



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women**

**Eighty-ninth session**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under  
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms  
of Discrimination against Women**

**Replies of Sri Lanka to the list of issues and questions in  
relation to its ninth periodic report\***

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\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



## **Issue 1 – Visibility of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto**

1. A Coordination Committee including inter-Ministerial officials was set up by the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (MWCASE) in 2017 to discuss the general recommendations of the CEDAW and to follow up on Concluding Observations received under the 08th Periodic Report, in consultation with civil society and non-governmental organization representatives.
2. Training programmes on the provisions of CEDAW were conducted by the National Committee on Women and MWCASE for the members of the judiciary, military personnel, police officers, prison officers, and other government officials.
3. For in-service judges, the Judges Training Institute (JTI) conducts residential workshops with the assistance of the International Commission of Jurists on CEDAW and gender equality. The new recruits to the judiciary undergo a training module on the areas of domestic violence law, women's rights and gender-based violence. JTI is presently engaging in developing a separate module for the new batch of magistrates recruited, on CEDAW in line with the Bangkok General Guidance for Judges on Applying a Gender Perspective in South-East Asia.
4. The National Police Academy conducts a certificate course on Sexual and Gender based violence (SGBV). This course comprises a module on 'International mechanism relating to Women's rights' which focuses on, inter alia State obligations in terms of CEDAW. Rights and obligations in terms of CEDAW is a component of the basic training programme for all new recruits of Sri Lanka Police. The basic course and higher diploma courses conducted by the Sri Lanka Army for the tri-forces contain a module on women's rights which disseminates the information on CEDAW as an integral part of the same.
5. Awareness programmes on human rights, fundamental rights and women's rights were conducted by the Police officers attached to the Children and Women Desks of Police stations in consultation with the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women, to police officers, officers of Tri-Forces, government officers, and general public, including women, children and other vulnerable groups.
6. The Institute of Peace Support Operations Training Sri Lanka provides pre-departure training including components of women's rights for the Sri Lankan peacekeepers to United Nations Missions since 2021.
7. All above steps have been taken with a view to disseminating information pertaining to the Committee's previous concluding observations.

## **Issue 2 – Women's rights and gender equality in relation of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, recovery efforts and global crises**

8. To mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the poor and the vulnerable persons including women, with prompt increase in the coverage of special social protection nets, the Government implemented several mitigation measures through the social welfare programmes including cash transfer programmes such as Samurdhi and financial assistance to the elderly, disabled persons and persons with chronic kidney disease. These cash transfer programmes were scheduled up during COVID-19 pandemic period for mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

9. In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 was established under the direct supervision of the Presidential Secretariat. The Task Force was mandated to direct, coordinate and monitor delivery of continuous services and for the sustenance of the overall community life. Separate quarantine centres for women were also created during the pandemic.
10. Instructions were given by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka to licensed banks to defer recovery of capital, interest or both of the borrowers who are affected by COVID-19 with a priority to accommodate requests for concessions made by borrowers in the micro, small and medium enterprises sector.
11. With a view to minimize the possibility of contraction of the virus while using public transport, Circulars were issued by the Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Government to ensure uninterrupted public service while safeguarding pregnant and lactating officers with the option to work from home. “When calling officers for duty to government institutions in the above manner, steps should be taken not to call pregnant officers, breastfeeding mothers and officers with particular illnesses.”
12. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) with the financial assistance of international donor agencies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency, provided women entrepreneurs support to develop businesses with the provision of equipment and technical assistance with a view to uplift the livelihood of such women who suffered a loss of income during the COVID-19 pandemic.
13. In addition to the regular social protection measures, the GoSL made several supplementary monetary assistances to the low-income families, including Female-Headed Households who lost their livelihood due to lockdowns. Further, the government spent around Rs. Bn.72 during COVID-19 pandemic for cash grant in addition to the regular cash transfer and 5.9 million people were benefited.
14. With the increase of domestic violence cases during the pandemic, the National Committee on Women extended the operation of the toll-free women helpline ‘1938’ to operate 24/7, to facilitate complaints of victims of SGBV. The follow-up process included counselling, psycho-social support, legal advice through the police and Legal aid Commission, livelihood training and provision of necessary equipment for self-employment initiatives.
15. The GoSL further provided temporary safe home facilities and assistance for victims of SGBV by way of setting up of special quarantine centres by MWCASE in coordination with UN agencies. In addition to the above, complaints received on the hotline ‘011-244 4444’ operated by the Police Women and Children Bureau were promptly responded to.
16. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare sector played a major role and the majority of the healthcare force was women. Women front liners played an active and indispensable role in many spheres and contributed to the containment of the pandemic. Women workforce in all sectors also adapted to the new conditions and reported to duties as was required or adeptly adapted to remote working conditions and ensured an almost uninterrupted provision of services.
17. Special livelihood support programmes were arranged with the assistance of the Government of Japan and the Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation for the returning migrant workers, the majority of whom were women, to develop livelihood skills and business enterprises to minimize the impact of loss of employment due to COVID-19.

18. The GoSL took measures such as interest free concessionary revolving credit schemes, skills development projects and provision of market opportunities to mitigate the effects of economic crisis and implemented different programmes to empower Female-Headed Households, widows and unemployed women, In addition, the nutrition allowance for pregnant mothers was increased from LKR 20,000 to 45,000 during the economic crisis, and identified pre-school teachers are provided with a monthly allowance of LKR 2500.

### **Issue 3 – Legal status of the Convention**

19. The fulfilment of Sri Lanka’s obligations under international treaties has been recognized through legal, constitutional and judicial processes prevailing in Sri Lanka while retaining its characteristics as a dualist country. Sri Lanka’s Constitution prohibits discrimination of an individual based on the grounds of sex. Article 12 (1) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees to all persons equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 12(2) guarantees the fundamental right to non-discrimination on the grounds of “race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.” The Government of Sri Lanka remains committed to ensuring that this right is protected and has taken action to address reported incidents of violations.

### **Issue 4 – Legal framework for prohibition of discrimination against women**

20. With regard to the drafting of a new Constitution, it is recalled that the then Cabinet of Ministers decided on 02.09.2020 to appoint an Expert Committee which comprised female representation under the chairmanship of President’s Counsel Romesh de Silva to draft a new constitution. The preliminary report after obtaining public views including observations from women groups such as Women and Media Collective was submitted to the former President on 25.04.2022.

21. The present Constitutional Council of Sri Lanka consists of 06 members which comprise female representation.

22. The Women Parliamentarians’ Caucus was established consisting of women parliamentarians as a common platform to carry forward the agenda on gender issues and to work together for the empowerment of women in political, economic and social spheres and for elimination of all sorts of violence and harassment against women in Sri Lanka. The Caucus has also created a network of partnership with the women Provincial Councillors and Members of the Local Government Bodies, Government Ministries, Departments and Institutions, United Nations Agencies, Local & International Civil Society Organizations and individual professionals.

23. A Select Committee of Parliament was established to oversee and report its recommendations to ensure gender equity with special emphasis on gender-based discriminations and violations on women and to assist MWCASE.

#### **Issue 4 (a)**

24. As per the instructions of the Attorney General, a concept paper to establish an Independent Commission on Women has been drafted by a female consultant and was submitted to the Legal Draftsman Department in May 2023.

**Issue 4 (b)**

25. It is notable that Sri Lanka's legal system is a unique blend of customary and personal laws enriched by history, culture and sacred beliefs of the people who are subject to such laws. This includes laws provided for the self-management of Islamic religious institutions, marriage, divorce and succession laws particular to Sri Lankan Muslims. In this manner, the Muslims of Sri Lanka are governed by their customary personal laws in keeping with their religion and culture.

26. In this context with regards to the amendment of the Muslim Marriages and Divorce Act (MMDA), a ten-member Muslim Law Reforms Advisory Committee appointed by the Minister of Justice in December 2020 has handed over their Report to the Hon. Minister in June 2021, and the same has been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers. The Advisory Committee has been requested to make further observations.

27. Given the sensitivity of the matter, it is important that any revisions to the law are achieved in close consultation with the community concerned. The objective of introducing amendments is to bring the personal laws into conformity with prevailing international and domestic standards. Personal laws will remain in operation as an integral part of the country's legal system.

**Issue 4 (c)**

28. The Cabinet of Ministers approved the proposal presented by the President in his capacity as the Minister of Women, Child affairs and Social Empowerment to implement the "National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" in February 2023 under 08 thematic areas; Identity and Autonomy, Economic Empowerment and Productive Employment, Social Equality and Empowerment, Equality in Decision-making, Disaster Management, Access to Justice, Peace and Security, Freedom from Gender-based Violence, Children – with special focus on girl child. The Policy was launched on 8th March 2023, and a Strategic Action Plan is being formulated in line with the said policy.

**Issue 5 – Discriminatory laws****Issue 5 (a)**

29. In order to further non-discrimination and equality between men and women, the Land Development Ordinance was amended by Amendment Act, No. 11 of 2022 certified on 19th March 2022. Accordingly, the amendment ensures that both male and female children will have equal rights in respect of succession, irrespective of gender.

30. The Cabinet of Ministers has granted approval to amend the Kandyan law Declaration and Amendment Ordinance to provide that a kandyan widow should have the same rights of inheritance which apply to widows under the general law.

**Issue 5 (b)**

31. Approval of the Cabinet of Ministers was obtained to amend the Civil Procedure Code No 2 of 1889 to allow Muslims to marry under the Marriage Registration Ordinance No 19 of 1907.

**Issue 5 (c)**

32. Kandyan Marriage & Divorce (Amendment) Act, No. 37 of 2022 repealed the Part II of the principal enactment containing provisions that a parent can consent for the marriage of a minor. The lawful age of marriage has been raised to 18 years and an absolute prohibition to the marriage of a minor was introduced.

33. Further amendments on equalizing the provisions referring to the rights of the widows and widowers, and illegitimate children within the Kandyan Marriage & Divorce Ordinance to general law is presently being drafted by the Legal Draftsman's Department.

**Issue 5 (d)**

34. Reports submitted by the Criminal Law and Civil Law Sub-Committees on Domestic Violence are referred to the MWCASE. The reports of the Family Law Committee and the Muslim Law Committee under the Civil Law Sub-Committee are yet to submit their final recommendations.

**Issue 6 - Access to Justice****Issue 6 (a)**

35. Periodic Awareness Programmes under the topics of Human Rights, Fundamental Rights, and Women's Rights were organized and conducted by the Police Officers attached to the Children and Women Desks of Police Stations with the involvement of the Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women to Police Officers, Officers of Tri-Forces, Government Officers, and the general public including women and children during the reporting period to enhance knowledge of gender equality. Apart from that, the provisions of CEDAW are being taught to the Police Officers who are undergoing their Basic Training and Intermediate Career Development Training by the Sri Lanka Police Academy and the Sri Lanka Police College.

36. Awareness programme was held for judicial officers on CEDAW and women's rights in 2018. All Police Officers attached to the Children and Women Desks of Sri Lanka Police are informed and trained to identify, record and investigate gender-based violence effectively with attention to the factors contributing to under-reporting of gender-based violence including the sociocultural values condoning it, the fear of reprisals, and obstacles to effective access to justice.

37. All Police Officers attached to the Children and Women Desks of Sri Lanka Police are informed and trained to identify, record and investigate statutory rape with the complete knowledge of Section 363 (e) amended by the Amendment Acts No. 22 of 1995 and No. 29 of 1998 of the Penal Code of Sri Lanka.

**Issue 6 (b)**

38. All Orders, Proclamations, Rules, By-laws, Regulations and Notifications made or issued under any written law by any Provincial Council or Local Authority and the Gazette shall be published in Sinhala and Tamil together with a translation thereof in English. Article 24 of the Constitution specifies the languages of the Courts. Accordingly, Sinhala & Tamil shall be the languages of the Courts throughout Sri Lanka. As such, the judicial language varies in terms of the language used by the

parties, either Sinhala or Tamil in lower courts, and English in higher courts. If there are language barriers the service of an interpreter is used. Almost all lawyers are conversant in either Sinhala or Tamil and in English.

39. Officers with Tamil language proficiency have been assigned to the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Additionally, from 2009 to the present, nearly 2317 Tamil-speaking Police personnel have been recruited as new officers by the Sri Lanka Police, with the majority of them assigned to the Northern and Eastern police stations to facilitate Tamil-speakers' access to justice and to address the issue of linguistic prejudice in the community. Furthermore, Tamil Training Centres of the Sri Lanka Police conduct Tamil language training courses and improve the working ability of police personnel in Tamil in all police stations throughout Sri Lanka. As of February 2023, a total number of 4155 Tamil speaking police officers serve in Sri Lanka Police.

40. The Attorney General Department deploys prosecutors in the High Courts of the Northern and Eastern provinces with language competency to prosecute in the language of the particular courts.

41. "Kantha Prabodaya", Radio Discussion Programme was conducted during the reporting period to discuss challenges faced by women. Nearly 30 programmes were conducted in both Sinhala and Tamil languages. It is organized as an interactive discussion to educate women listeners through a process of questions and answers on specific issues raised by concerned women. Matters discussed included cyber violence and the related laws, global challenges faced by women, laws relevant to women and girls, and pre-marriage counselling. Further, "Mehewara" and "Neethiyata Idak" programmes on television were broadcasted to discuss legal aspects relevant to women.

### **Issue 6 (c)**

42. A time schedule is developed to conduct a series of paralegal /awareness training programmes virtually due to the economic crisis of the country.

## **Issue 7 – Women, peace and security: transitional justice mechanisms**

### **Issue 7 (a)**

43. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAPWPS) was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in February 2023. The NAPWPS was recently launched in line with the recommendation of the Consultation Task Force. The implementation mechanism of the NAPWPS has been operationalized with the establishment of the Steering Committee comprising Government as well as Civil Society representatives.

### **Issue 7 (b)**

44. The National Reparations Policy and Guidelines formulated by the Office of Reparation (OR) was approved by the Cabinet in August 2021 and tabled in Parliament in February 2022 as required by the Office of Reparation Act. Accordingly, relief and assistance provided through the OR extends to eight key interventions namely provision of livelihood support, restitution of land rights, provision of housing, development of community infrastructure, administrative relief,

psychosocial support and measures to advance unity, reconciliation and non-recurrence of violence.

### **Issue 7 (c)**

45. The NAPWPS was drafted in consultation with stakeholders from all 9 provinces in Sri Lanka, including women leaders and women with direct experiences of conflicts and crises.

46. The National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council's Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2023–2027 was approved by the cabinet and launched.

### **Issue 7 (d)**

47. The National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses as the statutory body which protects, promotes, and enforces the rights of victims of crime and witnesses.

48. Section 31 of the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act no: 4 of 2015 in relation to the Testimony through Audio-Visual Linkage was amended by the Act No. 27 of 2017. With the said amendment it was facilitated to record evidence from a remote location “within or outside Sri Lanka”. Therefore, as at present the said provision is well in place and the National Authority has facilitated many witnesses in Sri Lanka as well as in other foreign countries.

## **Issue 8 – National machinery for the advancement of women**

### **Issue 8 (a)**

49. The draft National Plan on Women Headed Households was presented to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval and the decision was given to make necessary amendments as per the observations made by the Minister of Finance.

50. The Sri Lanka Women Bureau will take action to implement the Action plans with the participation and cooperation of all women groups including women federations and societies and other Community Based Organizations (CBOs), with the special attention for creating and building grassroots and regional level networking. District-wise Action committees are proposed to be set-up to monitor the implementation of the Action plan under the supervision of District Secretaries which will be facilitated by District Women Development Officers (WDO).

### **Issue 8 (b)**

51. Following the official launch of the National Human Rights Action Plan for 2017–2021 in November 2017, in Sinhala, Tamil, and English languages, an inter-ministerial structure was formulated to monitor the implementation of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Each of the 10 key clusters was headed by a lead agency in collaboration with other relevant agencies that have provided necessary financial resources from their respective budgets to achieve the KPIs falling within their purview.



52. Following the adoption of the National Policy on SGBV in 2016, the National Action Plan (2016-2021) was adopted with a three-pronged approach: prevent SGBV, intervene in situations of SGBV, and advocate for policies and laws to combat and address SGBV. Review on the implementation of the National Action Plan which was conducted in 2021 shows that more than 60 per cent of the Plan has been implemented by the line Ministries. UN agencies and other multi-sectoral service providers have supported the Child and Women Development Units of MWCASE in the implementation of the National Action Plan.

### **Issue 8 (c)**

53. As per the instructions of the Attorney General, the initial draft of the National Commission on Women had to be amended to ensure compliance with the Constitution and other laws. Accordingly, a fresh concept paper to establish an Independent Commission on Women has been drafted and was submitted to the Legal Draftsman's Department for consideration. The draft of the Bill was shared by the Legal Draftsman's for observations of the Ministry.

### **Issue 9 – Temporary Special Measures**

54. The GoSL has taken a policy decision to invest a minimum of 25 per cent of the government investments in projects for the rural economic empowerment of women. The MWCASE through the Treasury and the Department of National Planning has drafted national policies by directing women towards these projects, through the child and women development units set up at District and Divisional levels. Supervision and follow up, workshops on importance of gender budgeting and developing KPIs were conducted.

55. A circular was issued in November 2022 by MWCASE in consultation with the Department of National Budgeting to incorporate gender responsive budgeting when preparing budgets for 2023. The Gender Responsive Budgeting guidelines were drafted by the Finance Commission to be used in preparing the annual Action plans of Provincial Councils.

56. Livelihood and entrepreneurship development, market support, counselling and legal literacy programmes are conducted by the Sri Lanka Women's Bureau (SLWB) for the empowerment of rural women. Special measures have been taken to uplift the lives of women in the estate sector through implementing family cash management programmes, economic empowerment programmes and SGBV addressing programmes. A programme for women in the fisheries sector has been developed and implemented. Further, temporary shelters for women victims of violence are maintained by the public private partnership by the SLWB to provide for the protection and well-being of victim survivors. Self-employment projects for war affected women are conducted by The National centre for empowering Female Headed Households in Kilinochchi.

57. Further, MWCASE has taken actions to plan and implement programmes, projects and activities to benefit targeted women groups. Training and development programmes have been conducted to improve Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills and other employment focused skills of women with the support of the Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA). The "Suhuruliya" programme was launched in 2016 in collaboration with ICTA and various stakeholders aiming the empowerment of women through ICT, which benefited over 10000 women and girls covering all 25 districts.

## **Issue 10 – Stereotypes and harmful practices**

### **Issue 10 (a)**

58. Marital rape is recognized as an offence in situations where the parties are judicially separated.

### **Issue 10 (b)**

59. The draft amendments to the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act are under consideration with a view to ensuring immediate issuance of interim protection orders to ensure the protection of the victim.

### **Issue 10 (c)**

60. A special Unit under the Attorney General Department has been established in order to expedite the consideration of prosecution of sexual violence matters related to children. However, the matters of sexual violence against women handled by the officers shall pass through the multi-tiered system of supervision at the Department. Accordingly, every endeavour is made to expeditiously dispose all matters of sexual violence against women and to enforce their rights.

61. The law on acts of violence against women is governed by the Penal Code. According to Section 364 of the Penal Code, whoever commits the offence of rape shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than seven years and not exceeding twenty years with a fine, and shall in addition be ordered to pay compensation of an amount decided by court, to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed. Whoever commits rape on a woman under eighteen years of age shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than ten years and not exceeding twenty years and a fine and in addition shall be ordered to pay compensation of an amount decided by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed. In cases of incest whoever commits rape of a woman under sixteen years of age, wherein the a shall on conviction be punished with mandatory minimum sentence with rigorous imprisonment, for a term not less than fifteen years and not exceeding twenty years and with fine.

62. Further, in terms of Section 360B of the Penal Code, whoever commits the offence of sexual exploitation of children shall on conviction be punished with mandatory minimum sentence for a term not less than five years and not exceeding twenty years and may also be punished with fine.

63. Section 365B(2)(a) of the Penal Code stipulates that whoever commits grave sexual abuse shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than five years and not exceeding twenty years and with fine and shall also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such person. As per Section 365B(2)(b), whoever commits grave sexual abuse on any person under eighteen years of age, shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term not less than seven years and not exceeding twenty years and with fine and shall also be ordered to pay compensation of an amount determined by court to the person in respect of whom the offence was committed for the injuries caused to such person.

**Issue 10 (d)**

64. The overall implementation of activities stipulated in the National Action Plan to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence (NAPSGBV) was 62 per cent, and out of the 419 planned key activities 106 have been completed, while 154 activities are on-going.

65. Findings highlight that the Action Plan has achieved the expected targets to a commendable standard in the interventions on the areas of women and child affairs, health, justice, foreign employment and disaster management.

66. The NAPSGBV was reviewed in 2021 to identify its level of implementation, its impact within each sector country wide, new areas of interventions and other emerging challenges and opportunities and to give direction in the formulation of the new NAPSGBV 2023–2027. Pursuant to its review, a new Action Plan for 2023–2027 is under preparation.

**Issue 10 (e)**

67. the existing general criminal laws in Sri Lanka provide safeguards with regard to instances of child abuse including female genital mutilation, thus a lacuna in the law is not observed, but the complainants stepping forward to initiate legal proceedings in this regard is lacking.

**Issue 11 – Sexual and gender-based violence against women**

68. In line with the government’s Zero tolerance Policy on SGBV, a NAPSGBV for the period 2016-2020 was implemented. Further, its progress was reviewed focusing on preventing and intervening in situations of SGBV, and advocating for policies and laws to combat and address SGBV.

**Issue 11 (a)**

69. Prompt action is taken by the GoSL on complaints of SGBV against women. There are no reported cases of conflict-related SGBV against women within the period of 2016 to 2021.

**Issue 11 (b)**

70. 602 Children and Women Desks have been established at Police Stations. MWCASE has developed Women and Children Desks at 48 police stations. Essential equipment, training on investigation of cases of SGBV and other facilities have been provided to these Desks. Further, a Diploma course in counselling was conducted to Police officers of these Desks in 2017.

71. A “Guideline for District and Divisional level referral and coordination system for providing services to victims and survivors of SGBV” was developed as a pilot initiative following extensive consultations held from 2017 to 2020, with the involvement of District and Divisional level Government and Non-Governmental officers and Civil Society stakeholders in Mannar and Hambanthota. Following the pilot programmes, referral programmes were conducted in Kandy, Kegalle, Gampaha, Anuradhapura and Kaluthara districts.

72. Safe homes for women affected by sexual and domestic violence have been established in eight districts to ensure their safety, and mental and physical healthcare. They are provided with compulsory counselling/ psychosocial support. Legal and financial assistance and livelihood support are provided if required.

73. Under Article 136 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court commenced digital hearing including the electronic filing of applications, motions, appeals and other documents. The Court of Appeal also commenced the virtual hearing of criminal appeals with the appellants attendance secured through remote/ digital means from prison.

74. The Assistance to the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act, No. 4 of 2015 was enacted with the objectives of; providing for the setting out of rights and entitlements of victims of crime and witnesses and the protection and promotion of such rights and entitlements; and giving effect to appropriate international norms, standards and best practices relating to the protection of victims of crime and witnesses. The Act was later amended by the Amendment Act, No. 27 of 2017 to facilitate recording of evidence from remote locations. In order to fully operationalize and discharge its duties under the provisions of the Act, the National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses was established.

75. The Division for Assistance and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses of the Sri Lanka Police was established by Act, No. 4 of 2015 to protect and support victims and witnesses of crime. The victim women are produced before Judicial Medical Officers by the Police and referred to Psychiatrists for Psycho-Social Support. Those victim women are given long-term Psycho-Social Support through the “Mithuru Piyasa” centres established in Government Hospitals.

### **Issue 11 (c)**

76. All reported cases of SGBV are referred to relevant authorities by the Gender Complaint Centre of the National Committee on Women, and the cases reported to the Police are inquired and investigated as appropriate.

### **Issue 11 (d)**

77. The Sri Lanka Police is assisting the Attorney General’s Department and Courts by executing orders such as warrants of arrest and summons and submitting reports in order to expedite the speedy completion of a large number of cases of sexual violence pending before the courts. The Women and Children Abuse Investigation Range has also introduced an Overlooking System to expedite the completion of cases of sexual violence pending before courts by introducing checklist and training officers on human trafficking, scientific investigation methods, and cyber-crime investigations.

78. Admissibility of contemporaneous recordings as evidence has been accepted through the amendment to the Evidence Ordinance, and video evidence recording units have been established to facilitate the recording of evidence of child victims of crimes including the girl child. Further, a request has been made to the Ministry of Justice, Prison Affairs & Constitutional Reforms to allocate a separate date for hearing of court cases related to women and children.

## **Issue 12 – Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

### **Issue 12 (a)**

79. The National Strategic Action Plan to Monitor and Combat Trafficking (NSAP) was developed in conformity with the Palermo Protocol of 2000, the Penal Code (Amendment) Act, No. 16 of 2006 and other relevant legislation. The NSAP is predicated on 4 pillars – namely, prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership and is a guiding tool for implementing actions to combat trafficking in persons in Sri Lanka.

80. The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) of Sri Lanka steers the work in line with the four pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership. Despite challenges, the stakeholder institutions of the NAHTTF managed to achieve targets set forth in the Cabinet approved National Action Plans of 2015-2019 and 2021–2025 to monitor and combat human trafficking. These targets included, inter alia, establishment of the National Action Plan for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses and a Police Division for Victims of Crime and Witness Assistance and Protection, conducting awareness programmes for public servants on the Witness Protection Act, and creation of a fund to provide compensation for victims of violence.

81. In 2021, the NAHTTF enhanced its investigating efforts by establishing a specialized unit for investigations, “the Human Trafficking, Smuggling Investigation and Maritime Crime Investigations Division”, in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), thereby strengthening the identification of victims including migrant workers, investigating human trafficking cases and instituting court proceedings against the offenders. From 2020 to date, eleven indictments have been served, and one conviction was secured under Section 360(c) of the Penal Code marking significant progress. The ‘Trafficking Hotline’ services were expanded to include online support for referrals, and a new shelter facility has been established to accommodate victims of crimes including trafficking. Continuous training programmes are being conducted by Sri Lanka Police to enhance the investigative capacity of Police officers, particularly those attached to the special investigation division of the CID. The AG’s Department too conducts capacity building programmes to enhance the skills of prosecutors, specifically in the area of human trafficking. The Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) were developed to improve the identification and Protection of victims. In line with the above SOPs endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers, institution specific SOPs have been developed. MWCASE has developed SOPs with a focus on child trafficking.

82. Funds are sourced predominantly, upon request, through general annual budgetary allocations given to NAHTTF member institutions by the Treasury, for any relevant Anti-trafficking activities coming under the purview of each institution. Additional funds are sought through other national and international funding sources as appropriate.

### **Issue 12 (b)**

83. A shelter for women victims of trafficking is maintained by the MWCASE. Further, a media campaign to raise awareness on Government policies to combat human trafficking has been launched by the Ministry of Justice, Prisons Affairs and Constitutional Reforms in partnership with the International Organization for Migration. Sri Lanka Police, in particular the Community Police Division conducts regular awareness raising campaigns to educate the public on existing policies and

legislation on prevention of drug abuse, child abuse, traffic infractions, rights of women and children, and environmental regulations.

### **Issue 12 (c)**

84. As of February 2023, 69 cases of human trafficking under investigation have been reported, 180 persons were pending prosecution, 307 persons were accused, and 11 individuals were convicted.

85. A Committee was appointed by the MWCASE to look into the amendments to the Vagrants Ordinance. The Ordinance is being reviewed by the Committee to identify the gaps and based on its findings, a decision was made to repeal or amend the Ordinance.

## **Issue 13 – Participation in political and public life**

### **Issue 13 (a)**

86. As of 2017, the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS) being the largest service in the Public Service of Sri Lanka and being a service where most of the high-level decision making of the government is done was constituted with a 54.44 per cent of women members, which was the majority of the SLAS members. Recently, the number of women entering the SLAS has surpassed that of men as they have performed better at the entry competitive examination. The number of women functioning as Divisional Secretaries has risen from 31.7 per cent in 2016 to 37 per cent in 2018. Further, at present, there are 164 officers serving in the Sri Lanka Foreign Service, out of which over 59 per cent officers are female.

87. According to the Labour Force Survey in 2019, from the categories of Managers, Senior Officials and Legislators, 8.4 per cent were female while 7.6 per cent were male, which is an increase of female representation. Also, 6 per cent of the Members of the Parliament constitute women.

88. Programmes are planned to extend pressure and lobby for the provision of quota system in Parliament & provincial council through making provisions in the election law.

- The MWCA in collaboration with the University of Peradeniya has conducted leadership courses in Sinhala and Tamil for the local women's societies and women's federation to encourage women's participation in decision making process and in public life;
- The women representation in local government has risen to 25 per cent in 2018 with the introduction of a quota for women, advocacy mechanisms have been strengthened to request a quota for women in the parliament and in provincial councils.

89. Leadership training was conducted for female representatives of local government authorities by the National Commission for Women in order to uplift their capacity on decision making and networking.

### **Issue 13 (b)**

90. Four training programmes on enhancing communications skills of women aspiring to enter into politics and decision-making positions were conducted in Badulla, Nuwara-Eliya, Kurunegala and Colombo. The objective of the programme

is to encourage women to enter into politics, for active participation in policy formulation and to enhance the knowledge and quality improvement of women, who aspire to enter into decision making. More than 250 women, representing the major political parties and who have received nominations have participated in the programmes.

91. A forum discussion was held to obtain views of experts for advocacy to increase women's representation in trade unions and to promote women's participation at decision-making level within trade union operation. 40 experts including active trade union leaders were participants at the meeting.

### **Issue 13 (c)**

92. The Provincial Council Election Act will be amended to include a quota for female representation. The draft has been prepared by the Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Council and Local Government.

## **Issue 14 – Education**

### **Issue 14 (a)**

93. In Sri Lanka's education system, every child has an equal right to study up to the age of 19. There is no bar for girls to pursue any course that boys may follow and equal opportunities are provided. Girls are highly performing in our education sector and girls' population of general education sector is according to the 2020 school census report. Our education sector Apart from this facility, other measures have been taken to remove disparities in education such as introducing the technical education stream in the A-level syllabus and identifying the schools under the underprivileged area and facilitating them as feeder schools. To ensure participation in education of all students including girls, 1.06 million students in 7925 schools are provided morning meal. SURAKSHA Health insurance policy was introduced for all students and special facilities were provided for low-income families. Free schoolbooks and school uniforms are provided to all students. Free school shoes are provided annually to 0.7 million students from low-income families.

### **Issue 14 (b)**

94. Core Areas and Policy Elements of National Education Policy Framework 2022 -2030 state that:

*“Access to education regardless of gender, race, religion or social status, geographical location, or disabilities.”.*

95. Further it says:

*“Curriculum content and delivery that aims to promote the acquisition of basic life skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, creativity and critical thinking, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, and also that aim at promoting patriotism, ethnic cohesion, social harmony, and unity in diversity.”.*

96. Every Sri Lankan student deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education that is uniquely Sri Lankan, in conformity with the prescribed national education goals and basic learning competency domains, and comparable to those of the high-performing education systems in the world. Quality education includes many

dimensions: learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate in teaching and learning, and supported in the learning process by their families and communities; learning environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities; learning content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, and peace; learning processes through which trained teachers use outcome-based, student-centred teaching and learning approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; and learning outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education.

97. National Education Goals (NEG) can be condensed as follows:

- NEG 1 – Promote the physical, mental, spiritual, socio-emotional, and environmental well-being of individuals necessary for a healthy and happy way of life, based on respect for human values Happy and healthy human being;
- NEG 2 – Develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and human qualities for technological, socio-economic and cultural advancement, in keeping with national needs and global trends Productive individual;
- NEG 3 – Develop productive individuals with curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovativeness Progressive learner;
- NEG 4 – Promote respect for human rights and laws of the country, while fulfilling duties and obligations in keeping with the norms of social justice and democratic way of life Respectful and trustworthy person;
- NEG 5 – Develop individuals to manage change and cope with complex and unforeseen situations.

98. Measures have been taken to encourage curriculum developer regarding the gender perspective. An awareness programme was conducted on the inclusion of Gender perspective into the textbooks prepared by the National Institute of Education.

99. Measures have been taken to encourage girls to technical stream. 250 scholarships (Sujatha Diyani Scholarship Program) are given annually to girls from low-income families who participate in the technical education stream to encourage them to participate in the technical education stream.

100. As per the 08/2020 circular, all island school robot and invention competition is implemented annually, under two themes and five categories. The five categories are agriculture, engineering technology, Education, Health and Medical and Leisure. In order to ensure the women empowerment in technology we awarded special award for girls in each category to appreciate their participation. These efforts will enhance the female participation in science, Technology and invention sector.

### **Issue 14 (c)**

101. Sexual and reproductive health has been already included in the school curriculum which is taught to all the school children. A book named “16+ a call for youth” was introduced to students in grades 11 and 12 to give them comprehensive knowledge on reproductive health and on gender and gender mainstreaming.

102. The National Committee on Women in collaboration with the Family Health Bureau has prepared a training module for WDO and Counselling officers on the subject of reproductive health. Trainings were carried out in Western, North Western and Central provinces. Subject areas covered by the training are sexuality and



reproductive health, identifying organs of the body, under aged pregnancies and its consequences, family planning and giving birth to a healthy child. WDOs are expected to disseminate this information among young women and girls. The progress of the awareness programmes conducted by WDOs was evaluated by the Ministry to monitor effectiveness.

## **Issue 15 – Employment**

### **Gender Wage Gap**

103. The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka assures non-discrimination as per the Article 12. Following this principle, Labour Law of Sri Lanka has discarded the practice of gender-based wage determinations, and it has not been in existence for the past many years:

- As per the Article 12 (4) of the constitution, the following laws have been enacted for the safety and health protection of the working women in the private and semi government sectors;
- The labour laws apply at all occasions, where there is an employer-employee relationship and the employees both in formal or informal sectors can seek the reliefs prescribed by the labour laws. Therefore, the rights of employees in the informal sector including that of women are ensured legally. The Department of Labour has introduced an online link for the management of complaints. Any citizen of the country can lodge a complaint to the Department of Labour, via this online link, either by person or anonymously. Thus, it is considered as a good initiative to encourage implementation of the law in the informal sector as well.

104. The labour law of Sri Lanka does not differentiate with respect to the location of the workplace. Thus, the general labour law of Sri Lanka is applicable to the factories and other establishments in Free Trade Zones (FTZ) too. Regular labour inspections are carried out in the Free Trade Zones, both during night and day time.

105. The Department of Labour maintains two female hostels at Katunayake and Koggala for female employees in the FTZs, at a concessionary rate. At the same time “Mediation Centres” are maintained by the respective district level labour office in order to address the labour issues of all employees working in free trade zones. The ‘Mithuru Piyasa’ centres established in FTZs too, are visited by Labour Inspectors.

## **Issue 16 – Health**

### **Issue 16 (a)**

106. Recommendations have been given by the Ministry of Health for medical termination of pregnancies to be allowed legally only for rape, incest, and severe fatal malformations.

107. Information on measures taken to achieve global minimum standards for medical termination of pregnancies, which includes rape, incest, and severe fatal malformations to prevent any possible mortality or morbidity. At present, abortion is legal only in situations where there is a threat to the life of the mother.

**Issue 16 (b)**

108. Budget allocation has been ensured for health needs of women throughout the country through well women clinics, family planning clinics and healthy lifestyle clinics. Further, there is a separate Directorate overseeing the health of people in the plantation sector. More than 70 per cent of care seekers of healthy lifestyle clinics are women, where screening facilities for major non-communicable diseases are provided free of charge by the state sector.

**Issue 16 (c)**

109. The Ministry of Health has taken measures for the free dispensing of safe sexual health supplies with the aim of preventing sexually transmitting diseases. It should also be noted that, the transmission of HIV/AIDS from the mother to the child has been fully eliminated in Sri Lanka.

110. Sexual health services are provided free of charge for the required and eligible women. Family planning and reproductive health supplies are readily accessible to the public for reasonable prices, through the pharmaceutical services provided countrywide. At present, approximately 5300 pharmaceutical dispensaries have been registered under the Ministry of Health, and 48 government 'Osu Sala' dispensaries have been established.

111. The Medical offices of Health of the respective areas conduct awareness programmes on sexual and reproductive health. These programmes are also conducted for university students, and sexual and reproductive health education has been incorporated into the national school curriculum from Grade 7 onwards.

112. Furthermore, Youth friendly health services are provided in all major hospitals of the country. For the coordination of above services for the youth, the Ministry of Health has created a separate Directorate for the Youth, Elderly and Persons with Disabilities.

**Issue 17 – Economic empowerment and social benefits**

113. The Ministry of Agriculture has implemented the concept of "Ekwa Wawamu, Rata Dinamu" by which the community must take necessary actions to grow essential crops in their properties.

114. Programs are being conducted countrywide under the theme of "All families in a village should be strong at the family level" to educate the public. Furthermore, rural economic revitalization committees have been established covering every village to oversee the problems faced by each family and provide solutions.

115. Number of programmes has been conducted by the central and provincial Agriculture Departments to economically empower the women such as Hela Bojun programmes to food related Entrepreneur development, Value added agricultural products base entrepreneurship Bee Keeping and Mushroom production through financial assistance and business development training programme. Departments/ Institutes under the Agriculture ministry support to improve family nutrition by home gardening and back yard poultry farming. Department of Agrarian development has formulated "Sithamu" women organization national wide to economically and socially empower the women who has based on agricultural livelihood.

116. The Foreign Funded projects such as Smallholder Agri-business Partnership Program, Climate Smart Irrigated Agriculture Project implemented under the

Ministry of Agriculture have been designed to ensure empowerment of women by participating them in planning, implementing, decision making, close monitoring to avoid gender base violence and ensuring project benefit receiving according to the International Fund for Agricultural Development and World Bank recommendations.

117. A Food Security Program Unit was established by the Sri Lanka President's office to address increasing poverty and hunger information. Accordingly, Samurdhi recipient families with more than 05 members, families with disabled members and people with chronic illnesses, poverty-stricken families with children below 05 years, single parent families, families with pregnant and lactating mothers, and poverty-stricken families who have not even received primary education who are facing severe food insecurity have been identified as beneficiaries for receiving assistance under the World Food Program.

118. Community Health units of the hospitals including in divisional hospitals and base hospitals conduct clinics for women with the assistance of the Family Health Bureau (FHB). Midwives attached to the FHB visit homes to provide assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers in their home environment.

119. Alternative income generation programmes were introduced to women who expect to migrate for employment in order to ensure the economy and family security of women. Accordingly, self-employment grants have been given by the SLWB for 252 women beneficiaries and the expenditure incurred was LKR 4.02 million. Furthermore, training on income generation, skills development, product quality improvement, and vocational training for rural women through the exchange of experienced women have been conducted. 7761 women beneficiaries were benefited and LKR7.435 million has been spent for these programmes.

120. Awareness programmes were conducted by the WDOs and the National Committee on Women, for women societies and women's federations to educate the general public on prevention of violence against women. Furthermore, awareness training has been conducted on the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, No. 34 of 2005.

## **Issue 18 – Rural Women**

### **Issue 18 (a)**

121. Women Development Officers were given separate job descriptions with specific duties by the monitoring and evaluation accountability and learning system. Accordingly, they were required to report the progress of their work to the MWCASE on a monthly basis. Their progress is evaluated to understand their training needs, difficulties encountered to implement their tasks, barriers, resource issues, identify gaps and identify areas that need improvement. Policy decisions can be made based on the report and further programmes are developed. There are 10 pilot projects conducted under the MEAL project. These projects require the WDO to identify most vulnerable families and develop programmes to empower them economically (e.g. Allocation of Rs. 300,000/= to a family for livelihood development).

### **Issue 18 (b)**

122. The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act No. 2 of 1996 has ensured that two representatives of women engaged on fishing as permanent members of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Advisory Council. In addition to that there are 321 fisher

women societies registered under the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and a total of 11,520 fisherwomen are enrolled in these societies.

123. The National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy has formulated in 2018 ensuring the following thematic areas of gender equality:

- Promote equal opportunities for women’s participation in the activities of the sector;
- Make gender mainstreaming an integral part of small-scale fisheries development strategies;
- Build awareness among fishing communities on the rights of women to take up employment either directly or indirectly in fisheries;
- Ensure a minimum of 25 per cent representation of women in the “committee of office bearers” of fisheries community organizations;
- Remove discrepancies in wages paid to men and women in the fisheries sector for similar work;
- Create conditions for both men and women to have equal access to resources and benefits;
- Encourage both men and women to participate jointly in finding solutions to their problems related to fisheries and aquaculture development.

124. The Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, along with the Department of Labour, has taken the initiative to introduce a unified Act on the terms and conditions for different employment. The unification is not intended to reduce or limit the existing rights of employees, but rather to simplify and clarify the legal framework while maintaining the rights of employees. In terms of addressing labour rights, the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment has proposed to conduct consultations with relevant stakeholders. The unified Act will also have provisions to address workplace harassment and violence in line with C190.

125. The Forced Labour Task Force has been established to coordinate the efforts on forced labour-related activities and a mechanism is outlined to train labour officers and police officers on the identification and prosecution of forced labour.

126. The Department of Labour has introduced a complaint management system with effect from March 2022 to handle the complaints received by the Department effectively and efficiently. The complainants can get the updates on the next date of inquiry, details on arrears calculations etc. via a message to their mobile phones. This assists the officers to monitor the complaints and expedite the procedure in a transparent manner.

127. The National Dangerous Drug Control Board (NDDCB) is maintaining four treatment and rehabilitation centres for drug-dependent persons and the majority of the referrals are on a voluntary basis. In terms of Act, No. 54 of 2007 of the Treatment and Rehabilitation Act, there are legal provisions for voluntary admissions for treatment and care services. Further, according to the Poisons, Opium and Dangerous drugs (Amendment) Act, No. 41 of 2022, legal provisions have been enacted to refer persons who are alleged to have committed an offense under the said Act for voluntary admissions to medical treatment for de-addiction and rehabilitation. As per the Act, a person who is alleged to have committed an offense for having in possession dangerous drugs less than one gram, will undergo medical treatment and rehabilitation, thus can be referred for treatment and rehabilitation service.

128. In addition to that, the NDDCB has initiated a community-based rehabilitation programme for less severe drug-dependent persons with the support of community-

level civil society organizations, community leaders, and other government officials who are working at Grama Niladhari division levels. Further, one pilot project has been implemented which applied a specific model for community-based rehabilitation. The new model focuses on the empowerment of the family of drug-dependent persons and getting maximum support from the family for the recovery process. Further, the NDDCB is in action to expand voluntary basis residential treatment capacity and increase the coverage of treatment services while initiating an infrastructure development project with the support of local and foreign donors.

### **Issue 18 (c)**

129. In line with International Labour Organization Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) and Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration, the proposed unified Labour law will incorporate provisions for “equal pay for equal value of work”. Necessary provisions will also be included to address workplace discrimination based on gender, race, and other factors.

130. The Cabinet has approved the proposal to amend the Shop and Office Employees Act No. 10 of 1954. The legal restrictions existed for female employees on working at night will be removed to allow the employees in IT-based businesses, knowledge and business process outsourcing organizations, offices that conduct accounts, administrative and technical work of business organizations located abroad to work according to the employer’s time. Thereby, female workers who are above 18 years of age in those fields can be employed before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m.

131. This amendment will remove the legal obstacles in the labour law to the employment of women workers at night and it is also expected that the participation of women in the workforce in this country will be further improved.

## **Issue 19 – Disadvantaged groups of women**

### **Issue 19 (a)**

132. Several measures have been taken by the National STD/AIDS Control Programme (NSACP):

- Services given throughout the country without discrimination;
- Participation by the key population which includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ), in the planning of programmes/projects;
- A separate subcomponent has been established to look after public health preventive services for key population;
- Key population groups are involved in detecting STD/ HIV cases among peer groups and treatment and care are given free of charge;
- The NSACP operates well-structured Key Population (KP) interventions throughout the country having NGO/CBO partners centrally and in the district;
- High level of advocacy to different stakeholders such as parliamentarians, legal personals and police officers. These programs are routinely conducted by the multi-sectoral unit. Aims of those advocacy programmes are to facilitate KP, reaching services and reducing stigma and discrimination;
- The legal and ethics subcommittee of NSACP organizes high-level discussion to update information on services offered for KP, periodically. In addition to

providing information, the discussion also brought out many recommendations on conducting programmes with police, judiciary and relevant stakeholders about laws that affect KP attending for STI/HIV services and reducing stigma, discrimination of KP by other sectors;

- The NSACP training unit has been conducting a series of trainings regularly each year for health care workers on preventing stigma and discrimination in the healthcare setting with special focus on “empathy” during performance of duty.

133. Internal Circular No. 2740/2022 issued by the Inspector General of the Police (IGP) on arrests of persons of the LGBTIQ+ community dated 27.12.2022 has given special instructions to all police stations not to arrest members of LGBTIQ+ arbitrarily without having a proper complaint or a fair and justifiable reason to do so. The Circular sets out the instructions to ensure that appropriate measures are taken by the Sri Lanka Police to protect the fundamental rights of the transgender persons who have undergone gender transition and uphold the constitution and to motivate every officer to act accordingly.

134. Taking cognizance of the Supreme Court judgment, a number of criminal proceedings on non-discrimination have been revisited. Following consultations in 2022 between civil society representatives working on LGBTIQ+ rights and the IGP, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, a Senior Deputy IGP was appointed to address issues and difficulties faced by the LGBTIQ+ community. In 2022, a private member’s bill was submitted to the Parliament seeking to amend the Penal Code with the aim of protecting the LGBTIQ+ community.

135. The National STD/AIDS control programme of the Ministry of Health operates 30 Antiretroviral Medication centres across the country providing services free of charge. Legal gender recognition could be obtained by transgender persons in 3-5 days as per existing regulations.

136. The National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (2023-2032) was formulated to empower, promote and protect the rights of women. The policy will address 08 thematic areas which are considered crucial. These areas include Identity and Autonomy, Economic Empowerment and Productive Employment, Social Equality and Empowerment, Equality in Decision-making, Disaster Management, Access to Justice, Peace and Security, Freedom from Gender-based Violence and Children – with special focus on girl child. The approval of the Cabinet of Ministers for the policy was obtained on 28.02.2023.

## **Issue 19 (b)**

137. Empowerment of low-income families:

- Implementation of income generating Projects targeting the National Centre for Empowering FHH families in Kilinochchi District;
- “Diriya Man petha” projects & Agricultural related domestic industry;
- Empowerment of women in the Special projects;
- Empowerment of women in fisheries related domestic industry;
- Implementation of an alternative income generation program to ensure the economy and family security of women expected to go abroad for employment as Housemaids;

- Identify and create database for rural women affected by unregulated microfinance loan schemes & providing assistance to them. National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2023-2032;
- Empowering Women with special needs by the Sri Lanka Women's Bureau.

### **Issue 19 (c)**

138. Under the 2023 budget proposal, LKR250 million is allocated for young women entrepreneurs. Accordingly LKR250,000/- will be given as a loan facility for a minimal interest through the Rural Development Bank to be repaid in 03 years. Beneficiaries are selected by the SLWB. A programme has been introduced to strengthen the elderly, disabled, persons with low income and widows by utilizing their skills and labour. Furthermore, steps have been taken for the improvement of livelihood development opportunities for female headed households, with an allocation of LKR 250 million for this purpose. Identified women borrowers of micro credit are given financial assistance by the MWCASE to commence a livelihood in order to empower them financially to repay their debts. Approximately 7422 beneficiaries have been identified through Women Action Societies throughout the country. Joint ownership is granted when granting state land under the Land Development Ordinance.

### **Issue 19 (d)**

139. Sexual bribery can be convicted under the Bribery Act, No. 2 of 1965 although there is no express provision. The definition for gratification in the law as it stands does not extend to those of a sexual nature, despite covering other forms of bribery from money, loans, gifts, etc. Section 16 of Bribery Act states that - "who, being any such officer or servant, solicits or accepts any gratification as an inducement or a reward for such interfering, procuring, facilitating, protecting, or abusing as is referred to in paragraph (a) of this section". Section 17 who, being a public servant, solicits or accepts any gratification as an inducement or a reward for his giving assistance or using influence in the promotion of the procuring of any such contract as is referred to in paragraph (a) of this section, or in the execution of any such contract, or in the payment of the price or consideration stipulated therein or of any subsidy payable in respect thereof.

140. Sri Lanka has identified Sexual Bribery as a matter that requires urgent measures of redress. As such, specific sections are to be included to the Penal Code making Sexual Harassment and Sexual Bribery Penal Code offences. The Anti-Corruption Bill which is awaiting Cabinet approval to be presented in Parliament also recognizes Sexual Bribery as an offense that comes within corruption.

141. The Bribery commission of Sri Lanka is equipped with a hotline 1954 and an online complaint system in all three languages where the public can submit complaints.

142. The Ministry of Justice, Prison Affairs & Constitutional Reforms is in the process of introducing the Anti-Corruption Bill and the main intention of introducing the aforesaid draft Bill is to give effect to certain provisions of the United Nations Convention against corruption and other internationally recognized norms, standards and best practices. The Bill further provides for the establishment of an independent Commission to detect and investigate allegations of bribery, corruption, and offenses related to the declaration of assets and liabilities and associated offenses. The composite draft law will repeal the Bribery Act, No. 11 of 1954, the Commission to

Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption Act No. 19 of 1994, and the Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Law No. 01 of 1975. The draft Law has recognized ‘sexual favour’ as a gratification which is an offense of Bribery under the Act.

### **Issue 19 (e)**

143. The elderly population has been prioritized by creating a separate directorate to provide integrated care for elderly. Easy access and conducive environment have been created at the outpatient and inward facilities and also in the work settings. Also, an island-wide public awareness on healthy aging is being prepared targeting the entire elderly population.

### **Issue 20**

144. The released lands are handed over to the respective District Secretariats by the Tri Forces and those records are kept. Necessary actions are being taken after receiving those lands by the respective District and Divisional Secretariats.

145. In terms of land release in the Northern and Eastern provinces, 92 per cent of private lands retained by the military have been released to the legitimate civilian owners through the relevant authorities as of January 2023. In addition, over 95 Acres of land under the Army and Navy in Palaly in the Northern Province were released to the private owners on 3rd February 2023.

146. Sri Lanka has initiated action to restore land ownership of people who had been traditionally occupying and cultivating their lands, but which had been declared as forest or wildlife reservations after they were abandoned due to the conflict. A road map to remap such areas and grant deeds has now been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Hon. President in his visit to Jaffna in January this year attended a discussion at the Jaffna District Secretariat that focused specifically on land issues in the Northern Province and also directed the authorities to accelerate the process and also visited Ampara and Trincomalee to address similar issues in the Eastern.

### **Issue 21 – Marriage and family relations**

147. The Muslims of Sri Lanka are governed by their own laws in keeping with their religion and culture. In this context, with regards to the amendment of the MMDA, a ten-member Muslim Law Reforms Advisory Committee appointed by the Minister of Justice in December 2020 has handed over their Report to the Hon. Minister in June 2021, and the same has been submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers. The Advisory Committee has been requested to make further observations.

148. Given the sensitivity of the matter, it is important that any revisions to the law are achieved in close consultation with the community concerned. The objective of introducing amendments is to bring the personal laws into conformity with prevailing international and domestic standards. Personal laws will remain in operation as an integral part of the country’s legal system.

149. All Police Officers attached to the Children and Women Desks of Sri Lanka Police are informed and trained to identify, record and investigate statutory rape with the complete knowledge of Section 363 (e) amended by the Amendment Acts No. 22 of 1995 and No. 29 of 1998 of Sri Lanka Penal Code Act. Effective investigation, prosecution, and sanctioning of perpetrators through relevant circulars and orders are ensured with sufficient training and capacity-building programmes for the officers engaged in these procedures.