National Youth Policy Sri Lanka

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY
SRI LANKA

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development

Trust and Honor

I have utmost confidence in the youth community in this country .That unfailing confidence motivates me to eliminate despondency and insecurity from this country.

I am proud to state that the key vehicle possessed by us in building Sri Lankan nation as a modern country is our creative youth leadership. I urge from the entire world to give deserved honor to our youth   for their qualities such as dedication, determination and reconciliation.

Further, I present this focused and permanent Road Map tilted "National Youth Policy" with immense kindness and tremendous belief of the future to the daughters and sons of Sri Lanka, who for several decades explored various paths seeking their own identity in this historic land.

Mahinda Rajapaksha
President
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

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Content

Preamble

Sri Lanka is today at a defining moment in her post-independence history. In 2009, the ruthless separatist war that had engulfed the country for over thirty years came to an end for ever. More than three years on, it is important that as a society, we take stock of where we are: has Sri Lanka made use of the opportunities created by the cessation of civil war, to take the country towards reconciliation, social justice and peace? Young people, from all regions of Sri Lanka, perhaps paid the greatest price during the war because of the cruel disruption of the most critical and hopeful period of their lives. As a nation, how have we responded to the challenges faced by those young people? What have we done to ensure that future generations of young people will not have to face the same situation?

During the last 30 years, our society has also seen many changes brought about liberal economic policies with significant consequences for sectors such as health and education. In the past, excellent public health and public education services ensured that Sri Lanka performed above expectations with regard to human development. Are we continuing to build on those enlightened policies which emphasized equality for all Sri Lankan citizens?

As a nation, we face many critical, ethical and political issues on social justice, democratic space, and development. These are issues which affect young people seriously. How do we ensure that young people are adequately concerned of these issues? How do we inspire young people to be socially critical while also being socially responsible? How can we instill within them a sense of civic consciousness? How do we help young people to realize their full human potential?

As much as we ask these questions of young people, we need to ask these questions of ourselves: to examine the institutions, the systems and the socio-political, cultural and economic contexts within which young people exist today. We need to examine what these systems and processes teach young people, the kinds of role models we offer young people and the available spaces for ethical and socially responsible lifestyles in society today. Each generation has a fundamental responsibility for towards the future generations and we need to ask ourselves how much we have done to empower young people.

This National Youth Policy (NYP) takes as its primary organizing principle, the need to be guided by a core set of humanizing ethics and values that can be passed from one generation to another. It is concerned with not merely addressing 'youth problems' or 'youth as a problem' but to consider how youth can be empowered to engage in addressing the broader challenges of society. This policy is also concerned with ensuring that young people are sensitive to one another, appreciate and adjust to diversity, respect alternative views and set themselves high aspirations while tempering those aspirations with a social conscience.

The NYP recognizes and celebrates the potential of youth – not merely in symbolic terms but through concrete measures to enable, ensure and empower the youth of this country. It recognizes that socially responsible, ethically conscious and politically aware youth are integral in our nation's search for a just and peaceful society.

Introduction

1.1   Background and rationale

During the last 30 years, our society has seen many changes brought about by liberal economic policies with significant consequences for sectors such as health and education. In the past, excellent public health and public education services ensured that Sri Lanka performed above expectations with regard to human development. A key question that we continue to ask is whether we are continuing to build on those enlightened policies which emphasized equality for all Sri Lankan citizens.

These broader policy changes have undoubtedly influenced the way young people think and behave. While the youth have been a central focus of the state as well as of other agencies for several decades, they have often been described as 'violent" or 'frustrated' segment of the population. The youth-led insurrections in the 1970s and 1980s further fuelled these perceptions. Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth in 1990 provided an extensive analysis of the situation of young people and the problems they face. It provided several key recommendations many of which unfortunately are yet to be implemented.

The National Youth Services Council has been in existence since 1969 and was strengthened through the National Youth Services Act 69 in 1979. And then Sri Lanka's Ministry of Youth Affairs was established in 1979. The National Youth Corps was established in 2003, under the purview of the Ministry, which is now a key institution focusing on personality and vocational training of the youth. Thus, although Sri Lanka did not have a Youth Policy, several youth focused initiatives have been in existence for several years. Unemployment of youth has also provoked much interest which led to the formulation of a National Youth Employment policy in 2007.

However, the advantage of developing a National Youth Policy is that it provides an opportunity to explore youth issues in a holistic manner. Although many youth focused initiatives (both state and non-state) exist in Sri Lanka, the lack of proper coordination and coherence among these agencies results in overlapping and sometimes contradictory interventions. Furthermore, many youth focused initiatives approach youth as a 'problem' needing to be 'fixed' and as dependents who need to be managed and controlled. Consequently, the potential, energy and innovativeness of this group is largely ignored.

The formulation of the National Youth Policy is an attempt to foreground youth development in policy initiatives. This considers youth as constituency with certain rights and obligations. It recognizes the potential of youth to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country and it also identifies key actors and institutions that have a duty to ensure an enabling and ensuring environment where youth can flourish.

It considers the important sectors that have an impact on the situation of youth and suggests certain key strategy areas for development as well as identifying specific target groups requiring special attention. It also provides an institutional framework to coordinate youth development initiatives. Importantly, it is an attempt to provide a contextually relevant and grounded approach to youth development that can form the basis for diverse interventions which will enable youth to meet the challenges of today and of the future.

1.2 Process of policy formulation

When formulating the NYP, two principles were kept in mind: the need to develop evidence-based policy as well as to ensure a consultative process in policy formulation. Thus, the process of it's formulation was considered as vital as the actual production of the policy document. The diversity of issues affecting young people and the need to involve the public in policy formulation were considered as critical for this process.

The NYP is an outcome of a collaboration of three institutions: the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development, the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) and the Department of Social Studies of the Open University of Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development was responsible for providing financial support for this initiative as well as for overall monitoring of the process. The NYSC was primarily responsible for supporting the public consultations while the Department of Social Studies (SSD) provided technical expertise in conducting research, data collection, analysis and drafting of the NYP. A Steering Committee consisting of 27 members functioned in an advisory capacity.

Information for the formulation of the NYP was collected through different sources. Nine thematic papers were formulated to conduct literature reviews and to identify policy gaps in selected areas. 26 Youth Policy Forums were conducted in 25 districts. 53 Key Informant Interviews were conducted with key people in several sectors as well as eight Focus Group Discussions among selected groups.
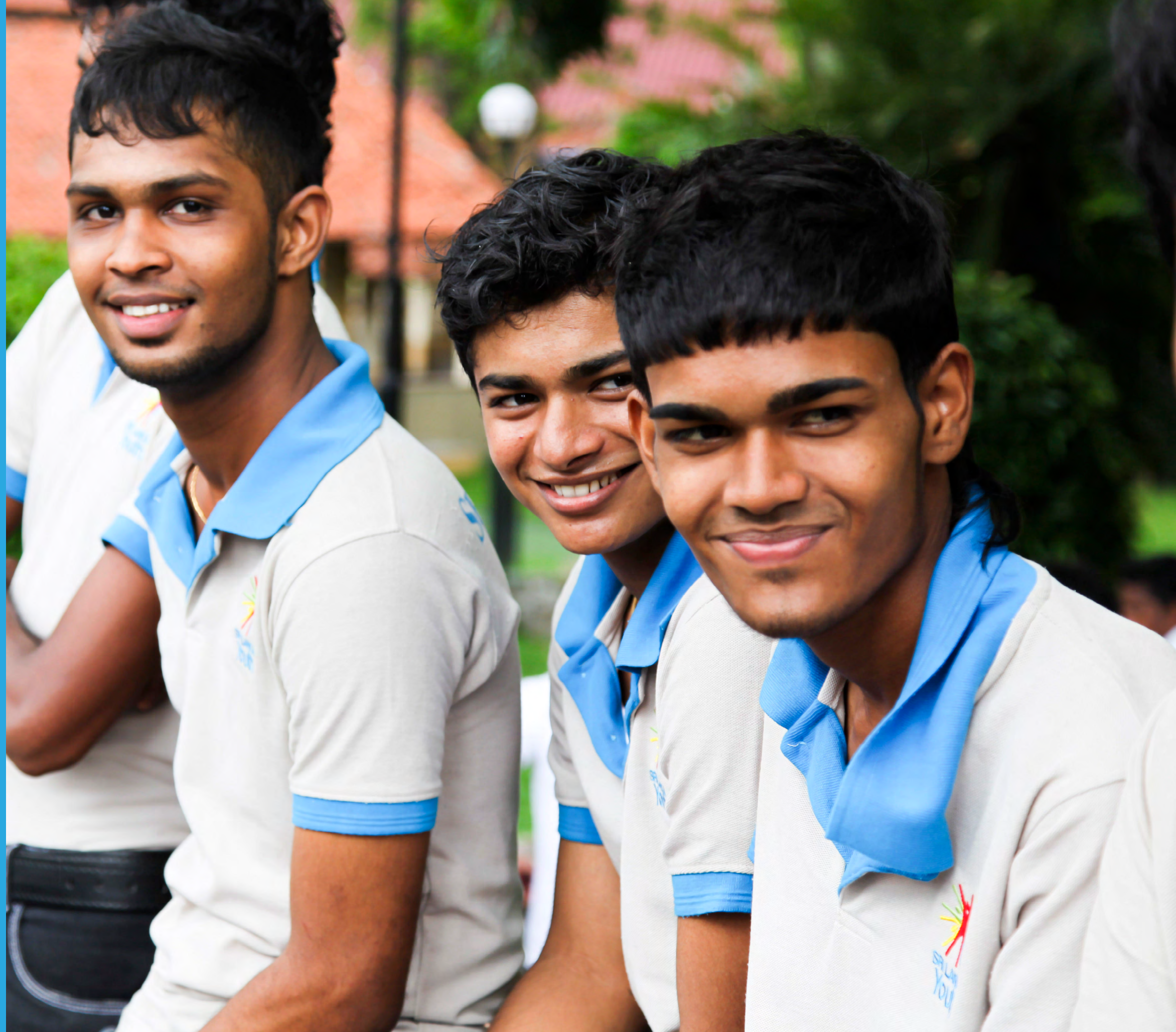
Principles & Values
Underlying the NYP

The three pillars, on which the NYP is formulated, are:

1. Ensuring youth:

to make sure that there is a conducive, supportive and equitable environment and opportunities for youth to flourish

2. Enabling youth:

to create conditions where youth can be independent, creative, innovative and confident

3. Empowering youth:

to strengthen youth to participate and take responsibility on behalf of themselves, their community and humanity

These pillars are further elaborated based on the following principles and values:

i.   Promotion of an inclusive Sri Lankan identity that is based on the concept of social harmony

ii. Respect for the long historical tradition of cultural diversity that has enriched Sri Lanka where all religions, faiths and cultures are treated equally

iii. Respect for equity and social justice in conceptualizing development

iv. Promoting total wellbeing of youth including physical, mental, spiritual, material and cultural

v.   Commitment for democratic principles and human rights as enshrined in the Sri Lankan constitution and international covenants to which Sri Lanka is signatory

vi. Promoting high standards of professionalism and integrity by all involved in youth work

vii. Ensure transparency and accountability in institutions and organizations involved in youth development

viii. Promoting a broader world view among youth enabling them to appreciate the complexity of the world around them both within and outside the country

ix. Ensure participation of young people at all levels of decision making process

x.   Respect human rights as a fundamental basis for youth development

Vision, Goals and Objectives

Vision

To develop the full potential of young people to enable their active participation in national development for a just and equitable society.

Goals and Objectives

3.1 Build the capacity of young people to meaningfully engage in the national development process

i.   Develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes through education and training

ii. Mobilize youth to engage in national reconstruction, reconciliation and development

iii. Establish mechanisms for youth participation in planning, decision making and implementation of development programs

iv. Provide equitable opportunities for young people to develop relevant skills which will help them to become responsible and independent members of the community

v.   Develop the spirit of volunteerism and establish mechanisms for youth to engage in community service

vi. Create awareness about the importance of sustainability and about environmental challenges arising out of increasing use of non-renewable resources, climate change and natural disasters

3.2 Enhance participation of youth in economy

i.   Create conditions for effective transition of youth from education to work through tertiary education

ii. Eliminate barriers and evolve opportunities to meet higher educational aspirations equitably

iii. Enhance employment opportunities with fairness and equity

iv. Promote entrepreneurial culture and supportive re-

sources for the economic advancement of youth

v. Promote entrepreneurial culture and supportive resources for the economic advancement of youth

vi. Enhance equitable and fair distribution of employment opportunities

3.3 Instilling a sense of social responsibility and social cohesion among young people while recognizing and respecting diversities of ethnicity, culture, religion, language and life styles in the country

i. Promote understanding among young people on issues of difference and diversity

ii. Promote awareness of the multiple histories and traditions of Sri Lankan society

iii. Develop understanding of universal values of inclusiveness and tolerance

iv. Promote respect for spiritual and ethical values

v. Promote a culture of non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflicts both inter-personal and inter-community

vi. Create awareness about environmental challenges arising out of increasing use of non-renewable resources, climate changes, and natural disasters

3.4 Developing the potential of youth to challenge all forms of discrimination and exploitation

i. Create conditions for young people to fulfill leadership roles in society

ii. Create space for youth to articulate perceived injustices, forms of discrimination and exploitation in order to collectively challenge and respond to such issues

iii. Develop ability of young people to seek information and think critically and independently

iv. Strengthen institutions and mechanisms that safeguard social justice

3.5 Develop supportive families and communities for the protection, growth and development of youth

i. Strengthen social protection measures for families and communities

ii. Promote safe and supportive family and community environments in which young people are protected from violence, neglect, exploitation and discrimination

iii. Strengthen community level mechanisms that protect youth from abuse

3.6 Promote health and wellbeing among young people

i. Provide access to youth friendly services that promote health and wellbeing

ii. Promote awareness on the factors that promote physical and mental wellbeing

iii. Provide opportunities for recreation, leisure and healthy lifestyles

iv. Ensure access to information on health and wellbeing including reproductive and sexual health, substance abuse, communicable and non-communicable diseases prevention

v. Promote awareness and engagement in art and cultural activities

vi. Provide professional counseling services in educational and vocational training institutions at all levels by integrating the relevant services of delivered by various government and non-governmental organizations

3.7 Facilitate a coordinated response to youth development and youth work among state, non-state organizations as well as families and communities

i. Establish an institutional framework to effectively coordinate youth work

ii. Establish a framework for ensuring coherence and synergy between sectors in areas affecting youth development such as education, health, employment, etc

iii. Establish a system for consistently monitoring and evaluating outcomes for youth through the various youth development initiatives

iv. Facilitate research, education and training in youth work and youth development and to establish a body of knowledge in this area

v. Create a mechanism for youth consultation on issues facing youth and wider issues facing the country

Situation of Young People

4.1   Definition

Within the overarching concept of youth as a group in transition, the definition of youth varies greatly across societies and cultures. This is due to the fact that youth as a category can be identified using various markers and characteristics that represent experiences and situations of young people in specific socio-economic and cultural contexts. Most definitions use the widely accepted age-grading classification which defines youth based on common experiences and role expectations of a particular age group. Accordingly, the universal definition within the UN system refers to youth as those in the age group of 15-24 while various countries have adopted slight differences in the age groups taking into consideration their own unique contexts. Although this categorization fails to reflect the diversity within age groups, it is nevertheless an accepted way to identify youth and their place in the larger society.

Against this backdrop, the National Youth Policy of Sri Lanka defines youth as those within the age group of 15-29 taking into consideration the nature of the transition from dependent child to independent adult in the Sri Lankan context. The NYP recognizes the inherent complexities of youth as a social category and remains fully aware of the multiple experiences in the life-course of young people from socio-economic, urban-rural, employed-unemployed, ethno-linguistic, religious and other cultural perspectives.

4.2   Demographic Situation

It is estimated that the youth population in Sri Lanka is about 4.4 million or 23% of the total population based on 2012[1]statistics. The youth population by sex indicates that there is an almost equal distribution of 50.23% for males and 49.76% for females.

Young people defined in the NYP are beyond the compulsory schooling age of 5-14, hence they can be broadly categorized into three groups as those engaged in educational activities, employed and unemployed. Of the young people, who are engaged in education, there is a drastic decline in numbers at Collegiate level (Grades 12-13) of 39.4% from Upper secondary (grades 10-11) enrolment rate of 80.6% for all areas in Sri Lanka. The lowest enrolment rate for both levels is among the estate sector youth. Young people in higher education in Sri Lanka are even fewer in number due to the limited number of tertiary education institutes.

4.3   Education and Training

While Sri Lanka can rightly pride herself on high rates of access to formal education, there are some concerns. A study by UNICEF in 2013 has found that 3.3% of lower secondary school age children are out of school[2]. The study goes on to say that a dropout rate of lower secondary school age was 1% for 10-year olds and 5.1% for 13-year olds. This is a worrying tendency which could adversely affect the next school age cohort, the youth. Furthermore, according to the Child Activity Survey of 2008/2009, disability and illness was the second highest reason given for non-attendance in school showing that disability is a serious constraint for enrolment and continuation of education. In terms of higher education, only 14.3% of the number of students eligible for admission was selected for admission in 2007. State expenditure for university education in 2010 was only 1.8% of the GDP.

Technical and Vocational Education which is a vital sector for youth has expanded rapidly in recent years. However, public acceptance of TVET institutes remains low due to poor image, low recognition of the vocation and relatively low recognition of the qualifications. Incompletion rates in TVET institute are also high. Since its main clientele comes from more socio-economically vulnerable segments of society, it is important that fee structuring should remain accessible and affordable.

An area of serious concern in education and training is the quality and outputs of education. Enrolment per se is not a satisfactory indicator of the quality of education and training. There are significant regional disparities in educational achievements with sharp difference between the Western Province and other provinces particularly conflict-affected provinces.

Education's broader goals need attention as well. Education has an impact on health and sexual behavior, leadership, personality development and consequently on issues such as social cohesion and social justice. These are often overlooked narrowing the goals of education to employability which has consequences for teaching and learning methods.

4.4   Youth employment and unemployment

Youth unemployment remains a critical issue for policy makers, youth and their families in Sri Lanka. Unemployment rates in the age group 15-19 years was 20% in 2010 and in the 20-24 age group, 19%. Female unemployment in this age group is also higher than male unemployment.

One of the greatest grievances for youth with regard to the employment issue is that political and social influence is the biggest leverage for obtaining employment. This is particularly so in the public sector but not completely absent in the private sector either. Even in the private

sector, belonging to the 'proper' social networks, becomes a key factor in obtaining employment. For these reasons many young people are of the opinion that merit is not as important as having the right connections when it comes to obtaining employment. Instances of irregularity in relation to competitive examination results and recruitment procedures were reported during consultations have consequences beyond the employment sector eroding confidence in public institutions and governance systems.

Preparing young people for the world of work has been unfortunately narrowed down to simply teaching youth IT and English skills. This disregards all the other skills that are necessary for the world of work such as leadership, team work, critical thinking, communication skills etc. It is also important to recognize that these so called 'soft skills' cannot simply be taught in a classroom but have to be inculcated through the teaching and learning environment and culture. The current highly competitive, examination oriented and 'fast-track' mode of teaching and learning is hardly conducive to promoting such skills. Improving employability therefore should not be limited to curriculum changes, but to reviewing educational goals and teaching learning methods.

4.5   Social Exclusion and Marginalisation

An analysis of Sri Lankan society suggests that access to resources and opportunities and an individual's life chances are largely shaped by the person's position in a social network. This position is determined by factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, language, and caste. Language is a particularly relevant marker of social position with the level of comfort and fluency in the English language influencing a person's status in society.

This also suggests that ascribed rather than achieved factors (such as education and qualification) are those that determine life chances for many people. Further, accessing resources and opportunities are viewed as a privilege rather than a right. Since the feeling of privilege is accompanied by a feeling of obligation rather than a sense of responsibility, this system perpetuates relationships of dependency and patronage in society.   Using political and social connections in everyday life – for accessing even basic services – has become normalized to a great extent. These circles of patronage are activated at all levels of society. However, this means, that those who for various reasons are unable to access these connections or who are left out of the circles of patronage face exclusion and marginalization seriously affecting even their most basic rights. While young people resent this situation, there appears to be minimal efforts by them to challenge such practices. Changing these practice require understanding

4.6   Health and well-being

There are two draft policies that are relevant to young people: the National Policy and Strategy on Health of Young Persons and the National Strategic Plan on Adolescent Health (2013-2017).

Health and well-being are a significant aspect of young people and their lives. Considered the second formative stage of life after childhood, youth is a period of growth, opportunities and challenges both physically as well as mentally. It is usually during this period that young people start to show signs of physical and emotional independence and begin to develop their own sense of identity and maturity. It is also a period of exploration and experimentation with the external world especially with substance use/ abuse and sexuality, away from the watchful eyes of parents and guardians. In Sri Lanka, it is reported that about 42% of out-of-school adolescents[3] are found to be smoking and 24% of male adolescents and 10 of adolescent girls to have ever used alcohol[4].

In addition, adolescents are also found to be having sex with commercial sex workers. However, their knowledge of reproductive health including Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV is found to be poor with only about 50% of adolescents showing awareness of them. Young people find it difficult to access information with regard to sexual and reproductive health. Youth with different sexual orientations or facing personal crises often have no support.

Another important issue with regard to health of young people is the increasing prevalence of risk for non communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases as well as certain types of cancer that affect them in their adult life. These diseases are outcomes of life-style and dietary habits which encourage sedentary and unhealthy way of living which is becoming the norm in among young people in contemporary Sri Lanka.

There is a worrying trend of increasing incidence of deliberate self-harm and suicide among young people. High levels of stress due to the competitive nature of education and the deteriorating quality of relationships with family and peer groups contribute to emotional and psychological distress among young people. There is a lack of culturally appropriate and locally available psychosocial services focusing on the needs of young people.

2UNICEF out of school children study, 2013

3WHO defines adolescents as those belonging to 10-19 years of age.
4According to the National Policy and Strategy on Health of Young Persons, 2011.

Priority Target Groups

Youth are not a homogenous group and it is important to identify specific groups that require specialized services and attention. This section is meant to draw the attention of state and non-state agencies to youth groups who should be prioritized in youth development and youth work initiatives.

5.1   Unemployed youth

With regard to employment of young people, there had been a gradual decline in the unemployment rate of those in the age group of 20-29 in the last decade with from 20.1% in 2002 to 12.3% in 2011[5].

Unemployment among youth leads to a series of potentially harmful situations: youth are constrained in seeking financial and social independence, contributing to family and society and may consequently suffer from low self-esteem and self-confidence and mental stress. All these will affect their transition to adulthood.

While in Sri Lanka, the emphasis has been traditionally on unemployed graduates, it is also important to consider unemployment among other youth groups. Furthermore, the current discussion on employability focuses rather narrowly on education, particularly university education, whereas improving employability requires a range of interventions including increasing employment opportunities more evenly across sectors and regions. Equal attention should also be paid to other training mechanisms that confer qualifications that could improve employment opportunities to a wider spectrum of youth.

5.2   Youth from war affected communi
 ties

As Sri Lanka moves towards peace and reconciliation, it is important that youth who have been affected by the war are instantaneously integrated into the community as fast as possible. This includes youth who have been directly engaged in warfare, youth who have witnessed and experienced violence as well as those who have experienced exclusion and discrimination by being identified with a particular faction. Nevertheless, there are feelings of suspicion, mistrust and betrayal within and between communities.

[5]*Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey, 2011. Dept of Census and statistics. 2002 rate is excluding Northern and Eastern Provinces while 2011 rate includes all districts.*

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5.3 Excluded, discriminated and exploited youth groups

Programs intended for youth need to ensure that discriminated and exploited youth groups are not excluded. This involves being sensitive to marginalized youth groups. This includes youth of minority ethnic and religious groups, disabled youth and former militants. There are politically engaged and active youth groups who often clash with authorities sometime resulting in confrontations. Finding ways of engaging more meaningfully and constructively with this youth group is important for preventing escalation of violence among youth

5.4 Youth at different education levels

One of the primary characteristics of the youth cohort is a high degree of participation in formal education. However, it is also important to recognize that there are different exit points from the formal education system and to provide varying options for those exit points. For instance, post Ordinary Level and post Advanced Level are two critical points at which youth training and education needs must be addressed. The decreasing participation of young men in formal education is an issue that needs attention.

Attention also needs to be paid to school drop outs (those who do not complete at least the minimum formal education). The current education system also means that there is a 'gap' period between O/Ls and A/Ls as well as between A/Ls and university entrance. Youth who are in anticipation to continue their education at these two points would benefit from targeted programs.

5.5 Young women

While Sri Lanka performs reasonably well in the gender development indices there are certain serious problems affecting young women. Incidents of gender-based violence and sexual harassment are worryingly high. Numbers of teenage pregnancies and sexual abuse also suggest that young women are vulnerable to exploitation, harassment and violence. While there are high numbers of female participation in education, these figures are not reflected in female labour participation rates suggesting the prevalence of cultural and social barriers for female employment.

5.6 Rural youth

Education, employment and leisure activities are still heavily concentrated in urban areas. This growing regional disparity has several consequences: youth are pushed out of their communities to seek their fortunes elsewhere leading to other social problems. At the same time, rural communities are deprived of their most vi-brant and energetic resources.

5.7 Urban low income youth

An often neglected group, urban low-income youth face many challenges. Usually stigmatized as prone to criminal behavior, they are a target of the law-enforcement authorities and excluded by many service providers. The specific challenges and concerns of this youth group needs to be identified and addressed.

5.8 Youth in conflict with the law

While media reports of youth in conflict with the law are on the increase, there is urgent need to ensure that the judiciary responds appropriately to young people. The existing Children and Young Persons Ordinance does not cover those over 16 years of age. Ministry of Justice is taking steps to rectify this issue Experience of young persons with the law can have significant consequences for their future. Disruption to education and training, exposure to mature and repeat offenders and social stigma during their formative years may result in social and psychological impacts. It is important to minimize these consequences and explore alternative ways of dealing with youth in shelters due to abuse, remand homes, prisoners and sex workers who are in conflict with the law.

5.9 Estate Sector Youth

Estate sector youth are governed by very specific economic systems which inhibits their development in very unique ways. All policies need to pay attention to these unique conditions and develop specific ways of addressing the concerns of this group.

5.10 Differently-abled youth

Differently-abled youth have special needs which should be prioritized in order to ensure their equal access, opportunities and participation. Allocating sufficient resources for this group of youth is also essential.

Chapter 6
Key Strategy Areas, Policy Intervention

This chapter identifies areas and recommendations for policy intervention. Since issues that affect youth are multi-sectoral, certain identified policy interventions are addressed to specific sectors.

6.1 Education

Sri Lanka has made great strides in education as a result of free education policies covering primary, secondary and tertiary education. Sri Lanka has impressive human development indicators and this is primarily the result of its progressive free education policy which has existed for several decades. It is important that these foundations are built upon and strengthened since a large number of young people are engaged in educational activities. Issues in the education sector have a direct bearing on their sense of wellbeing and growth.

Critical issues in the education sector are as follows:

i. Growing disparity in terms of resources and quality among educational and training institutions at all levels

ii. Access to education is constrained due to increasing costs of education

iii. Growing industry of unregulated, private educational institutes

iv. Inability to meet the growing demand for tertiary and higher education

v. Poor standards in carrier guidance

vi. Relevance and quality of curricula including highly competitive and stressful nature of current curricula

vii. Politicization and militarization of education management and administration

viii. Lack of professionalism and declining status of the teaching profession

ix. Knowledge and skills of teachers not being updating in a rapidly changing educational environment

x. Loss of faith by the public in state education due to growing perceptions that the state education system is plagued by inefficiency, poor quality and frequent disruptions

xi. Trust in the exam system being eroded due to various reasons

Policy Interventions

i. The New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka formulated in 2009 needs to be implemented

ii. Extend age of compulsory education to 16 years

iii. Increase allocation of resources for education to meet global standards agreed to by the Government of Sri Lanka[6]

iv. Standardize recruitment and strengthen professionalism of education management and administration

v. Improve facilities in disadvantaged educational institutions to reduce disparities

vi. Strengthen and provide adequate resources of improving competencies in the English language and other national languages

vii. Implement recommendations for inclusive education as outlined in the National Policy for Disability in Sri Lanka, 2003

viii. Strengthen alternative educational mediums such as distance education to increase opportunities for higher education

ix. Using new technology for educational communication

x. Increase participation of youth in decision making in educational institutions through strengthening of student associations while ensuring that external interference and influence is minimized

xi. Promoting a culture of critical thinking and civic engagement within educational institutions

xii. Establish career guidance and academic counseling by adequately trained professionals in schools/universities with inputs and links to potential employers. This includes assessing a young person's interests, strengths and capacities and guiding education and training choices regarding career options

xiii. Strengthening of non formal educational activities in communities for out of school youth especially school drop outs and providing alternative training options of quality and support for continuing education

xiv. Ensure adequate soft skills programmes at all levels of educational and training programmes

xv. Promote nonprofit private sector participation in education and training

6.2   Skills Development and Vocational Training

Skills development and vocational training should ideally respond to the large mass of youth who opt for a range of non-traditional employment opportunities. There are many employment opportunities in newly emerging economic areas where high quality skills development and training is essential. While the TVET sector has rapidly expanded recently in Sri Lanka, there are several issues which require attention:

i. Lack of recognition and social status for skilled labour work

ii. Existing vocational training in the regions are not geared towards employment in the formal sector

iii. Gaps in implementing the National Competency Standards

iv. Lack of minimal labour standards such as minimum wage, occupational and health standards in skilled labour work

v. Lack of coordination among vocational training institutes and lack of standards

vi. Low salaries for technical and vocational instructors

Policy Interventions

i. Promote awareness on skilled labour and non-traditional occupations

ii. Introduce subsidized fee structures for TVET courses

iii. Ensure that vocational training institutes are accredited and conduct competency based training

iv. Establish acceptable labour standard for skilled labour work

v. Recruiting qualified vocational instructors through introducing an attractive salary scheme

6.3   Youth Employment

While youth unemployment has shown some slight declines during the last decade, the issue of youth employment remains as a key concern. This issue has been receiving substantial attention, yet, many policy initiatives have not been followed through adequately. The discussion on youth employment also needs to look beyond the simplistic idea of a 'gap' between education and the labour market and seriously consider both the issues in the education sector as well as constraints in the labour market. Youth, especially those with lower educational achievements and from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds are also usually employed in the informal sectors where there is little protection, career advancement and training opportunities. Critical concerns for youth employment include:

i. Underemployment among educated youth

ii. High levels of unemployment among women and rural youth

iii. Lack of transparency in recruitment procedures

iv. Societal attitudes limiting career options for young people

v. Regional disparities in employment opportunities

vi. Lack of protection in informal economic sector where there is a high degree of youth participation

Policy interventions

i. Revisit and implement the National Action Plan for Youth Employment formulated in 2007 with necessary amendments

ii. Diversify employment opportunities across public, private as well as non-governmental, humanitarian and development sectors, and strengthen initiatives such as Jobs-net and create awareness among youth about diverse and innovative job opportunities.

iii. Integrate youth needs in national level initiatives such as poverty alleviation, human resource development and economic development

iv. Establish labour standards and protection for youth in informal sector job security

v. Establish a merit-based and rational system of employment to the public sector

vi. Establish a complaint mechanism for those who have been discriminated by recruitment procedures as well as strengthening the independence of Public Services Commission for checks and balances.

vii. Establish a job market information and job forecasting network under the state monitoring system

viii. Promote self-employment and entrepreneurship through facilitating links with regional Chambers of Commerce so that young people have access to mentoring and other forms of support

ix. Introduce new courses based on foreign job markets

x. Initiate discussions with the private sector regarding constraints faced by young people in entering the private sector: these include cultural constraints as well as the concentration of private sector job opportunities in certain urban locations, particularly the Western Province

xi. Enhance career guidance services for selecting training and jobs

xii. Establish a minimum wage for all sectors

xiii. Promote financial support, information and technology for small scale entrepreneurs and self employed persons.

6.4   Civics and citizenship

The participation of youth in civil society is declining or linked closely to various political parties. While youth must be free to learn and subscribe to various political ideologies, they must also have the opportunity to engage in civil society initiatives independently of party politics. Most often young people are manipulated by political parties both in and out of power. State resources are sometimes used for mobilizing young people with political agendas.   It is unfortunate that most youth movements in Sri Lanka are linked to political parties and political figures and that there are very few independent initiatives by young people.

The lack of civil society participation among young people is reflected in their apathy and disinterest in matters of social importance. Youth are becoming increasingly disillusioned and cynical about politics, civic engagement and the possibility of peaceful social transformation. They are focused more on individualistic goals and the pursuit of personal ambitions. Critical issues to be addressed include:

i. Declining participation of youth in civil society initiatives

ii. Political manipulation of youth movements

iii. Shrinking opportunities for civic and social engagement

iv. Declining trust and confidence in civic and political institutions among young people

v. Lack of mentoring process in terms of leadership building

vi. Lack of a civic education across educational and training institutions

Policy Interventions

i. Establish community service for youth and promote volunteerism

ii. Establish a reward system for recognizing outstanding community service among youth at national level

iii. Promote and encourage independent, youth focused civil society initiatives.

iv. Review Juvenile Justice systems and propose amendments to include supervised community service in lieu of institutionalization

v. Take steps to ensure the freedom of movement and association of youth groups.

vi. Establish youth mentoring and youth leadership pro-

grams focusing on civil and political rights, responsibilities and obligations

vii. Enhance the wider representation of young people in the Youth Parliament and make use of their suggestions at regional and national levels

6.5 Professionalization of the youth work sector

The present youth work is characterized as a top down approach that hardly reflects the developmental needs of young people. This has hampered the evolution of a participatory and development approach to youth work. Youth work could also be characterized as a form of event management where main youth work programs are implemented in a uniform manner throughout the country according to an annual calendar. This limits the ability of the youth officers to act innovatively at the grassroots level. In general, youth work in Sri Lanka is perceived as a variant of social or charity work, not necessarily as a distinctive professional category. The youth officers are often called to play conflicting roles where they might be seen as involved in political mobilization at the grassroots levels. This explains the underlying challenge faced by the youth officers in delivering professional youth services. Recruitment to youth service is based on minimal academic qualifications such. There are also lack of opportunities for professional education and training for the youth workers.

Critical issues:

i. Youth work is still to be recognized as a distinctive professional category

ii. outh services continue to adopt a top down approach

iii. Lack of focus on empowerment related issues within the current youth service.

iv. Lack of opportunities for continuous professional education of youth workers

v. Injustice caused by class, caste, religion, ethnicity etc

Policy interventions

i. Recognize and promote youth work as a distinctive professional category

ii. Establish a professional association for youth workers independently managed by professionals

iii. Promote youth work education and training, and make youth work education as a requirement to be recruited as a youth worker

iv. Steps should be taken to develop occupational standards relating to youth work and introduce licensing system for youth workers based on their professional qualification status

v. Promoting high standards of professionalism, integrity, accountability and transparency by all involved in youth work

6.6 Health and Wellbeing

Sri Lanka's free health policy has meant that it has made great strides in improving the health of its citizens. Compared to countries at a similar developmental level, Sri Lanka's health indicators are impressive. Within this context and in the increasing prevalence of risk factors for non-communicable diseases in Sri Lanka, understanding the social determinants of health and adopting a multi-sectoral approach to health and wellbeing is extremely important. It is also important to ensure that young people have the capacity and knowledge to make responsible choices and that there is a supportive environment for them to exercise these choices. The key health issues facing youth in Sri Lanka include:

i. Increasing prevalence of risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cardio-vascular diseases

ii. Lack of information and access to youth friendly services on sexual and reproductive health

iii. Increased risk of mental health issues thereby increasing the risk of self-harm and suicide among young people

iv. Increase in substance use among young people

v. Lack of awareness about existing services and inadequate professional counseling services for young people

Policy Interventions

i. Adopt and implement National Policy and Strategy on Health of Young Persons (2011) and the National Strategic Plan on Adolescent Health (2013 - 2017)

ii. Improve quality and access to youth-friendly health programs and services

iii. Review and improve school health programs and expand and strengthen physical, mental including sexual & reproductive health education at school level and continue these services as appropriate to higher education sector including universities and technical and vocational training institutes

iv. Establish psychosocial services including counseling services at community level

v. Build capacity of health professionals to respond to youth health issues

vi. Provide protection and support services for young people who have experienced sexual violence, domestic abuse and mental illness

vii. Develop awareness among youth on lifestyle associated diseases and promote physical activity, healthy lifestyles and healthy dietary habits

viii. Enhance life skills specially on decision making and critical thinking to avoid risk behaviors

6.7 Social Exclusion and discrimination

Young people believe that there is a high level of social exclusion and discrimination in Sri Lanka[7]. Such perceptions are not merely a problem of 'wrong attitudes' among young people, but based on their experience of everyday life such as obtaining a service from local authorities to the more serious instances of accessing education and employment. Exclusion and discrimination is not based simply on age but in a combination of other factors such as gender, ethnicity, political affiliation etc which seriously impacts on young people from less influential socio-economic backgrounds. These are not issues that can be addressed simply but require critical reflection on some of the most fundamental social and cultural practices in Sri Lankan society. These include:

i. Socially conformist practices that limits young peoples' cultural choices.

ii. Increased reliance on patronage in almost all forms of social engagement

iii. Deterioration of the independence of public institutions

iv. Declining trust of young people in key public institutions such as law enforcement, state bureaucracy and the judiciary

v. Injustice caused by class, caste, religion, ethnicity and etc for youth

Policy Interventions

i. Review primary and secondary education curricula for social discriminatory messages and revise accordingly

ii. Develop equal opportunity policies in key sectors, especially with regard to job recruitment and establish systems for review and implementation

iii. Strengthen transparency, accountability and access to information in the public sector

iv. Establish a Youth Ombudsmen to respond to instances of discrimination and exclusion

v. Create spaces for youth to participate meaningfully at family, community and national level

vi. Identify and increase opportunities to fulfill the aspirations of disabled and differently abled youth

vii. Review and update the existing policies for differently abled people and facilitate the need of differently abled youth

6.8 Peace and Reconciliation

As Sri Lanka moves into the post-war era, it is important to focus on social cohesion, develop a sense of belongingness and connections. Youth must imbibe a system of shared values based on the concepts of respect and dignity for self and others. It is important that youth learn about the past, acknowledge our failures and seek ways to move forward. Young people should be guided towards healing and reconciliation while respecting others.

Key issues that require attention include:

i. Minority youth not having a voice in the national reconciliation process

ii. Youth in war-affected communities lagging behind in development due to disruptions during the last several decades

iii. Problems with demobilization and reintegration of youth involved in conflict including youth in the military

iv. Lack of opportunities for interaction among youth of different communities due to language, religion and sex segregation in educational institutions and other constraints

v. Lack of commitment to social cohesion in society

vi. Young people's mobility and other activities constrained due to delays in normalizing civilian administration in war affected communities

Policy Interventions

i. Peace education and social cohesion to be included in educational curriculum

ii. Special youth development initiatives to be implemented and resources allocated for war-affected areas so that they are on par with other regions.

iii. Extend opportunities for youth engagement and interaction between different communities

iv. Explore and enhance opportunities for youth to interact and communicate with each other through art, sports and culture.

v. Ensure National Language policy is implemented in public and private sectors, especially in law enforcement agencies.

vi. Promote educational institutions which are not segregated on gender, ethnicity, language and religion

6.9   Arts, recreation, sports and leisure

There are wide disparities with regard to opportunities and resources in arts and sports and recreational and leisure opportunities for youth. At the same time, a highly competitive education system has resulted in many young people not having the time for such activities. At another level, such activities have also become highly competitive with the pleasure of participation lost. School administrators and teachers often complain about the high levels of interference by parents in the extra-curricular activities. These factors affect the personality and character development of young people. Qualities such as sharing, building trust, confidence, self-esteem, generosity, creativity are developed through such activities. Cultural and social constraints result in youth-led activities to be frowned upon or requiring close adult supervision which is sometimes not welcomed. Critical issues to be addressed:

i.   Over emphasis on examinations and academic excellence in educational institutes ignore the importance of leisure activities

ii.   Undue emphasis in achievement and success in sports and leisure activities

iii. Lack of opportunities for youth to initiate and organize leisure and sports activities

iv. Significant regional and socio-economic disparities in the availability of opportunities and resources for arts, sports and leisure activities

v.   Lack of institutional support for youth to pursue careers in arts and sports

Policy Interventions

i.   Strengthen state support and reward system for participation in sports at national and international level and implement the National Sports Policy

ii.   Encourage private sector participation in the promotion of arts and sports sectors for young people

iii. Review global best practices in youth recreational programs and adapt for national context

iv. Strengthen and promote extra-curricular activities in educational institutions

v.   Identify and promote regional and local recreational opportunities such as outdoor activities, sports and opportunities for enhancing creativity

vi. Establish institutions to promote diverse arts and cultural activities.

vii. Reward for the excellence in Arts and Sports when providing educational and employment opportunities

Institutional Framework, Monitoring and Review System

In order for policy to be successfully implemented it is important to have in place a proper institutional framework. At the same time, it is vital that mechanisms are in place to review the policy and its impact in order to make appropriate changes and adjustments. A coordinated and youth focused approach in national policy is essential for the recommendations of this policy initiative to be fruitful.

This chapter outlines the proposed institutional mechanism for implementing, monitoring and reviewing the NYP.

7.1 Institutional Framework

The multi-sectoral focus of the NYP means that coordination among different organs of the state is an essential factor for the success of the NYP. The main focus of coordination should be to ensure that:

- All national policies and plans integrate youth development principles in the planning process

- National policies and plans affecting youth are aligned with the principles, values, objectives and recommendations of the NYP

In order to facilitate this approach, it is proposed that a Presidential Youth Development Commission be established under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development

7.2 Presidential Youth Development Commission

Establish a Youth Development Secretariat based at the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development to coordinate and facilitate the work of the Presidential Youth Development Commission.

Chair: Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development

Secretary: Director General, National Youth Services Council

Members:

1. Secretary Ministry of Education
2. Secretary Ministry of Higher Education
3. Secretary Ministry of Health
4. Secretary, Ministry of Local Government
5. Secretary, Ministry of Justice
6. Secretary, Ministry of Sports
7. Secretary, Ministry of Social Services
8. Secretary, Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms
9. Chairperson / Director General, Commission on Vocational Training
10. Representative from Treasury
11. Youth representatives (3) from national level youth organisations (in order to ensure that different youth can be represented, the 3 youth organisations can be rotated annually from among the various youth organisations that are in operation)
12. Three representatives from non-state youth sector (this position can also be annually rotated among various non-state youth organisations in order to ensure wider participation)
13. Representative from the media
14. Member from the Professional Youth Work Association
15. Chairman, Youth Corps
16. Chairman- Information Communication and Technology Agency

Responsibilities of the Commission:

- To monitor implementation of NYP
- To ensure independent evaluation of the impact of NYP at regular intervals and renew accordingly
- To review state policy in alignment with NYP and to advocate the objectives of NYP with relevant state organs
- Promote Research and Development (R&D) in the youth sector

7.3 Youth Ombudsman

In response to the specific political and social history and context of Sri Lanka in relation to youth, it is proposed that an independent Youth Ombudsman be appointed. This will serve as an independent body to advocate on behalf of youth issues.

The primary responsibility of the Youth Ombudsman will be to deal with complaints regarding the delivery of services to youth and instances of discrimination faced by youth. The Youth Ombudsman's office will also provide information on the services available to youth as well as their rights and obligations. Regional level youth ombudsman offices should be established to facilitate its work.

7.4   Implementation of NYP

The main institution responsible for the implementation of the NYP will be the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development through the National Youth Development Secretariat.

To ensure continued relevance due to the changing nature of the socio-economic, political and demographic profile of the country the NYP should be reviewed every five years.