-2

20 UNDP and Civil Society in Sri Lanka: Partnership in Crisis Situations, UNDP Sri Lanka, 2007

21 ‘Red Ribbon Award recognises the work of Sri Lankan Women Living with HIV’, UNAIDS, 6 December 2012, <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2012/december/20121206rrsrilanka/>

women's organisations and CBOs that work with SLWNGOF come from all ethnic groups and communities from around the country.²² Meanwhile the Child Right Advocacy Network (CRAN) is the only civil society network in Sri Lanka for the protection and promotion of children's rights. It currently has a membership of approximately 150 CSOs and works through 22 district forums.²³ On HIV/AIDS, the relevant coalition selects the civil society participants in the GCM, discussed above.

Examples of recent collaborations between different actors put forward in the review include collaboration between civil society and donors to develop a curriculum for vocational training, which has helped improve the syllabus, and collaborations between CSOs and private sector companies to provide micro-financing opportunities, often with a focus on women. An area of collaboration with government has been the assistance of CSOs in helping to train delegates in the national youth parliament, set up by the government and supported by the National Youth Services Council.

5. Lessons learned and recommendations

In view of the above, from a civil society perspective, the following measures were suggested as part of this review process to enhance and accelerate progress on Goals 1 to 7.

- **Goal 1:** The Ministry of Social Services should co-ordinate with CSOs in the implementation of action plans for poverty reduction, particularly to create awareness of services offered to communities and to ensure effective implementation. The government should also prioritise job creation to match the educational and professional backgrounds of young people, and the development of employability skills during secondary and tertiary education.
- **Goal 2:** To improve the quality of education and reduce school drop-out rates, the government needs to have a strategy to systematically educate parents and teachers on the importance of continuity in children's education and to understand better the value of vocational education at the time it is needed.
- **Goal 3:** Sri Lanka should pay special attention to the reproductive health of young women, and to preventing abuse and gender-based violence, while promoting women's economic empowerment and the employment of women in decision-making positions. A focus on getting more women into Parliament would signal greater emphasis on women's empowerment.
- **Goal 4:** The government should work with civil society and the private sector to take more steps to improve nutrition, including educating mothers on the preparation of low-cost nutritional food and encouraging urban and rural home gardening.
- **Goal 5:** Interventions that focus on creating awareness and encouraging behaviour change are needed for girl children and women, so that they have more power over their reproductive health as a way of reducing maternal

²² 'About SLWNGOF', Women and Media Collective, <http://womenandmedia.org/networks/slwngef/about-slwngef>

²³ For more information, visit <http://mhps.net/groups/organizations-networks-and-professional-associations/child-right-advocacy-network-cran-1550552987/>

mortality. Community-based interventions using peer-led programmes on maternal and reproductive health are also needed to bring about changes in the nutrition of expectant mothers.

- **Goal 6:** While continuing its attention on HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, Sri Lanka also needs to concentrate on NCDs. Health should be treated as a rights based issue. Importance should be given to addressing mental stress and trauma, including that related to the conflict, particularly among young people. The government should work with civil society and the private sector to develop an action plan on this, and CSOs should lead in the implementation of initiatives in this regard.
- **Goal 7:** Water conservation and management, especially in the dry zones where agricultural activities take priority, is a current need, with Sri Lanka now seeing the effects of climate change. Hence there is a need for well-planned rainwater harvesting schemes, de-silting of abandoned lakes, large-scale irrigation projects and public education on mitigation of climate change challenges. Other measures to meet targets under Goal 7 should include moving into renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, investments in public transport and the promotion of biogas.

More emphasis also needs to be placed on peace-building and dealing with post-conflict issues such as rehabilitating former combatants, providing support to widows and reducing the circulation of small arms.

Beyond the current goals, and based on experiences to date, a national level co-ordinating body for development programming, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is suggested as essential for the next phase of developmental activities for Sri Lanka. This should be established as a separate unit within the government and involve civil society, the private sector, and bilateral and multilateral donors.

CSOs involved in this review also suggest that goals, targets and indicators should be gender sensitive, which will be valuable in measuring and accelerating progress. More generally, goals, targets and indicators must take into account the causes of marginalisation and discrimination, and be aware of the fact that this limits access to resources and opportunities. Development initiatives should be assessed at least partly by the extent to which they advance equality and address the causes of exclusion. Excluded, marginalised or discriminated against people in Sri Lanka include HIV- positive people, indigenous people, former combatants, single women, people who live on estates, older people and sex workers. There is also a need to recognise young people as a special category, particularly since Sri Lanka is the only south Asian nation that lacks a national youth policy. The MDGs as they stand cannot address the origins of, and contemporary practice of, discrimination and exclusion in Sri Lanka. This implies that a rights based approach is needed that enables all sections of the community to access their fundamental human rights, along with initiatives at the social and cultural level, and a regionally nuanced approach, given the different distributions of populations and identity groups in different regions.

Further sharing of information, knowledge and experience is needed to enhance progress. Civil society should also begin to develop its own alternative sources of data in order to be able to better critique official data.

The government needs to ensure that the legislation and regulations on development administration and finance are functional to enhance accountability and transparency. Civil society has raised this as an issue.

6. The post-2015 development framework

This review suggests that in its future strategy Sri Lanka should identify priorities that ensure sustainable and inclusive growth through a co-ordinated effort, with assistance from bilateral and multilateral agencies, and through fostering private sector development and civil society participation. It is suggested that this should include the mainstreaming of climate change initiatives, with a focus on 'green growth', and that it should address social exclusion. Projects to address skills gaps, water scarcity, energy inefficiency, poor transport connectivity, and resettlement and reintegration in conflict-affected areas should form part of the agenda.

Young people need to be brought into the post-2015 agenda. They should be seen as agents of change in all goals, and it is also suggested that a new goal should be created specifically addressing the needs of young people.

Other key lessons to come out of this review for a post-2015 development framework include:

- Development must be participatory, but political will and direction is also essential. Governance should therefore be a key part of the new framework.
- Development policies should allow for regional specification – in the case of Sri Lanka, to address the disparities that exist between different parts of the country.
- Civil society should be included in the planning and implementation of a new framework.
- In order to ensure accountability and transparency there needs to be proper mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and report.
- Data are essential to measure development; data must be disaggregated, easy to access and kept up to date.
- Links must be made with international treaties and other national development processes, rather than development goals attempted in isolation.
- The framework must address subject areas that are relevant to the people, such as sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods, and the role of young people.

- In Sri Lanka, goals should encompass peace building and conflict transformation.
- There is a need to raise awareness of any new framework among the public through outreach initiatives.
- Any new framework must place emphasis on communication and co-ordination between different stakeholders.

7. Conclusion

Sri Lanka has achieved, or is in the process of achieving, good progress on the MDGs by 2015. Key initiatives of the government in the recent past that have helped achieve the goals include poverty reduction programmes, economic and infrastructure development projects, primary and secondary education modernisation projects, and appropriate and timely health strategies, with support from bilateral and multilateral donors. However, disparities are observed in performance at the sub-national level. Here the government should take remedial measures to bring district level indicators up to the current national average level.

Given the rise of climate change as a challenge in Sri Lanka, the country should look forward towards developing a 'green economy' and should focus on the concept of sustainable development goals. Meanwhile from a health perspective, it is time for Sri Lanka to address ageing, non-communicable diseases and the impacts of violence, while treating health as a rights based issue. In striving to be a healthier, happier nation, Sri Lanka should try to overcome wide disparities and include all parts of society in its development initiatives.

Participating organisations

Original research partner:

- Alliance Lanka

Research interview and focus group participants:

- Arunalu Community Development Centre
- Asian Development Bank
- Colombo Municipal Council
- Community Development Consortium, Hitthetiya
- Community Development Foundation, Kollankuttigama
- Dehena Community Development Foundation
- Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Planning
- Department of Registrar General
- Didula Community Development Foundation Equal Ground
- Family Health Bureau
- Human Rights and Community Development Centre

- Kotte Municipal Council
- Lanka Plus
- Mihikatha Environmental Organisation
- Ministry of Child and Women's Affairs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Housing Construction
- Ministry of Livestock and Rural Community Development
- Ministry of Social Services
- Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training
- Moratuwa Municipal Council
- National Cleaner Production Centre
- National STD AIDS Control Programme
- Organic Environment and Rural System Foundation
- Positive Women's Network (PWN+)
- Ruhunu Sisila Service Organisation
- SERVE 24
- Sri Lanka Family Planning Association
- Sri Lanka National Development Foundation
- Temple Based AIDS Prevention Programme
- Tissajaya Child Welfare Foundation
- UNAIDS
- United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Urban Settlement Development Authority
- Uva Farmers Development Foundation
- WASON Foundation
- Women in Action
- World Health Organization

Consultation partners:

- Alliance Lanka
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Consultation participants:

- AIDS Foundation
- Alliance Development Trust
- Asian Development Bank
- Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Commonwealth Foundation
- Conflict and Peace Analysis Unit, Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Connect Lanka
- Cordoba Foundation
- Department of Census and Statistics
- Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Planning
- EAP
- Family Planning Association
- Federation of Local Government
- Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
- International Organisation for Migration
- Ministry of Economic Development
- Ministry of Social Services
- Muslim Aid
- nATANDA Dance Theatre
- National Youth Services Council
- Neth FM
- Organic, Environmental and Rural Systems (OER) Foundation
- Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority
- Sunday Times
- Sri Lanka United Nations Friendship Organisation
- Tissajaya Child Welfare Foundation
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Women in Action

Plus independent participants



**Commonwealth
Foundation**

Marlborough House, Pall Mall,
London SW1Y 5HY,
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 7930 3783

F +44 (0)20 7839 8157

E foundation@commonwealth.int

www.commonwealthfoundation.com