

STRENGTHENING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUTH LEAVING CARE IN SRI LANKA

 **SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
SRI LANKA



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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a pervasive problem in present Sri Lanka, with unemployment rate among youth aged 15-24 years being the highest out of all other age groups. Further, there is a large population of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), which is reported to be higher than the global average for this age group. Sri Lankan youth are challenged in their transition from school to work due to multiple factors including the lack of required skills, available opportunities, and career counseling to find and explore opportunities in the job market. The biggest bottleneck, however, is the 'disconnect' between 3 key stakeholders: educational and vocational training institutions, employers, and the youth, resulting in skills, information, and aspirational gaps. Youth who have grown up in alternative care – particularly those in institutional care – are predominantly disadvantaged due to unique circumstances and challenges they face while in care, and when transitioning into independent life. Constrained by an identity that often makes them vulnerable to social stigma and discrimination, youth leaving care homes (i.e. 'care leavers') in Sri Lanka struggle to enter and navigate the exigencies of the world of work, and challenges they face while in care, and when transitioning into independent life.

Constrained by an identity that often makes them vulnerable to social stigma and discrimination, youth leaving care homes (i.e. 'care leavers') in Sri Lanka struggle to enter and navigate the exigencies of the world of work. Their prospects of gaining educational qualifications, vocational training, entrepreneurship opportunities, or at least a decent employment is generally at a low level. Furthermore, demotivation and disempowerment due to repeated injustice and callous treatment by the system and society, breaks their spirit, thus draining their aspirations of engaging in gainful and meaningful employment. Consequently, upon leaving care, such groups of young people are often left to fend for themselves in extremely vulnerable conditions, including exploitation in the labour market.

In order to address these, SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka conducted an advocacy event targeting policy makers, employers, educational institutions, and care providers. The advocacy event held on the 4th of September, at BMICH. This event was a joint effort of SOS Children's Village and Generation Never Give Up (GNG) Network of care leavers.

Objectives

- To influence policies and practices related to improving youth employability and employment for youth leaving care in Sri Lanka
- To promote youth participation in promoting their right to employability and skills development for securing gainful employment

1.2. Youth Consultation

Prior to the advocacy event, SOS CV Sri Lanka with the assistance of GNGN, conducted a youth consultation, in order to get young people's views and recommendations to key duty bears concerning to strengthen the employability leaving care, while bridging the gaps among these stakeholders and the youth. The consultation was participated by around 20 youth care leavers of SOS and a few childcare institutions (including members of the GNGN of care leavers in Sri Lanka). Refer Annex 2 for their recommendations provided by the youth to policy makers, educational and vocational training institutions, employers and care providers.

actively engaged from its inception; organizing the youth consultation, design and printing of IEC materials, and organizing and facilitating the event held on 4th September, 2019. The entire advocacy event was revolved around youth and it provided the platform for the youth to put into practice the ideals of youth engagement, and empowerment. It was also an opportunity to rapport building and more opportunities for meaningful communication that engage governments and civil society stakeholders.

1.3. Generation Never Give up Network (GNGN)

'Generation Never Give-up Network' of care leavers in Sri Lanka, which was formed in 2017, to provide peer support and promote their own rights as well as the rights of children still in care.

Some of key performances of GNG Network;

- Actively advocate on the birth certificate issue and represent GNGN at the parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Children.
- Presented a proposal on Promoting the Welfare of Youth Who Leave Alternative Care to the Minister, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and the Chairs of Parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee
- Represent at the deinstitutionalization and alternative care of children (DiAC) conference held on 5 December 2017.
- Represent at the 3rd Biennial International Conference, organized by Udayan Care, India

The successful completion of the advocacy event 'Strengthening the Employability of Youth Leaving Care in Sri Lanka' was another milestone of GNGN. The youth were

2. PARTICIPANTS

The advocacy campaign strengthening the employability of youth leaving care in Sri Lanka was launched with the participation of over 100 stakeholders representing the Government, civil society, the private sector and the media (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Participants by category/sector

IEC materials was designed and printed by 'PrintForest', a company owned and managed by a care leaver.

SECTOR	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Government	24
Civil Society (I/NGOs, individual practitioners)	27
Private Sector	15
Media	25
Child Care Institutions	10
Care Leavers	15
SOS CV International/SL	22
TOTAL	138



3. OPENING CEREMONY

The event commenced with the lighting of the traditional oil lamp by Ms. Chandima Sigera, National Commissioner, Department of Probation and Child Care Services (DPCCS), who represented the Government of Sri Lanka, Ms. Shubha Murthi, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, SOS Children's Villages International who represented the civil societies and alternative child care providers, and Mr. Dhanushka Jayaratne, President of Generation Never Give Up Network, representing all youth who have left alternative care.

The welcome speech was delivered by Mr. Dinesh Rohan Jayathilake, Secretary, GNG Network, highlighting the objectives of the event.



4. KEY NOTE SPEECH



Mr. Kanishka Weerasinghe
CEO
Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC)

Welcoming the delegates, Mr. Kanishka said he was delighted to talk to a group of young leaders who are the future leaders of the country. Revealing his first encounter with SOS Villages, he appreciated the work of SOS for the children, and especially those underprivileged.

Giving an introduction to EFC, he said 'the EFC has a membership of over 750 corporates, and employ around 800,000 people directly in this country, which is around one tenth of the work force. It has been working with ILO since 2016 to implement a network of youth initiatives supported by employers of this country to ensure that all children are given an opportunity either to get an orientation to the world of work, especially in the private sector, or to make use of many other opportunities they have. He said, "Our moto is not to leave anyone behind, we work closely with the Prime Minister's Office and Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), and our youth network encourages all youth to join the private sector."

EFC has adopted a two-pronged approach: to ensure that young job seekers acquire pre-requisite skills for the modern world of work, and to create opportunities for youth by exposing them to all aspects of good corporate governance. This approach, as Weerasinghe further elaborated,

extends to young graduates as well as others who have been through the process of a formal higher education.

Recently, EFC took over to hosting another initiative called 'Junior Achievers', supported by the Development Unit of the Prime Minister's Office. Corporate volunteers guide young children in school between ages of 16 – 18 in relation to entrepreneurship. Here, they are given an insight to develop a business plan, accounting, reporting, and good governance principals. This is an important initiative in reaching school children at an early stage which will benefit them in the future. These opportunities are available for children leaving care from SOS and supported organizations.

Mr. Weerasinghe said, "We encourage care leavers to explore training and job opportunities enabled by the EFC's such as Empowerme.lk (an online portal linking job seekers with employers), we also gave orientation to about 100 youth from Horana and Ratnapura and I was informed by one of the corporate colleagues that they are seriously thinking to connect youth through our portal, rather than by conducting job fairs."

Vouching his support to eliminate the bottlenecks in the journey of securing employment in the private sector, he said, "we want SOS to join us and we ensure you that some of the bottle necks such as the requirement of information on guardians and parents are addressed in a proper way. We want you to feel special, because you are young people joining the world of work and looking at taking this country forward. We will do our utmost to ensure that you find these opportunities and these bottlenecks are addressed. That is why we are here. You as young leader to aspire joining the world of work, we welcome you to join us through Empower.lk. It is a simple process you register yourself and we will guide you. If you are from SOS, you will go from our recommendation. That is our guarantee."

Ending his speech, Mr. Werasinghe said, "We are very happy to partner with SOS and provide all these opportunities to young care leavers. I am impressed that this event was organized by the young care leavers which shows their capabilities, capacities, and entrepreneurship as well."

5. SPEECH



Ms. Shubha Murthi
Deputy COO
SOS Children's Villages International

Ms. Murthi opened her remarks by congratulating the young organizers. "I am extremely proud to be standing here because this is an event organized by the youngsters and it is clear that there is a lot of capacity and interest in addressing their own cause. We as adults can only help them and they have to do it."

She continued, "The demography of young people is changing so much, not only in Sri Lanka, but all around the world. The population in this part of Asia is becoming younger and younger. This means that there is market potential and there are lots of opportunities which is very encouraging. At the same time, the competition for education and employment has increased in many folds. In countries like India, young people need to compete with a couple of hundred in searching for a job."

She further added, "because of this competition, the success rate for young people is not growing. A poor person is left out having no money for education, and this is where a poor person is left out of the job market. They have no money for education and get marginalized. We need inclusive education for them to come out of this plight. In most counties young

people are sent to the Middle East. Majority of them go as laborers and maids. Why is this happening? For me, it is because of not having an inclusive education and lack of creating job opportunities and possibilities for these people to live and contribute to their own countries. But then, we have the other side of the coin where we are overstressing on education. Children are busy from morning to evening, moving from one class to another. This needs to be changed, if not, we will have a lot of young literates who are unable to get a job. It is very important the Government and policy makers look into this, where it is necessary to retain the knowledge base of the country.'

Talking about the Generation Never Give Up network, she said, "GNG is a great platform to express issues of care leavers. You feel hurdles, difficulties, and you need to be ready to face all these challenges. No child should grow up alone. Because you are the one who need to stand up and say 'we do not give up and we stand up for who we are.'

6. STATUS OF THE EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OF SOS YOUTH IN ASIA

As a prelude to the panel discussion, a presentation was made on the status of the employability and employment of SOS Youth in Asia. This presentation highlighted the challenges faced by young people leaving alternative care, SOS CV interventions with young people and the good practices.

7. PANEL DISCUSSION LED BY YOUTH

To provide better employment for youth, better coordination between policy makers, educators, employers, and the development sector is important. In order to discuss issues of youth leaving care, an open discussion was conducted with a panel comprised of policy makers, educators, employers, and the development sector (Refer Annex 1: Profile of the Panelist). This discussion was conducted by GNGN Safe Member K.G.N.S. Nimali and its President, Mr. Dhanushka Jayaratne.

Remembering the birth of GNGN, Nimali said, “we came out as a group of youth out of care at the Speak out Session of Care Leavers ‘18+: Building Support Systems for Youth Leaving Care, organized by SOS Sri Lanka at Water’s Edge on 27th of July, 2017.” As some of the progress of GNGN, she highlighted the issue of the Birth Certificate. GNGN together with other stakeholders worked with the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Children and Women, and as a result the marital status column was removed from the Birth Certificate. On behalf of GNGN, Nimali expressed the appreciation to Dr. Thulitha Wijemanne, the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Women and Gender, Dr. Sudharshini Fernandopullai, Co-Chair of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Women and Gender and Ms. Chandima Sigera, National Commissioner, DPCC for their utmost guidance and support to make this a success.

Adding to this the conversation, Dhanushka mentioned about the collaboration between the DPCCS and the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) to provide vocational training for youth at Certified Schools in Sri Lanka and thanked the National Commissioner of DPCC for her contribution to support youth leaving care to secure better employment.

“Certified schools provide a systematic vocational training to the children admitted. There are five certified schools in Sri Lanka, located in Makola, Kappetipola, Hikkaduwa, Ranmuthugala and Kondavil. The reasons for admission of children to such schools include, theft/ burglaries, disobedience to parents, sale and use of alcohol, in need of care and protection, attempted suicide and unclassified.”

Question #1:

Issues related to the Birth Certificate include incomplete information, such as the father's name and the marital status of parents, which induce stigma, and the lack of recognition and awareness of the Probable Birth Certificate among service providers including government officials. Such issues often lead to the denial of attaining school or higher education, registering in sport activities and skills development opportunities, discrimination in job recruitments and marginalization at the workplace. Also, these youth have faced issues when getting visa to travel overseas for training/jobs. Can you certify that the Government will assist in solving this Birth Certificate issue of children who live in Alternative Care and how can we make the Government accountable to solve the Birth Certificate issue?

Answer: Dr. Nandaka Molagoda, Economist, Policy Development Office, Prime Minister's Office

Thank you for highlighting this issue. First I should say that as a Government Servant, I was not aware of the birth certificate issue until recently and was not informed about such difficulty faced by children in alternative care. As I was informed, some of the interventions are already underway to find solutions. Our office needs to be informed in writing about this issue, and we will be able to convey a meeting with all relevant authorities to find a solution. We as a policy making body, can intervene to find a solution. You as citizens of this country, are entitled to have a legitimate birth certificate. With a request from the National Commissioner, DPCC, we can intervene and take corrective measures with relevant authorities. We need to act fast.

Question #2:

Care leavers are often stigmatized and discriminated against in job recruitment processes as well as in work places due to being identified as an 'orphan', and being 'outcast' for 'not being from a good family'. Focus is given to one aspect of their identity instead of recognizing their skills, qualifications and contributions. Further, employers assume that youth from care facilities do not possess the required skills or aptitudes, a bias that results in qualified young people losing valuable opportunities without even being given a chance to prove her/himself. Such perceptions and attitudes of employers and co-workers compel these youth to hide their identity in fear of being branded, degraded and denied opportunities. What is your opinion on this, do you think it is fair to treat youth from alternative care in this manner?

Answer: Mr. Sujeewa Rajapaksha, Managing Partner of BDO Partners

When I was working in the Human Resources Department, I interviewed so many young people in providing practical training. And as the Chairman of the Chartered Institute, I worked with many young students. We as a company in the private sector, we need to follow certain procedures just as the Government offices, but when it comes to recruitment, we adopt our own procedures. I have never examined the birth certificate during the interview or the marital status of their parents. We check birth certificates only to verify the applicant's name. We may check the birth date. Other than that we have no reason to scrutinize the birth certificate. Also, we never differentiate between children from different backgrounds. My Company employs children from alternative care, but we never treat them indifferently. We treat everyone equally.

I have open doors for trainers and employees to meet me directly. They discuss personal issues, but we never disclose the issue with others and they are kept strictly confidential. I can assure you the private sector companies will not discriminate youth coming from different background and we treat all employees equally. We provide placement based on their competencies. We have counselling programs if needed, we refer youth to the counselling sessions. We conduct evaluations every 6 months and evaluate the performances and counselling records to see if he/she is fit for the job. Finally, I should say we treat everyone equally and you do not need to worry.

Question #3:

As a civil society organization, can your organization provide assistance to train officials on the Probable Birth Certificate?

Answer: Ms. Madhu Dissanayake, Assistant Representative, UNFPA

Conducting Census is a main role of UNFPA and every birth is important to us. We have advocated for the removal of marital status of parents column and only recently we were able to make that change in the birth certificate. We have informed small organizations to refer the birth certificate and National Identify Card (NIC) during recruitment and it leads to uncomfortable situations. We were informed of many discriminations due this and we put this agenda point to the Parliamentary Oversight Committee due to its severity. The issue is the deficiencies in the birth certificate and it has led to discrimination. There are disabled children without birth certificates. Community awareness has been given on this issue, and now every mother wants to obtain a birth certificate for her child. We continue to raise awareness on this and see the need to capacitate civil organizations on this issue.

We need to ensure that every child possess a birth certificate and civil organizations are given awareness on this.

Question #4:

According to the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey in 2018, youth unemployment rate (age 15-24 years) is 21.9 percent, which is the highest reported unemployment rate among all age groups. Further, there is a large population of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), which is reported to be higher than the global average for this age group - Sri Lanka recorded a rate of 22.7 percent in 2017, above the ILO global average estimate of 22.1 percent.

Sri Lankan youth are challenged in their transition from school to work due to multiple factors, including the lack of required skills, lack of available opportunities, and lack of guidance in finding available job opportunities. The biggest bottleneck however is the disconnect between 3 key stakeholders: educational and vocational training institutions, employers, and the youth resulting in skills, information, and aspirational gaps. The bottleneck in large part, is the lack of engagement among the above-mentioned stakeholders. While this situation affects the youth population of the country in general, marginalized and vulnerable groups of youth such as those without parental care or those who have grown up in alternative care are more deeply affected and often fall through the proverbial cracks in the system.

What steps have you/your organization taken to bridge the gap between these three key stakeholders?

Answer: Mr. Janaka Jayalath, Deputy Director, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)

This is a severe issue in Sri Lanka as vocational training has mandates in many ministries, but there is no coordination between them. It is not easy to solve this overnight. As I see, we need the technology to bridge the gap between the stakeholders. This is a political issue and there is a need to define a way to solve this. This disconnect prevails in many countries. All Governments want

to groom their young people to suit the job market and no country has come up with a solution. We consulted the Chamber of Commerce how we should prepare our youth for the current job market. They were looking for youth with low skills, who can perform jobs that required less skills. We referred to this to the Dept. of Census and Statistics and they confirmed the same.

How we should prepare for this as a Government? Our commercial sector need to adopt longer term plans. In 5 years, the jobs available now will be obsolete. This is a big change and it is difficult for us to adopt this change. We need a work force with critical thinking, team work mentality, and high skills in numeracy. Our schools need to be ready to impart knowledge on life skills to children. The school system is like a dinosaur, they do not like change, therefore we cannot ask them to change their teaching methods overnight. We need to do these changes gradually.

We have introduced vocational training in schools. This is important as children need vocational training and not just knowledge based on books. The Junior Achievement program is meant to teach children on how to run a business and methods to close it within 8 months. We need practical approaches like that and need to get ready to adopt future trends. We need to prepare for the future and need to impart knowledge to children, so they will be able to find a path. This is not just a Government responsibility. As an individual, we also need to aspire for improvements and changes. We need to train our minds to think positively. As a society, we need to search for opportunities. Technology can help us do certain things, but not all. The new generation has so many opportunities. We need to find solutions on our own and not rely on others. It is difficult to give an answer to your question. It is not easy to connect these Institutions. It will be difficult to take these Institutions on one stage and address the issues. This is the reality.

Question #5:

Youth need to leave alternative care at age 18. With limited knowledge on available vocational trainings, youth face difficulties when searching for jobs. In Maharashtra, India, a percentage of reservation has been made in employment for care leavers, especially for disabled youth. Also in Philippines and Bangladesh the Government has introduced special schemes to give jobs for children in alternative care.

What steps has VTEC taken to update youth leaving care about the vocational training suitable for their educational qualifications and does the Sri Lankan Government also have policies to provide reservations (quotas) when providing employment?

Answer: Mr. Janaka Jayalath, Deputy Director, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)

The Government has introduced a policy with provisions for disadvantaged youth accessing vocational training. We received approval by the Cabinet and we are currently in the process of developing the implementation plans. We need to see what provisions have been given for disadvantaged youth in providing vocational training. They need access to Vocational Training Guidance supplementary centers established all over Sri Lanka.

We have trained officers in the centers to help youth to find the right vocational training for their skills. We also have developed an online app, where anyone interested can find their eligibility for the given course. The test can be done free of charge at centers in your areas. The applicant needs to answer 63 questions and in a short period, the result sheet can be obtained to assess the competencies for the given job. Most of the time, students select a vocational training without having prior knowledge and proper information on the training. He/she does not know their competencies. We see students have very limited information on available courses and most of the time, they select courses only known to

We have almost 3000 vocational trainings and around 200,000 followers for courses in Govt. and Private institutions. All this information can be obtained online and through our centers. Every 6 months, we access the labour markets, trend in future jobs, demands, and provide services accordingly. We also established a Job Bank, WWW.Youthjobs.lk. This is a platform to connect employers and job seekers to provide opportunities to access information to apply for suitable jobs.

Most of the youth access our services, you don't have to have a National Identity Card. We have created a system in which when you enter the birth date, the system generates a temporary number. He/she can use this number instead of the NIC. This is the best way for youth who do not have an NIC to register themselves for vocational training.

Question #6:

ILO has a worldwide alliance committing to provide employment to youth under the flagship 'decent Youth Job Initiative'. We also know worlds youth skills day was held in July this year. As a donor and a development partner that provide financial and technical support to the Government and Civil Society, what is the role of the ILO in resolving issues faced by care leavers in gaining employability skills and decent jobs?

Answer: Ms. Simrin Singhe, Country Director, ILO

I know there are special vulnerabilities related to care leavers, and from the ILO's perspective, attention needed to be placed for special needs of care leavers. One thing we have found working around the world, that children live in homes, and other care facilities, single family households tend to perform much better in the world of work than many others who have gone through 13 years of education. Sadly, they have lots of very hard and unfortunate experiences (children should not have) and they are prepared for the world of work, when they enter the job market, they know negotiating skills, they are

Sri Lanka youth unemployment is higher than the global average, you have 20% youth unemployment when Global average is 13%. Why is this? There are some long term vision issues, not just coming from the Government, but from the private sector, developing partners, civil society organizations need to find the way. Despite high educational attainment, Sri Lanka has an ageing population, and labor shortages. VTEC always complains they have jobs, but cannot find people.

ILO is trying to break away from traditional everyday course business. This year, ILO turns 100 and we want to see future of work in Sri Lanka and are looking through the lens of women and youth. There are promising areas where the jobs will be created and also there is a need for serious revision of policies and directions to happen. Sri Lanka simply cannot compete with India, Bangladesh and Vietnam when it is comes to manufacturing and agriculture. When considering the educated population, the only area that Sri Lanka can compete in the services sector and knowledge economy. This is the area we found where there are so many opportunities and good jobs to be created and profit for businesses with greater revenue for Governments through taxation.

I encourage youth irrespective of whether they are in care or not, to think of jobs not in terms of the public sector, Govt. jobs or to work in a factory, to work in an office in Colombo, or a blue chip company. There are so many jobs that technology can harness right now. The world is completely changing and technology has a big role to play in it. For example the tourism sector. You can organize home stays, cultural tours, or supply food for tourists by utilizing technology; there is so much that can be explored using technology. You have young and ageing population. Women are staying at home and not working. For such women, we can get jobs around care giving using digital platforms. Sri Lanka's richness in Ayurveda, Bio diversity hotspots can also be offered as services using digital platforms. We need to use these

opportunities. The other area is the green and sustainable consumption and production. There is a lot of potential for green jobs, in terms of using solar, watershed management. Sri Lanka is always hit by drought and flood continuously. This is not going to stop. There is lots of potential in terms of jobs, continuity planning and a lot of potential for a business to grow.

Youth should not feel that they are going on a vocational and nonacademic track, and therefore, they are not that smart. We need an attitude shift. Countries like Germany, plumbers' make 50% more than a PhD doctor. This is where the demand for services are. You have to be adaptable and these opportunities cannot be taught in a class room.

Finally, I congratulate SOS as you have 98% employment rate the your employed care leavers earn over RS. 30,000 per month.

Question #7:

How do companies deal with youth who have aggressive attitudes?

Answer: Mr. Sujeewa Rajapaksa, Managing Partner of BDO Partners

The HR department of an organization needs to work on this. Most organizations have Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). SOPs are practiced in many organizations, but small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) may not be using them. This is where we need awareness. The employer is moving fast and under lots of stress. We need to understand employers' perspective also. Under such circumstances, can they adopt welfare attitudes? HR should be provided awareness. Most companies are working for a goal, but they need to look beyond. Some big companies have Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), but I do not know if they focus on employee issues. If you are a member of the EFC, then they can provide awareness. Otherwise it is difficult. Not all SMEs are members of EFC. It is difficult to monitor by the Government. Our universities do not provide skills that are

required for the job market. There is a big gap in competencies required by the employers. We need to correct it.

Question #8:

Entrepreneur skills for youth leaving care

Answer: Mr. Janaka Jayalath, Deputy Director, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)

Entrepreneurs need training. We need to encourage youth to start their own businesses and they need entrepreneur training. We have a 10 day ED (Entrepreneurial Module). After the training, youth need to develop a business plan. This can be given to a financial institution to obtain a loan. We need to improve the entrepreneur training. In other countries, they use different methodologies. Some countries use Business model canvas. The business model canvas is a shared language for describing, visualizing, assessing, and changing business models. It describes the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value. The other is mentoring. This is not practiced in Sri Lanka a lot. They get business leaders to provide advice and teach them how to do it. They conduct workshops and one to one mentoring. Youth need to follow these and get experience in developing Entrepreneurial models.



Panelists

8. Q & A (OPEN DISCUSSION)



Madhu Dissanayake, UNFPA, talking about the new youth strategy of UNFPA, My Body, My Life, My World! Ms. Madhu Dissanayake said that the world's young people have the potential to lead positive change in the world. She emphasized: 'We need people like Einstein. We need design thinkers, innovators. We cannot go on this journey without youngsters. You need to think every day, what is my contribution to the World? If we want the world to decide your contribution, you will be soon replaced by Artificial Intelligence. We are there to support you to ensure that youth have the knowledge and power to make informed choices and to participate as active citizens.'

Probation Commissioner

There was a time, when you apply for jobs, the interview panel inquire about father's status. Now this column has removed. Parent's marital status is not considered in both Govt. and Private sector. But this information is needed to be kept in the personal file. This is causing stress among most of the youth. There are provisions to do adjustments, but due to lack of knowledge of some Government officers, it has become a difficult task. Incomplete information on the BC does not prevent youth from getting an NIC, passport, or a driving license. The issue lies not with the system, but with practices. Some Government officers do not recognize the Probable Age Certificate as a legal document. DPCC together with the Parliamentary Oversight Committee is working on the BC issue. This is not something we can do alone. We need the support of GNGN to push things forward.

Directing a question to Mr. Jagath Jayalath, the National Commissioner questioned about providing vocational training for youth living in alternative care. 'Our children in Certified Schools are not allowed to go out, hence we have no way of capacitating these children. We need to have a method to teach vocational training within the Institution. We request from TVEC attention on this and find a solution to train children in Certified Schools.'

Mr. Jayalath Jayalath: Centers provide vocational training needs and maintain certain standards to conduct accreditation courses. We can start discussions on an implementation mechanism.

Child Care Institution : Children in homes cannot be sent out for jobs without a decision from placement committee or a Court order. This is a long procedure, and by the time, the opportunities may not be available. I need to ask the National Commissioner if there is a way to speed up the process to help these children to apply for jobs at the right time.

Commissioner: I need to discuss with my team to provide a solution for this.

9. VOTE OF THANKS

The Vote of Thanks was delivered by Ms. Rasika Priyadharshini, member of GNGN. She thanked the representatives from Government Departments and Ministries for the active participation, especially the guidance and support received from Dr. Thulitha Wijemanne, Dr. Fernandopullai, and the panelist for their insight and guidance for youth to enter the world of work. She also thanked the civil society organizations and Child Care Institutions for their utmost support to GNGN to advocate for the rights of youth in alternative care and the private sector for their contribution to provide job opportunities. Finally, she thanked the media for covering this event.



10. KEY IEC MATERIAL

The main IEC material used during the event included:



1. The policy brief on Strengthening the Employability of Youth Leaving Care, in Sri Lanka (English, Sinhala), which includes the context analysis of the issue and recommendations to the government. This was distributed among all the participants.
2. Presentation on SOS Youth Care and Employability in Asia

11. MEDIA COVERAGE

The event media was facilitated by the 'Ogilvy on Advertising'. The advocacy event was covered by both print and electronic media and around 10 media houses/personals were presented at the event. Press releases were published in Sinhala English, and Tamil in leading newspapers, in Sri Lanka.

12. CROSS FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

The successful completion of the advocacy event was a result of a great team effort and cross function collaboration for advocacy of SOS CV Sri Lanka. The event brought expertise, experiences and knowledge of staff within SOS CV to execute an effective event strategy. All staff attached to the National Office, Corporate Partnerships, Fund Development and Communication (FDC) and staff of SOS Villages, worked as a team and this in turn helped them to gained knowledge on advocacy and to observe the implications of balancing service delivery with advocacy. Although, SOS CV has limited human resources, the change of management and staff culture and the increased knowledge towards advocacy contributed to the achievements in advocacy work and increased support despite their busy day-to-day schedule.

13. OUTCOMES AND THE WAY FORWARD

1. Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha, a politician (and former Chairman of Tertiary Vocational and Education Commission) is proposing amendments to the Constitution, and in the sections related to care of children, the care of persons in detention, remand and in care as well as the development of education for promoting employability skills are included. Prof. Wijesinha has shared this with Hon. (Dr). Thusitha Wijemanne - Chair of the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Women and Gender as well as with SOS Sri Lanka, for advocacy.
2. Prof. Wijesinha has also proposed a closed-door consultation on structural changes needed to improve the situation of children in care (including those whose mothers are in custody or in mental health institutions), followed by a press conference. He advises us to do this together with Hon. (Dr). Wijemanne and Hon. (Dr). Sudarshini Fernandopulle - Chair of the Parliamentary Caucus for Children.
3. In response to the recommendations submitted to the Prime Minister's office, a letter has been sent to Heads of 16 Departments/ Ministries to propose a suitable mechanism to implement the recommendations that are aligned to their respective institutions.
4. The Director of the Department of National Planning of the Ministry of Finance expressed interest in meeting officials of the GNGN to further discussions and to develop a joint proposal.
5. Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC) has offered to link their Employers' National Network on Youth Initiative (ENNYI) with GNG Network, as well as training and job opportunities enabled by the EFC's schemes such as 'empowerment.lk' (an online portal that links job-seekers with employers) and Junior Achievers (a collaboration with the Policy Development Unit of the Prime Minister's Office). EFC is also willing to act as a 'mediator' between youth leaving care and employers, in order to educate employers and prevent them from inquiring into their backgrounds, etc. when youth are being referred to prospective employers through the EFC.
6. An individual practitioner who conducts classes for building confidence in speaking English has offered her services to care leavers. An unconventional method is being used by her where she uses creative activities (including art and craft) and interactive sessions to help individuals get rid of the fear of speaking English. She is willing to conduct separate classes for these youth Organizations that participated representing Child Care Institutions.
7. The event was resultant in giving more prominence to the GNGN. Several requests were made from Children Care Institutions to join the 18+ Alliance and also queries on the procedure to register youth in their centers to the GNGN.
8. The issue of birth certificate was further discussed with the Probation National Commissioner. She said Registrar General Department has pledged support in terms of issuing Probable BC (instead of Probable Age Certificate), which is supposedly equally legitimate. The National Probation Commissioner requested support from SOS to conduct a media campaign to raise awareness on general public and Government staff through talk shows and advertisements.



ANNEX 1: Profile of the Panelist



Dr. Nandaka Molagoda
Economist
Policy Development Office (PDO) of
the Prime Minister's Office

Dr. Nandaka Molagoda brings over 25 years of experience, having worked in various positions at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the public and private sector in Sri Lanka. He has worked on Fiscal, Monetary and other Economic Development Policy related matters in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Eastern Europe, the Euro Area and Russia.



Ms. Simrin Singh
Country Director
ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and
the Maldives

Ms. Singh, who is a national of the United States of America, has been an ILO staff member since the year 2000. Since then, she has held various positions in different ILO Offices as well as at ILO headquarters in Geneva. Her most recent post at the ILO, held between 2008 and 2017, was as a Senior Specialist on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, based in the ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand.

Ms Singh holds a Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology and Sociology from Connecticut College in the USA and a Master's Degree in International Development Studies from The George Washington University, USA.



Ms. Madhusa Dissanayake
Assistant Representative
UNFPA

Ms. Madusha Dissanayake is a Social Anthropologist with more than eighteen years of post-qualifying experience & expertise in the areas of public policy, social and behaviour change communication, public health, gender, human rights and International relations. She has developed programmes, initiated and established several community based organizations & networks and enhanced capacities of organizations, communities and individual women, youth and marginalized communities.

She has worked in the NGO and state sectors primarily in the UK and Sri Lanka but with much exposure to systems and programmes of several other countries. She is currently the Assistant Representative of UNFPA. Before joining the UN, She worked as the Director for Public Affairs, Policy and Advocacy at the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka. Her work is directly targeted at identifying gaps in policies, systems & Service provision within the government, Non-government, and private sector, and to support the development of suitable gender sensitive, rights-based policies & programmes in order to reduce maternal & infant mortality & morbidity, violence & abuse, social & economic inequalities and strengthen better development outcomes for children, young people, women & families. Further she was also a visiting lecturer at the University of Colombo - Centre for Studies in Human Rights with in Faculty of Law.

Madu's passion for working on achieving Justice, Choice and well-being for all; has enabled her to have a parallel volunteer life while working for organizations for 24 years where she was able to address many issues close to her heart & soul using both avenues. She has held roles from a Community Volunteer to International Trustee approved by the UK Charity Commission. Her longest has been the involvement with Home-Start Worldwide and Home-Start Lanka, which largely focuses on Prevention of abuse & family support.



Mr. Janaka Jayalath
Deputy Director
Tertiary and Vocational Education
Commission (TVEC)

Mr. Janaka Jayalath is the Deputy Director General of Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the apex body for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Sri Lanka. He is an Electronic Engineering Diplomat of IET Katunayake and graduated from University of Colombo with B.Sc. in Physical Science and later M.Sc. in Computer Science. He has completed Diploma in e-Governance at PIM, University of Sri Jayawardenepura and MBA from the University of Moratuwa.

Previously he has worked as a Manager Systems in leading telecom provider, Project Manager for two Asian Development Bank projects and has about 25 years of experience in the areas of Telecommunication, ICT, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Labour Market Information Systems, Career Guidance systems and e-Learning systems. He has published several research papers locally and internationally. He has written a book on “Quality Assurance of TVET Qualification Frameworks in South Asian Countries” including a few chapters in his field. He is a PhD. research scholar at Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand. Mr. Jayalath was instrumental in declaring World Youth Skills Day (WYSD) by writing the first concept paper and works as a South Asian Cluster coordinator of UNESCO-UNEVOC Network, coordinating nine countries in the region in TVET development activities.



Mr. Sujeewa Rajapakse
Managing Partner of BDO Partners

Mr. Sujeewa Rajapakse counts over 30 years of experience in audit and consultancy services. He is an expert in providing Business Advisory Services covering a wide range of industries from general trading, apparel, real estate, leisure management and plantations, finance and banking to name a few. In addition to being a Fellow Member of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka, he holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

He is a Past President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (ICASL) and the International Liaison Partner (ILP) of BDO Partners, Sri Lanka. He is currently the Chairman of the Statutory Auditing Standard Committee of the ICASL, board member of the Sri Lanka Accounting and Auditing Standard Monitoring Board, Council Member of the University of Sri Jayawardenapura. He was a member of the Monetary Policy Consultative Committee of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka [CBSL], Commission member of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Sri Lanka Pay Commission. He is a director in many listed and unlisted companies.

He has gained extensive exposure from the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), Confederation of Asia Pacific Accountants (CAPA) and South Asia Federation of Accountants (SAFA) through various capacities including a Board Member or a Technical Advisor.

Mr. Rajapakse is actively involved in Social Entrepreneurship programmes to provide financial assistance by way of equity capital and advises startups in the Country. He has been an active contributor in the famous Social Entrepreneurial Programme "Ath Paura" which is telecasted in ITN.

ANNEX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE YOUTH

Recommendations to Policy Makers

1. Enforce regulations and procedures that enable care leavers to be legally entitled to all essential documents (National Identity Card, Birth Certificate, medical records, etc.) required for the use of essential services, upon leaving their care institution. In regard to the Birth Certificate, i) issue an extract with only the name, gender, date and place of birth and the mother's name to all citizens for daily transactions, with the option of obtaining the longer version upon request for specific purposes; ii) issue a Probable Birth Certificate for children whose parents' details are unknown or cannot be traced at all. The format of this certificate however should be changed to give it a more professional, authoritative look, with a date of birth (e.g. 1st of January/1st of July) and without blank spaces; iii) widely disseminate information about these documents including their legal validity among all stakeholders including government officials, service providers, corporates and the general public.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive and effective strategy to facilitate close engagement, communication and collaboration among educational and vocational training institutions, employers and youth, including those from alternative care facilities.
3. The leaving care process should ensure that higher educational, vocational and employment opportunities are afforded to all care leavers inclusive of those with disabilities, regardless of the type of care placements they are in or the age at which they leave care. In this regard, formulate policies and programs that support care leavers in enhancing their employability skills and accessing decent employment. This should be incorporated into the implementation plan of the National Alternative Care Policy 2019 as well. Consult this group of youth and consider their specific circumstances and requirements when formulating youth and employment-related policies and programs, including public-private partnerships.
4. Forge partnerships with Civil Society Organizations and corporates to provide vocational training and educational qualifications as well as entrepreneurship opportunities of their choice to youth leaving care. Ensure the quality of skill development programs and entrepreneurship interventions by putting in place a quality assurance system.
5. Incorporate the development of soft skills into education curricula, starting from early childhood education itself, as strong human capital foundations are key to building such skills. These include advanced cognitive skills such as complex problem-solving, socio-behavioral skills such as teamwork, and skills that facilitate adaptability such as reasoning and self-efficacy. In addition, support alternative care providers to instill essential life skills in children and youth, so that upon leaving care, they can thrive in both vocational pursuits and independent living. It is also critical that English language and ICT skills are imparted to children and young people in alternative care, through specialized programs. Resources for such programs should be allocated by the government.
6. In terms of financial support, provide assistance for further education and start-up capital for care leavers going into business in partnership with private companies and Civil Society Organizations. Establish a fund specifically for this purpose.
7. Ensure stability of care by refraining from transferring children from one childcare institution to the other, especially for behavioral issues. Instead, support care institutions to provide better psychosocial and rehabilitative support to children through training and better access to public, private and voluntary service providers. This also requires a comprehensive database of service providers and an efficient referral mechanism.
8. Sensitize relevant State authorities, e.g. judges, police and probation officers, school authorities and childcare institutions,

as well as public and private service providers, employers and the general public on treating children and youth in/leaving alternative care with empathy, sensitivity, compassion, patience and respect – without judgement and discrimination. Incorporate this aspect into training curricula of government officials including judges and develop capacity building programs for managers, caregivers and staff of child care institutions that are offered free of charge or for a nominal fee. Exposing them to such programs on a regular basis, monitoring their conduct towards children/youth and holding them accountable are essential for good practices to be established. A strong monitoring mechanism is required for this purpose.

Recommendations to Educational and Vocational Training Institutions

1. Initiate government-led career guidance programs at the school-level, for advising and directing youth to available education, training, and job opportunities. Such initiatives are particularly important in circumstances where caregivers are not well-educated and hence not in a position to guide the children under their care themselves. In addition, organize periodic career guidance camps for children in alternative care, targeting especially children from 14-18 years.
2. Engage with alternative care providers on a regular basis and share information about the courses, facilities and opportunities available.
3. Offer subsidized placements, quotas and scholarships, with inclusive programs and facilities for care leavers with disabilities. However, steps should be taken to ensure that this does not propagate discriminatory practices against these youth by either the staff or the students, by ensuring confidentiality and promoting equality as well as ethical conduct within the institution. The staff should be sensitized not to humiliate these youth if any irregular behavior is observed in them owing to long-term institutionalization.

4. Provide courses in the vernaculars as well as English, giving youth the freedom to select the medium of their choice.

5. Develop a process through which care leavers are provided with on the job training at reputed agencies with safe working environments, following the training period.

Recommendations to Employers

1. Focus on the educational/professional qualifications, skills and capacities of the youth during job recruitment processes and refrain from asking personal questions that attack her/his dignity, alluding to her/his identity as an 'orphan', family status and institutional experience. Similarly, protect the identity of the youth during job placements.

2. Provide a fair remuneration based on the skills and educational qualifications of the youth. Put in place systems to prevent them from being exploited and being taken advantage of their vulnerable situation and the absence of a responsible adult to protect or guide them. Educate them about their labour rights as well. Provide a safe work environment and some extra attention and guidance where needed, to support their career growth.

3. Promote a culture of equality at the workplace where all employees are treated equally regardless of their identity, family background, social status, etc. Educate employees about the principle of equality and encourage them to treat co-workers from different backgrounds with respect.

4. Provide internships, training and job shadowing opportunities to youth in order build their capacity, identify their strengths, gain insights into the vocation and make informed decisions about their careers.

5. Offer mentorship programmes to young people leaving care, to support them in finding and navigating education and vocational training opportunities.

Many have no connections to a committed adult in their lives who can provide social support. Mentorship programmes are therefore key to helping these young people develop trusting relationships, build confidence and social capital, facilitate learning and support their journey into independence.

Recommendations to Care Providers

1. Build self-confidence and resilience in children while developing a range of life-skills, to instill in them the strength to face the challenges of leading an independent life outside of the care facility, including in the world of work. Keep motivating them and providing them with opportunities to build their confidence, as this is a cornerstone of strengthening the employability of youth leaving care.

2. Support the youth to develop skills that are demanded by employers at an early age, including soft skills, and thereby increase their employability when they enter the labour force. Therefore, the skill development process should start at an early age, as a part of the leaving care process. This should be based on a 'child development plan' developed through a comprehensive analysis of the child, in consultation with the child.

3. Provide the right guidance to the youth in terms of providing correct and sufficient information on educational and vocational training opportunities and facilitating access to gainful employment. This also includes career guidance and assistance in finding a job that matches the skills, qualifications and aspirations of the youth. This process would also help to ensure that these youth do not take low-paying jobs or continually re-enroll in educational programmes to avoid homelessness.

4. Provide comprehensive and continuous training to caregivers to build their capacity for supporting children and youth, including in their skill development and transition from school to work. Most importantly, provide them with encouragement and incentive to be a 'mother' to the children in their care and

treat them with compassion, understanding, sensitivity, patience and respect.

5. Educate the employer about the background of the youth who is being referred to them, in order to avoid placing the youth in a vulnerable position during the interview as well as at the place of work. Engage and follow up with the employer continuously at least for a period of time till the young person becomes settled at the workplace, to ensure her/his safety, wellbeing and progress.



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CREATING A HIGH-SKILLS AMBIENCE

ISHARA JAYAWARDANE

Opportunity, skill and talent are inseparable. There are so many opportunities out there but without identifying your talent and then translating that into skill, you cannot benefit from these opportunities. That is the problem. SOS is an organization that is very concerned about this issue since their youth leaving care are directly affected by this problem. Recently therefore they took the initiative to hold a program recently which achieved two objectives. One being to influence policies and practices related to improving youth employability for youth leaving care in Sri Lanka. And the other being to promote youth participation in promoting their right to employability and skill development for securing gainful employment.

Dailip News attended the program held at the BMICH under the theme of Youth Strengthening the Employability of Youth Leaving Care that was attended by policy makers, bureaucrats, educational and vocational training institutions, Private sector, Corporates, development sector partners, child care institutions, media, academia and care leavers.

The keynote address was given by CEO, Employers Federation of Ceylon Kanishka Weerasinghe, who felt that youth makers need to reach out to young people from all strata. He said that to young people need to acquire skills that prospective employers expect and that opportunities need to be created for them.

"I wish to say that the strategy adopted by many organizations to further this cause seems to be working. SOS is chief responsible for this event and the EFC is also on board. The strategy is now not only to reach out to local graduates at local universities but to youth leaving school at an early age. The idea is to provide guidance so they can identify independent. They are also helped to identify opportunities which leads them to prospective employment. There is another initiative we are looking at which is Young Achievers. The targeted age group is 16-18. Here the idea is to reach entrepreneurship skills to school children. This initiative is supported by the Prime Minister's Office. We have just commenced this initiative. Reaching out to young children at an early age will benefit our cause. This initiative is an important as the one where we guide local graduates into the private sector. This program is also very relevant to youth leaving SOS," explained Weerasinghe.

Weerasinghe also mentioned a website called www.empowerme.lk where youth and employers can interact by registering themselves.

"Recently I had an encounter with the Youth Corp at an orientation. One corporate colleague told me that they are not interested in conducting

job fairs anymore. They want to connect with the youth through our job portal and they want to provide more training for youth, rather than spending money and resources on job fairs. We need to face reality. What we really want is sustainability and continuity. We want to tell the youth that they are special people and we will be their special people and we will stand by them. We will do our best to help the youth find jobs," pointed out Weerasinghe.

Deputy COO SOS Children's Villages International, Shubha Murthi, stated that she has seen the capacity of the Sri Lankan Youth. She implored them not to give up in the face of hurdles and problems that they will face every day. "As Adults we can only help you. But you need to be the change for your own cause. This event is being held through the efforts of the youth, and I find this very encouraging. They have the potential to succeed and I know they will succeed because they have the willingness to create change for themselves," said Murthi.

She further stated that the demography of young people in the world is changing so much. The population in Asia is becoming younger and younger with India being the exception and Japan. "Here there is great potential. I see great potential. But the competition for education and employment has increased. Today young people have to compete with couple of thousands. This is very different to my time when I had to compete with maybe 500 - 1000. In India they have to compete with hundred thousands. Because of this competition the success rate for youngsters is not growing. A poor person is left out having no money for education. They become marginalized because they do not have the means. They need 'Inclusive Education' means. They need necessary for the people to come out of this. This is necessary for the people creating job opportunities for the people to live well and contribute to their own countries. But then we have the other



Sujewa Rajapakse.
Pictures by Dushmantha Mayadunne

Kanishka Weerasinghe

Simrin Singh

Dr. Nandaka Molagoda

Madusha Dissanayake

Shubha Murthi

UNEMPLOYED



side of the coin where we are over-stressing on education. The kids study from morning to evening, and I pity them because they have to work from 6am-11pm, going from one tuition class to another and sadly at the end of the day they won't have a job. The government needs to do something because the youth need to be able to contribute to their own country."

The participants from relevant sectors got an opportunity to interact with the young adults.

Following the two speeches was the panel discussion that focused on the youth face culture some youth and SOS youth face when trying to get a job without a birth certificate and NIC. This affects 2% of the society. The problem is not only the lack of a birth certificate but also the incompleteness of it. The box in front of the parents' name is blank. The reasons could be many. The child could have been born out of wedlock. Or maybe even the mother is not sure of who the father is. Or maybe the mother has simply not obtained a birth certificate. In other instances the guessed birth certificate is not recognized by officials who are not knowledgeable about it.

There is also the stigma attached to not having a birth certificate or an incomplete one. Those who do not possess a legitimate one are made to feel inferior or unworthy. Because of this situation have who do not have a birth certificate have the door slammed in the face. They are unable to take part in sports or educational competitions. They cannot even apply for VISA to go abroad. Prime Ministers' Office, Policy Development Office, Economist Dr. Nandaka

Molagoda, said that a person has a right to accessing services that his or her other countrymen enjoy. "We recognize the fact that those who do not possess a birth certificate are still citizens of this country. We understand that it is their right to have equal status along with everyone else in this country. They are entitled to these rights that the rest of the population enjoy. We need to find answers posed by the challenge concerning job opportunities. This problem is not only relevant to Sri Lanka but to the rest of the world. How should we prepare our children for? There are no clear cut answers. We need to think in the long term, we need to prepare cannot do this change. The government cannot do this alone. We need our stakeholders to play a part," said Molagoda.

BDO Partners, Managing Partner, Sujewa Rajapakse, who has worked with many students, feels that we must empathize with those who are marginalized. Because they too are having a hard time with the way society seems to look at them. Having to face endless questions and being scrutinized, life is not easy and we should judge them on based on their talents and abilities, according to their talents and abilities, not by a blank space on a document.

"Having worked with students I feel this attitude of discrimination should cease. As the private sector we can play a role here. I think we should be concerned with the applicants' qualifications and abilities. This is what I have told those under me. If she or he does not have the necessary skills then that is a different matter," said Rajapakse.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Assistant Representative Madusha Dissanayake, said the problems we are facing is a recent problem but has been a thorn in our side for a long time. "Every birth is special. We do not have a sympathy with those who do not have a proper birth certificate. I am primarily concerned with the deficiencies in a birth certificate that causes it not to be recognized as legitimate. Spreading awareness

is important. The birth certificate is valuable and it is the mother's duty to obtain a birth certificate for the child. Mothers need to know the importance of registering. I want to say that at the UNFPA we believe that a child is entitled to their rights - my body, my life and my three rights - my body, my life and my world. This is what we promote when it comes not only to employability but to sex and health as well. The child is entitled to a legitimate birth certificate. I want to encourage the youth to step out with their own thoughts and ideas and ask themselves - How can I contribute to the world?" said Dissanayake.

ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Country Director, Simrin Singh, stated that from an ILO perspective, what she saw so far is that these youth are tremendously creative and innovative. They possess negotiation skills and they know how to work as a team.

"I know that the SOS youth leaving care face many obstacles. Special attention must be given to this. As the ILO we see these possibilities in the youth of Sri Lanka but there are obviously long term issues that need to be addressed when it comes to education and employment. I think young girls and women especially without staying at home need to go out there and face these challenges. There are so many job opportunities out there and they can develop their skills. So the youth in Sri Lanka need to ask themselves - are you ready? There are so many niche areas out there that the youth can thrive in, because everyone cannot be a doctor or engineer. They just need to refine their skills. With the advancements in technology employers look at a certain level of the performance. So the youth need to be nurtured," said Singh.



Kanishka Weerasinghe, EFC's Director General
BY RANDIMA ATTYGALLE

“I am nothing but a lama niwase lamaya. (child from the orphanage) I have no proper birth certificate, no means of securing decent employment, so here I am as a kade kolla (boy working in the shop)” laments Isuru Lakshan (name changed to protect the identity of the young person). Having left institutional care at the age of 18 with no skills or proper education, Isuru's world is today limited to the onions, condiments and rice sacks he weighs at the mudallali's shop. A gifted hairstylist, Erandi (name changed) is confident she will turn out to be a successful beautician only if someone guides her. “Today I carry the label of pariwas lamaya (a child of Probation Care) says the 22-year-old Erandi who is reduced to a janitor at a small scale factory. These are not just stories of Isuru and Erandi but tales of woe of thousands of our own children leaving institutionalized care.

Our law requires youth in child care institutions who have reached the age of 18 to part with their care homes and live independently. No corresponding legal framework provides for the transition to independence or aftercare of these vulnerable youth. The only reference to aftercare is made in the National Alternative Care Policy (2019) and in the NCPA (draft) Guidelines for Child Care Institutions in Sri Lanka (2013). However, an implementation plan to realize measures spelt out

in the policy including enabling access to vocational training and job placement among many other measures, is yet to be developed. In a social setting where ‘children’ are cared for by parents until the completion of higher education and even beyond, the bleak future awaiting children with no

No more a ‘no

The recent advocacy initiative, by the SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka for youth leaving their care has galvanized emp



SOS family

parental care is beyond imagination. Lacking proper parental guidance, skills and education which meets employment demands, a large proportion of these youth become easy targets of predators of all kinds. In this backdrop, children who come under the wings of SOS Children's Villages (SOS CVs) across the world

including here at home are more fortunate. A global federation and the world's largest non-governmental organization, founded by Hermann Gmeiner in Tyrol, Austria in 1949, SOS Children's Villages work in 136 countries today protecting, caring and empowering children who

have lost parental care or who stand at risk of losing it. Since its establishment in 1981 here at home, SOS Children's Villages in Sri Lanka have touched the lives of over 41,000 children and continue to reach out to children and communities providing family care, emergency care, temporary care, family strengthening, vocational training for youth and a range of ancillary services such as pre-schools and medical centres.

Promoting youth employability today is among the top priorities of SOS CVs. A strategic initiative developed under the banner of ‘Generation Never Give Up’, SOS global framework for youth employability is also a further reflection of the organization's maxim ‘Never give upon a child’. Based on the three pillars of Mentoring, Training and Practicing, the SOS global framework for youth employability is today committed to eliminating the bottlenecks which block the potential employment opportunities for youth leaving care. The recent advocacy event organized by SOS Sri Lanka galvanizing policy makers, employers, representatives from education and vocational training institutes and other relevant professionals and stakeholders was an intervention to spur a dialogue in this regard. A youth-driven initiative where care givers themselves rendered voice to their experiences, challenges and recommendations, the event was also patronized by National Directors of SOS from 14 Asian countries as means of sharing good practices. The initiative strived to influence policies and practices related to improving youth employability and employment for youth

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SOS கிராம இளைஞர்கள் எதிர்கொள்ளும்

சமூக தடைகளை களைதல்

போல் வில்சன்

இலங்கையில் நிறுவ இல்லங்களில் வளரும் அடிப்படை மின்னளிகள் வளர்த்து சமூகத்திற்குள் செல்லும் போது சமூகத்தினால் ஓரங்கட்டப்படுகையில் அவர்கள் பலத்த சிக்கல்களை எதிர்நோக்க வேண்டியுள்ளது. இலங்கையில் பராமரிப்பில்லாத வெளிப்பெரும் இளைஞர்கள் எவ்வளவுமும் போல் சாதாரணமாக வாழ்க்கையை முன்னெடுப்பதற்கு தடைகளுக்கு முகங்கொடுக்க வேண்டியுள்ளது.

பொருத்தமான தன்வீரவான் தொழில், சமூகத்தினால் ஏற்றக் கொள்ளப்படுகின்ற தன்மை, முன்னேற்றமான வாழ்க்கை போன்ற போன்ற பொருளானவன இளைஞர்களுக்கு இலகுவாக அடைந்து விடும். நிறைவடைந்த பணியாளர்கள் எதிர் பார்ப்பும் தொழில் வழங்குதல்களுக்கு, குறித்த தகவலை படைத்த இளைஞர்களை இணங்கான முடியாமல் உள்ளது. இதன் காரணமாக, தொழில் சந்தையில் காணப்படும் கேள்விகளை நிவர்த்தி செய்வதற்கு அவசியமான கல்வியை/ பரிந்துரைகள் கல்வி சேவை வழங்குதல்கள் வழங்கவில்லை. இருந்த போதிலும், தாம் தொழில் சந்தைக்கு

தயாராகவுள்ளதாக அவர்கள் தெரிவிக்கின்றனர். இந்தக் காலகட்டத்தில் வளரும் இலங்கையில் தொழில் சந்தையில் காணப்படும் தொழிலாளர்களின் மற்றும் தொழிலாளர் மற்றும் இளைஞர்கள் விழிப்புணர்வுற்றவர்கள் எனக் காணப்படுகின்றனர். தமக்கு மிகவும் சிறந்த தொழில் தேர்வை மேற்கொள்வதற்கு அவர்களுக்கு அவசியமான தகவல்கள் மற்றும் வழிகாட்டிகள் காணப்படுவது இல்லை.

இவற்றை தீவிரம் செய்வதற்கு SOS ஸ்ரீலங்காவின் கொள்கை வடிவமைப்பாளர்கள், தொழில் வழங்குதல்கள் கல்வி நிலையங்கள் மற்றும் பராமரிப்பு வழங்குவோர் இலங்கைக் கொண்டு விடே கவனத்தையுடன் அமர்வொன்று கூட்டி ஆய்வித்திட்டு பண்டாரங்களை உருவாக்கி சர்வதேச மாநாட்டு மண்டபத்தில் தடைபெற்றது. வளர்ப்பு அல்லது பாதுகாப்பு இல்லத்திலிருந்து வெளிப்பெறும் இளைஞர்கள் முகங்கொடுக்கும் தொழில் வாய்ப்பு, தொழில் நியாய வழக்கணிப்பு, மற்றும் அவர்களின் சிறப்பு அத்தாட்சி பதிர்நின்றுள்ள குறைபாடுகள் அல்லது சிறப்பு அத்தாட்சி பதிர்நின்றுள்ள குறைபாடுகள் மற்றும் ஆள் அடையாள அட்டைகளைப் போன்ற பிரச்சினைகளை இலங்கைக்கு



SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES SRI LANKA

டப்பட்டது. ஏற்காலத்தில் இப்படியான குறைபாடுகளை நிவர்த்தி செய்வதற்கு தடவடிக்கை எடுக்கப்படுமென கூட்டிக்கூட்டப்பட்டதுடன், ஆக்கபூர்வமான விழிப்புணர்வையும் உருவாக்கும் நிலை குறித்தும் கருத்து எடுத்துரைக்கப்பட்டது. இலங்கையில் 2 சதவீதமானவர்களுக்கு சிறப்பு சான்றிதழ் பதிர்நின்று மற்றும் சிறப்பு சான்றிதழ்களின் உண்மை குறைபாடுகள் காரணமாக அடிப்படை இளைஞர்கள் தொழில் நியாய பரிந்துரைக்கின்றனர். தொழில் வாய்ப்புகளின் கூட நிறுவனங்கள் அடிப்படையில், பரிந்துரை அடிப்படையில் தொழில் வழங்கினால் இல்லத்தினால் இலங்கை வெளிப்பெறும் இளைஞர்களுக்கும் தொழில் வாய்ப்புகள் கிடைக்கும் என்ற கருத்து முன்னவைத்து கவனத்தையுடன் இடம்பெற்றது. இலங்கையின் இலங்கை, இலங்கைகள் பராமரிப்பிலிருந்து வெளிப்பெறும் இளைஞர்களுக்கு தொழிலாளர்ப்பு மற்றும் இளைஞர் தொழில் வாய்ப்பு

மேம்படுத்தவது தொடர்பான கொள்கைகள் மற்றும் செயற்பாடுகளை ஊக்குவித்தல், தொழில் நிறை அபிவிருத்திக்கான அவர்களின் உரிமையை ஊக்குவித்து, அது ஊடாக பயனுள்ள தொழில் வாய்ப்பை பெற்றுக் கொள்வதற்கு இளைஞர்களை ஊக்குவித்தலாகும். இலங்கையினால் தேசிய கொள்கை வடிவமைப்பு மற்றும் கொள்கை தடைமுறைப்படுத்தல் குறித்து கவனித்தி நத்தக் எச். மொல்கொடவும் (பொருளாதார வல்லுநர் சிறந்த அலுவலகம்), கல்வி நிலையங்கள் குறித்து ஜனக ஜயபக்தும், (சிறப்பு பணிப்பாளர் நாயகம் ஸ்ரீலங்கைத் தலைக்கல்வி ஆணைக்குழு), அபிவிருத்தித்துறை குறித்து செல்வி சிம்ரீச் சிங்கும் (பணிப்பாளர்) இலங்கை மாவலியுக்கான அலுவலகம்) மற்றும் திருமதி மதுரா நிராயக்கவும் (உதவி பிரதிநிதியுக்கான தலைக்கல்வி ஆணைக்குழு) கருத்துரைகளை வழங்கினார்கள்.

இலங்கை பிரஜையொருவர் எந்தவொரு நிறுவனத்திலும் பணிபுரற்ற முடியும். இது அடிப்படையில் உரிமையும் கூட ஆனால் பணிச் சிறப்பும் சான்றிதழின் ஏற்படும் குறைபாடுகளால் கல்வியை தொடர முடியாது, தொழில் பெறமுடியாதுமே பல விதமான சவால்களுக்கு முகங்கொடுத்து

வருகின்றனர். இப்படியான பிரச்சினைகளால் சிலருக்கு ஆள் அடையாள அட்டையை சிறப்பு நினைக்கக் கண்டு தற்காலிக ஆள் அடையாள அட்டையை பெறாமல் என்று கருத்து கூறப்பட்டது. ஆணை மற்றும் சிறப்பு அத்தாட்சி பதிர்நின்று பெற்றோர் திருமண மானவரான என்ற பகுதி சிலருக்கு அப் பதிர்நின்று பெறுவதில் ஊக்கங்களை உருவாக்குகின்றது. இலங்கைத் தலைக்கல்வி ஆணைக்குழு மற்றும் சிறப்பு அட்டைகளைப் பெறும் இளைஞர்களின் கல்வித் தகவல்கள், தொழில் பரிந்துரை மற்றும் ஆக்கத்திறனை அடிப்படையாக கொண்டு தொழில் வழங்குதல்கள் வெண்டும். தொழில் எதிர்நிர்ப்பட்டன் செய்வது பெற்று, சிறப்பு சான்றிதழ் இணை குறைபாடு குறித்து பேச வேண்டியுள்ளது. நிறைவடைந்த முக்கியத்துவம் கொடுக்க வேண்டும். அத்துடன் கல்வி வழங்குதல்கள், இளைஞர்கள் மற்றும் தொழில் வழங்குதல்களை பேச காணப்படும் இடவெளி இங்கு உரையாடப்பட்டது. இந்த பிரச்சினைகளை நிவர்த்து முன்னெடுக்கக் கூடிய விடயங்கள் பற்றி ஆராயப்பட்டன. (தொ.நி. 27 ஆம் பக்கம்)

Everybody's child'

SOS Villages, Sri Lanka, to secure gainful employment for young graduates, employers, policy makers and multiple stakeholders



Shubha Murthi

time we were young graduates, today youngsters have to compete with a couple of hundred thousands and in this process less privileged get further marginalized owing to the absence of inclusivity in education." The SOS International's senior official further charged that policy makers of South Asia should take stock of the knowledge base of a country going beyond encouraging paper-based education. "Having many literates alone will not be welcoming," observed Murthi who called for a more holistic education in which skills will be fortified.

Lamenting that those who have been erred by certain educational trappings seek overseas employment as unskilled labourers or domestic workers, Murthi also called upon governments to create local job opportunities to retain them in the domestic workforce. Alluding to the SOS adage of 'never give up on a child', the senior official also urged youth leaving care never to give up in the potential world of work which she compared to a 'multi-cuisine' repete with bitter-sweet flavours. The observations and recommendations on employability shared by the care leavers directly with duty bearers at the event will be incorporated into a Road Map and followed up by the SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka.



Vocational training at SOS (Pic by Thushara Athapathu)

leaving care and to promote the rights of youth to employability and their skills development to secure gainful employment.

"You are special not because of anything else but because you, young people aspire to join the world of work and take the country forward," remarked the Director General of the Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC) Kanishka Weerasinghe delivering his key note address at the event. Remarking that the SOS initiative is aligned with the EFC's commitment of 'never leaving anyone

behind', Weerasinghe invited SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka and all other parties committed to the welfare of care leavers to engage with the youth initiatives of the EFC- the nucleus of employers in the country with a membership of over 700 corporates today. Encouraging care leavers to explore training and job opportunities enabled by the EFC's progressive schemes such as 'Empowerme.lk' (an on line portal linking job seekers with employers), Employers' National Network of Youth Initiatives (ENNYI) and Junior Achievers (a collabo-

ration with the Policy Development Unit of the Prime Minister's office), the EFC's Director General reiterated that all youth in the country should be empowered for gainful employment in the private sector. "Our approach is two pronged: to ensure, that young job seekers acquire requisite skills for the modern world of work and to create opportunities for the youth exposing them to all aspects of good corporate governance." This approach, as Weerasinghe further elaborated, extends to young graduates as well as others who have been through the process of a formal higher education. He also vouched to help eliminate the bottlenecks in the journey of securing employment in the private sector by the youth leaving care.

Recollecting his first association with the SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka as a prosecuting state counselor for the Attorney General's Department 26 years ago, the EFC Chief remarked that he was heartened by its gesture of taking a sexually exploited and a stigmatized young child under its care when all hope failed for her. Acknowledging that what he sees today as a further reflection of the organization's commitment to ensure a better future for children, Weerasinghe lauded the 'SOS products' that steered the event.

"It is a manifestation of the capabilities, capacity and moreover the entrepreneurship of our youth," observed the senior professional who urged all EFC member companies to take ownership of the initiatives towards youth empowerment directed by the EFC and thereby become partners in 'sustainable work opportunities' championed by his organization.

The absence of an inclusive education very often impedes the employment opportunities for the less privileged youngsters and this becomes a double whammy on



SOS children receiving vocational training

those leaving care, remarked the Deputy COO, SOS Children's Villages International, Shubha Murthi. "Unlike the

High Youth Unemployment: Skills Shortage, Employability Mismatches- Report

Shortage of skills and mismatches with labour market demands are some of the contributing factors for the high unemployment among youth.

According to the 2019 Labour Force Survey, the highest unemployment rate is from the GCE A/L and above age group, with the youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate currently at 21.6%.

A UN press release said that, "While Sri Lanka has made significant achievements in Education, especially in Primary and Secondary Education, this achievement is not sustained at University level."

"Currently, there is a lack of evidence in understanding the problems faced by youth in skill and finding decent employment, as is the evidence on solutions for enhancing skills. In line with this, a study was commissioned by the



Mr. Saman Waduge

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for South Asia, to find solutions to improve the probability of finding decent employment for the youth category in South Asian



Ms. Simrin Singh

nations, including Sri Lanka," the release said.

Following up on the study, UNICEF, together with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the ILO Country Office for Sri

Lanka & Maldives co-hosted a multi-partner dialogue, bringing together key stakeholders in the Skilling and Training Ecosystem in Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the event, on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Simrin Singh, Director - ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka & Maldives, stated, "Rising youth unemployment is a significant problem across countries and societies, and is compounded by multiple factors. Investing in and equipping young people for the future of work is a long-term collaborative effort and requires multiple stakeholders working together to address the issue".

Further, Youth Affairs Additional Secretary Saman Waduge highlighted, "Over the years, the Ministry of National Policies, Economic Affairs, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, Northern

Province Development and Youth Affairs, has remained a key partner in empowering young people of Sri Lanka to enhance their employability prospects. Our work ensures that we leave no youth behind".

The dialogue identified opportunities for public and private sector engagement in skilling programmes for youth. It further identified entry points for the Government, Private sector, Worker Groups, Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Institutions, and UN agencies to engage in supporting youth with skills, employability and age-appropriate employment in Sri Lanka.

The dialogue will serve as the initial step to identify key thematic areas for the South Asia Regional Forum on Youth and Skills to be held in Mumbai in October 2019.



BDO Partners Managing Partner Sujeewa Rajapakse, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) Deputy Director General Janaka Jayalath, ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives Country Director Simrin Singh, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Assistant Representative Madusha Dissanayake, and Policy Development Office and Prime Minister's Office Economist Dr. Nandaka H. Molagoda

BY BERNADINE RODRIGO

SOS Children's Villages is an organisation founded by Austrian Hermann Gmeiner in 1949 as a result of the compassion he felt towards the children who were orphaned and helpless after the great tragedy, World War II. With help from donors and sponsors, Gmeiner was able to set up his first village in Tyrol, Austria and they slowly expanded across the world. Today, they function in 135 countries including Sri Lanka, with the villages in Sri Lanka amounting to a remarkable six in Piliyandala, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, Anuradhapura, Moneragala, and Jaffna. They work to aid children who do not receive the normal love and care of a family which every child requires. While they have obtained an astonishing amount of success with children, providing them with family-based care and education in practical and vocational skills, they still face the dilemma of children under their care growing up to be unemployed. Therefore, as well as looking after those below the age of 18, they are determined to make sure the futures of young adults leaving the villages are secure.

Hence, they have been conducting panel discussions and talks about the issue so they may come up with a solution. The "Strengthening the Employability of Youth Leaving Care" forum held on 4 September 2019 was one such discussion which was organised by the youngsters themselves. Their panellists included Policy Development Office and Prime Minister's Office Economist Dr. Nandaka H. Molagoda, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) Deputy Director General Janaka Jayalath, ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives Country Director

Parentage does not define skill



Simrin Singh, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Assistant Representative Madusha Dissanayake, and BDO Partners Managing Partner Sujeewa Rajapakse. The panel was appropriately concentrated with those both in the public and private sectors so that a wholesome solution could be drawn.

Right from the introduction to the conference, it was clear that the children – or in fact, the youths – leaving the villages, in addition to some other hurdles, were faced with one massive objection when it comes to finding employment, an issue which is mostly unknown and often never even thought of. In everyday terms, it is discrimination. However, this is not discrimination of the popular sort. It isn't based on race, religion, or gender; rather, it is quite an old-fashioned form of discrimination, one that is based on the situation of the parentage of the individual. It seems that employers – specifically in Sri Lanka as relevant to the forum – are especially concerned about the

marital status of the parents of the child during his/her time of birth. According to the youths who spoke during the discussion, employers and interviewers in both sectors tend to focus a great deal on the birth certificates of interviewees and scrutinise every single detail, especially those about the parents of the individual. Dr. Molagoda made it clear that this issue occurs only on the lower levels of the hierarchies of companies as he had not heard of this until recently, and Rajapakse confirmed it when, with utter shock, he claimed that this was the first time he'd ever heard of it. There is some hope in resolving this problem as according to one of the youths and Dissanayake, there is an ongoing challenge led by the orphaned youth against having the details of their parents' marital status on birth certificates, which so far, is successful. Nevertheless, the discrimination seems to be ever-present against these children as some pretentious workers often look down upon these children as poverty-

stricken, uneducated, and not worthy of respect.

Another problem besides this main concern of the youth shown by Dr. Molagoda was the fact that the system of education – not only in Sri Lanka but also in the entire world – does not equip a child to face the world where skills that deviate from books are necessary. Both he and Singh agreed that the world is ever changing and that something must be done to prepare students, not only those in the villages but also those in normal living situations, for the real obstacles of the world of employment. They also both agreed, along with many of the other panellists and the audience that this is, in fact, a duty of the public and not just the government. Singh also pointed out that job opportunities are not unavailable but in truth, they just aren't being filled. She also showed that technology can be used to create more jobs, especially in the tourism sector and yet these areas are just not being exploited by traditional-minded leaders of the workforce.

Such are the issues faced by the young adults leaving the care of the Children's Villages. While having to battle through problems faced by youths who have been brought up in privileged conditions, they also have the massive trial of having to face unfair indifference, leaving them at a large disadvantage which they most definitely do not deserve.

PHOTOS SAMAN ABESIRIWARDANA



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එස්. ඩී. එස්. ළමා ගම්මාන ජාත්‍යන්තර සංවිධානය විකල්ප රැකවරණය හැරයන යොවනයන්ගේ සේවා නියුක්තිය ගත්කිමත් තීරීම යන මෑයෙන් සංවිධානය කළ විශේෂ වැඩමුළුවක් කොළඹ බණ්ඩාරනායක අනුස්මරණ ජාත්‍යන්තර සම්මන්ත්‍රණ ශාලාවේදී පසුගියදා පැවැත්විණි.

එහිදී එස්. ඩී. එස්. ජාත්‍යන්තර සංවිධානයේ නියෝජ්‍ය ප්‍රධාන මෙහෙයුම් නිලධාරීනි ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුර්ති මෙනෙවිය අදහස් දැක්වූ අයුරු හා පැමිණ සිටි පිරිසෙන් කොටසක් මෙහි දැක්වේ.

අග්‍රාමාත්‍ය කාර්යාලයේ ප්‍රතිපත්ති සංවර්ධන නිලධාරී ආචාර්ය නන්දක එච්. මොළුගොඩ, තානීය හා වෘත්තීය අධ්‍යාපන කොමිෂන් සභාවේ නියෝජ්‍ය අධ්‍යක්ෂ ජනරාල් ජනක ජයලත්, ජාත්‍යන්තර කම්කරු සංවිධානයේ ශ්‍රී ලංකා මාලදිවයින අධ්‍යක්ෂ සිම්රිත් සිං, එක්සත් ජාතීන්ගේ ජනගහන අරමුදලේ සහකාර නියෝජිත මධුෂා දිසානායක යන මහත්ම මහත්මීහුද මීට සහභාගි වූහ.

ජායාරූපය - කුෂාර අතපත්තු

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