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Shaping Change Where It Counts the Most

Bandaranaike Academy for Leadership & Public Policy

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RESEARCH THAT INSPIRES

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SPECIAL FEATURE

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Editorial

Greetings from BALPP!

The Research Wing of the BALPP (Bandaranaike Academy for Leadership and Public Policy) launches the current issue of the Policy Tribune to mark the Second-year anniversary of the academy. As Sri Lanka's first and premier institution on public policy research and leadership training, the BALPP is dedicated to training young scholars and professionals to become efficient and responsible leaders and informed citizens in their communities, workplaces and wider society. The BALPP Policy Tribune serves this objective by disseminating knowledge on key thematic areas related to public policy planning, strategic leadership and ethical governance.

When observing the current global issues such as youth uprisings, geopolitical tensions, climate change and environmental degradation, social injustices such as gross human rights violations, poverty and food insecurity and public health crises such as pandemics and rise of infectious diseases etc., it is evident that policy failures and gaps in leadership have contributed to these crises. The youth unrest and large-scale anti-government protests in Sri Lanka (2022), Bangladesh (2024) and Nepal (2025) have common foundations: unaddressed socio-economic disparities and corruption caused by constant policy failures and gaps in leadership and governance. In USA, the government shutdown is widely viewed as a policy failure which is detrimental to economic growth and has a huge impact on the job security of thousands of federal employees. Such developments in a leading democracy is a warning sign for all governments to rethink policy planning and implementation mechanisms.

The appointment of Sanae Takaichi as the first female prime minister of Japan marks a significant milestone in the country's politics. However, she faces substantial challenges including domestic issues such as economic stagnation, declining public trust in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and instability caused by a fragile government as well as diplomatic challenges such as balancing relations with China and US, immigration issues and addressing regional and global trade and security concerns. Analysts believe that Sanae Takaichi could overcome these challenges by implementing policies that can rebuild public trust, revitalize the economy and navigate complex geopolitical challenges by managing a delicate balance in Japan's foreign policy. These regional and international developments highlight the importance of efficient policy planning and strategic leadership in averting threats, managing crises and strengthening socio-economic growth across the globe. The BALPP Policy Tribune serves as a platform for educating the public on such issues and raising awareness through policy briefs, structured interviews, photo essays and opinion pieces.

Editorial

We are happy to mention that the current issue has received an overwhelming response from many enthusiastic young scholars, professionals and civil society activists from Sri Lanka and abroad. The contributing authors represent a wide range of sectors such as public administration, academics and research, defense and security, policy planning, human rights, gender and development etc. The Research Wing of the BALPP would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Dr. Asma Faiz, Associate Professor of Political Science at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Pakistan for accepting our invitation and contributing to the current issue as a guest writer. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions from staff attached to other think tanks such as Institute of National Security Studies (INSS), Ceylon Foundation for Economic Policy-Analysis (CFEP), Arutha, Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, Sri Lanka Barometer Initiative and International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), emphasizing critical areas related to strategic leadership and public policy planning.

The independent panel of reviewers played a pivotal role in this process by providing constructive feedback and encouraging the authors to produce good quality manuscripts. We are forever grateful for their continuous guidance and commitment in making this publication a successful and meaningful one.

We would like to invite all of you to read the latest issue and provide your feedback and comments for further improvement. We look forward to a productive engagement with all stakeholders to create policy-oriented citizens and train strategic leaders who can contribute to the formation of a progressive society.

Shayani Jayasinghe
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Reframing Support for Women-Headed Households in Post-War Sri Lanka: Policy Gaps and Strategic Recommendations

By Arun Jentrick and Bipasha Baruah

The end of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009 brought about profound demographic and social changes, with one of the most significant being the rise in Women-Headed Households (WHHs). These households emerged not only due to war-related widowhood, enforced disappearances, detentions, and displacements but also from broader and ongoing societal shifts. Women across the island became heads of households due to divorce, abandonment, male labour migration, disability, and voluntary choices such as escaping domestic violence or assuming responsibility for family members (Vasudevan, 2013). Despite the fact that nearly one in four households in Sri Lanka is now headed by a woman (Department of Census and Statistics 2018), policy frameworks and public narratives continue to narrowly frame WHHs through the lens of post-war widowhood.

This reductive image limits eligibility for support and distorts program designs by failing to reflect the intersectional and diverse realities of WHHs (Kodikara 2018). Many women who do not fit this singular category such as those who are unmarried, divorced, separated, disabled, or transgender remain excluded from services and protections. Support systems are often fragmented, donor-driven, and short-term, lacking attention to long-term recovery, economic empowerment, trauma healing, or the burdens of unpaid care work. This policy brief draws on evidence-based insights from WHHs and policy practitioners across Sri Lanka to highlight urgent gaps and to propose inclusive, sustainable, and equitable strategies. It aims to reframe WHHs not as passive recipients of aid but as active agents of resilience, leadership, and community recovery.

Defining the Problem: Policy Gaps and Limitations

Despite the increased visibility of WHHs in Sri Lanka, national policies particularly the NAP (National Action Plan), continues to rely on a narrow, war widow-centric definition that excludes many women who head households due to abandonment, separation, migration, disability, or personal choice. This limited framing has resulted in the systematic exclusion of groups such as unmarried women, those with missing or detained spouses, divorced and transgender women, and women with disabilities from accessing state benefits and development programs. Such homogenization reflects what Fraser (2007) terms 'misrecognition' where policies fail to reflect social diversity and instead reinforce injustice by denying entitlements to those who do not conform to dominant narratives.

The absence of an intersectional approach undermines redistributive justice and deepens inequality. At the same time, fragmented service delivery, rigid eligibility requirements, and bureaucratic inefficiencies limit even the minimal support available. Also as evidenced by Elson's (1993) critiques within the broader neoliberal framework, this shifts care responsibilities onto women while maintaining structural barriers. Short term, donor led interventions that are often implemented without community consultation or follow up further reduce empowerment to token gestures. The lack of participatory mechanisms means WHHs are seldom involved in shaping policies that directly affect them, reinforcing top-down, patriarchal structures and rendering policies misaligned with lived realities.

Post-War Context and the Emergence of WHHs

The emergence of WHHs in Sri Lanka must be situated within both the long-term social disruptions caused by the civil war and the structural inequities that persist in peacetime. While the war undoubtedly accelerated the visibility of WHHs through widowhood, disappearances, displacement, and long-term detentions, the persistence and expansion of WHHs across both conflict affected, and non-affected regions point to more systemic drivers. Women also assumed headship through divorce, abandonment, unmarried caregiving, disability, or the rejection of patriarchal marital structures—realities that remain largely invisible in official policy frameworks.

The NAP for WHHs, while a welcome acknowledgement of WHHs as a distinct policy category, falls short in addressing this diversity. Its primary focus on war widows and ex-combatants narrows eligibility and operational scope, excluding WHHs who do not fit this narrative. For instance, women whose husbands are missing but not declared dead are left in administrative limbo, ineligible for State support due to the absence of death certificates, and this points towards a major failure in the system to recognize war's bureaucratic violence. Similarly, divorced, separated, and unmarried women, many of whom are WHHs by necessity or choice face moral scrutiny and legal invisibility.

While the NAP outlines broad objectives such as access to justice, economic empowerment, and psychosocial support, it has not translated into coordinated or accountable delivery mechanisms. Budgetary allocations remain unclear, inter-ministerial collaboration weak, and program implementation ad hoc and donor dependent. Moreover, the lack of consultation with WHHs in the design and monitoring of the NAP further limits its relevance and responsiveness. As a result, interventions remain top-down and ill-suited to local contexts, failing to address the intersectional challenges these women face.

A critical rethinking of WHH policy is urgently required. One that moves beyond post-war victimhood and instead acknowledges the multiplicity of WHH identities, their structural exclusion from labour markets, care economies, and land rights, and their potential as key actors in Sri Lanka's recovery and development. Recognizing this requires not only inclusive eligibility frameworks but sustained investments in social protection, trauma-informed care, legal recognition, and participatory governance.

Everyday Challenges Faced by WHHs

Despite the NAP for WHHs acknowledging the economic vulnerability of WHHs, policy responses have failed to reflect the depth and complexity of the economic marginalization these women face. Many WHHs are engaged in informal, precarious work with no job security, limited social protection, and little opportunity for upward mobility. While the NAP promotes economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and self-employment, it does so within a neoliberal framework that shifts the burden of recovery onto individual women without addressing systemic inequalities. Microfinance initiatives, in particular, have been aggressively promoted as a poverty alleviation strategy, yet these programs often exclude the poorest WHHs who lack collateral or market access.

As observed by Baruah (2010) and Wilson (2011), women are encouraged to take loans without sufficient training or follow up support, leaving many entrapped in debt cycles. Furthermore, these programs are rarely tailored to the diverse needs of WHHs across regions, caste, disability status, and literacy levels. There is little evidence of long term economic planning or State supported enterprise development embedded in national programming. Instead of providing stable pathways to economic security, current policies reinforce the feminization of poverty and ignore Elson's (1993) call to restructure the care and labour economy.

Equally troubling is the lack of recognition of the social and psychological vulnerabilities that WHHs experience daily. The NAP gestures toward psychosocial well-being and legal protection but offers no concrete mechanisms for accessible mental health support or protection against everyday harassment. WHHs, particularly those who are unmarried, divorced, or caring for missing family members, continue to experience moral policing, exclusion from community networks, and routine discrimination in accessing State services. Bureaucratic hurdles such as the need for death certificates or land ownership documents disqualify many from accessing essential benefits, despite their eligibility in principle.

This administrative rigidity mirrors Fraser's (2007) critique of institutional misrecognition and highlights a fundamental disconnect between the State's policy design and the lived realities of WHHs. Intersectional disadvantages compound these exclusions: disabled women, those from marginalized caste groups, or transgender WHHs face added discrimination that the NAP fails to address in any substantive way. Feminist security theorists like Tickner (1992) and Sjoberg (2015) remind us that women's insecurity is not limited to conflict zones but is embedded in the very structures meant to protect them. Without trauma informed care services, community-based support mechanisms, and anti-discrimination safeguards, Sri Lanka's policies fall short of recognizing WHHs as rights bearing citizens. The State's reluctance to institutionalize inclusive social protections and care services reveals a pattern of governance that prioritizes infrastructure over lived human experience, and this further deepens WHHs' exclusion from recovery and development.

Opportunities and Coping Strategies

Despite facing persistent structural and social barriers, WHHs in post-war Sri Lanka have adopted a range of innovative coping strategies that reflect agency, resilience, and resourcefulness. The transition into sole household leadership often arising from loss, separation, or rejection of oppressive domestic situations has, for many, marked a shift towards greater control over financial and caregiving decisions. While this shift is often accompanied by stress and uncertainty, some WHHs report increased confidence and autonomy in managing their families' needs. Feminist political economy perspectives highlight that such leadership within patriarchal systems can offer both constraints and opportunities (Elson 1993; Ruwanpura 2008).

Alongside individual agency, collective organizing has emerged as a powerful survival mechanism. In the absence of sustained State support, informal women's groups have become crucial for pooling resources, sharing knowledge, and engaging with local authorities. However, national policies such as the NAP have failed to adequately recognize or support these grassroots networks, instead focusing on fragmented, top-down interventions. Economic diversification is another vital survival strategy, with many WHHs simultaneously engaging in poultry farming, tailoring, or market vending to minimize risk. These practices align with the livelihood vulnerability framework (Scoones 1998), but without secure land tenure, credit access, or market linkages, such efforts often remain at subsistence levels (Baruah 2010; Wilson 2011).

Education is also widely prioritized by WHHs as a long-term investment, with many making personal sacrifices such as reducing their own food intake to ensure their children's schooling. Faith and spirituality further act as emotional anchors, offering strength in the face of social exclusion and economic hardship (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). Yet, despite these adaptive strategies, national policy remains largely unresponsive to the lived resilience of WHHs. There is a critical need for institutional mechanisms that build on existing coping capacities rather than overlooking them. Recognizing WHHs not merely as recipients of aid but as active agents of community resilience and transformation must be central to future policy design.

Reimagining Policy through WHHs' Lived Realities

WHHs in post-war Sri Lanka are often misrepresented in policy as passive recipients of aid, yet evidence shows they are active agents managing multiple roles with resilience and innovation. Many form informal networks, savings groups, and mutual support systems that reduce economic risks and build community cohesion. This clearly illustrates what Björkdahl and Selimovic (2015) described as 'gendered silences', where women exercise agency and adaptation in ways that are often overlooked in formal recovery frameworks. However, most State and NGO programs continue to offer short term, narrowly defined livelihood schemes like tailoring or poultry farming, with little regard for women's actual interests or market realities. Without consultation, such top-down interventions reinforce dependency and fail to unlock women's full potential.

Simultaneously, fragmented service delivery across ministries and the absence of follow up mechanisms erode impact and sustainability. Fraser's (2007) critique of piecemeal policy is relevant: without structural coordination, programs remain superficial. WHHs continue to bear the burden of unpaid care work, yet this labour remains invisible in policy frameworks. Recognizing care as productive work through subsidies, flexible training, and community-based services would enable women to participate in the economy and leadership roles. As Folbre (1991) and Elson (1993) argue, transformative policy must redistribute both resources and recognition. Thereby, centering WHHs in policy design is essential for inclusive post-war recovery.

Recommendations

To ensure meaningful inclusion of WHHs in post-war recovery, policies must begin by adopting an inclusive definition that recognizes widows, divorced or separated women, abandoned women, unmarried caregivers, women with missing spouses, those with disabilities, and transgender women. Documentation barriers should be addressed through alternative verification methods like community attestation. WHHs must be directly involved in shaping policies through structured consultations and representation in planning and monitoring bodies. A shift from donor driven, short term projects to long term strategies is essential; one that guarantees access to land, credit, and markets while offering diverse skill training beyond stereotypical trades.

Livelihood training must expand into sectors like construction, ICT, and electrical work while microfinance schemes need reform to ensure fair terms and linked support services. Unpaid care work should be recognized in national statistics and program eligibility, with support through community-based childcare, eldercare, and mental health services. Cross ministerial coordination is key to delivering holistic support, including establishing one-stop service centres tailored to WHHs' needs. Culturally sensitive trauma healing and counseling programs must be expanded, especially in rural and conflict affected areas. WHH led networks and cooperatives should be formalized as models of community resilience. Finally, disaggregated data collection and gender audits must inform all recovery efforts.

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Achieving Economic Advancement in Sri Lanka through Specialization Focused on the Growth of the Small and Medium Enterprises: Gleaning Insights from Japan

By Dr. Dimithri Devinda Jayagoda

To understand the economic policy of a country, we mostly pay attention to how the government manages the economy through fiscal, monetary, and structural tools to achieve goals such as growth, stability, full employment, and inflation control. Let's explore this through a general framework. Economic policy mainly consists of fiscal policy managed by the government, which involves government spending (on infrastructure, education, health, etc.) and taxation (income tax, corporate tax, VAT, etc.). This will result in stimulating the economy, managing public debt and deficits, and influencing income distribution.

Monetary policy of a country is managed by the Central Bank by focusing on setting interest rates, managing money supply and currency exchange rate policies. The trade and investment policy involves deciding tariffs and quotas, engaging in free trade agreements and aligning foreign direct investment (FDI) rules. It decides structural and supply-side policies by forming labour market reforms, conducting education and skill development, infrastructure development and regulatory reforms. Setting economic equality, poverty reduction, social safety nets and welfare programmes like unemployment benefits, food subsidies, or housing assistance is also part of the policy setting.

Apart from setting major policies for economic development, a government should focus on development in a more sustainable manner. So, this will help to maintain a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, namely, economy, society and environment. Great learnings can be retrieved from Japan. The "One Village, One Product (OVOP)" strategy is similar to the "One Town, One Product (OTOP)" development initiative that emerged in the 1970s in Oita Prefecture, Japan, but has since been adopted by many countries to support domestic financial development and entrepreneurship (Natsuda et al., 2012). Its central idea is to identify and promote one unique product, craft, or way of life of a village or locality that represents its cultural, historical, or natural diversities.

About the Author Prof. Dimithri Devinda Jayagoda is a Professor at the University of Bolton – Academic Center Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates. He teaches Business Management, Marketing, and Sustainable Development. Before joining the University of Bolton, he served as Head of the Department of Business Management and Senior Lecturer at the Sri Lanka Technological Campus (SLTC), Colombo, from September 2022 to September 2024.

It is highly recommended for Sri Lanka to adopt this, as it will strive to rejuvenate the economy of the countryside, create jobs, keep the knowledge of traditions and techniques alive, and stimulate innovations. OTOP has become a powerful tool for economic revitalisation in Japan, building on local strengths, high quality, and participation by communities. OTOP has had an immense impact by preserving local cultures, achieving sustainable development, and creating an exclusive global market for Japanese rural products. It capitalizes on unique local cultural traits, customs, natural resources, and skills to provide a product that can recompense that locality in the more widespread market. Having initially succeeded in revamping rural economies in Japan, the OVOP movement was readily adapted and implemented in other parts of the world thereafter (Tambunan, 2015). Several regions received support in reviving their economies by creating unique local products and promoting them on international platforms. Following the movement's success in Japan, other countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia started to adopt the same model.

There are key attributes visible in these initiatives. Culture and local identity are two of the main features. OVOP is a local economic development initiative that encourages communities to identify, develop, and promote a unique product based on local resources, culture, and skills. Originally started in Japan in the 1970s, the movement empowers villages or towns to produce distinctive goods that can compete in national and global markets, aiming to boost self-reliance, create jobs, and preserve local identity. Unique products are being marketed from each rural village in Japan. Mainly these products focused on locality and local delicacy or locally famous cultural identity.

OVOP highlights the unique cultural legacy, rituals, and conventions of the town, with the product being a local typical craft, culinary product item, or a service reflecting the identity of the area (Natsuda et al., 2012). By emphasising a particular flagship product from the town, a background can be created for enhancing the local economy while creating job opportunities that can eventually lead to attracting tourism or investments in the area. This usually leads to the prosperity of small businesses and industries in that particular locality. The village or region selects a unique product that symbolises its individuality, which might be local farming items, crafts, or some special services that the product comes from. It should also be tightly linked to the cultural legacy or natural ravages of the area.

This concept also promotes sustainability. It promotes the use of natural local resources, which can help people economically whilst encouraging environmental consciousness, marketability and branding. The OVOP's localized development strategy led to the creation of over 300 distinctive products across the region, significantly boosting rural entrepreneurship, reversing the trend of rural decline, and even creating opportunities for international exports.

One of the notable success stories is Oyama Town, which capitalized on its abundance of plums to develop Umeshu (plum wine). This product gained widespread popularity across Japan, becoming a high-demand item. As a result, Oyama experienced increased local employment, rising income levels, and a revitalization of its agricultural sector. Another strong example is Yufuin Town, which focuses on promoting eco-tourism, traditional hot springs (onsen), and local handicrafts. Through its emphasis on cultural preservation and sustainable tourism, Yufuin transformed from a quiet rural area into a thriving tourist destination, generating significant economic benefits while maintaining its natural and cultural assets.

Similarly, Showa Village leveraged its traditional craft of handmade washi paper (traditional Japanese paper made by hand using natural fibers, typically from the inner bark of three plants: Kozo (mulberry bush), Mitsumata (edgeworthia, Gampi) to enter niche international markets, particularly among artists and designers. This not only preserved a dying artisanal skill but also created new job opportunities and fostered local pride in cultural heritage. Several key factors contributed to the success of OVOP in Japan. These include strong community ownership and pride, a value-added approach to local resources, capacity building through skills training, robust government support, and a guiding philosophy of “Think globally, act locally.” Collectively, these elements helped Japanese communities turn their unique assets into sustainable sources of income and identity on both national and global stages.

The selected product is branded and marketed as the town's flagship item. Efforts are made to build a strong brand identity around the product, showcasing its unique features and storytelling about it. The presence of a unique product helps to strengthen the image of the town on both local and global platforms through branding and advertising campaigns. Local, regional, and national promotion efforts are undertaken to increase awareness and demand for the product (Tambunan, 2015). This may include trade fair appearances, online selling platforms, and retail partnership opportunities for wider accessibility.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (2019) has stressed the necessity for improving quality and standards of products. Under the guidance of JICA, there are efforts being made to enhance the quality of the products that have been singled out. More efforts should be made to provide training for artisans or manufacturers to develop their skills to improve production and quality standards. As OVOP concept prioritizes quality over quantity, those countries that implement it, focus on high-quality products, rather than mass production. This also establishes a clear difference between the two competing products in local and global markets. If Sri Lanka were to adopt the OTOP strategy, each town or region could specialize in producing some unique product or craft representing its unique cultural and historical attributes, perhaps even of the natural attributes. With diverse resources and a rich heritage, Sri Lanka has ample options to implement these strategies. Here are a few potential areas that can be considered.

Ceylon Tea (in Kandy) is known for its lush greenery. Tea cultivation in Kandy could focus on high-quality Ceylon Tea (Sri Lanka Tea Board, 2023). The town needs to adopt measures to improve the production methods used to grow tea, taking care of the quality of tea leaves and promoting unique blends of different types of teas. Marketing efforts can be instrumental in promoting areas specialized in tea cultivation and strengthening the cultural and economic significance of Ceylon tea. Developing the Handwoven textile industry in Galle leads to the empowerment of the artistic community and boosting their creativity. Conventional weaving methods should be preserved and enhanced to create an assortment of specialized and searingly strong textiles. The cultural significance of these products and their highly eco-friendly nature could be the basis of sales pitches.

Given the high quality of cinnamon produced in Sri Lanka, the emerging entrepreneurs based in the Southern region from Kalutara to Matara could focus on cinnamon-based products. It could mean everything from cinnamon sticks to essential oils and other modern uses. This would be a great chance for the towns in this region to sell their unique taste of cinnamon, one that was linked with the spice trade throughout history.

Ratnapura, also known as ‘The City of Gems’, is yet to take the mantle by expanding the specialization in gems and jewelry production (Perera, 2018). This would involve some great steps toward ethics in the sourcing of gems, innovative designs in jewellery, and keeping up with the quality in craftsmanship. It is worth noting that the success of the OTOP strategy depends on community engagement, participation, collaboration between local stakeholders, and effective promotional methods. The selected product should not only be unique but should also ensure sustainable socio-economic development. Tourism can play an important role in the process, and steps should be taken to attract tourists who would want to learn more and purchase these unique local products.

A group of professionals and academics initiated a study in 2024 in Sri Lanka, conducting a basic pilot study in a few selected areas where one specific product is specialized and developed. As a result, the book ‘One Town, One Product: Case Studies of Vibrant Communities in Sri Lanka’, edited by Dimithri Devinda Jayagoda and Buddhini Chatumaduri Dharmawardhana, provides insights into these concepts. That study was carried out within a limited time frame, involving observations and discussions with local villagers (Jayagoda and Dharmawardhana, 2025).

The products and services produced in each town, the processes involved, and the challenges faced by the villages or individuals engaged in these industries were not explored in greater detail due to several limitations, including financial, time, and human resource constraints. The team intends to carry out extensive research in the future, overcoming these challenges, and aims to publish additional volumes of this book as an extension of the current study (Jayagoda and Dharmawardhana, 2025).

In conclusion, it is apparent that Sri Lanka has the potential to achieve economic development while fulfilling most of the Sustainable Development Goals, including ‘No Poverty’ (SDG 1), ‘Zero Hunger’ (SDG 2), ‘Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), ‘Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). The application of the OVOP concept in Sri Lanka presents a promising pathway for inclusive and sustainable rural development. By leveraging the country's rich diversity in culture, agriculture, and natural resources, OVOP can empower and encourage local communities to identify unique products that reflect their identity and heritage. It encourages value addition, enhances entrepreneurship, and creates opportunities for export-oriented local industries, particularly in rural and underdeveloped regions.

While several small-scale initiatives in Sri Lanka such as traditional crafts, spices, and agriculture-based products already align with the OVOP philosophy, a more structured national OVOP framework could amplify a very strong socio-economic impact. Success will depend on government support, capacity building, access to markets and finance, and strong community ownership. If effectively implemented, OVOP can become a powerful tool to reduce rural poverty, promote regional equity, and drive socio-economic transformation across Sri Lanka.

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Dignity-Based Leadership in Practice: Visual Narratives from the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association

By Sithhara Guruge

Leadership in Sri Lanka is too often imagined as something formal: one that is tied to titles and examination results. Unfortunately, the education policies of the country have continued to mirror this narrow line of thinking because for decades, science and mathematics have been placed on a pedestal whilst subjects like history, civics and arts have been pushed aside as optional or soft subjects (Priyadarshani et al., 2022; Aturupane, 2023). Recent debates over curriculum reform even suggested removing history as a compulsory subject, prompting public concern that the humanities were being treated as being dispensable (Samaraweera, 2025). Yet leadership is not built on test scores alone. It grows in lived experiences of care, service and creativity (Goleman, 2015; Bandura, 1997; Garrido, 2025).

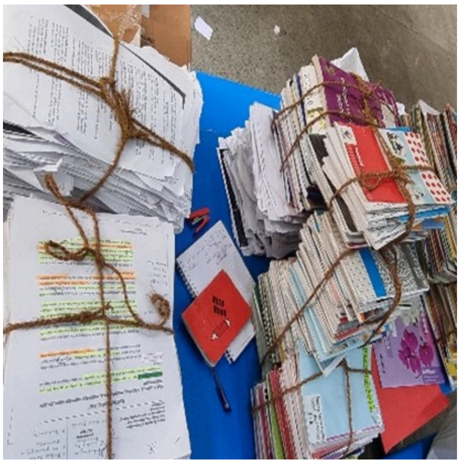
Where formal curricula fall short of achieving their intended objectives, informal institutions have quietly stepped in to nurture what policy neglects. The Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association (SLGGA) with its century long traditions have become one such space. They are not bound by exams or marks. Instead, it is an activity-based form of learning: girls and young women plan, play and serve. They make mistakes and learn through them to lead with dignity. Dignity-based leadership is about recognizing the worth of every individual, treating others with fairness, respect and creating a space for voices that are often left unheard (Hicks, 2018). Thereby, it aims to shift the meaning of leadership away from hierarchy and authority towards empathy, inclusion and service.

While guiding quietly answers the gaps left by policy, it also speaks to the world. The work of the SLGGA reflects the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out by the United Nations. It advances SDG 4 on quality education by showing that learning is more than textbooks and SDG 5 on gender equality by placing young girls at the center of leadership training. For the Girl Guides, these SDGs are not abstract promises but lived realities, cultivated through the practice of dignity-based leadership. Thereby, this photo essay offers a glimpse into that reality where volunteer activities build character and nurture leadership grounded in dignity and service.

About the Author Sithhara Guruge is currently a Research Intern at the Bandaranaike Academy for Leadership and Public Policy (BALPP). She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Science from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from the University of London.

Campers at Work: Small Hands but Big Preparations

One afternoon at Lyceum International School, Nugegoda the courtyard came alive with energy. Some girls were tying ropes and shaping wood into camp gadgets while others painted decorations to give colour to their tents. At the corner of the company another group of girls were as busy as bees but were focused on carefully sorting out piles of old and used printed materials. Some were bundled to sell for camp funds while others deemed academically useful were set aside to be donated to the needy.



In this mix of making, painting and collecting, they were learning more than how to prepare for a camp. Every task mattered and every girl's contribution was recognized. This reflected SDG 4 in practice as classroom learning was replaced by practical lessons in foresight, planning and collective responsibility. Scholars describe such project based activities as powerful training grounds for leadership because they demand problem solving and adaptability in real time (Larson & Angus, 2011). The girls were not just decorating or tying knots; they were coordinating, mobilizing resources and balancing creativity with contribution (Heifetz, 1998; Komives et al., 2006).

Such experiences nurture the qualities essential to leadership development, especially in a national context where education remains dominated by exams and technical content (World Bank, 2017).

Voice of the Future SLGGA Media Stars 2025: Where Confidence Meets Leadership

At the Colombo Public Library Auditorium, more than 450 girl guides gathered for a workshop on communication. Partnering with the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation, this event gave them the chance to practice storytelling, public speaking and media use. Some girls spoke with trembling voices while others with surprising confidence. Heads nodded and hands clapped, but each attempt carried the same lesson: the belief that their voices mattered. Psychologists describe this as self-efficacy, the sense that one can act and make a difference (Bandura, 1997).

Ms. Anudi Gunasekara, Sri Lanka's representative at the Miss World Pageant 2025 and runner up in the Global Multimedia Challenge also encouraged everyone to view media as a tool for opportunity and creativity. When children take the microphone and share their stories, they learn more than communication. They begin to build trust in themselves and confidence in each other.

Research shows that these skills are closely tied to stronger civic participation and public life (Gonzalez et al., 2024). In that sense, the workshop was dignity-based leadership in action as it gave every girl's voice value echoing SDG 5's call for equality and SDG 4's vision of education that goes beyond textbooks to nurture confidence and creativity.

From Laughter to Leadership: The Butterfly Fiesta

Commissioner Butterflies, Ms. Rihana Anwar brought together more than 500 children from the Western Province into a world of colour and sound: a Butterfly Fiesta! Faces were painted, donuts decorated, clay figures shaped, and obstacle courses run with excitement. Mascots of Minnie Mouse and Winnie the Pooh joined in, and their playful presence made the children laugh even louder. What looked like a carnival was actually a reflection of dignity-based leadership practices

Psychologists remind us that play strengthens skills such as resilience, emotional balance and social intelligence which in turn prepares children to face challenges with confidence (Ginsburg, 2007). The Fiesta showed that informal spaces can complement formal schooling by giving children a chance to grow in ways that written tests cannot measure. In the sound of laughter and the sight of butterfly wings, leadership was quietly taking shape. It was learning in its truest sense, the kind of growth SDG 4 imagines when it speaks of quality education beyond books. It also echoed SDG 5 as every girl was given the same chance to join, play and shine. Woven through it all was dignity-based leadership: the quiet act of treating every child's joy as valuable and every small voice as worthy.






A more noteworthy fact was that Ms. Rihana and her team faced limited funds and difficulties in handling logistics, yet they secured sponsors and brought volunteers together to make the Fiesta a success. Their efforts show that learning dignity-based leadership skills does not stop with age or title. While the butterflies learned through play, the leaders who organized the event learned through challenge. Leadership grew on both sides, proving that it too is a lifelong journey.

From the camp preparations at Lyceum, to the voices in Colombo, the wings of the Butterfly Fiesta and the dedication and creativity of the organizers, one truth shines through: leadership is not confined to titles or examinations! It is nurtured in experience, in creativity and in service. Sri Lanka's education policy may continue to prioritize what is measurable, but the Sri Lanka Girl Guides show that what is immeasurable is often what matters most. The activities photographed give life to SDG 4 by showing that quality education is also found in play and teamwork. It also echoes SDG 5 by placing girls at the center of equal participation and empowerment. In doing so, they remind us that leadership is not a product of the system alone but of moments lived and shared. Thus, these photographs capture more than events; they reveal how guiding lights grow into leading lights. From campfires to policy tables, these girls and the women who guide them are building the future of dignity-based leadership in Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgement
Having journeyed through the movement as a President's Girl Guide Awardee, the author would like to extend her sincere gratitude to the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association. Much appreciation is given to the amazing team of leaders guided by the Chief Commissioner, Dr. Kusantha Herat, who went above and beyond to facilitate this activity within the framework of the Association's Child Safety and Protection Policy. The support received during events and conversations was invaluable in understanding how guiding shapes leadership at different levels!

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Breaking Ground: Policy Pathways for Women's Inclusion in Sri Lanka's Construction Industry

By Anika Williamson

Introduction

Sri Lanka's construction industry stands as a cornerstone of the nation's economic development, contributing significantly to GDP and employing hundreds of thousands of workers. Despite this economic significance, the sector faces a stark gender imbalance with women comprising a small fraction of the construction workforce, primarily in administrative and support roles, with even fewer in technical or leadership positions (Vijayaragunathan and Thalpage, 2019). This imbalance represents not only a social equity concern but also an economic inefficiency, limiting the talent pool in an industry that regularly faces skills shortages (Trading Economics, 2025).

As commercial and residential property development continues to expand across urban centres such as Colombo, Kandy, and Galle, it is necessary to pay attention to the composition of Sri Lanka's construction workforce. This opinion piece explores the multifaceted barriers to women's participation in Sri Lanka's construction industry and proposes policy interventions at both government and industry levels to create a more inclusive sector.

Current State of Women's Participation in Sri Lanka's Construction Industry

The construction industry in Sri Lanka, like in many other countries across the globe remains heavily male dominated. Women represent a very small percentage of the total construction workforce with significant disparities across job categories. While women have some representation in administrative and support roles, they constitute an even smaller fraction of on-site construction workers and technical professionals like engineers, architects, and project managers.

These figures have shown minimal improvement over recent years, despite overall growth in the industry. This stagnation is particularly concerning given that women comprise a substantial portion of engineering and architecture graduates from Sri Lankan universities. This indicates a significant leakage in the talent pipeline between education and entry into the professional workforce (Shanthaarchchi, 2024; Island, 2025).

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Cultural Perceptions and Gender Norms

The Sri Lankan culture often maintains traditional gender roles that can discourage women from entering male dominated fields. Construction work is frequently perceived as "men's work" requiring physical strength and technical aptitude attributes that cultural norms have traditionally not associated with women. These perceptions begin early with career guidance in schools rarely promoting construction as a viable option for girls.

Research indicates that many Sri Lankan families would discourage their daughters from pursuing construction careers due to concerns about the work environment and social perceptions (Shanthaarchchi, 2024). This cultural barrier creates a fundamental obstacle to increasing women's participation from the outset.

Drawing from direct professional experience within the industry, this account illustrates how gender bias manifests in workplace settings, while also highlighting perceived improvements in efforts to encourage female participation.

Family Responsibilities and Work-Life Balance

The expectation for women to serve as primary caregivers and household managers presents another significant barrier. Construction work often demands long, inflexible hours and sometimes requires travel to remote sites that conflict with caregiving responsibilities disproportionately assigned to women within our society. Studies consistently show that Sri Lankan women spend significantly more time daily on unpaid care work compared to men. This disparity creates a structural disadvantage for women seeking to establish careers in time intensive fields like construction.

Workplace Harassment and Hostile Environments

Perhaps the most immediate deterrent for women on construction sites is the prevalence of harassment and discrimination. Research indicates that a substantial majority of women who have worked in construction report experiencing various forms of harassment or discrimination, ranging from inappropriate comments to more serious incidents (Holdsworth, et al, 2020). These problems are often more pronounced in larger construction sites and rural locations.

The male dominated culture of many construction sites, combined with inadequate facilities for women (such as separate restrooms and changing areas), creates environments where women often feel unwelcome, unsafe, or unable to perform at their best. The physical isolation of being one of the few women on a site compounds vulnerability and discomfort.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

Beyond social factors, institutional barriers persist. These include limited access to technical training, networks, and mentorship opportunities. Construction skills development programs often inadvertently exclude women through their scheduling, location, or outreach methods. Additionally, recruitment practices frequently rely on word-of-mouth and existing networks, which tend to perpetuate gender homogeneity.

The lack of visible female role models in leadership positions within construction companies further reinforces the perception that the industry is not for women. Very few construction company boards in Sri Lanka include women. However, I believe this is changing with women such as Sandamini Perera - Co-Founder & Co-Chairperson of Prime Lands (Pvt) Ltd and Romali Tudawe - Chief Executive Officer at Tudawe Brothers (Pvt) Ltd, paving the way for others to step into the construction industry (Daily FT, 2024; Prime Lands Residencies PLC, n.d.)

Australia's Women in Construction Initiative

Australia has made significant strides in increasing women's participation through its National Women in Construction Initiative. This comprehensive program includes targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, and mandatory inclusivity training for all site supervisors. The initiative has substantially helped increase women's participation in the Australian construction industry recently (National Association of Women in Construction, n.d.).

Singapore's Built Environment Industry Transformation Map

Singapore has successfully implemented quotas for women's employment in government construction contracts, requiring minimum female workforce participation on public projects. Additionally, their "Respectful Workplaces" certification program, administered by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA), incentivises companies to create harassment free environments (Building and Construction Authority, n.d.). These measures have resulted in women comprising a notably higher percentage of Singapore's construction workforce compared to regional averages.

Sweden's Flexible Work Arrangements

Sweden stands out for its innovative approach to work-life balance in construction. Many Swedish construction firms have implemented compressed work weeks, job sharing arrangements, and on-site childcare facilities for major projects. These practices have contributed to significantly higher women's participation rates in on-site construction work and the overall construction workforce compared to global averages (IMD, n.d.).

Policy Recommendations for Sri Lanka

Based on local challenges and international successes, the following policy recommendations aim to increase women's participation in Sri Lanka's commercial and residential construction sectors. However, it is important to note that Sri Lanka's economic context, social systems, and labour protections differ significantly from developed countries, requiring adaptation rather than direct replication of international models.

Government-Level Interventions

- **Educational Reform and Early Exposure**
    - Introduce construction related activities and career orientation in primary and secondary schools, targeting both boys and girls equally

- Establish scholarship programs specifically for women entering construction related tertiary education
- Support technical and vocational education and training institutions such as the National Institute of Technical Education (NITA) in actively recruiting female students for construction courses

- **Legislative and Regulatory Measures**
  - Strengthen and enforce anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws specific to construction workplaces
  - Implement gender responsive procurement policies with incentives for construction contracts that demonstrate gender diversity
  - Establish minimum requirements for women's participation in government funded construction projects
  - Reform labour laws to mandate adequate facilities for women on construction sites, including separate restrooms, changing areas, and personal protective equipment designed for women

- **Financial Incentives and Support**
  - Provide tax benefits for construction companies that achieve gender diversity targets
  - Establish grants for women entrepreneurs starting construction-related businesses
  - Create subsidised childcare programs specifically for women in construction

Industry-Level Interventions

- **Workplace Culture and Environment**
  - Develop and implement industry wide codes of conduct that explicitly address harassment and discrimination
  - Create certification programs for "Women Friendly Construction Sites" with clear standards and regular audits, potentially administered by the Chamber of Construction Industry Sri Lanka (CCI) in partnership with the Institute for Construction Training and Development (ICTAD)
  - Establish a centralised reporting mechanism for harassment complaints that ensures confidentiality and effective resolution
  - Companies championing women in the workforce and skill development programs. JAT Holdings PLC for example has a training program specific for female painters

- **Flexible Work Arrangements**
  - Promote job sharing models that allow for more flexible scheduling
  - Implement phased return-to-work programs for women after maternity leave
  - Pilot compressed work weeks and flexible scheduling arrangements to allow for better work-life balance, subject to amendments to the Shop and Office Employees Act and Factories Ordinance to accommodate alternative work arrangements

- **Mentorship and Professional Development**
  - Establish industry wide mentorship programs pairing experienced women in construction with newcomers

- Create women's networks within the construction industry for peer support and professional development
- Develop leadership training programs specifically targeting women in mid-level construction roles

- **Visibility and Role Models**
  - Launch media campaigns highlighting successful women in Sri Lanka's construction industry
  - Establish annual awards recognizing women's achievements in various construction roles similar to those arranged by organizations such as Women In Management
  - Create a speakers' bureau of women construction professionals for school career days and public events

Collaborative Public-Private Initiatives

- **Construction Skills Development Program for Women**
  - Establish training centres in partnership with industry associations that offer women only introductory courses to construction trades
  - Develop apprenticeship programs with provisions for female participants
  - Create mobile training units that can reach women in rural areas

- **Construction Industry Gender Equity Council**
  - Form a multi-stakeholder council including government representatives, industry leaders, educational institutions, and women's organizations to monitor progress and coordinate initiatives
  - Collect and publish gender disaggregated data on the construction workforce annually, coordinate between relevant government departments and industry associations to ensure comprehensive data collection and reporting
  - Empower the council to review and recommend updates to policies and programs based on measured outcomes

- **Community Engagement and Awareness**
  - Launch public awareness campaigns challenging stereotypes about women in construction
  - Work with community leaders and religious institutions to address cultural barriers
  - Engage with parents' associations to promote construction careers to girls

Conclusion

Increasing women's participation in Sri Lanka's construction industry, particularly in commercial and residential property development, represents both a social imperative and an economic opportunity. By addressing cultural perceptions, family responsibilities, workplace harassment, and structural barriers through coordinated government and industry policies, Sri Lanka can tap into an underutilised talent pool and create a more innovative, diverse, and productive construction sector.

The experiences of countries like Australia, Singapore, and Sweden demonstrate that meaningful progress is possible with targeted interventions. Sri Lanka must adapt these approaches to its unique economic and social context rather than replicate them directly. For Sri Lanka to maintain competitiveness in its construction industry while addressing skills shortages, embracing gender diversity is not optional, it is essential.

As we build the physical infrastructure of Sri Lanka's future, we must simultaneously build the social infrastructure that enables all capable individuals, regardless of gender, to contribute their skills and talents to this crucial industry. The policy recommendations outlined here offer a blueprint for the construction industry, one that will ultimately strengthen not only our buildings but also our society and economy.

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Interview

Human Rights in a Plural and Diverse Society


Shayani Jayasinghe/ Senior Researcher of the BALPP in Conversation with Dr. Mario Gomez, Executive Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo

- **What are the main Human Rights Priorities in Sri Lanka Right Now?**

There are several and I will deal with a few of them.

One of the main problems in Sri Lanka at the moment is impunity. This has been a problem for several decades. People have committed human rights violations, but they have not been prosecuted or had to suffer other consequences. This applies in relation to crimes in connection with the ethnic conflict, and in relation to other crimes such as corruption or the abuse of power.

There have been crimes associated with the conflict: murder, disappearances, and sexual violence. Parties linked to the state, the LTTE(Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and other armed groups have been alleged to have committed these crimes. However, very few perpetrators have been prosecuted. In one case where the perpetrator was convicted, and his conviction confirmed by the Supreme Court, he was released by way of a Presidential Pardon during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 16 odd 'Emblematic Cases' involving serious human rights violations that took place during the war, prima facie cases were established against several perpetrators, but no prosecutions ensued.

There have been dozens of commissions of inquiry over the years. Some of them have established prima facie cases against perpetrators and even named them. However, in almost all cases, they have not had to face prosecution.

For prosecution and penal consequences to ensue, you need an independent Attorney-General's Department and an independent police force to do the prior investigations and bring these cases before the court. In recent years, there has been a call to establish an Independent Prosecutor's Office to prosecute serious human rights crimes because the Attorney General plays conflicting roles: the office is advisor to the state and 'defender of the public interest'.

Religious violence perpetrated against religious minorities has also been a problem over the years. On some occasions the state has stood by and allowed extremist groups to attack religious minorities, physically and through hate speech online. No criminal consequences have ensued.

Creating a society that is wedded to the rule of law and addressing impunity would require that all perpetrators be prosecuted and that the law is applied equally across all groups and persons, irrespective of the position they hold in public life, or their ethnicity or religion. Any person who violates the constitution or the law, should be held accountable.

- **What are your views on the Chemmani Mass Grave?**

The Chemmani mass grave site is one of almost 30 conflict-related mass grave sites in Sri Lanka. It is another illustration of the failure of the Sri Lankan state to deal with its unpleasant past. Excavations have taken place at many of these mass grave sites, but no one has been held responsible for the crimes. It is a dark period of our history, a period that we should not forget.

Chemmani was first identified during the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case (one of the few prosecutions during the conflict) when one of those who was convicted took police officers and identified the location as a mass grave site.

Recent excavations have unearthed several hundred skeletal remains including remains of young children. The situation calls for an impartial and independent judicial process and the forensic capacity to establish the identity of the remains.

- **What are your views on the rights of women and LGBTI+ communities?**

There are several issues with regard to women that need to be addressed through policy and practice. One of them relates to the lack of women in politics and other spheres of decision-making. While this Parliament is better than the previous one, there is still a long way to go to ensure a parity of representation between women and men in decision-making. There are other areas such the corporate sector, the public sector, and in the professions, where women continue to be under-represented.

Violence against women continues to be widespread in homes, in the workplace, and in the public space. The law on Domestic Violence has helped abused women to access remedies, but this law needs to be reformed so that it integrates a rights-based approach entrenching a right to be free from violence from all sources. Women continue to play a disproportionate role as carers, and their economic contribution is not recognized by national statistics.

The LGBTI+ community continues to be discriminated against in law. The Penal Code prohibits homosexual activity, even if it is among consenting adults. While other countries such as India, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, have removed the discriminatory provisions on homosexual activity, Sri Lanka has not moved with the times. The Supreme Court has said that decriminalizing homosexual activity would enhance the dignity of these groups, yet there has been no legal reform on this matter. The current government came into power promising to remove these provisions. Yet, it has been a year now, and there has been no movement on this. Where Sri Lanka should be leading on legal reform whether it be with regard to artificial intelligence or rights of the LGBTIQ community , the country always tends to lag behind.

- **What has been the Role of the Courts?**

The Supreme Court has played an important role in upholding rights recognized in the Constitution and the rule of law. In recent years, there have been some significant decisions on a variety of matters. For example, the Court has said that Sri Lanka is a plural society even though the Constitution privileges Buddhism, and that all religious minorities should have the freedom to practice their religion. It has upheld the right of a Bhikkhuni to an identity card. There have been cases that have upheld the right to free expression, the freedom from torture, and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, the right against arbitrary arrest, and the right to equality and equal protection of the law. It has also reviewed the unconstitutional release of convicted prisoners by the President, the declaration of emergency by the state, and issued an important decision on the X-Press Pearl marine disaster.

One of the important principles that has been established by the Court is on public trust. The Court has stated that all public power is held in trust by public officials. Power cannot be used for an extraneous purpose and must be used for the purpose for which it was given. These principles must be shared with all public officers and here the BALPP has a role to play.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court does not have the power to review the validity of laws. Almost all democracies give their constitutional courts the power to review legislation. However, this power was removed in 1972 and has not been re-introduced. Any future constitutional reform process should make sure that the courts are given this power again and consequently establish three co-equal organs of government: the legislature, the executive, and the courts.

- **What roles do the Human Rights Commission and the other Independent Commissions play?**

The Human Rights Commission has several roles. It can inquire into allegations of human rights violations, it can engage in awareness-raising and education, it can review policy and legislation and make recommendations to government, it can inspect places of detention, and it can conduct other inquiries into human rights violations.

The Right to Information Commission has played an important role in advancing the right to information and creating a culture of transparency. It has tried to make the disclosure of public information the norm, and secrecy and opaqueness the exception. Having information in the public domain is important to combat corruption and ensure transparent governance.

There is a newly established National Commission on Women, and I hope that this commission will play an important role in advancing women' rights.

- **What are the Priorities for Law Reform?**

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) should be abolished. It is one of the most draconian laws in our books. It provides for long periods of detention without judicial supervision and creates very broad offences. It has been used not only against those who have resorted to armed violence, but also against Sinhalese and Muslims who have opposed the state. The government came to power promising to abolish the PTA, but nothing has been done in a year. There has been no moratorium on its use, and the Act continues to be used.

The Online Safety Act should be repealed. Here too, the Act provides for very broad and vague offences. There is a need to regulate online speech. However, the law should ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between free speech, one of our most cherished rights, and the regulation of online posts.

The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) should be amended to ensure that Muslims can marry under the general laws of marriage, if they so wish. The law should also ensure a minimum age of marriage for girls from all religions and enable the appointment of Muslim women as Quazi Judges.

A new law on the rights of persons living with disabilities is urgently required. Many previous governments have promised a new law, but this has not transpired. The new law should take a rights-based approach drawing from the principles in the International Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which Sri Lanka is a party.

The ICCPR Act should also be repealed. It was supposed to entrench rights but instead has been used against those who dissent against the state and against political opponents.

As I have already mentioned, the Penal Code should be amended to decriminalize homosexuality and abolish discrimination against the LGBTI+ community.

- **Is there a need for Constitutional Reform?**

The Executive Presidency should be abolished. Too many powers are vested in a single office. As the economic crisis of 2022 showed, it has failed as a system of governance. We need to return to a Westminster system with an appropriate balance of powers among all three organs of government: the legislature, the executive, and the courts. Many previous governments have promised to abolish the Executive Presidency. This government has also promised to do the same. Whether it has the courage to go ahead with this reform is left to be seen.

We urgently need a constitutional settlement to the ethnic question. The constitutional proposals for power-sharing released in 1995 that suggested a Union of Regions for Sri Lanka provided some of the best ideas to move forward on a constitutional settlement. Unfortunately, this was not pursued.

We should also be willing to consider the idea of asymmetric power sharing. Some societies like Spain with a dominant minority in one region have used asymmetric power sharing to address their ethnic conflicts. Under asymmetric power-sharing, one region may have more powers than other regions.

As I already mentioned, constitutional reform should also consider giving the Supreme Court the power to review legislation.

- **How can Human Rights be Integrated into Public Policy and Public Decision-Making process of Sri Lanka?**

For these human rights standards that are being articulated by the Supreme Court and other institutions to be effective, they must become part of public policy, legislation, and public decision-making.

The Bandaranaike Academy of Leadership and Public Policy and similar institutions have a role to play. You have regular access to public policy makers, and you should use that opportunity to organise dialogues and interactive discussions on these themes and the standards developed by the Supreme Court. Other institutions like the Sri Lanka Institute for Development Administration (SLIDA), the Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance, and other training institutes also have access to public officers and decision-makers, and they should use these opportunities too. Independent commissions such as the Human Rights Commission, the RTI Commission, the Commission to Investigate All Forms of Bribery and Corruption, and the National Commission on Women, also have a role to play in engaging with the public sector and the public on issues of human rights.

Bridging the Gender Gap in Educational Leadership in Sri Lanka: Rethinking Policy and Practice

By W.G.K.M.S. Rathnayaka

Introduction

Throughout the world, teaching is regarded as a feminine profession (Bush, 2021). However, female leaders are underrepresented in schools worldwide and they are known to face a variety of challenges including gaining access to and exercising leadership (Bush, 2021; Coleman, 2005; Hockett, 2021; Lu, 2020; Martnez, et al., 2020; Mitroussi and Mitroussi, 2009; Oyeniran, 2018; Oyeniran and Lili, 2020; Vella, 2020; Young, 2005).

Similarly, Sri Lanka has the impressive statistics on female participation in the teaching profession, yet a paradox remains as females are dramatically underrepresented in educational leadership positions. Despite comprising more than 75% of the teaching workforce, females hold only about a quarter of principal positions in government secondary schools (MoE, 2006-2020).

This policy brief examines the roots and consequences of this leadership gap, drawing from both global and local research. It also recommends actionable strategies to create a more equitable landscape for aspiring female educational leaders in Sri Lanka.

The Feminization of Teaching, Not Leadership

Like many other nations, Sri Lanka has been taking measures to promote gender equality in a variety of areas, including education. However, when compared to the percentage of female teachers, female principals in government schools are significantly underrepresented in secondary schools in Sri Lanka as in Table 1 (MoE 2010-2020).

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Year	Teacher Workforce (6-13)				Principals Workforce (Secondary Schools)			
	No. of Female Teachers	% of Female Teachers	No. of Male Teachers	% of Male Teachers	No. of Female Principals	% of Female Principals	No. of Male Principals	% of Male Principals
2020	182,916	77.2%	53,989	22.8%	2,038	26.8%	5,577	73.2%
2019	168,166	79.2%	44,122	20.8%	2,902	26.8%	7,944	73.2%
2018	178,174	77.2%	52,484	22.8%	2,617	24.8%	7,921	75.2%
2016	167,484	76.2%	52,256	23.8%	2,325	23.0%	7,776	77.0%
2011	152,166	75.0%	50,718	25.0%	2,079	21.3%	7,677	78.7%
2006	134,263	74.8%	45,294	25.2%	1,995	20.7%	7,664	79.3%

Table 1. Details of teacher workforce and principals workforce in Sri Lanka (MoE, 2006 - 2020)

From 2006 to 2020, females consistently represented around three-quarters of Sri Lanka's teaching workforce, ranging from 74.8% to 79.2%. However, their representation in secondary school principal positions remained disproportionately low as 20.7% in 2006 to 26.8% in 2020. This slow progress highlights a persistent gender gap in educational leadership, where women dominate teaching but remain underrepresented in leadership roles.

The reasons for this phenomenon are complex and multifaceted encompassing personal, societal, and institutional barriers. The leadership is still framed as a masculine domain and teaching may be viewed as compatible with women's traditional caregiving roles (Ajani et al., 2022; Elisha, 2012; Herath, 2015).

Global Contexts: Comparative Insights

This leadership disparity is not unique to Sri Lanka. In New Zealand, although nearly 80% of teachers are women, female representation in school leadership is disproportionately low (Wylie et al., 2020). Similarly, in the USA, women make up about 80% of teachers but only 13.2% of superintendents and 26% of secondary school principals (Young, 2005). In the UK and Greece, Mitroussi and Mitroussi (2009) found that cultural and structural barriers kept women out of senior leadership roles, despite their dominance in teaching.

These global patterns emphasize the requirement of policy reforms that actively minimize the system barriers and create pathways for female leadership in education.

Barriers to Female Educational Leadership

More practical reasons like gender discrimination, gender bias, stereotyping, cultural norms, traditional social roles, social expectations, family commitments, heavy workloads, household responsibilities, inability to balance private life and work life, difficulties in administration, or a combination of these factors act as barriers for females to achieving leadership positions (ElAtia et al., 2022; Elisha and Edward 2014; Kazak, 2022; Komiti and Moorosi, 2020).

Female principals perceive that their capabilities and intelligence can be undermined simply because they are women (Komiti and Moorosi, 2020). Historically, males and females have had reasonably prescribed roles where males were income generators and females were confined to familial responsibilities (Kapoor et al., 2021). Countries like China, Turkey, India and many Islamics have gender norms that males traditionally lead, and females are limited to other submissive roles (Ajani et al., 2022; Elisha, 2012).

Institutions such as traditional corporate structures and educational administrations often perceive women as as inferior employees due to assumptions about family responsibilities, which undermines their reliability and commitment. Such gendered expectations create career barriers including limited advancement opportunities and financial burdens associated with maternity leave (ElAtia et al., 2022; Komiti and Moorosi, 2020). Moreover, the females experienced challenges including lower remuneration than males and gender-based discrimination at the workplace (Kapoor et al., 2021; Komiti and Moorosi, 2020).

Besides the institutional barriers, cultural and societal norms also hinder women's career advancement. Cultural beliefs that leadership is a male domain can discourage women, particularly teachers, from aspiring to roles such as principalship (Kapoor et al., 2021; Mulawarman, 2015). Although women today have greater freedom to focus on their careers, many still prefer roles that allow a balance between professional and family responsibilities (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011).

In Sri Lanka, there is a cultural belief that male principals are better leaders for mixed schools and boys' schools while female principals are suitable for leading girls' schools (Sedere, 2012). Herath (2015) highlighted females in Sri Lanka struggle with accepted customs, values, attitudes, and prejudices arising from various historical experiences in Sri Lankan culture. The lack of transparent selection and promotion policies, and challenges in getting mentoring opportunities can slow down female teachers' from entering leadership positions (Kapoor et al., 2021).

Further, researchers have found that there are some challenges like the glass ceiling effect for females to perform in their leadership positions which men are not likely to face (Zacharakis, 2017). The glass ceiling was understood as the invisible but inaccessible barrier that prevents minorities and women from climbing the top steps of the hierarchy, regardless of their qualifications or achievements (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995 as stated in Pavlidou, 2022).

Female principals often face significant challenges in balancing family responsibilities with professional aspirations, which can discourage them from pursuing leadership roles (Kapoor, et al., 2021; Woldegeb riel and Mekonnen, 2023). Married female leaders with young children, in particular, encounter heightened internal barriers due to their family commitments (Campbell and Campbell-Whatley, 2020).

Policy Recommendations

Addressing the gender gap in educational leadership in Sri Lanka requires multi-level interventions ranging from recruitment policies to training, mentoring, and cultural transformation.

Mentoring

Extra training or formal mentoring is an added advantage for females to obtain school leadership positions and successfully lead the schools with enhanced confidence (Funk and Polnik, 2005; Kapoor et al., 2021; Murakami and Törnsen, 2017). Even in the absence of formal mentoring, many female principals engage in informal mentoring to build confidence for applying for principalship (Kekana, 2015; Bartling, 2013). Both formal and informal mentoring are important in motivating women to pursue leadership roles (Bush and Middlewood, 2012).

Developing the targeted leadership training programmes for females, providing mentoring, coaching, and networking opportunities may help to build confidence, perform better in the principal's role, and provide role models for aspiring female leaders (Agyiewaa and Attom, 2018). Formal mentoring programmes for female principals should be established in Sri Lanka to offer guidance, support, encouragement, and confidence to take on leadership roles and develop the female leaders' leadership skills.

Continuous Professional Development

Training has been identified as very crucial for females to successfully lead the schools (Funk and Polnik, 2005; Kapoor et al., 2021; Murakami and Törnsen, 2017; Woldegebriel and Mekonnen, 2023). Ng and Szeto (2015) show that new principals promptly want to develop skills in human resources management, practical techniques of financial management, the skills to deal with legal matters in school management, and curriculum and instructional leadership.

Continuous and tailor-made professional development programmes should be specifically designed and implemented for female principals with the relevant and practical content. They should be designed to address the unique challenges female principals face, including societal expectations, stakeholder management, and work-life balance. Policies and practices should also be implemented to support the work-life balance of female principals including flexible working arrangements during professional development.

Establishing a Professional Community

Female principals who build supportive work teams can manage family responsibilities without disturbing school operations which allows them to maintain the work-life balance (Garcia, 2015). Facilities and support should be provided to establish a professional community for female principals to share their experiences, knowledge, best practices; and to help address the problems they face, to empower them, and to reduce feelings of isolation.

Recognition and Motivation

The outdated belief that women lack the essential skills or desire for leadership is no longer valid because the real challenge for contemporary organizations is addressing the increased demands on leaders while balancing work and family responsibilities (Blackmore, 2013). Career advancement opportunities for women are influenced by both organizational factors such as promotion pathways and networking and individual efforts like self-study, confidence, and motivation to pursue leadership roles (Komiti and Moorosi, 2020). When planning the recognition programmes, special focus should be given to acknowledging the unique contributions of female principals and offering rewards that reflect their achievements to motivate them and other females to take on leadership roles.

Making Aware the Society

Awareness campaigns should be held with the community including educators, students, and parents to reshape societal expectations about gender roles in school leadership, and to promote the idea that leadership is not gender-specific and encourage acceptance of female leaders in all school settings.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka has made remarkable progress in access to education, especially for girls and women, through policies such as free education and the provision of other welfare facilities. However, this success has not translated into equal representation in school leadership. Female dominated teaching profession and male-dominated leadership reveals persistent gender inequality in the educational sector in Sri Lanka.

Bridging this leadership gap is not merely an issue of professional equity, it is a matter of social justice and institutional effectiveness. Diverse leadership strengthens educational institutions by bringing varied perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches. To ensure that Sri Lanka's education system continues to evolve in an inclusive and equitable direction, gender-focused reforms in leadership development must be prioritized. Only then, we may truly claim that our education system is not only providing access to resources, but also equal opportunities for growth and development.

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A Review of Editorial Policies on Use of AI Tools in Research

By Uditha Gunasekara

Abstract
The field of research and scholarly publishing is rapidly changing due to Artificial Intelligence (AI), with tools such as machine learning, natural language processing, and generative AI increasingly integrated into research workflows. These technologies support hypothesis generation, data analysis, academic writing, and literature management, while also raising challenges related to transparency, accountability, and ethical use in research. This review examines the policies and guidelines of five leading scholarly publishers such as Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, MDPI, and Taylor & Francis. It concerns the use of AI in research and scientific publishing. Findings reveal significant variations in disclosure requirements, particularly concerning AI-assisted writing, authorship, and peer review practices. While all publishers prohibit AI systems from being listed as authors, they permit limited use for editing, proofreading, and language enhancement, provided it is transparently declared. The study highlights the absence of standardized policies across publishers, emphasizing the need for broader dialogue to ensure integrity, credibility, and the responsible use of AI in scholarly communication.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Research, Publisher Policies, AI Tools

AI in Research

AI is a rapidly evolving field that integrates technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing, and generative AI across diverse sectors. It focuses on developing systems capable of reasoning, learning, and performing tasks that typically require human intelligence or involve large-scale data analysis. As a multidisciplinary domain, AI draws on computer science, statistics, engineering, linguistics, neuroscience, and philosophy. According to Google Cloud (2025), AI in business relies mainly on machine learning and deep learning to enable data analytics, forecasting, natural language processing, recommendations, and intelligent information retrieval.

About the Author Uditha Gunasekara obtained his BA Degree in Demography from University of Colombo and then he obtained his MA degree in Development Practice from University of Peradeniya. Currently, Mr. Gunasekara is serving as a Research Officer of the National Library & Documentation Services Board, Sri Lanka as well as an officer in charge in to the SDGs. His research interests are in Information Literacy, Development Studies, and Research Methodology and particularly in data analytical tools such as SPSS & NVivo. He has authored several research articles in the fields of population & development studies and Library & Information Science.

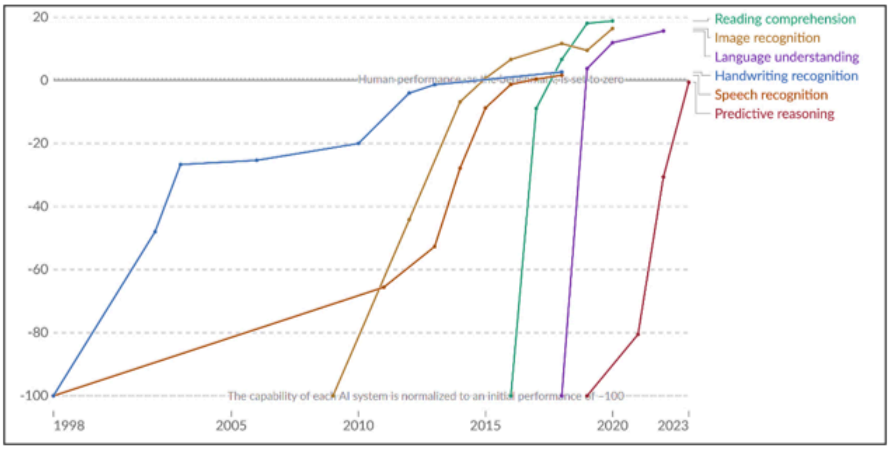

Figure 1: Test scores of AI systems on various capabilities relative to human performance. Source: Kiela et al. (2023)

Here, Figure 1 illustrates the dataset which captures the progression of AI evaluation benchmarks, reflecting their adaptation to the rapid advancements in AI technology. The benchmarks cover a wide range of tasks, from language understanding to image processing, and are designed to test AI models' capabilities in various domains.

Research plays a major role in knowledge production, development, and the identification of new technologies and methodologies within academic circles. AI is rapidly transforming research across disciplines including social sciences, humanities, science, technology, and engineering. Currently, AI technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing, and generative AI are being integrated into every stage of the research process from hypothesis generation and experiment design to data collection, analysis, and publication. AI driven tools for research help researchers discover new sources, extract information from large databases, and find out the most relevant research articles to save their time. AI tools like ChatGPT, Copy.ai, and Elicit support writing while Zotero, Mendeley, and EndNote aid literature management. On the other hand, Grammarly and scholarly are search engines that enhance writing quality and research discovery while AI detection tools such as Turnitin AI help prevent misuse. These technologies benefit academic writing and data analysis, though their broader impact on research culture is still emerging (Van Belkom, 2020; Checco et al., 2020).

Researchers increasingly rely on AI generative text tools for conducting research, writing, and publishing. In response, scholarly publishers have developed AI related policies to guide manuscript preparation. For example, bibliometric studies such as Ganjavi et al. (2023) examined 100 science journals and highlighted author guidelines and consistency regarding the use of generative AI (GAI). Similarly, Lund, Brady and Naheem (2023) analyzed AI authorship policies across the top 300 academic journals. It was identified where and how AI contributions are acknowledged, including in the methods section, acknowledgments, dedicated sections or cover letters. It also examined the frequency of terms like 'AI-assisted technology,' 'authorship criteria,' and 'writing processes' in existing policies (Lund & Naheem, 2023). Apart from this, Leung et al. (2023) outlines best practices for using AI tools in scholarly publishing for authors, peer reviewers, and editors by emphasizing that authors are responsible for ensuring accountability, transparency, and confidentiality when incorporating AI into their work.

In the global context, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, 2023) supports research integrity by providing ethical guidelines for publishers and journals. On 13 February 2023, it issued a statement on AI tools like ChatGPT, clarifying that AI cannot be listed as an author since it cannot take responsibility, declare conflicts of interest or handle copyright matters. Authors must disclose any AI use in manuscript preparation, images, or data analysis, and remain accountable for the content. COPE also offers resources on the opportunities and risks of AI, and most publishers have since adopted its guidelines.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taken a leading role in shaping global policies on the ethical use of AI in research, education, and publishing. Its Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) adopted by all Member States highlights principles such as human rights, accountability, transparency, inclusivity, and data protection across the AI lifecycle. In 2023, UNESCO issued policy papers and global guidance on generative AI, highlighting both opportunities and risks, and stressing the need for human oversight, ethical evaluation, and disclosure of AI use in scholarly work. For research publishers, this means ensuring transparency in how AI tools are applied in manuscript preparation, data analysis, or content creation while safeguarding privacy, avoiding bias, and upholding fairness. UNESCO also promotes media and information literacy as essential to addressing challenges like bias, misinformation, and equity in AI driven research.

Objectives

The main objective of this review is to identify scholarly publisher policies and guidelines on the use of AI in the research process, including scientific writing and publishing. It focuses on the five top ranking publishers according to Scilit: a comprehensive content aggregator for scholarly publications, developed and maintained by the open access publisher MDPI AG. It is freely available to researchers, scholars, and the general public, covering journal articles, book chapters, monographs, and preprints (Scilit, 2025).

Top 05 publishers listed are as follows:

01. Elsevier
02. Springer Nature
03. Wiley
04. MDPI AG
05. Taylor & Francis

Publisher Policies

Elsevier

Elsevier has implemented a comprehensive AI author policy to ensure the integrity of the scholarly record while providing guidance on the use of generative AI and AI assisted technologies in academic publications. The policy promotes transparency for authors, readers, reviewers, and editors by clearly outlining roles and responsibilities associated with AI use.

Authorship implies responsibilities and tasks that can only be performed by humans, disallowing AI-generated content tools from being listed as authors. The guidelines provide a framework for editors, reviewers, and authors to navigate ethical, practical, and technical questions related to AI use; thus, safeguarding the quality and reliability of academic publications (Elsevier, 2025).

Springer Nature

Springer Nature updated its editorial policies to focus on AI authorship, generative AI images, and AI use by peer reviewers. Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT cannot be listed as authors, as authorship requires human accountability. AI usage must be documented in the Methods section, except for AI assisted copy editing for style and correctness. All final text must have human oversight and approval. AI-generated images and videos are prohibited, and reviewers should not upload manuscripts into AI tools. Any AI use must be transparently declared to ensure research quality, credibility, and compliance with ethical standards.

Wiley

Wiley developed best practice guidelines on AI and AI generative tools in 2023, and it was subsequently incorporated into the authorship section in the same year. AI-generated content tools, such as ChatGPT and other LLMs, cannot be considered original research without human direction. Their use must be transparently documented in the Methods or Acknowledgements sections, with authors taking full responsibility for accuracy and referencing. Basic editing tools for spelling, grammar, and style are exempt (SciPub, 2025).

MDPI AG

MDPI AG updated its authorship guidelines stating that AI tools such as ChatGPT and other LLMs cannot be listed as authors because they cannot take responsibility for content. Authors remain fully accountable for the originality, validity, and integrity of their manuscripts and must adhere to the publisher's ethical policies. While AI use is permitted, it must be transparently declared in the Acknowledgements and detailed in the Materials and Methods section.

Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis emphasizes that authors are responsible for the originality, validity, and integrity of their submissions. AI tools cannot be listed as authors, as authorship involves uniquely human responsibilities. Any use of AI must be acknowledged and documented with authors ensuring compliance with editorial policies and ethical standards.

Comparative Analysis

At present, the use of AI and generative AI tools throughout the research process is rapidly increasing. Preventing their use in manuscript preparation is a significant challenge for publishers.

Instead, publishers recommend clear disclosure of any AI tool usage to ensure transparency, accountability, and originality in research papers. Publishers require authors to disclose any use of AI tools in manuscript preparation to ensure transparency and to uphold research integrity. Such disclosures must specify how AI was used, whether for language editing, idea generation, image creation or data analysis, and should be placed in sections like acknowledgments or methods. Importantly, AI tools cannot be credited as authors since they cannot take responsibility, declare conflicts of interest or manage copyright agreements. Authors remain fully accountable for the accuracy, originality, and ethical standards of the work produced with AI assistance. Hence, these policies safeguard against plagiarism, bias, and misuse while promoting responsible and ethical integration of AI in scholarly publishing.

Name of the publisher	Materials & Methods	Acknowledgements	Cover letters	Disclosure section	Use of language Model	Reference	Notes
Elsevier	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-	-
Springer Nature	Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wiley	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-
MDPI AG	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	-	-
Taylor & Francis	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-

Table 1: Type of disclosure required by the publishers when authors use AI in manuscript preparation. Source: An evaluation of scholarly publisher policies on the use of AI Tools in research, 2024

Here, Table 1 shows the types of disclosures made by leading scholarly publishers. When authors use AI within the allowed sections, they are required to disclose this in various sections such as Materials and Methods, Acknowledgements, Cover Letters, Usage of Language, References and Notes. According to the Taylor & Francis policies, author/s must declare their use of AI tools in a separate discloser section. However, Springer Nature requires disclosure only for Materials & Methods. Some publishers, like Elsevier and Springer Nature request the authors to explicitly name the AI tools used and explain their purpose, while others such as Wiley permit more general statements. Similarly, certain publishers mandate that disclosures appear in a specific section like the Methods or Acknowledgments (Springer Nature, 2025). Despite these variations, all publishers consistently prohibit AI from being credited as an author, underscoring the principle that accountability must remain with human contributors or authors.

These disclosure requirements aim to maintain research integrity and accountability in the era of AI. While AI can assist with tasks like grammar correction, image generation or statistical analysis, the ultimate responsibility lies with human authors. The policy ensures transparency, preventing hidden AI involvement that might lead to plagiarism, data manipulation or ethical breaches. By mandating disclosure, publishers align with guidelines from COPE and UNESCO; thus, reinforcing ethical authorship standards.

Implications

The findings reveal a lack of standardization among publishers regarding policies on the use of AI in research writing, manuscript preparation and publishing. Each publisher introduces its own policies and guidelines while permitting the responsible use of AI. Authors are allowed to use AI tools for editing, proof reading and language improvement in hopes that it may contribute to improving the manuscript quality. Awareness of all publisher's policies or guidelines before manuscript preparation can also help reduce the risk of rejection for authors.

However, a broader dialogue is necessary across all levels to prevent unintended negative outcomes. Major academic publishers including Elsevier, Spring Nature, Wiley, MDPI and Taylor & Francis are facing issues in the areas of AI and research, especially when it comes to transparency and accountability, scope of acceptable editorial and peer review practices and ethical alignment. Hence, publishers and authors should be made aware of the current research practices. As it stands today, even if publishers acknowledge AI's promise as a helpful tool, they continue to place strict limits on its use in order to ensure that human monitoring, disclosure, and the responsibility to protect credibility and reliability of scholarly work is upheld.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides a human centered framework that many research publishers are encouraged to integrate into their editorial standards and ethical guidelines. Also, COPE states that AI tools cannot be listed as authors since they do not meet authorship criteria or legal responsibilities. Thus, authors must transparently disclose the use of AI, specify the tools used and their role, whilst remaining fully responsible for all manuscript content.

In the Sri Lankan context, specific guidelines for the use of AI in research publishing are still being developed. Several journals, including the Journal of the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka, Ceylon Journal of Science, Journal of Natural & Physical Sciences, the Sri Lanka Journal of Trauma and some conference organizers (local and international) request authors to disclose AI tool usage, take full responsibility for the content, and prohibit crediting AI as an author. Authors must ensure content accuracy, prevent plagiarism, and confirm they have permission for any AI-generated material. For example, to ensure transparency and uphold scholarly standards, the Journal of the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka requires authors to disclose any use of AI tools during the research and manuscript preparation process, typically before the Acknowledgements. AI tools must not be listed as authors. Human authors remain fully responsible for the integrity, accuracy, and originality of their work, in accordance with the requirements outlined by the Journal of the National Science Foundation.

The White Paper published by the Committee on Formulating a Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (CFSAI) identified that Sri Lanka's AI research and development sector should focus on critical areas and foster local innovations such as LLM tools in Sinhala and Tamil aimed at addressing national needs rather than simply replicating global technologies.

Also, it was noted that AI developments in Sri Lanka depended upon strong collaboration between academia, government, and industry professional who must be supported by skills, infrastructure, and international partnerships in order to foster innovation and stay aligned with global advancements.

Therefore, to ensure accountability, integrity, and transparency, the increasing use of AI tools in research must be guided by consistent and openly communicated editorial standards. Future research should focus on developing clear frameworks for the ethical use of AI, including guidelines for disclosure and appropriate attribution in scholarly work. Achieving standardization across journals and institutions will be critical to upholding the credibility of research and ensuring uniform practices both nationally and internationally.

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Instructional Leadership Practices of School Principals in Improving the Teaching and Learning Process of Secondary Schools in Sri Lanka

By H. M. K. S. Herath

Leadership can be defined as the act of guiding and inspiring an individual or motivating a team to achieve specific goals and objectives. The leadership role of school principals is fundamental for developing and improving learners' performance in schools. Out of all other objectives, the main aim of school principals is to facilitate and develop their students' academic improvement. There are various factors affecting the students' academic success, among them the leadership practices of principals directly affect the success of education in schools (Safeek and Nawastheen, 2020). Out of all other leadership practices, the widely practiced leadership style is instructional leadership (Hung and Ponnusamy, 2010). As an instructional leader, a school principal should create an educational advancement environment in the school, and to achieve these objectives, principals practice instructional leadership in their schools to uplift the learning standards of students. Instructional leadership is particularly effective in promoting professional development of teachers, enhancing teacher efficacy, and improving pedagogical outcomes of students (Yusof, et al, 2019).

Therefore, the instructional leadership practices of school principals are widely recognized as a key factor that influences teaching quality and student academic achievement (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). The literature reveals that regional disparities, insufficient resources, and a lack of systematic professional development programs for principals exacerbate the challenges in implementing effective instructional leadership practices (Bush and Glover, 2014). Considering the Sri Lankan context, there are a considerable number of school principals who engage in the school administration and management process; however, their contribution to the development of the school quality index appears to be low (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2024). Therefore, the principal as an instructional leader of the school should engage in instructional leadership roles such as supervision, teacher motivation, and providing the necessary feedback, as well as incentives for teachers to enhance skills for classroom teaching.

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Hence, principals' instructional leadership indirectly affects the students' pedagogical enhancement of the school; however, there is a lack of concern about instructional leadership in the education system. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this policy paper is to identify the instructional leadership roles of school principals in the Sri Lankan context. To this end, a systematic review was conducted to examine the role and impact of principals' instructional leadership practices and propose policy recommendations for the prevailing issues in the Sri Lankan school system.

Instructional leadership is the improvement of the teaching and learning process by improving teachers' behaviour to enhance the academic achievement of students. School principals, as instructional leaders play crucial roles in defining school mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive learning environment (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Accordingly, school principals collaboratively work with teachers to create a shared vision for teaching and learning, and provide the support, resources, and guidance needed to assist teachers in achieving school goals and objectives successfully. When considering instructional leadership, it can enhance learning in several ways. According to the key areas of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), firstly, instructional leaders set clear visions and goals for schools to outline desired learning outcomes for students. This helps teachers and students focus on a specific vision of the school and work towards a common goal. Secondly, instructional leaders build the learning culture of the school. Principals collaboratively work with teachers, encouraging them in professional development whilst nurturing an environment where everyone can learn. Another key role of instructional leadership is allocation of resources for school education. Principals as instructional leaders need to ensure that the school is equipped with adequate resources required to achieve their target objectives, and this includes instructional materials, technology, and professional development opportunities to improve teaching practices. Finally, principals play a crucial role in curriculum development and alignment. Principals who value instructional leadership work with teachers to create a strong, aligned curriculum that meets the diverse needs of their students and achieve pedagogical outcomes.

As McBrayer et al., (2022) and Shaked (2022) explain, instructional leaders make a real difference in several important ways. According to the above scholars, first and foremost, principals focus on learning, fostering a love of learning, and ensuring all students have access to high-quality education. Also, instructional leaders create a school culture with high expectations for both students and teachers in the belief that every student can achieve academic success. This mainly focuses on setting goals and actively supporting student stewardship of learning while simultaneously helping them to achieve individual learning goals. It is considered that monitoring of students' progress is another important practice of instructional leadership. Instructional leaders design and maintain systems that continuously monitor students' advancement toward their learning goals, using the information gathered to refine teaching strategies and address emerging learning needs. They understand the importance of protecting instructional time, minimizing disruptions, and maximising the time and resources available for effective teaching and learning.

Therefore, principals as instructional leaders pay attention to curriculum implementation and the advancement of the teaching and learning process of their schools. Curriculum coordination of school principals ensures coherence across grade levels and subject areas, fostering a smooth learning progression for students. Ultimately, providing ongoing support for teachers is essential. This can include observations, coaching, mentoring, supervision, and professional development opportunities geared towards empowering educators to be their best.

Teachers are the largest and most crucial input of the education system; hence, they influence the educational outputs. Therefore, teachers are considered essential constituents of the education system who provide the development of creativity among students, both as role models and as mentors. Because of the appropriate behaviour of the teacher as a role model, teaching is very fundamental and what the students learn would depend on the teacher's effectiveness. Teachers' effectiveness entails their competence, personal attributes, and behavioural manifestations that assist students in improving desired learning outcomes. Principals' instructional leadership can directly influence the teacher's effectiveness in classroom management and classroom instruction. The principal's guidance of teachers to follow several instructional leadership practices to manage classroom activities, such as directing, coaching, mentoring, supervising, critical reflection, and researching can facilitate collaborative and critical thinking to enhance the quality of teaching. Through instructional leadership practices, principals can create a culture of accountability to foster teachers' effectiveness and, with that, pursue a high level of academic achievement for all students.

Instructional leadership practices of school principals play a crucial role in the development and pedagogical enhancement of the students. As the top management of the school, not only principals but also deputy principals, assistant principals, sectional heads, and subject heads are essential to practice instructional leadership practices to achieve the desired learning outcomes of the teaching and learning process. In conclusion, instructional leadership is a critical component of school effectiveness. By prioritizing teacher development, pedagogical practices, and student achievement, principals can drive school improvement and student success. As educational leaders, principals must recognize the importance of instructional leadership and adopt practices that support teaching and learning.

Policy recommendations: Hence, instructional leadership directly influences the students' achievement and teachers' effectiveness. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Education in Sri Lanka needs to prepare continuous professional development (CPD) programmes on instructional leadership for principals, deputy principals, sectional-heads, and subject heads of schools to give a clear vision about students' academic excellence. It is important to implement a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess instructional leadership practices on teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Furthermore, provide policy support to provide teaching materials, technology, and updated curricula, with flexibility for Sri Lankan contextual needs.

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Bangladesh's Lessons for Sri Lanka: Combating Corruption and Building Economic Resilience

By Randeni R.A.S.T, Shanuka R.V, Athauda A.M.S.O.M & Wijayawardhana W.M.P.M

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Introduction

The economic and political crisis caused by COVID-19 in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh revealed serious issues of governance and corruption in both countries. A simultaneous economic decline and political turmoil in Sri Lanka led to the 'Aragalaya 2022' movement (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2023), while discontent among the people in Bangladesh resulted in the July Revolution of 2024 (Maisha & Monamee, 2025). These uprisings highlighted the urgent need for effective anti-corruption policies and comprehensive governance reforms. Corruption was deeply rooted in various public sectors, further weakening the already fragile economy and hindering long-term recovery of both the states.

In response, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh sought comprehensive reforms aimed at reducing corruption, enhancing transparency, and improving governance. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) played a central role by providing both countries with financial and technical support (Gopinath, 2025). Its proposals focused on restructuring public economic management systems, increasing transparency in public procurement processes, and strengthening anti-corruption regimes. There was an increasing need to curb corruption as both countries endured economic fluctuations.

Regional events that unfolded recently also highlighted the importance of governance reforms. In 2022, Kazakhstan experienced political unrest due to Russian-led interventions, and this illustrated how internal instability may unduly invite the presence of external actors (Nichols, 2022). Similarly, bombings which targeted the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project showcased the need to reevaluate security and governance measures pertaining to foreign funded initiatives (Ahmad, 2024). The war in Ukraine, further disrupted global supply chains, increasing energy costs and challenging economies that were already struggling due to corrupt systems (Kim, 2022). Bangladesh in contrast worked closely with China, using concessional loans and diversified trade to stabilize its economy, and this highlights the importance of strategic international relations in building resilience (Sikandar, 2024).

This article compares the policies on governance and corruption-mitigation implemented by Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, drawing lessons from their responses to corruption issues. It aims to outline major strategies that could promote sustainable recovery and foster good governance in both countries.

Comparative Analysis of Corruption Minimization Measures of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

The Government of Sri Lanka has implemented a series of reforms aimed at enhancing governance and accountability. A key component of this initiative is the Anti-Corruption Act, No. 9 of 2023, which received assent in August 2023 and expanded the powers of the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) as well as the legal framework to combat corruption (Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2023). Alongside these legislative measures, the Governance Diagnostic Report (GDA) was released in the same year (International Monetary Fund, 2023) as a direct response to the corruption related demands raised during the 2022 Aragalaya protests. It offers a roadmap for reforms that focus on transparency in public procurement and effective public sector management. Further to support this effort, the government enacted the Public Financial Management Act, No. 44 of 2024 (Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2024),which aims to increase transparency in public procurement and enhance the accountability of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) which have been grappling with corruption for a long period of time.

Moreover, under the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sri Lanka has officially committed to improving the effectiveness of tax collection and strengthening its anti-corruption systems. Technical expertise and financial support from the IMF through the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) have played a key role in supporting these reforms.
Bangladesh still faces endemic corruption, especially in the public sector. The governance diagnostic report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the country identified significant weaknesses in tax management and public investment management (International Monetary Fund, 2023). To address these issues, Bangladesh introduced the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, which established the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to investigate corruption in government institutions with technical support from the IMF and other international organizations (Anti-Corruption Commission Reform Commission, 2025). Additional measures include asset declaration and transparency for public officials, similar to those in Sri Lanka and reforms in public procurement to reduce the risk of corruption in contracting (Anti-Corruption Commisional Reform Commission, 2025). The IMF encourages Bangladesh to persist with tax collection reforms and initiatives to improve accountability in the public sector.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have both launched extensive campaigns to combat corruption, emphasizing transparency, citizen accountability, and better fiscal management. Despite sharing similar goals, their approaches differ significantly. Legally, both countries enacted anti-corruption laws and established special commissions. The Sri Lankan Anti-Corruption Act emphasizes asset declarations and stronger investigative powers, whereas Bangladesh concentrates on strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and developing legislative tools to prosecute corruption crimes.

Under public sector reforms, Sri Lanka has made notable progress in increasing transparency in public procurement and improving oversight mechanisms in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In contrast, Bangladesh has prioritized strengthening its public financial management systems and tax administration. Following international best practices, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has advised both countries to enhance the efficiency of their anti-corruption systems since both countries are on the right path to recovery. The IMF's technical guidance and, in some cases, financial support have played a crucial role in advancing these reform initiatives.

Lessons Bangladesh Can Teach Sri Lanka

Bangladesh can serve as a lesson for Sri Lanka, especially in managing public sector debt, macroeconomic stability, and institutional governance despite facing similar macroeconomic challenges. One key fact is that Bangladesh maintains a restrained foreign borrowing policy. Although its economic growth relies heavily on extensive infrastructure projects, these are mainly financed through medium and long term, concessionary loans from multilateral agencies rather than short-term, high-interest commercial loans. This approach has helped reduce its debt-to-GDP ratio and maintain a stable external position, allowing it to avoid sovereign default. In contrast, Sri Lanka has accumulated unmanageable debt, and its international reserves have fallen, leading to balance-of-payments problems.The Bangladeshi example suggests that Sri Lanka could improve fiscal sustainability by prioritizing multilateral concessional finance over commercial credit, thereby lowering external vulnerabilities. Accordingly, corruption can be curtailed by replacing short-term commercial borrowing with multilateral concessional loans, which are subject to strict oversight, transparency, and governance. Multilateral agencies enforce competitive tendering, publish project information openly, and conduct frequent audits, thus preventing fund diversion. They also offer technical support to strengthen public financial management and institutional capacity, reducing the risks of misuse. Unlike high-interest loans that often accelerate project timelines but foster irregularities, concessional financing supports accountable, transparent, and carefully monitored implementation.

The second lesson is Bangladesh's strategy to diversify foreign exchange inflows. Traditionally, reserves mainly consisted of remittances and garment exports (Begum, 2025). However, the decline in garment exports during the crisis exposed the risks of relying heavily on this sector. Sri Lanka's over-dependence on tourism and remittances further emphasizes these vulnerabilities. Shifting toward a more balanced portfolio, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), digital and technology-based service exports, and other channels, can significantly improve long-term resilience. Diversifying sources of foreign exchange also helps reduce corruption, as dependence on a few high-revenue sectors often makes economies vulnerable to rent-seeking, where a few influential organizations exploit their power to receive special treatment, bend the rules, or gain unfair profits or favoritism. The flow of foreign revenue from diverse channels, such as FDI and digital services, boosts competition, increases transparency, and strengthens regulatory oversight across sectors.

FDI, in particular, involves strict compliance, corporate governance, and international auditing standards that discourage corruption. Additionally, growth in the digital and technology service sector export channels economic activity into more traceable, formal transactions, unlike cash-based commodity export sectors,where corruption is harder to detect. Therefore, a diversified inflow structure reduces concentrated power, improves oversight, and promotes cleaner, rules-based economic growth.

Thirdly, the long-term adherence to export-oriented industrialization by Bangladesh through the garment industry is a demonstration of the significance of a robust industrial policy (Akinrebiyo, 2024). In the case of Sri Lanka, the expansion of the economic base other than tourism to include manufacturing and agro-based industries through the creation of specific special economic zones (SEZs) and the removal of regulatory barriers is necessary. These measures would increase industrial capacity and revenue diversification. Industrial diversification also counters the excessive concentration of economic power in a few sectors and, at the same time, reduces the influence of established interest groups that often use policy tools to pursue personal benefit. When manufacturing and agro-based industries are incorporated into global value chains, they are exposed to international compliance mechanisms, auditing regimes, and high-quality standards that make corrupt practices more visible. The ultimate outcome would be the minimization of corruption in the country.

Conclusion

The recent developments in Bangladesh offer valuable lessons for Sri Lanka in fighting corruption and strengthening economic resilience. Concessional multilateral financing, external sources of foreign exchange diversification, improvements in institutional governance, and expanding industrial capacity beyond a few sectors are some steps that can enhance transparency, accountability, and growth in Sri Lanka. These measures would also reduce opportunities for corruption and help create a more rule-based economic system that promotes sustainable recovery and long-term socioeconomic growth.

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Expert Opinion

Federalism in Pakistan: A Contested Terrain

By Asma Faiz

Federalism is at the heart of the institutional architecture of the state in Pakistan. It draws on the 1935 India Act before partition in 1947. However, in practice the state had centralist tendencies from its inception. One of the major causes of separatism in East Pakistan that led to the emergence of Bangladesh was the massive centralization of power at the federal level, with little room for provincial autonomy. The 1973 Constitution reflected sensitivity about ethnic identity of the federating units of the country through the introduction of de jure federalism. The struggle for provincial autonomy continued in the face of concentration of powers in the hands of Islamabad. Some of the issues of centralization were addressed through the 2010 18th Amendment that removed the Concurrent List of legislative subjects and devolved 40 out of its 47 subjects to the provinces. In 2025, Pakistan faces multiple challenges including the democratic backsliding after the controversial 2024 elections, ethnonationalist movement in Balochistan and the Taliban's terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). This article investigates the evolution of federalism in Pakistan with a focus on two critical junctures: the 1973 Constitution, and the 2010 18th Constitutional Amendment that sought to re-activate the federalization project. I will conclude with a brief audit of the federal institutions a decade and half after the introduction of the 18th Amendment.

Like India, Pakistan is an ethnic federation where the question of power sharing between the center and provinces has been at the heart of political agenda. During the first decade after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Bengali discontent grew in the face of domination of West Pakistan in the military, bureaucracy, big business and the landed wealth.

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In India, the Nehruvian state carried out the provincial re-organization of the Indian Union from 1956 onwards by acceding to the demands of ethno-linguistic nationalists.[1] In Pakistan, the ruling elite adopted the opposite path of merging the provinces and princely states of West Pakistan into the mega-province of One Unit in 1955. This scheme sought to create parity between East and West Pakistan despite the former's clear majority. Ethnic nationalism reached new heights against the One Unit project (1955-1970) in East Bengal, Sindh, Balochistan and Bahawalpur.[2]

Separation of Bangladesh in 1971 set the stage for the 1973 Constitution that brought the federalization project to the center, with the introduction of bicameralism which provided smaller provinces of Sindh, KP and Balochistan equal representation in the upper chamber Senate. Moreover, the Council of Common Interests (CCI) was introduced as a platform for vertical intergovernmental coordination. It was mandated to resolve any kind of disputes between the federation and provinces or to settle inter-provincial discord. However, the quest for provincial autonomy remained a pipe dream even after the enactment of the 1973 Constitution, especially as Pakistan suffered from political instability under military rulers (1977-1988, 1999-2008). Even as the Constitution had set up the institutional architecture of federalism, it failed to bring about meaningful empowerment of the territorial units. It was in this context that the ground was prepared for the introduction of the 18th Amendment. In this regard, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the broader systemic features on the federal project in Pakistan. Both the 1973 Constitution and the 2010 18th Amendment came in the aftermath of the military's retreat from the political scene, i.e. after General Yahya and Musharraf resigned in 1971 and 2008 respectively. This led to the presence of a comparatively balanced civil-military equation under Z. A. Bhutto (1971-77) and President Asif Zardari (2008-2013) that in turn had a positive effect on the agenda of bringing down the scope of Islamabad's control over provincial affairs. This was more so with the case of the passage of the 18th Amendment in 2010. [3]

The 18th Amendment was a unique moment in the political and legal history of Pakistan. It brought mainstream parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakhtun and Baloch ethnic parties to the same platform to deliberate over constitutional matters dealing with devolution. The result was an unprecedented consensus on amendment of 102 articles of the Constitution. The Amendment deleted the Concurrent List and empowered the majority ethnic communities in the provinces and granted legitimacy to ethno-territorial units as the foundation of Pakistan's federation.

[1] See for instance Louis Tillin, Remapping India: New states and their political origins. (Hurst Publishers, 2013), 1-26.

[2] Yunas Samad, A Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan, 1937- 1958, (Sage Publishers, 1995), 180-184.

[3] Katharine Adeney, A step towards inclusive federalism in Pakistan? The politics of the 18th amendment. Publius: The Journal of Federalism 42, no. 4 (2012): 546-547.

This historic empowerment of the provincial majorities generated a reaction from provincial minorities who championed the demand for creation of new provinces where they could establish their majority. Hence, the Muhajirs in Sindh, the Siraikis in Punjab, the Hindko-speakers in KP and the Pakhtuns in Balochistan launched their movements in favor of the demand for creation of new provinces.[4] The powers of the Senate, the upper chamber of parliament, were gradually increased to make it a more substantive platform for consultation and law-making. At the other end, these changes stopped short of altering the mode of elections to the Senate whose members continued to be indirectly elected by members of provincial assemblies and the National Assembly.[5]

While the 18th Amendment took these steps towards substantive federalism in Pakistan, it failed to undo the inter-provincial asymmetry. Pakistan's federal structure has been underlined by the 'one-province-dominates-all' logic because one province is demographically stronger than all the other provinces combined.[6] East Pakistan before 1971 and Punjab afterwards fall in this category. In the case of East Pakistan, the 'nationalist' discontent was a reaction to the denial of its due share in the power-wielding state institutions. While the 18th Amendment sought to transfer significant administrative and fiscal powers to the provinces, it did not alter the overwhelming inequality in population as well as resources between the provinces. Despite comparative increase in the powers of the Senate through this Amendment, the National Assembly still remains the overwhelming focus of legislative powers at the federation, hence curtailing the scope of input from the smaller provinces.[7]

One of the major sources of ethno-provincial discontent has centered on the distribution of the financial resources between the federal and provincial governments. The 2009 National Finance Commission (NFC) Award laid down the current formula for sharing of resources. In Pakistan, the federal government remains the overwhelming source of the national revenue generation at approximately 93%. Provinces only generate 7% of the revenue, thereby conceding the Center a strong bargaining position.[8] The 2009 NFC Award sought to provide an unprecedented increase in the provincial share in the divisible pool, at 56% for the year 2010-2011 and at 57.5% for the following years. Prior to this Award, the provincial share was limited to 47%. The NFC Awards are supposed to be negotiated every five years.

[4] Maryam Khan, Politics of Ethnic Federalism in Pakistan, in Making Federation Work: Federalism in Pakistan after the 18th Amendment, ed. Asma Faiz, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 163-167.

[5] Mohammad Waseem, The Federal Project in Pakistan: beyond Fixing the Design, Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 62, no. 3, 2024, 213.

[6] Mohammad Waseem, A Majority Constraining Federalism, India Quarterly, 67, no. 3, 2012, 214-215.

[7] Ibid. 216.

[8] For details see Aisha G. Pasha and Hafeez A. Pasha, Financial Implications of Devolution in Pakistan, in Making Federation Work: Federalism in Pakistan after the 18th Amendment, ed. Asma Faiz, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 122-128.

The 2009 NFC Award moved away from a population only formula for horizontal distribution of the provincial share to a multi-indicator model, allocating 10.3% weight to poverty, 5% to revenue generation, 2.7% to inverse population density and 82% for population. KP was awarded an additional 1% share to make up for the cost of security operations, while Balochistan received a guaranteed transfer of its share.[9] The federal and provincial executives periodically meet to finalize a new NFC Award. In 2025, there are renewed calls for negotiation of a new NFC Award. The 18th Amendment put brakes on any future plans to reduce the provincial share of national resources as covered in Article 160-3A of the Constitution. The delay in finalization of a new Award is reflective of the pressures coming from various stakeholders to transfer resources back to the federation.[10] With the PML-N-led coalition government's recent acquisition of two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, discussion about a revision of the NFC Award has once again become louder. Such an effort will require a constitutional amendment and would raise the ethno-territorial discontent among the provinces particularly outside Punjab.

Fifteen years after the passage of the 18th Amendment, what have been the successes and shortcomings of this attempt at decentralization of powers in Pakistan? What explains the perceived delay in its implementation? The quest for provincial autonomy and decentralization of powers in Pakistan cannot be separate from the broader reality of a political system where democracy has constantly faced challenges. Pakistan has been considered a hybrid system since the 2018 elections.[11] Democratic backsliding has gradually increased.[12] There have been apprehensions about the military establishment's quest to reverse the process of transfer of powers to provinces ushered in by the 18th Amendment.[13] The implementation of this amendment along with the creation of new ministries and departments in the provinces was a tedious task which often received opposition from bureaucracy as well as the federal government. There was a fear that the provincial elites would take control of important areas of policy such as health and education, leaving the federal government, bureaucracy and donor agencies as marginal players at best.[14]

[9] Jawaid Bokhari, Updating NFC Award, Dawn, 11 August 2025, available at https://www.dawn.com/news/1929983 accessed on 18 August 2025

[10] Umair Javed, Party Politics and the NFC, Dawn, 4 August 2025, available at https://www.dawn.com/news/1928638 accessed on 20 August 2025

[11] Talbot, Ian. Pakistan's Hybrid Regime: Growing Democratization, or Increased Authoritarianism?" In Routledge Handbook of Autocratization in South Asia, ed. Sten Widmalm, (Routledge, 2021), 141-150.

[12] See for instance the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's 2024 annual report that documents the decline in human rights and civil liberties across the country. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2024, (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2025), available at https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/rising-militancy-and-democratic-backsliding-mark-2024/ accessed on 19 August 2025

[13] Khurram Hussain, Rolling Back the NFC Award, Dawn, 10 August 2023, available at https://www.dawn.com/news/1769338 accessed on 21 August 2021.

[14] Mohammad Waseem, The Federal Project in Pakistan, 217.

The aftermath of the 18th Amendment has seen empowerment of provincial governments which in turn failed to devolve powers to the local government. Not surprisingly, the local governments remain marginal at best. This has also led to complaints of marginalization from ethnic minorities within the provinces. The demand to create new provinces which gained momentum immediately after the passage of the 18th Amendment has lost track. The province of Balochistan is currently restive with the deepening of the separatist insurgency. The Islamist militancy is on the rise especially in the former tribal areas of KP. Pakistan's deficit of governance is clearly reflected in the poor management of the climate-induced disasters. The 2025 monsoon season has led to destruction in KP and Gilgit-Baltistan. It has raised concerns about the capacity of provincial administration to deal with environmental crises. The 2018 merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) into the KP province has failed to provide the much needed legal and administrative reform as well as peace and stability in these conflict- ridden areas of Pakistan. In 2025, Pakistan's restive polity necessitates governance based on consensus between federal and provincial executives. To reduce the ethno-nationalist discontent outside the Punjab heartland, Pakistan's federalization project needs to be pursued with heightened commitment and vigor by the state managers

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Navigating a Changing Climate Finance Landscape

By Yenuli Ranaweera

As climate change continues to threaten Sri Lanka's economy, ecosystems and communities, the need to focus on Climate Finance becomes increasingly urgent. Climate Finance refers to both public and private funding that supports initiatives aimed at mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts. For example, this could include investment in renewable energy projects, financing climate resilient infrastructure or funding reforestation and conservation efforts. For vulnerable nations like Sri Lanka, it represents not only a source of funding but a pathway to sustainable development and resilience.

In recent years, international discussions have increasingly reinforced the urgency of addressing climate change. The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) offered a timely platform to reflect on how countries like Sri Lanka can strategically use climate finance to meet their development and climate goals. On July 23, 2025 the International Court for Justice (ICJ) issued a landmark advisory opinion. It clarified the legal obligations of States under international law to prevent environmental harm, mitigate climate change, and provide reparations where necessary.

In this context, mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) play a crucial role by channeling resources to developing countries. Under its latest replenishment round (GCF-2), more than US$10.6 billion has been pledged to support projects that cut emissions and enhance resilience in vulnerable nations (Green Climate Fund, 2025). Globally, this ambition is much larger. At COP29 in 2024, it was agreed upon to secure efforts of all public and private entities to scale up finance to developing countries to $1.3 trillion per year by 2035 (United Nations, 2024). These developments are particularly urgent as the climate crisis grows more severe, and the global financing landscape undergoes profound shifts.

The Urgency of Climate Finance for Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has taken notable steps towards advancing climate finance in recent years. The Central Bank released the Sustainable Finance Roadmap 2.0 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2025) and introduced a Green Finance Taxonomy (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022).

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These measures are complemented by emerging financial instruments such as green bonds, sustainability linked bonds, and carbon market strategies. Sri Lanka's first green bond framework was published in 2023, opening pathways for both public and private green investment. In September 2024, DFCC Bank issued Sri Lanka's first green bond. In January 2025, it was listed in the Luxembourg Stock Exchange (Luxembourg Stock Exchange, 2025). This bond focused on funding solar energy projects to support Sri Lanka's goal of achieving 70% electricity generation from renewable energy by 2030.

Despite these initiatives, Sri Lanka still faces significant challenges. The country ranks 22nd on the World Risk Index that indicates its level of climate risk (Ranasinghe, 2025). This risk arises from the interaction of three factors: hazards, exposure and vulnerability. Hazards are events like droughts, floods or heatwaves. Exposure refers to people and infrastructure located in harm's way. Vulnerability is about how sensitive a system is and how well it can adapt. Sri Lanka needs an estimated USD 26.5 billion by 2030 for climate actions (The Diplomat, 2025). According to estimates shared at COP28 to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 Sri Lanka will need an additional USD 100 billion.

Green Lending enables investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and other sustainable economic practices. Low levels of green lending mean that many potentially impactful projects in these sectors remain unfunded. For instance, a study by the Climate Policy Initiative shows that despite global climate financing surpassing USD 1 trillion in 2022, USD 6.2 trillion is needed annually by 2030 and USD 7.3 trillion by 2050 to achieve Net Zero (Allen and Overy, 2023). This highlights a significant funding gap against the country's climate commitments. Therefore, to bridge this gap, Sri Lanka must strengthen its institutional capacity, mobilise greater public and private finance, and scale up innovative financing mechanisms.

Evolving Global Climate Finance Landscape

While Sri Lanka strives to strengthen its domestic climate finance architecture, the global landscape is shifting rapidly. A key theme of FfD4 was the urgent need to increase climate finance to support mitigation, adaptation, and resilience building, especially for more vulnerable countries. However, donor priorities are evolving amidst geopolitical transformations. The recent withdrawal of USAID which terminated 98% of USAID's climate related awards was a significant turning point (Refugee International, 2025). Its withdrawal has left significant gaps leading to increased likelihood of forced displacement and reduced capacity for green transitions. At the time of withdrawal, USAID had partnered with several government ministries for renewable energy projects, scaling climate adaptation solutions and strengthening local climate risk management (The Sunday Times, 2025).

Following this withdrawal, communities already on the front lines of climate change now face higher risks since the absence of these funds threaten to undermine progress on disaster preparedness and the availability of natural resources.

This contraction is mirrored by broader aid cuts across the Global North (AugusMedia, 2025). Countries such as the UK, Sweden and France have also scaled back their climate financing commitments. Instead, these funds are increasingly redirected towards defence and domestic priorities. Ironically, such aid reductions come despite the recent international pledges such as the agreement at the UN COP29 climate summit to increase climate finance to USD 300 billion per year by 2035 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2025). Hence, the disconnect between policy and action is starkly clear.

For developing countries like Sri Lanka, the retreat of traditional donors creates an urgent funding vacuum. As a result, countries like China are increasingly positioning themselves as climate finance leaders. For example, between 2013 and 2022 China has provided on average USD 3.8 to 4.5 billion per year through bilateral and multilateral channels (World Resource Institute, 2024). Similarly, at COP28 the United Arab Emirates launched "Alterra" a USD 30 billion climate investment fund that is aimed predominantly at developing economies (Alterra, n.d.).

Private philanthropic actors are increasingly important players in the climate finance space. Philanthropic foundations' annual contribution for climate change mitigation has more than tripled since 2015 and now reaches around USD 9.9 to 16.4 billion each year (World Economic Forum, 2023). These funds are especially valuable for taking on higher risks in early-stage projects that may not attract traditional investors. In Sri Lanka this could be particularly useful in conservation efforts, climate smart agriculture and coastal adaptation. For example, Talawakelle Tea Estates PLC and WNPS PLANT are leading Sri Lanka's largest private forest restoration project: creating a 13km riverbank corridor with local community involvement (Wildlife & Nature Protection Society, 2024). However, as the conversation about funding continues, so does the discussion about the disparities among countries in terms of responsibility and vulnerability to the climate crisis.

Addressing Inequities: The Global North, Global South and Climate Justice

The global climate crisis exposes deep inequities between the Global North and Global South, particularly in terms of historical emissions and responsibilities. The Global North is responsible for approximately 92% of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions (Bandera, 2024). Yet the Global South face increasing pressure to adopt costly mitigation measures. Low-income countries (LICs) and lower middle income countries (LIMCs) house more than half the world's population, yet they only contributed to approximately 17% of the global emissions in 2021 (Kraemer and Volz, 2024).

This injustice is more than just a statistical observation. Sri Lanka which emits less than 0.05% remains one of the most climate-vulnerable nations (Ministry of Environment Sri Lanka, 2022). For example, unpredictable weather patterns have caused substantial crop losses and disruption of livelihoods: the changing rainfall patterns have had devastating effects on farmers in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa (Samarasinha, et al., 2020).

Sri Lanka also ranks very high in the Global Risk Index, especially when it comes to climate change induced risks to water. This highlights vulnerability in the country's water infrastructure and security in terms of quantity and salinity intrusion (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2023). Hence the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries highlights the need for support grounded in equity and justice.

In response, discussions on reparations for climate injustice have gained momentum (Lorenz, 2023). Reparations include financial compensation, technology transfer, and adaptation support to those most affected by climate change. Global South countries have formed several coalitions and launched diverse advocacy campaigns to amplify their demands for climate justice and reparations. For instance, the Alliance of Small Island States which is an Inter-Governmental Organisation of low lying coastal and small island countries and the African Group of Negotiators which coordinates the climate positions of 54 African countries, can be cited as examples (Golding, 2023; UNFCCC, n.d.).

Sri Lanka has actively contributed to this agenda by establishing the Climate Justice Forum (CJF) which advocates for fair financial support and dedicated loss and damage funding for vulnerable nations (The Sunday Times, 2023). However, addressing loss and damage requires dedicated financing and institutional mechanisms that reflect the reality that some climate impacts are unavoidable and demand reparative support. Sri Lanka is already experiencing significant economic losses due to high exposure to floods, droughts and sea-level rise (Frykman and Seiron,2009). If left unaddressed, the projected costs of climate change could rise to 6% of GDP by 2100 (The Asian Development Bank, n.d.). These inequities also extend beyond environmental and social impacts, affecting the financial systems of vulnerable countries, particularly through their sovereign credit ratings.

Climate Risk and Sovereign Credit

Climate risks carry severe financial consequences with direct and significant impacts on sovereign credit ratings, and in a vulnerable country like Sri Lanka this affects both the cost and accessibility of borrowing (Cevik and Jalles, 2020). As such exposed to high physical climate hazards and extreme weather anomalies are often seen as high-risk borrowers by credit rating agencies Cappiello et al., 2022). This leads to lower credit ratings and higher borrowing costs. The increased borrowing costs stem from lenders' concern about the potential for climate-related shocks to disrupt economic activity and government revenue. It would also increase expenses on disaster relief and reconstruction efforts, straining public finances.

Sri Lanka's recent debt crisis has made the country even more vulnerable to the growing threats of climate change. With high public debt and limited fiscal space, the government struggles to access affordable finance. Climate risks make this situation worse by reducing investor confidence and weakening the country's credit rating. Events like crop failures or infrastructure damage have direct economic consequences that affect the government's ability to repay debt.

At the same time, access to climate finance or green bonds often depends on maintaining a strong credit profile, which Sri Lanka currently lacks. This mix of financial pressure and climate vulnerability discourages traditional lenders and limits the country's ability to fund essential adaptation efforts such as resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and climate-smart agriculture. Without these investments, Sri Lanka remains exposed to future climate shocks, which in turn increases financial stress and deepens the crisis.

Ruling of the International Court of Justice

In July 2025, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion that marked a pivotal step in clarifying the legal responsibilities of States under international law in relation to climate change (International Court of Justice, 2025). While the request for the opinion was led by Vanuatu, it also received strong support from Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC).

The ruling affirmed that wealthier nations hold greater legal responsibility for addressing climate change. For a developing country like Sri Lanka which has contributed little to global emissions but faces severe climate risks, this marks an important recognition of climate justice. It reinforces the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", confirming that countries with higher historical emissions must take stronger action to cut emissions and provide financial and technical support to vulnerable nations. At the national level, this places greater emphasis on ensuring that Sri Lanka's emission reduction targets which are outlined in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC's) are aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement and backed by clear policy measures.

Hence, the ICJ's recognition of reparation for environmental damage is highly relevant to Sri Lanka since it is a nation where climate change can cause significant economic and social damage annually. While the countries responsible for acts that cause environmental damage may be required to provide reparations to undo the harm caused, they are also required to restore the situation as closely as possible to how they would have been if the act had not happened. In cases where such restoration is not feasible, reparations may instead take the form of rebuilding damaged or destroyed infrastructure and restoring affected ecosystems and biodiversity. However, where full restoration is materially impossible, responsible states are obligated to provide financial compensation. Thus, the ruling opens a legal pathway for Sri Lanka to seek compensation or reparations for loss and damage, and thereby, it helps address a long-standing and underfunded gap in the global climate response.

Recommendations

Sri Lanka's climate finance landscape reflects domestic progress, challenges, and evolving global dynamics. Sri Lanka has made progress in setting up climate finance frameworks, issuing green bonds, and exploring innovative tools. However, significant financing gaps and institutional barriers remain, hindering progress toward national climate targets. To bridge these gaps and strengthen the country's ability to mobilise and manage climate finance effectively, the following strategic actions should be prioritised:

- Strengthen institutional capacity by streamlining project preparation, monitoring, and reporting processes to better attract international funds

- Prioritise projects that simultaneously reduce vulnerability, enhance local resilience, and contribute to national emission reduction targets

- Expand green lending by incentivising public and private financial institutions and improving risk sharing mechanisms, ensuring greater capital flow into renewable energy and climate resilient agriculture

- Integrate climate risk into fiscal policy through scenario-based analysis to inform infrastructure planning, budget allocation, and debt management. This method helps to identify potential risks and opportunities, leading to more informed decision-making and better strategic planning during times of uncertainty.

- Invest in capacity building by training officials at all levels in designing, implementing, and monitoring climate finance initiatives

- Leverage international legal developments, particularly the 2025 ICJ ruling, to strengthen Sri Lanka's claims for climate reparations, technical assistance, and finance commitments from high-emitting countries, while advocating for fair allocation in global forums

The climate finance landscape is undergoing profound transformation as traditional funding sources decline and new actors including emerging economies, philanthropic institutions and evolving legal frameworks reshape access to capital. For Sri Lanka navigating this changing environment requires more than securing funds. It demands strengthening institutional capacity, diversifying financial streams and developing climate projects that integrate resilience with sustainable development objectives. Tailoring climate finance strategies to Sri Lanka's specific vulnerabilities and development priorities is essential. This approach is not simply about adaptation or mitigation; it is fundamental to safeguarding the country's future and advancing equitable sustainable growth within a rapidly evolving global financial system.

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Compulsion of Empowering the Country's Maritime Economy through a Pragmatic Maritime Strategy

By Commander (H) Bhanu Abeygunawardhana RSP psc

Introduction

It is important to note that "strategy" is a slippery word and an even slipperier concept. It has multiple definitions and denotes different meanings to different people. However, as per the Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve long-term or overall objectives. Nevertheless, strategy' has become a very widely used and exceedingly involved term in the modern world. Moreover, its scope encompasses economic, technological, political, cultural, ideological, and military factors. A strategy takes into consideration most of the domestic and foreign factors. Notwithstanding the divergent views on the scope of strategy, it is evident that strategy helps in identifying a course of action for the accomplishment of the desired goal. In particular, as explained in the Maritime Doctrine of Sri Lanka (MDSL- 2020) of the Sri Lanka Navy(SLN), "Maritime strategy" is the plan by which the maritime power of a state is developed and used for achieving the national objectives within the sphere of the national strategy. On the other hand, the maritime economy encompasses all economic activities related to the sea, including resource extraction, transport, industries, and services, and its success relies on the effective utilization of these resources and implementation of proper policy frameworks and strategies.

It is important to understand that national values are the benchmark for deriving the national purpose, national interest, national aim, and national policy of any country. As a maritime nation Sri Lanka faces similar consequences. The desire of the people to improve their lives according to their morals, principles and values reflects national purpose. The state plays a vital role in achieving what the people desire. Based on the national purpose, national aims and objectives are formulated. National interests are developed by paying attention to prevailing local and global conditions and the assessment of future prospects. In essence, national interest encompasses a variety of factors, such as security, economic prosperity, diplomacy, and cultural values. National aims or objectives are what defines the scope of national interests.

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The national policy comprises of the broad guidelines for formulating and developing strategies to be adopted in various fields, both internal and external, to achieve the national objectives set out by the government. The national policy indicates the specific transformation to be achieved in the appropriate field, indicating where priorities should be emphasized.

However, as an island nation, every citizen of Sri Lanka, including policymakers and strategic level decision makers, must reconsider to what extent we have focus on the exploitation of the maritime economy to achieve our national purpose, national interest, national aim, and national policy. For instance, it has been identified that even though the country is a maritime nation, community awareness about the potential of the maritime sector is comparatively low. A major reason behind this issue is that the school curriculum does not provide a significant provision for ocean related education. The lack of awareness on Sri Lanka's maritime interests has directly affected its maritime economic sector, despite the country having a vast sea area, including a 1,340 km coastline and territorial waters extending 12 nautical miles from the shore, covering approximately 21,500 km^2.Furthermore, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extends outward 200 NM from the shore and covers an area of about 510,000 km^2 of the Indian Ocean (Arachchige et al., 2017).

The Necessity of Establishing a Pragmatic Maritime Strategy for Sri Lanka

It is necessary to explain that the "Maritime strategy" of a nation is the art of directing the development and application, both direct and indirect, of the maritime elements of a nation during times of peace and war towards the accomplishment of its objectives. Maritime Strategy is the overall approach of a nation to synergize all aspects related to maritime activities in order to maximize national gains. Thus, it would cover economic, commercial, political, military, scientific and technological facets connected to Maritime affairs. More specifically, it is derived from the maritime policy of a country and comprises of elements such as Ports & Harbors, Merchant Marine activities, Ocean Economic Resources (Living & non-living resources), Shipbuilding and Repair Facilities, and contributions of the Naval Forces.

Moreover, as an island nation, Sri Lanka must think broadly about how to make use of the opportunities available for the nation through the effective utilization of maritime spaces and resources. It is important to pay attention to the role of the Maritime Strategy within the structural framework of the national policy planning mechanism. To understand the role of a Maritime Strategy and what is required to be achieved through it, it is necessary to study policy frameworks and strategic functions at various levels. More specifically, strategic hierarchy clearly shows that the Maritime Strategy of any nation must be part of a country's national policy. National Interest developed through a robust Maritime Policy remains the most important element of a Maritime Strategy. Depending on the national maritime aspirations, maritime infrastructures are developed and modernized.

Different writers and strategists have expressed different views about the strategic importance of sea power and developing maritime strategies. The great naval strategist Admiral AT Mahan (1911) talked about six sources of sea power, such as geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, population, character of people and character of government (Office of the historian, 2019).

Sri Lanka as an island nation must clearly pay attention to its strategic location facing the Indian Ocean. As explained by Admiral AT Mahan (1911), the country's strategic location is vital to boost its economic growth through effective and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. But to what extent have we used it to enhance our maritime economy? As per the views of A. T Mahan, Sri Lanka can reap many socio-economic benefits through the effective use of human resources and by examining and evaluating the strategies of the governments that ruled the country and how much effort they have taken to develop the maritime economic sector to boost the economic growth of the country. In particular, coastal nations largely depend on maritime trade to boost their economies. Generally, the geographical location and the overall economic self-sufficiency of a country play a vital role in maritime trade related activities. In modern times, 90% of world trade moves by sea routes.

For instance, due to the technological innovations that have transformed the maritime transportation sector in the last two centuries, ships remain the most effective and reliable means of moving massive quantities of goods and passengers from one place to another. The ocean is abundant in natural resources such as seafood, chemicals, minerals, and all forms of hydrocarbons etc. Furthermore, the ocean floor consists of vast deposits of untapped copper, nickel, and aluminum reserves, which are crucial for industrial growth. The rapid growth of the world's population is gradually leading to a scarcity of land resources for human use, and ultimately, this is directing them to find alternatives. Since then, people have used oceans to obtain their food and other offshore resources.

On the other hand, rapid population growth and decreasing resources on land have accelerated the exploitation of ocean resources and marine ecosystems. Sea based resources have become crucial to the economic success of littoral states and must be supervised and administered efficiently. Due to large scale exploitation and irresponsible human behavior, the world is facing a severe energy crisis. Ocean resources such as minerals, waves, currents, tides, wind, etc., are increasingly used for energy production. It has been estimated that the thorium and uranium extracted from oceans could facilitate the energy requirement of 06 billion people with a per capita requirement of 5 kWh per day for around 700,000 years, and the deuterium and hydrogen could supply fusion power for a period four times greater than the age of the solar system. Presently, all the marine, chemical and geological resources and about 90% of all biological resources are found in the near-shore area of the ocean (Ragheb, 2011). In particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea-III (UNCLOS III) provides the legal rights to maritime nations, including Sri Lanka, to explore and conserve maritime resources such as fish, gas, oil and other hydrocarbons.

These resources can be explored around the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) and can extend up to the continental shelf. The existence and presence of these resources are important to the economic growth and survival of a coastal state such as Sri Lanka. The figure below shows the vast EEZ of the country and the area claimed as the continental shelf by the Government of Sri Lanka in 2009.

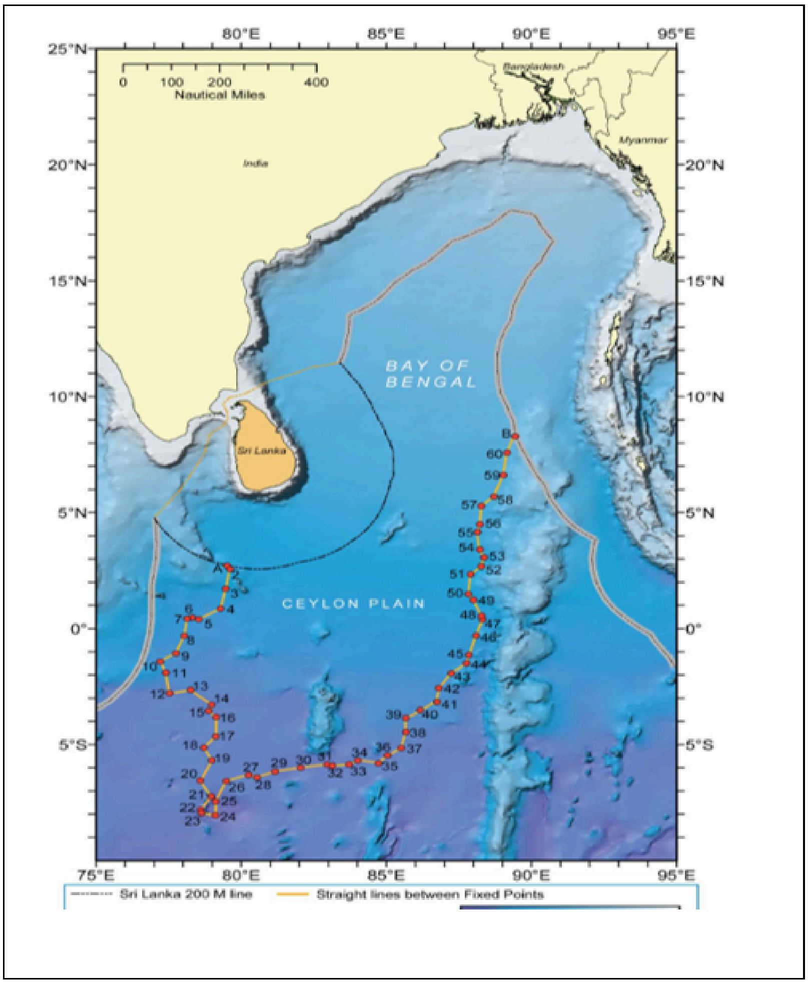

Figure: EEZ and Claimed Continental shelf area by the Government of Sri Lanka

Source: Continental Shelf Submission of Sri Lanka (2009)

Underutilizing of Available Opportunities as Maritime Nation

However, it is necessary to pay attention to where we position ourselves today as a maritime nation. Indeed, when we consider the contribution of the maritime sector to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, its contributions are highly visible. The Annual Performance Report of the Ministry of Fisheries (2023) has emphasized that the marine fisheries sector has contributed to only 1% of the country's GDP growth, even though Sri Lanka has a vast EEZ area. In addition, it has been observed that, other than the marine fisheries sector, exploitation of other living resources for economic growth is almost neglected. Also, shipbuilding and repairing sectors which have immense economic potential, are handled by only a few stakeholders. These sectors should be well developed and modernized with the aim of boosting economic growth. It is important to highlight that, even in ancient times, Sri Lanka was famous as a maritime hub with a thriving shipbuilding industry.

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Siriweera (2011) has explained that ancient Sri Lanka was not only a shipping and naval hub but also an island that boasted of an advanced shipbuilding industry, and during ancient times citizens of the country under royal patronage, had contributed immensely to the development of this industry in various ways. In particular, many states have significantly developed shipbuilding and repair industries to foster economic growth through the attraction of foreign revenue and generation of many job opportunities. On the other hand, other than the row mineral sand exporting, Sri Lanka, as a maritime nation, has not paid much attention to the exploitation of non-living maritime resources deposited on the ocean floor. The lack of proper infrastructure, and shortage of adequate technology has contributed to such issues.

Coastal tourism is one of the fundamental areas of attracting foreign revenue to the country. However, it is necessary to make use of the opportunities arising in the coastal tourism sector by paying proper attention to the latest trends in the global coastal tourism industry. Proper policy planning, effective decision making and active stakeholder engagement are very important in this regard.

On the other hand, other than the Port of Colombo and Hambantota International Port, Sri Lanka does not provide sound port and harbour facilities for mariners. If developed properly, shipping logistics industry has the ability to boost the economic growth of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Galle and Trincomalee harbors can be developed as tourism harbors with modernized port facilities. Developing Sri Lanka into a maritime hub requires the effective use of the strategic location of the country and existing port facilities to draw in more business and investment opportunities. Indeed, it can create significant multi-sectoral benefits to the country in areas of technology, professionalism, economics and societal progress. It has been identified that Sri Lanka’s maritime hub concept is facing numerous challenges due to the lack of government support, poor planning, lack of technology and funding and geopolitical tensions.

The Port City Colombo (PCC) initiative aims to develop the area into a regional financial and corporate hub, while also being modernized and developed as a multi-service Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to drive Sri Lanka's economic growth. (About Port City Colombo - Sri Lanka’s Global Business Hub, n.d.). In particular, it is one of the biggest Private-Public Partnerships (PPPs) in Sri Lanka. More specifically, it is ideally situated in the center of South Asia and strives to establish itself as a global hub for investments, services, and lifestyle. However, it is questionable as to how far we have grabbed the opportunities that lie with the PCC concept. It is important to highlight that four main barriers were identified when developing Sri Lanka’s maritime hub concept.

They are the absence of national interest, lack of knowledge on the study of the maritime sector, shortage of adequate technology and lack of a comprehensive policy framework (Briefing Note Sri Lanka: A Maritime & Logistics Hub, n.d.). Also, some of the highest concentrations of biodiversity in the world may be found in Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone, which also directly and indirectly supports the livelihoods of millions of people. Minerals, natural gas, and petroleum are among the vital resources found in Sri Lanka's oceans that are not being used to their full potential. Importantly, the development of a robust Blue Economy strategy presents many vital opportunities to achieve sustainable economic growth and development.

The global policy debate is centered on sustainable economic growth, and many developing nations have already created integrated ocean governance frameworks that have effectively reduced inter-sectoral conflicts and encouraged cooperation in blue economic sectors. The necessity of policies that balance future economic growth coupled with ocean protection and restoration has also been recognized by the Blue Economy concept. For instance, to construct a cohesive strategy that fully utilizes Sri Lanka's abundant ocean resources, the government must align its economic development plan with blue economic priorities. In particular, all pertinent economic sectors must have sustainable access to Sri Lanka's enormous ocean resources, and conservation initiatives must encourage community-led involvement to show the benefits of teamwork (Sri Lanka’s Blue Economy: A position paper by UNDP Sri Lanka & Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies, n.d.).

During the study, it has been observed that there are four main causes for the underutilization of the ocean economy by Sri Lanka as a maritime nation. They are- absence of national interest, lack of awareness on maritime sector studies, shortage of adequate technology and the unavailability of long term and short-term policy making for exploring available opportunities within the maritime sector.

Recommendations

By paying attention to the above factors, this study provides the following recommendations for strengthening the country’s maritime economy through a pragmatic maritime strategy:

a. Inculcate in the various levels of education about the significance of maritime studies, which may lead to developing a national level interest in exploring available opportunities of the maritime sector.

b. Invest in acquiring and developing technology for the effective utilization of marine resources

c. Strengthen scientific research to identify opportunities to foster innovation, develop the maritime sector and enhance economic resilience.

d. Empowering universities and think-tanks to develop robust policies and effective maritime strategies

Policy Implications and Way Forward

It is evident that any strategy or policy formulated must align with national interests and objectives of a state. National interests can be categorized as survival, vital, major, and peripheral. However, strategies in areas such as political, economic, military, social, and cultural can only be developed once the national interests to be achieved are clearly defined. In the case of Sri Lanka, maritime strategy should be derived from its the national interest, and ultimately, it should be planned and executed at these four levels.
More importantly, like any other maritime nation in the world, and considering the growth of activities in our offshore areas, we have no alternative but to explore, exploit, protect, and safeguard our maritime resources. This is only possible through the formulation of a pragmatic maritime strategy. Safeguarding the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) is essential for a country's economic growth and stability. Adopting a strategy that is neither affordable nor achievable will not yield intended benefits. Therefore, a robust strategy is essential. Sri Lanka must adopt a robust plan for utilizing the knowledge and human resources produced by schools, universities, training institutes, technical colleges, etc. for the growth and development of the maritime economy.

Moreover, there are four main causes that has led to the underutilization of the marine resources in Sri Lanka. In particular, absence of a national interest with regard to developing the maritime sector, poor knowledge about the huge potential of the maritime sector, the lack of advanced technology and the absence of a proper policy planning mechanism hinders the progress in exploring available opportunities within the maritime sector. Developing interest among the population at various levels emphasizes the significance of maritime interests for the economic growth of the country.

A strategic approach is essential to explore opportunities in the maritime economy through ports and harbors, the merchant marine, ocean resources (both living and non-living), shipbuilding and repair facilities. Naval forces play a vital role in safeguarding and supporting this process. Ultimately, developing a strong maritime strategy for Sri Lanka can serve as a foundation for the country to lead in sustainable and rapid economic development. However, the active involvement of both state and non-state stakeholders is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and robustness of these policies.

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The Basel Convention's Policy Framework and its Role in Managing Transboundary Hazardous Waste: Based on a California-Mexico Case Study

By Ashan De Silva

1.Introduction

Global waste trade has become a profitable industry that motivates developed countries to transport their waste beyond their borders, often targeting underdeveloped countries that have fewer regulations, policies, and fiscal constraints. According to the United Nations, every year an estimated 11.2 billion tons of solid waste is collected worldwide (Achankeng, n.d.). Among all waste streams, electrical and electronic equipment poses the fastest growing challenge due to its complex and hazardous substances, affecting both developed and developing countries (United Nations Environment Programme, 2017). Therefore, the surge in waste generation, coupled with a lack of infrastructure and resources, has transformed waste into a formidable adversary that directly threatens the well-being of both ecosystems and individuals. Hence, this has become a major contemporary issue within the international community. Today the global waste trade has grown into a $2 trillion USD market and is projected to reach $2.3 trillion USD in 2027 (Sakayan et al., 2024).

As highlighted in the American Society of International Law (ASIL) publication, international law plays a significant role in our daily lives across various spheres. In particular, under the Public Health and the Environment section, article 47 emphasizes the importance of preventing hazardous waste spills. This is achieved by mandating governments to implement policies that prevent the illegal transport and disposal of hazardous waste across national borders.

A key source of international law in this area is the policy framework enshrined in the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, adopted in 1989 (American Society of International Law, 2018). It establishes an overarching regulatory and policy framework that mandates environmentally sound management practices, prior informed consent, and cooperation among States to regulate hazardous waste flows. The Basel Convention, effective from 1992, was created in response to hazardous waste dumping in developing countries, especially in Africa.

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It aims to protect human health and the environment from the harmful effects of hazardous waste and other specific waste types, including household and electronic waste. It also encourages cooperation, technical assistance, and capacity building via regional centers for better waste management. The Convention has significantly curtailed the 'toxic trade' ensuring safe disposal and fostering global environmental governance. By addressing hazardous waste generation, transport, and disposal, it promotes sustainability and protects vulnerable populations from pollution risks (Basel Convention, 1989).

This study examines the transboundary movement of hazardous waste between California and Mexico and analyzes the significant policy failures, public health risks, and environmental impact, reflecting weaknesses in international law enforcement and bilateral cooperation. Also, despite the Basel Convention providing a legal and policy framework, unregulated shipments and ineffective implementation challenge Mexico's sovereignty and safety of its citizens.

Also, the failure of U.S. ratification on common international policy enforcement creates gaps that exacerbate pollution and illegal waste trafficking. This study examines these challenges through two case studies to identify mechanisms that address the legal and policy gaps between international law commitments and their practical implementation along the California-Mexico border.

2. USA and Mexico Transboundary Hazardous Waste Policy Formulation

As one of the greatest producers of waste, the United States is a prominent actor in the calculus of the hazardous waste industry. This is due to the United States having strict environmental laws and policies around the disposal of waste in the country which makes it a cheaper, more viable option to deliver waste to other nations (Fry, 2023). According to the Global Waste Index 2025 by Sensoneo, the U.S. generates 951 kilograms of municipal solid waste per capita annually, an increase from 811 kilograms in 2022. Alarmingly, 447 kilograms per capita of this waste is landfilled, reflecting poor waste management practices. Among U.S. States, waste generation varies significantly, with California producing the highest waste at 1,781 kilograms per capita, followed by Florida with 1,511 kilograms. In contrast, states such as Alaska and Rhode Island generate less than a quarter of this amount, indicating disparities due to differing policies and infrastructure (Sensoneo, 2022).

The United States while a signatory has yet to ratify the Basel Convention, creating a significant enforcement and regulatory gap concerning hazardous waste exports. Conversely, Mexico has ratified the Convention and is committed to its obligations. Hazardous waste policy formulation in the U.S. includes Federal legislations such as the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and California's State specific rigorous regulations administered by the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). However, the United States has not ratified the Basel Convention due to incompatibility with domestic law, particularly the RCRA.

Unlike Basel's Prior Informed Consent (PIC) system, RCRA does not require explicit consent from the receiving country before hazardous waste is exported. Hence, ratifying the Convention would require Congress to amend existing legislation; a decision very likely to take the backbench.

For many years, California has exported thousands of tons of hazardous waste to Mexico. Yet, Mexico lacks the necessary policy framework to properly inspect or treat this waste, leading to serious environmental and public health concerns. The absence of robust international laws and policies governing the transboundary movement of hazardous waste between the United States and Mexico has created loopholes that both governments and private companies continue to exploit (Sakayan et al., 2024).

Figure 1: Map of the US-Mexico Border Region Collaborating Universities. Source: Varady et al., 2000

Investigative reports from Mexican and Californian news outlets have exposed illegal shipments of hazardous waste to Mexico, revealing a largely hidden and secretive trade. This is confirmed by the closeness of the borders shown in Figure 1 above. A recent investigation by CalMatters identified several companies including Tesla, Sally Beauty Supply, the United States Navy, and various California government agencies as entities that have sent hazardous waste to Mexico in an attempt to circumvent California's strict environmental laws and policies (Vera-Morales, 1994). Given these challenges, it is clear that the Basel Convention's laws and policies should play a more effective role in addressing hazardous waste management.

3. Issues in the Implementation of Transboundary Hazardous Waste Policies

In practice, the differing policies and enforcement mechanisms regarding hazardous waste management between the two countries lead to insufficient management of cross-border environmental risks. This gap underscores the urgent need for a stronger, harmonized hazardous waste management policy framework that integrates both international and national mechanisms. The following two case studies, which highlight issues in the implementation of transboundary hazardous waste management, reveal critical weaknesses and emphasize the need for stronger hazardous waste management practices.

3.1. Case Study 01: Temarry City Case 2022

The Temarry plant, located 1.5 miles South of San Diego in Tecate, Mexico exemplifies how California offloads the risks associated with hazardous waste disposal. The facility processes over 4,000 tons of California's hazardous waste each year. On March 24, 2022, residents near Temarry were exposed to toxic fumes after 16 barrels of hydrogen sulfide were spilled. The incident highlights the dangers of weak regulations and poorly defined policies governing the trade of hazardous waste between California and Mexico.

According to Article 4(9) of the Basel Convention (1992), transboundary movements of hazardous waste must be conducted with prior informed consent and only when the exporting country lacks the capacity for environmentally sound disposal. The large volume of waste sent to Temarry, and the 2022 hydrogen sulfide spill suggest potential violations of these conditions. Furthermore, Article 9 defines illegal traffic as any transboundary movement conducted without proper notification, consent or compliance with relevant policies and regulations. The unregulated nature of the waste trade at Temarry along with its environmental and health impacts may qualify such acts to be illegal under this provision. It also potentially violates Mexico's sovereignty as well as its environmental and individual rights.

3.2. Case Study 02: The case of Mr. Clarence Nugent

As a source of foreign revenue, maquiladoras are second only to Mexico's petroleum industry, exceeding tourism since 1984. In 1981, Nugent, a 75-year-old American businessman was caught and prosecuted by Mexican authorities for illegally transporting and dumping over 800 barrels of hazardous waste near his mercury recovery operation. Nugent denied the charges, claiming corruption as the motive behind his prosecution (Rose, 1989). The case was eventually settled, but it underscored the urgent policy need for more effective cross-border environmental controls.

The Basel Convention establishes a comprehensive legal and policy framework for regulating the transboundary movement and disposal of hazardous waste, making it directly applicable to the case of Mr. Clarence Nugent. The key provisions that were applicable include Article 4 which requires prior informed consent for waste shipments and prohibits illegal traffic; Article 9 which mandates cooperation among parties to prevent and punish illegal traffic; and Article 11 which allows bilateral agreements to enhance cooperation without weakening the Convention's standards. Mr. Nugent's illegal dumping violated all three of these provisions since he transported hazardous wastes into Mexico without proper authorization causing environmental harm and breaching the Convention's core obligations.

The above two case studies indicate that weak enforcement and insufficient cooperation in transboundary hazardous waste management creates policy loopholes that circumvent environmental safeguards, thereby violating the policies and laws of the Basel Convention. Further complicating policy enforcement is the reluctance of U.S. regulators to oversee cross-border facilities rigorously; and this creates a regulatory vacuum that undermines the Basel Convention's principle of prior informed consent and environmentally sound management (CalMatters, 2023).

4. Critiques and Best Practices for Transboundary Hazardous Waste Management

The Mexico-California hazardous waste spill case starkly illustrates the practical challenges and shortcomings of the Basel Convention's legal and policy framework in managing transboundary environmental issues. Mexico constrained by limited technical capacity policies, insufficient funding, and weaker regulatory frameworks struggles to monitor and control hazardous waste imports effectively. Meanwhile, the United States despite having stronger domestic laws and policies like RCRA has not ratified the Basel Convention, limiting its ability to regulate waste exports fully. Moreover, policy failures in transparency and data sharing exacerbate risks to human and environmental health, particularly in vulnerable border communities.

To address these challenges, several targeted policy recommendations emerge. First, the United States should ratify the Basel Convention to strengthen its regulatory and policy reach over hazardous waste exports, align its obligations with Mexico's commitments, and foster greater bilateral accountability. Second, increased funding and technical assistance must be allocated, especially through the EPA's budget. This support will strengthen Mexico's enforcement capacity and help carry out joint monitoring initiatives under the La Paz Agreement. Third, both countries should prioritize transparency by improving data sharing and public access to information. This will empower communities affected by hazardous waste trade. Fourth, diplomatic efforts must also emphasize the polluter-pays and precautionary principles to ensure that preventive measures are taken proactively through strong hazardous waste management policies. Thus, implementing these recommendations is critical to safeguarding vulnerable border communities, ensuring environmental sustainability, and strengthening the role of the Basel Convention.

Sri Lanka can derive important insights from the California-Mexico case study, and this becomes particularly important given the recent waste management crises such as the catastrophic Meethotamulla landfill collapse in 2017, and marine environmental disasters linked to incidents such as the X-Press Pearl and New Diamond shipwrecks. These incidents have had severe impacts on public health, coastal ecosystems, and economic stability. With the country generating over 7,000 tons of municipal solid waste daily, much of which is inadequately managed or disposed of, the urgency for comprehensive reform is clear (Central Environmental Authority, Sri Lanka, 2023). The California-Mexico case study demonstrates the consequences of weak regulatory oversight and cross-border waste loopholes which resonate with Sri Lanka's struggles in monitoring imports, hazardous waste, and illegal dumping.

Drawing from these lessons, Sri Lanka should pursue stronger policy enforcement, improved environmental monitoring, and comprehensive adherence to international conventions such as the Basel Convention. Policymakers must prioritize transparent data management, invest in state-of-the-art waste treatment facilities, and foster cross-agency and transboundary cooperation. Moreover, increasing public engagement is a vital step to ensure effective waste governance, protect vulnerable communities, and safeguard the nation's ecological health.

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Tools for People or for Profit: Artificial Intelligence and Digital Sovereignty

Shiran Illanperuma and Vijay Prashad

In July 2024, the Committee to Formulate an Artificial Intelligence Strategy (CFSAI) for Sri Lanka published AI Sri Lanka 2028: Sri Lanka's National Strategy on AI. This draft for public consultation is about 68 pages long. The words 'sovereign' or 'sovereignty' do not appear even once.[1] In these pages, there is little to no discussion on crucial questions, such as: Who will own the data? Who will own the infrastructure? Who will regulate and govern? And, who has the technological capabilities to define the development of this technology?

Two recent developments highlight the urgency for formulating a robust understanding of challenges to sovereignty and governance posed in the digital era.

First, internet services by Starlink were granted a license to operate by the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL) in August 2024. Since then, Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has raised national security concerns that local authorities have no access to Starlink's data system – not even a local point of contact should any security concern arise.[2] Starlink is owned by US billionaire Elon Musk, who bankrolled the presidential campaign of US President Donald Trump. Starlink is known to have close relations with US intelligence and operates without authorisation in countries such as Cuba and Venezuela – both targets of US-backed regime change operations.[3]

[1] Ministry of Digital Economy, AI Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's National Strategy on AI Open for Public Consultation, notice dated 7 September 2024, accessed 13 August 2025, Ministry of Digital Economy (Sri Lanka) website, https://mode.gov.lk/notices/AI%20Sri%20Lanka%20Sri%20Lanka%E2%80%99s%20National%20Strategy%20on%20AI%20Open%20for%20Public%20Consultation.

[2] The Morning, 'AKD's Concerns over Starlink', The Morning, 11 May 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.themorning.lk/articles/X3zVcklP2pbUtLre9ISk.

[3] Redacción Razones de Cuba, 'Starlink: A Threat to Cuba's Technological Sovereignty', Razones de Cuba (English), 22 May 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://razonesdecuba.cu/en/starlink-a-threat-to-cubas-technological-sovereignty/.

Second, Sri Lanka is planning to implement a national digital identification system with the support of India's National Institute for Smart Government. However, the fact that bidding for this project was restricted to Indian firms has naturally raised concerns in Sri Lanka over the security of data as well as the neglect of local talent and capabilities. Should local firms be given priority when developing digital infrastructure? If they lack experience or expertise, how best can policy be shaped to address these deficiencies?

Bringing AI down to Earth

If you were to do a Google image search of the words 'artificial intelligence', the search engine would throw at you a legion of computer-generated images in cool blue tones depicting brains, robots, circuits, and neural networks. Some of this imagery evokes Michelangelo's fresco painting, The Creation of Adam, which is to be found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City. Such imagery, frequently used on the covers of corporate pamphlets and government white papers, can induce among layfolk a feeling of powerlessness. AI is presented as some kind of ethereal or immaterial force. This is wrong.

AI is made by humans, and its foundation remains in human labour exercised through blood, flesh, and bone. Likewise, hardware and infrastructure that AI depends on – including the undersea cables carrying data, and the labyrinthine datacentres with their noisy cooling systems and the strain they place on the grid – are very much material, their impacts felt by people and the planet alike.

Consider this: 30% of the critical minerals required for electronics and AI hardware come from the African continent.[4] Without the copper mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the lithium mines in Zimbabwe, the graphite mines in Mozambique, and the rare earth metals and platinum group metals in South Africa, there is no AI. Without the people labouring in these mines, underpaid, overexploited, their governments co-opted, destabilised, or overthrown by multinational corporations, there is no AI.

The incredible Large Language Models (LLMs) that many people have started to integrate into business and personal life rely on another source of human labour: data labellers. In Kenya, for example, data labellers work for nine-hour shifts and earn less than $2 an hour.[5] It is this human labour that makes LLMs like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini possible.

Growing Polarisation

The international division of labour developing in the production chain of the digital economy brings with it a new wave of polarisation between states.

[4] Alberto Lemma, 'Critical Minerals, Critical Moment: Africa's Role in the AI Revolution', ODI: Think Change, 10 February 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://odi.org/en/insights/critical-minerals-critical-moment-africas-role-in-the-ai-revolution/.

[5] Billy Perrigo, 'Exclusive: OpenAI Used Kenyan Workers on Less Than $2 Per Hour to Make ChatGPT Less Toxic', Time, 18 January 2023, accessed 13 August 2025, https://time.com/6247678/openai-chatgpt-kenya-workers/.

Polarisation between regions and national economies is nothing new in the history of capitalism – various terms and euphemisms have developed to describe or accommodate this reality. Dualities such as core vs. periphery, developed vs. underdeveloped, first world vs. third world, and now Global North vs. Global South, all arise from these dynamics.

That said, the rapid development of AI technology raises the stakes and introduces a new urgency to the age-old dynamic of uneven development. For perspective, let's try to digest the following facts:

- Three Global North companies – SubCom, Alcatel Submarine Networks, and Nippon Electric Company – produce 87% of the undersea cables through which the internet operates. The only major Global South payer in this field is China's HMN Technologies, which has a mere 11% market share.[6]

- Three US companies – AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud – own 68% of the world's cloud infrastructure.[7]

- Four US companies – Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft – will invest over $300 billion on AI in 2025.[8] The Grok system of X, owned by Elon Musk, is spending $1 billion per month to enhance and maintain it.[9]

The $300 billion figure is three times larger than Sri Lanka's entire GDP. This quantum of money could pay back Sri Lanka's external debt five times over.

Even China, the closest competitor to the US in terms of AI, will only invest around $98 billion in 2025.[10] But what China lacks in investment firepower, it makes up for in scale, coordination, infrastructure, and digital sovereignty.

Digital Solidarity for the Global South

At this rate of investment, the scientific breakthroughs behind AI will only grow. The technology is here to stay. In the hands of a private minority, the risks to the personal freedom of peoples and the sovereignty of nations are immense. Yet AI, like any technology, also brings with it great possibilities for emancipation and cooperation. The question is who will own the technology, how will it be used, and in whose interests?

[6] Daniel F. Runde, Erin L. Murphy, and Thomas Bryja, 'Safeguarding Subsea Cables: Protecting Cyber Infrastructure amid Great Power Competition', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 16 August 2024, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/safeguarding-subsea-cables-protecting-cyber-infrastructure-amid-great-power-competition.

[7] Edward Gately, 'Cloud Fight: AWS Leads, But Azure, Google Cloud Tout Bigger Growth', Channel Futures, 1 November 2024, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.channelfutures.com/cloud/aws-leads-azure-google-cloud-bigger-growth.

[8] Stephen Morris and Rafe Uddin, 'Big Tech Lines Up over $300 bn in AI Spending for 2025', Financial Times, 6 February 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.ft.com/content/634b7ec5-10c3-44d3-ae49-2a5b9ad566fa.

[9] Jill R. Shah and Carmen Arroyo, 'Musk's xAI Burning Through $1 Billion a Month as Costs Pile Up', Bloomberg News, 18 June 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-06-17/musk-s-xai-burning-through-1-billion-a-month-as-costs-pile-up.

[10] Xinmei Shen, 'China's AI Capital Spending Set to Reach up to US$98 Billion in 2025 amid Rivalry with US', South China Morning Post, 25 June 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.scmp.com/tech/tech-war/article/3315805/chinas-ai-capital-spending-set-reach-us98-billion-2025-amid-rivalry-us.

Apart from China, the Global South does not have the capital or the technology to develop a sovereign, or even semi-sovereign, digital infrastructure. However, the material foundations of AI and the digital economy are still very much dependent on the Global South's natural resources and labour. This dependence is multiplied when factoring in the reality that it is also the Global South which holds most of the world's potential energy resources, whether they are fossil fuels, solar and wind potentialities, or the critical minerals needed for nuclear or green energy. The transport and transfer of these resources, and the electronic components along the production chains, still require the roads, railways, ports, and airports of the Global South.

It is not true that the Global South has no agency or leverage in this crucial conjuncture. What is lacking is a political agenda and a framework and platform for cooperation. Yet there are some early indicators of this. At the 2025 BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro, member states signed the Statement on the Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence. This statement affirmed that global governance of AI should 'address the needs of all countries... and respect sovereignty'.[11] Also at the above summit, Brazilian President Lula da Silva declared that 'Artificial intelligence must not be a privilege for the few, nor a tool of manipulation in the hands of millionaires'.[12]

A few weeks later, at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai, Chinese Premier Li Qiang highlighted the urgent need for multilateral and bilateral cooperation for AI governance.[13] The Chinese side put forward a 13-point Global AI Governance Action Plan, highlighting a range of issues including technological cooperation, building digital infrastructure, addressing environmental concerns, forming common standards, and conducting early risk assessments of AI.[14]

By contrast, the second Trump administration's 2025 AI Action Plan sought to further deregulate the sector in the interests of tech oligarchs like Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Sundar Pichai, and Sam Altman, all of whom were prominent figures at Trump's own inauguration ceremony.[15]

[11] BRICS. BRICS Leaders' Statement on the Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence. 6 July 2025.

[12] Maiva D'Auria, 'Artificial Intelligence Must Not Be a Privilege for the Few, Nor a Tool of Manipulation in the Hands of Millionaires, Declared Lula at the BRICS Summit', BRICS Brasil (English site), 7 July 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://brics.br/en/news/artificial-intelligence-must-not-be-a-privilege-for-the-few-nor-a-tool-of-manipulation-in-the-hands-of-millionaires-declared-lula-at-the-brics-summit.

[13] 'Premier Li Qiang: China Proposes a Global AI Cooperation Organization', CGTN, 26 July 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-07-26/China-moots-global-AI-cooperation-organization-1Fk5YdE35kc/p.html.

[14] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Global AI Governance Action Plan, 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference and High-Level Meeting on Global AI Governance, 26 July 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China website, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng./xw/zyxw/202507/t20250729_11679232.html.

[15] J. B. Branch, Ilana Beller, and Tyson Slocum, 'The Trump AI Action Plan Is Deregulation Framed as Innovation', TechPolicy.Press, 30 July 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, https://www.techpolicy.press/the-trump-ai-action-plan-is-deregulation-framed-as-innovation/.

At a time when the US is doubling down on unilateralism, a new mood in the Global South offers the potential for renewed multilateralism and cooperation – especially for the joint development, governance, and benefit from new technologies like AI.

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Language, Power, and Inequality: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Divisions in Sri Lanka

By Natasha Palansuriya

Introduction

Language continues to serve as a significant axis of division within Sri Lankan society, shaping interpersonal dynamics across ethnic, religious, and regional lines. As the principal vehicle of human communication, language is intrinsically linked to fundamental rights and human dignity, a connection that is particularly salient in multilingual contexts (Wakkumbura, 2016; CPA, 2023). It not only influences individual and collective identities, but also underpins cultural heritage and political representation, rendering language rights essential for safeguarding minority groups defined by linguistic differences.

In Sri Lanka, too, language is closely linked to issues of power, identity, and belonging. While policy reforms in Sri Lanka have formally elevated the status of Tamil to parity with Sinhala, in practice, Sinhala remains predominant in national politics and governance, with far-reaching consequences for social cohesion. Consequently, advancing language inclusion is imperative, not only for the affirmation of minority identities, but also for building trust between communities and facilitating meaningful engagement between minority communities and the state (Ramasamy, 2022; Wakkumbura, 2016).

The following analysis explores the historical and policy choices that entrenched linguistic divisions and considers their ongoing ramifications as well as the persistent policy challenges that confront Sri Lanka today.

Colonial Rule and Language

British colonial rule fundamentally altered Sri Lanka's linguistic landscape, setting in motion dynamics that would later fuel interethnic tensions. The Colebrooke Report (1832) marked the first formal language policy in colonial Sri Lanka, privileging English as the language of governance and education (Gooneratne, 1968; Canagarajah, 2005; Thirumalai, 2002; Coperehewa, 2011; Herath, 2015). British language policies also reinforced social inequalities among linguistic groups (Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1998; Herath, 2015) and created a new social hierarchy (Herath, 2015).

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Tamils, often having greater access to English-medium education, became overrepresented in the colonial administration, causing resentment among Sinhalese (Fernando, 1976; Coperehewa, 2011; Eckstein, 2018; Herath, 2015).

Language Policy and Conflict in the Post-Independence Era

In the post-independence era, language policy became a central tool in Sinhalese majority strategies to consolidate political power, systematically disadvantaging Tamil speakers. While English remained the official language until 1956, a decisive shift occurred already in the 1940s when J.R. Jayawardene proposed Sinhala as the sole medium of instruction in education, paving the way for the Official Language Act of 1956 ('Sinhala Only Act') (Eckstein, 2018). By making Sinhala the exclusive official language, this Act curtailed socioeconomic mobility for Tamil-speaking citizens, exacerbating ethnic tensions (de Silva, 1987; Little, 1999; Thirumalai, 2002; Herath, 2015; CPA, 2017; 2023). Limited reforms, including the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 and the 1972 constitution's recognition of Tamil as a 'national language', provided mainly symbolic concessions, as implementation was undermined by weak institutional capacity (Wakkumbura, 2016; Ramasamy, 2022). Later, the 13th and 16th constitutional amendments in 1987 and 1988 declared Tamil an official language and mandated bilingual administration. Yet, their impact remained marginal (Herath, 2015; Wyss, 2020).

The cumulative effect of these policies entrenched long standing inequities and deepened Tamil grievances. Exclusion from education, administration, and employment opportunities fuelled youth mobilisation in the 1950s and 1960s, and by the 1980s, linguistic marginalisation had become a rallying point for the Tamil Federal Party's demand for autonomy. The emergence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the escalation of interethnic violence highlight how language policy became inseparable from broader struggles over power and identity. These disparities, originating in colonial hierarchies and institutionalised after independence, persisted well beyond the civil war's conclusion in 2009, continuing to shape patterns of inequality and conflict in Sri Lanka (Herath, 2015; Eckstein, 2018).

Post-War Language Policy Recommendations

Since the conclusion of the thirty-year civil war in 2009, processes to legitimise language policy have centered on fostering social reconciliation (Wakkumbura, 2016; Wyss, 2020). The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), established to guide post-war reconciliation, underscored the critical role of language rights in sustaining ethnic harmony. In pursuit of this objective, the LLRC advanced recommendations envisioning Sri Lanka's evolution towards a trilingual society, advocating educational initiatives to promote proficiency in Sinhala, Tamil, and English among all citizens (Herath, 2015; Wakkumbura, 2016). Complementing these aims, the government instituted mechanisms to realise the LLRC's vision, including the National Languages Project (NLP) to facilitate implementation of the Official Language Policy (OLP) (Herath, 2015: 11; Wakkumbura, 2016).

The Impact of Language Policy on Social Cohesion in Contemporary Sri Lanka

Recognizing the importance of language in fostering national unity, the Sri Lanka Barometer (SLB)[1] Public Opinion Survey on Reconciliation has, since 2020, systematically measured how linguistic factors influence reconciliation and social cohesion.[2] The SLB survey reveals a persistent disparity in access to government services, with Tamil speaking citizens consistently facing greater challenges than Sinhala speakers in obtaining services in their mother tongue (Sri Lanka Barometer, 2023; 2024; 2025). In 2023, Sinhalese individuals were approximately 1.6 times more likely than Sri Lankan Tamils, 2.8 times more likely than Up Country Tamils, and 3.0 times more likely than Muslims to always or often receive government services in their mother tongue.

In 2025, a majority of respondents from primarily Tamil speaking ethnic groups reported that they rarely, never, or only sometimes receive government services in their mother tongue (Sri Lankan Tamils – 53.7%, Up Country Tamils – 89.2%, Muslims – 63.4%), in stark contrast to Sinhalese respondents (20%) (Sri Lanka Barometer, 2025). This enduring linguistic inequity in public services not only hinders meaningful civic participation and inclusion for Tamil speakers but also undermines their ability to exercise fundamental rights, reinforcing historical grievances and perpetuating social divisions.

Although English medium education in the post-independence period did foster a tenuous link among the elite across ethnicities, it failed to bridge the wider communicative divide, resulting in limited interaction between most Sinhalese and Tamil communities (Coperehewa, 2011). The SLB survey findings underscores this enduring role of language as a barrier to inter-ethnic interaction. According to 2025 data, more than half the population (54.4%) identified language as the main barrier to associating with individuals from different ethnic groups — a proportion that has increased over time (from 31.8% in 2021 to 48.7% in 2023).

This trend highlights the ongoing constraint language poses to inter-ethnic association and the cultivation of mutual understanding. Notably, the survey also indicates a reduction in the proportion of respondents citing ‘language’ as the main basis for discrimination, decreasing from 10% in 2023 to 5.8% in 2025. This shift suggests that while language divisions in Sri Lanka were historically rooted in ideology, they have increasingly become a practical challenge that demand targeted policy interventions. These findings underscore how insufficient language accessibility not only restricts service provision but also perpetuates social fragmentation and hinders the development of inclusive, cohesive communities.

[1] The SLB is a collaborative research initiative involving The Insights Initiative, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) programme. SCOPE is co-funded by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by GIZ in partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka.

[2] The most recent survey, conducted in 2025, sampled 3,876 Sri Lankans aged 18 and above, randomly selected using a nationally representative sampling frame, with a 95% confidence level and a 1.6% margin of error at the national level. Data collection took place in January and February 2025.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka's language policies, shaped by colonial legacies and reinforced by post-independence state practices, have entrenched enduring inequalities between Sinhala and Tamil speakers. Despite constitutional recognition of both languages, weak implementation has left Tamil speaking communities at a structural disadvantage, limiting access to services and reinforcing exclusion.

Contemporary evidence from Sri Lanka Barometer surveys confirm that language remains a central barrier to both civic participation and interethnic engagement and trust. Legal recognition without effective practical enforcement has failed to adequately address historical grievances, leaving linguistic inequity a persistent fault line in Sri Lankan society.

In a context such as Sri Lanka, where language has long been intertwined with processes of power, marginalisation, and conflict (CPA, 2023), robust protection of language rights is fundamental to ensuring equitable access to services and effective governance. Advancing towards a genuinely multilingual society requires more than symbolic reforms: it demands sustained institutional commitment, investment in accessibility, and recognition that language rights are fundamental to reconciliation and sustainable peace.

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Cover Story

Liberty Leading the People (1830) by Eugène Delacroix

Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People captures the moment when ideas met reality. Painted after the July Revolution of 1830, it brings together ordinary Parisians - workers, students, and citizens - rallying under the tricolour. At the center stands Liberty, a figure both real and symbolic, guiding them through the smoke of conflict. The painting blends passion and struggle, showing how change often rises from the streets rather than the halls of power.

This image reminds us that leadership can come from courage as much as authority. Liberty here is not distant or divine, but human- walking beside those she leads. It is a vision of citizens taking ownership of their future, of progress born from shared conviction. In that sense, Delacroix's work speaks to every generation that must decide for itself what freedom means, and what it is worth.

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