

Transcript of Sri Lanka HLPF Presentation -

Mr/Ms Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

SLIDE 1

Let me, at the outset, express on behalf of my delegation, our appreciation for this opportunity to present the first voluntary national review of Sri Lanka on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at this 2018 high level political forum. Sri Lanka has always been an active supporter for realizing global initiatives launched by the United Nations for creating a better world for the peoples that we represent, which includes present as well as future generations.

Excellencies,

The Agenda 21 declaration agreed at the Earth Summit in 1992, with the objective of transforming our world to a sustainably developed society, is remarkable. I will share with you briefly Sri Lanka's journey since Agenda 21 came into effect, and the readiness and progress of Sri Lanka in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

SLIDE 2

Sri Lanka is a small country but we have 6 cultural and 2 natural world heritage sites, recognized by UNESCO. We also have the largest land mammal in the world – around 6,000 elephants; and our oceans are home to the largest marine mammal in the world, the blue whale. Sri Lanka is ranked among the top 35 biological diversity hotspots in the world. Our tea plantations produce the world famous Ceylon Tea. These treasures and the peaceful, reconciled and stable environment established, especially since the January 2015 Presidential Election have made Sri Lanka an attractive tourist destination.

SLIDE 3

We are a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country enriched with a long history and a culture. Mainly, the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims belonging to Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islam faiths live in harmony all around the country.

SLIDE 4

In the early 2000s when Agenda 21 era started, the people were still experiencing the enormous sufferings of the three-decade long conflict. Uncertainty and fear prevailed throughout the country due to the conflict. The people were displaced internally in their own backyards. The attacks also targeted economic nerve centres. Such violence affected all communities, and we failed to reach the socio-economic heights that our nation could have achieved.

Sri Lanka's troubles were compounded by the December 2004 Tsunami which resulted in the loss of over 32,000 lives, colossal property damage and two-thirds of the country's coastline being severely affected.

SLIDE 5

A high allocation in the national budget for the conflict resulted in limited allocations for productive sectors. As a result, the road system in several areas especially in rural areas remained in a dilapidated condition. Other infrastructure such as the rural fairs, community facilities and public utilities remained underdeveloped. Economy recorded a negative growth. Increasing the access to electricity and supplying an uninterrupted electricity supply had become challenges. The outlook of the overall economy was grim with poverty and unemployment rates remaining high.

SLIDE 6

Given this backdrop, Sri Lanka's transformation to its present day status is quite impressive.

The Presidential and General elections in 2015 set Sri Lanka on a new trajectory to,

- strengthen relationships and partnerships with other countries and organisations,
- and restore trust and confidence nationally and internationally to guide the country towards sustainable development.

Today, people enjoy democracy, fundamental freedoms, peace and development. The right to information is guaranteed by law. Laws have been amended to increase women's political participation. Commissions for Human Rights, Police, Public Service, Judicial Service, Investigating Allegations of Bribery and Corruption, and Elections function independently with Commissioners nominated by the Constitutional Council which has civil society representation as well.

SLIDE 7

Sri Lanka's impressive figures especially on health and education reflect the impacts of its Universal Free Education Policy and the Universal Free Health Policy that were introduced in 1940s. These policies maintained and built upon by successive governments have played a pivotal role in ensuring access to education and health facilities for all citizens.

SLIDE 8

Sri Lanka's progress in reducing poverty, both at the national and sub-national levels as well as across different population groups has been significant. The national poverty rate which stood at 22.7% in 2002 had declined to 4.1% in 2016. This reduction in poverty is observed across sectors and provinces. Poverty headcount index in the Estate sector, which has historically been the highest in the country, has declined remarkably from 30% in 2002 to 8.8% in 2016.

SLIDE 9

Sri Lanka's performance in mitigating certain communicable diseases is also noteworthy. In 2016, the WHO certified Sri Lanka as a Malaria free country. The country's Tuberculosis incidence rate in 2015 was 65 per 100,000, with a mortality rate of 5.6 per 100,000 has to be compared with 37 per 100,000 in the South Asian region as a whole. Life expectancy at birth has increased to 75 years overall, while that for women exceeds 78 years.

SLIDE 10

In the economic front, Sri Lanka has recorded a strong growth rate in recent years. The annual per capita income has increased to 4066 US dollars. The annual average growth rate of real GDP per employed person has been at around 6.3% in the post-conflict period.

The contribution of informal sector employment to total employment is relatively large at about 60.2%. Tourism has picked up significantly in the post-conflict period, with tourism earnings as a share of GDP increasing from 1.8% in 2009 to 5.6% in 2016.

At present, 89.5% of Sri Lanka's population has safe drinking water compared to 68% in 1990. The government has planned to increase the access to pipe borne water services in both rural and urban areas. However, particularly with the increase of demands for water for diverse needs, ensuring sustainability of safe water supply has become a challenge. Taking into consideration the effects of climate-change and resultant food security concerns as well, the management of water resources has been given high priority. With respect to sanitation, in 2015, the WHO declared Sri Lanka as having the best sanitation coverage in the South Asia. Over 87% of the population has onsite sanitation facilities.

Access to electricity in Sri Lanka has now reached near universality. It has been made affordable to the low income groups through the tariff structure. The government provides a 24 hour uninterrupted power supply which is not common in the South Asia region. The government is also exploring possible avenues for increasing the share of renewable energy in its total energy supply, which at present, accounts for 53% of total primary energy supply. A special program called the "Battle for solar power" was launched to promote solar energy.

Sri Lanka's computer literacy is gradually improving among all population groups. The government has taken many initiatives to develop computer literacy such as introducing ICT related subjects into the school syllabus. The government has also planned to integrate ICT literacy into school curricula and improve facilities available for digital-based teaching and learning, especially in rural areas, to impart important ICT skills to the younger generation.

SLIDE 11

Sri Lanka achieved the SDG target of maternal mortality rate more than two decades ago. Compared with the South Asian context of over 180 per 100,000 live births and the SDG target

of 70 per 100,000 live births, Sri Lanka's figure of 33.7 per 100,000 live births can be considered as impressive. Moreover, the under-five mortality rate of 10 per 100,000 live births and the neonatal mortality rate of 5.8 per 100,000 live births, are lower than the relevant SDG targets.

Primary school enrolment has already reached 100%, which means it will only be a matter of time for the already 98% youth literacy rate to reach 100%. Free education, provision of free text books and uniforms have reduced the financial burden of the parents and increased their access to education. The enactment of Compulsory Education Regulations has also contributed to increase the school enrollment.

SLIDE 12

Infrastructure destroyed during the conflict, including the northern railway line has been reconstructed and is fully operational. Infrastructure in other cities and villages are also being developed. Inter-provincial and intra-provincial connectivity have been improved by constructing expressways and ring roads, and by upgrading of road conditions throughout the country. These improvements in the transport sector have connected the people and goods to the employment and markets.

SLIDE 13

Sri Lanka has, however, several challenges ahead in its journey towards sustainable development.

The monsoon pattern has changed resulting in prolonged droughts, high intensity rainfall, flash floods and landslides which have caused severe hardships to farmers, reductions in crop production and disturbances to socio-economic development.

The rapid increase of Non Communicable Diseases, swift rate of population ageing and changes in disease patterns call for transforming the healthcare needs of the country. More finances will be needed for the medical treatment and care facilities for the ageing population.

Despite being on the safe side with respect to food security, ensuring nutrition security has become a challenge. The prevalence of stunting, wasting, underweight and anemia among less

than 5 year old children group has increased. Sri Lanka is one of the highest wasting prevalent countries in the world. A multi-sectoral approach with coherence in food, nutrition and consumption policies is needed to build up the nutrition security in Sri Lanka.

Inadequate investment is another challenge. FDI inflows remain significantly low in comparison to other regional countries. The government is implementing policies to attract FDI through efficient business facilitation, investment promotional activities in key potential markets overseas, and improved accessibility to information on investment opportunities.

Another concern is the lack of export diversity. The government is working to expand from traditional primary exports to value added manufactured exports, and diversify variety in the export basket.

SLIDE 14

On the way forward, Sri Lanka has planned for both livelihood and infrastructure development in a sustainable manner. Cloud smart classrooms and increasing the share of renewable energy including solar and wind are planned.

For metropolitan development, the government has prepared the Western Region Megapolis Master Plan in 2016, under which a rapid transit system including a network of light rail transits that connects central business areas with suburban areas will be established. Social, economic and environmental aspects have been addressed in this metropolitan development plan.

SLIDE 15

The policy framework of the government that is enriched with SDGs provides guidance to address challenges and plan the way forward to make Sri Lanka a sustainably developed country. The Vision 2025 strategic development framework of the government envisions transforming Sri Lanka to a knowledge-based and competitive social market economy. The medium term Public Investment Programme 2017-2020 of the Department of National Planning details the projects and programmes to achieve the development goals including SDGs.

The Ministry of Sustainable Development has published its strategy as a guide to other organisations to mainstream SDGs into their institutional plans in a comprehensive strategic management approach, that highlights the need for adhering to inclusivity and stakeholder engagement principles. Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act provides the legal framework and mechanism in this respect. A Council has been appointed by the President to implement the Act, and there is a Parliamentary Select Committee to oversee the implementation of SDGs.

The VNR process itself was a good example of the government's efforts of increasing multi-stakeholder engagement. The government adopted a collaborative and inclusive process with stakeholders at national and provincial levels including representatives from different government entities, private sector, academia, development partners and civil society organisations. The stakeholders identified successes and challenges, and outlined the steps that need to be taken to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda which has been incorporated in the report.

The government is appreciative of all the stakeholders who dedicated their time and effort to make the VNR process a success. The government is committed to further increase its multi-stakeholder engagement in achieving the 2030 agenda.

Finally, while reiterating the commitment of the government of Sri Lanka to the SDGs at the highest levels, we are determined to work towards making our country achieve the SDGs and grow as a stable, peaceful, reconciled and prosperous nation for all our citizens - leaving no one behind.

SLIDE 16

Thank you!