



**N E X T  
G E N E R A T I O N**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# > CONTENTS

> <b>Forewords</b>	<b>2</b>	> <b>Chapter 5: Youth, politics and agency</b>	<b>30</b>
> <b>Messages</b>	<b>4</b>	Youth agency and activism	
> <b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>	> <b>Chapter 6: Reconciliation and the future</b>	<b>36</b>
Identity: who are the Sri Lankan youth?	9	Responses to the official peace and reconciliation process	36
Education	9	Sense of safety after the end of the war	36
Employment	9	Violence against women and children	38
Experience of violence	10	Changes in ethnic relations	38
Politics and agency	10	Responding to post-war mechanisms	39
Reconciliation and the future	10	Areas of improvements after the war	39
Recommendations	11	Constitutional reform	42
Peace and reconciliation	11	Next steps for peace	42
> <b>Introduction: negative peace and ambivalent reconciliation</b>	<b>12</b>	Future direction	42
Sri Lankan youth at a glance	12	> <b>Conclusion</b>	<b>44</b>
Next Generation research contributors	13	Recommendations	45
Description of the report	13	Peace and reconciliation	45
> <b>Chapter 1: Sri Lanka's road to civil war</b>	<b>14</b>	> <b>References</b>	<b>46</b>
The country and its people	14	> <b>Appendix 1: Next Generation Sri Lanka methodology</b>	<b>49</b>
Conflict revisited	14		
Reconciliation after the defeat of LTTE	16		
Economy after 2009	17		
> <b>Chapter 2: Who are the Sri Lankan youth?</b>	<b>18</b>		
Generational issues	21		
> <b>Chapter 3: Sri Lankan youth: education and employment challenges</b>	<b>22</b>		
Educational development	22		
Unmet employment needs	24		
> <b>Chapter 4: Youth and experience of violence</b>	<b>28</b>		

# > FOREWORDS

The phrase 'next generation' is now heard much more often than it once was. Our focus has finally moved, as it should, to the key sector of society – its youth. In an era where there is a great deal of social change, magnified by modern technology that provides various new platforms of expression, this research is both apt and timely.

*Next Generation Sri Lanka*, organised by the British Council in partnership with the Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Learning of Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, uses data collected from 2,636 young people aged 18–29. The research series has obtained data to address the question, 'How is Sri Lanka's next generation responding to changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process?'

As the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the topic of the 'next generation' has always been my primary concern. It is my duty towards all students of the university to see that everything within the university is geared towards their development and growth.

As I was reading this report, I came across an interesting fact: 'According to the UN Security Council Report (2008) on Children and Armed Conflict, since 1990, more than two million children have been killed in armed conflicts, and approximately six million children have become permanently disabled. Yet in most countries, the ravages of war and political violence have been triggered by the youth population'. This rings very close to home.

As well as what it suffered during the three-decade-long civil struggle, Sri Lanka has also been a victim of several insurgencies. That of 1971 was very close to my heart. At that time, I was a student at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Many of my friends

were killed in this insurgency. I do not wish for a time like it again, but it still highlights the fact that while it was the youth who faced the magnitude of the wrath of the government, it was also the youth who had the power to question a system that they believed was unjust.

Even to this day, I grieve at the waste the insurgency caused. More than 10,000 young people were killed. They were intelligent and purposeful, and could have created a better tomorrow, if only they had been given a better outlet to express themselves, an environment that nurtured them. In short, if only they had been given something better. These times are long gone, but it is still something we should remember to avoid such calamities recurring.

Therefore, I applaud the effort taken by the British Council and Sarvodaya to gain an insight into what the youth today feel. They are aware of the hardships that their respective communities have faced and will be keen to avoid prolonging those difficulties.

In terms of peace and reconciliation, I agree with the report when it says that it remains at a standstill. I believe this is because the country itself has not recovered from the violence and invasions it has suffered throughout its history. Those who should be able to guide the youth have not themselves had help, therefore they are unaware of how to move forward. The young people who underwent the terror and torment during the 30 years of civil conflict have not yet had the opportunity to reconcile or address their fears.

The Next Generation research expands on topics such as identity, education, opportunity and job satisfaction. It shows that the youth who participated in the study are proud to be recognised as Sri Lankans, and that they are ready to take up an active role in reconciliation.

The report also expands upon how many of the minorities of the society are marginalised, such as the difficulties experienced by ex-LTTE fighters and those living in Estates in seeking better livelihoods. It was also interesting to see that not only the minority communities face hardship – the difficulties undergone by youth from the majority are also captured here.

There is a central topic in this detailed research concerning the creation of a more inclusive environment for the youth to engage and contribute. I strongly endorse this. I encounter youth on a daily basis, and I have experienced their innovation, creativity and their thirst to develop. There is always something to listen to, and, if we take time to listen to them, much can be achieved. This report has done that too. We should remember that by listening to our youth, we do not simply respond to their needs – their ideas can indeed give us the solutions we seek as well.

I believe that the recommendations provided by this research have genuine practical value that will allow the youth to flourish. It must always be remembered that the successful development of a country solely depends on the successful development of its youth.

**Professor Sampath Amaratunga**  
Vice Chancellor, University  
of Sri Jayewardenepura

For the last two decades, at both the international and national level, we have talked a great deal about the rights of women and the rights of children. Two major international conventions exist and there are United Nations agencies that have been set up to deal with these specific issues. Yet one could argue that the major question that still faces the world today is the future of its youth. It is a cross-cutting concern with other mandates, but it needs focused attention. The appointment of a Sri Lankan as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Youth signals an opportunity for Sri Lankans to look closely at their own needs and concerns.

*Next Generation Sri Lanka* looks at the situation of youth in the country, elicits their views and opinions on important matters and focuses especially on the issue of reconciliation. The findings gives us reason for optimism – for example, that Sri Lankan youth identify as Sri Lankans first – but also point to areas of concern. Their views express their sense of frustration with the way things are in society, yet also a belief that their generation can do things for the better.

The post-war era is a time for rebuilding our society at every level. Yet the vast majority of the youth interviewed were unaware of any reconciliation programme run by the government or NGOs, and very few had taken

part in any related project or activity. Though they acknowledged an improvement in personal freedom, many women felt unsafe in the north and east due to criminal violence. There was also disagreement on how to deal with the past, and over the role of justice and memory. The need for the government to be more fully engaged in these areas cannot be understated.

Despite their opinions on reconciliation and identity, it appears that for most, youth education and employment seem the key issues, as that most affects their everyday life. Their tales of discrimination and frustration must be a clarion call to any government to prioritise this area as one of the most important aspects of a future agenda.

Through technology, today's youth have access to a world that their parents have never known. With that access comes hope and frustration. Sri Lanka has had two youth insurrections in the 1970s and the 1980s. It is unlikely that youth will take to open violence again, but their anger may unfold in other ways, unless their concerns are dealt with and met by the authorities and society as a whole. It is important that Sri Lanka's institutions and best minds put their ideas together to come up with an achievable action plan for meeting the needs of today's youth.

**Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy**

# > MESSAGES

It is with great pleasure that I write this message to all Sri Lankans, particularly our youth – this next generation and the generations to come. While there have been other youth-focused studies, the Next Generation research is unique in numerous ways. Among them is its special focus on post-war youth attitudes and aspirations.

This landmark report will mark a historical milestone both in academia and praxis of this country's youth-focused affairs. Being Sri Lanka's pioneering non-government development organisation, the Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya is proud and humble to have collaborated with the British Council through the Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Learning, as both research partner and the advocate of the research outcomes. Sarvodaya believes in a model and a way of life based on holistic and integral development, and our youth is at the heart of our policymaking endeavours. Sarvodaya recently launched a novel project known as 'Tharunodaya' (Awakening Youth), critically assessing the significance and the need to empower

our youth using an entrepreneurial model. This is one key highlight among many other youth-led initiatives conducted by Sarvodaya and our sister organisations. We believe that youth are our future.

I believe we have genuinely heard the voices of our country's youth through this comprehensive exercise. It is time for our policymakers to strategically design and implement youth-focused planning and engagements. Some findings are highly positive and praiseworthy; some are negative and require our immediate attention. To address this level of complexity will require different approaches. Therefore, policymakers from different fields and walks of life should join hands to address these issues holistically and comprehensively. The government can seek novel avenues to address government-level interventions. Civil society organisations can confidently employ the key findings to enhance their existing work and to re-design programmes and projects to address the challenging needs. Grass-roots youth organisations can use the results to address provincial-level

ground realities. Educators can re-design teaching methods to comprehensively address matters of reconciliation and co-existence using more nuanced approaches.

This report reflects that Sri Lanka's next generation are keen to see a better future. We can and we should listen to them with patience and care. Our approaches to hear them and to co-create positive outcomes are vastly important in this venture. The complexity of challenges demand that we use diverse problem-solving tools and mechanisms. It is also imperative that we engage our youth at all levels of policymaking, advocacy and implementation.

Let us listen to them, think locally and beyond. Let us co-create their future and ours with the required empathy and compassion. Let us work hand-in-hand to make their future and ours a better and a prosperous one. Let us awaken our next generation together!

**Dr Vinya S Ariyaratne**  
President – Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya  
Shramadana Sangamaya

The British Council in Sri Lanka is very pleased to have partnered with Sarvodaya on the production of this significant piece of research, which looks at the attitudes and aspirations of Sri Lanka's young people aged 18 to 29. Next Generation is a global research series focusing on young people; it is carried out in countries that have gone through a period of significant change, including conflict.

We believe Next Generation is important because the voice of youth often goes unheard and unheeded, particularly at times of significant change; as a result their concerns are not addressed, which can lead to feelings of alienation and disconnection, and a sense of disempowerment in society. Yet their views are important, partly because the prosperity and security of the country will – in the near future – be in the hands of the young people of today, and because the country's youth have so much to offer today, in terms of their energy, their creativity and their drive for change. Therefore, decision makers at all levels and in all sectors need to be aware of and to respond to the concerns of the rising next generation.

It is clear from *Next Generation Sri Lanka* that, despite efforts made since the end of the civil war, young people are still affected by that conflict and its legacy. We know that the country continues to suffer from intermittent violence between ethnic and religious groups, that the political situation has remained unstable, and that the economy has not yet offered the growth and prosperity anticipated following the end of the war. In this report, the young people of Sri Lanka highlight their concerns about unemployment, and about the quality of the education system and its inability to equip them with the skills needed to enter the workforce. They share their views on politics, and their sense of their voice and agency within their community. Importantly, they speak about their experience of conflict, and their experiences of and hopes for the reconciliation process.

While it is easy to focus only on the areas of criticism or concern, we should not ignore what is positive in this research, and the sense of hope. Despite the ongoing tension, most young people across all communities identify themselves as Sri Lankan. They feel they

are different from the 'older generation', whom they feel often hold cultural and religious biases. Young Sri Lankans believe that the education system can and should play an important part in engendering social cohesion from the very youngest age. But we must not underplay some of the significant challenges, which include increased gender-based violence and the perception of weak rule of law in the north; the economic hardships that means education is often not completed and the consequent effects on employability; and the strong perceptions of discrimination and corruption in the public systems.

This report is a vehicle for the voices of young Sri Lankans, their hopes and fears, their ambitions for themselves and for their country. It is both relevant and timely. We would all do well to listen, to respond and to act.

**Gill Caldicott**  
Director, British Council  
in Sri Lanka

# > EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly ten years since the end of the protracted civil war that gripped Sri Lanka, young people across the country are still grappling with a multitude of issues. They must navigate a stagnating economy, a complex peace and reconciliation process, contentious transitional justice mechanisms and political instability. The intermittent violence between ethnic and religious groups, mostly orchestrated by extremist factions – such as were seen in March 2018 – demonstrate that Sri Lanka is not truly in a post-conflict state. Politics in the country has continued to be volatile since the end of war, and the peace and reconciliation process has been highly contentious. These two are not unrelated. With a history of violent insurgencies led by youth against the government, understanding how youth have responded to the changing dynamics of the country with the reconciliation process is important.

Sri Lankan youth today have access to social media, use mobile phones and are linked to the outside world. They have more opportunities to obtain foreign employment and

education than the previous generation. Many young Sri Lankans excel in sports, education and innovation in the international arena. They are also highly educated, especially in comparison with the South Asian region. Acknowledging the immense potential young Sri Lankans hold in shaping the future of their country, the British Council and Sarvodaya partnered to develop *Next Generation Sri Lanka*. This research series, which has also taken place in countries including Pakistan, Colombia, Turkey and the UK, explores how young people perceive their lives at times of change, and provides them a platform for their voices to be heard.

In Sri Lanka, the research explores how young people have responded to the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process. The research is part of a broader approach that will enable the voices of Sri Lankan youth from all communities to be heard within the wider society; we hope this will ultimately contribute to policies that address their needs.



Addressing their needs is vital, particularly in the case of peace and reconciliation. One of the social groups most often ignored is youth, yet they can be both victims and perpetrators in intergroup conflicts (Jonas and Morton, 2012). Significant research has emerged concerning how the young population is victimised during the situations of political violence concerning the state organised repressions. According to the UN Security Council (2008) report on children and armed conflict, since 1990, more than two million children have been killed in armed conflicts, and approximately six million children have become permanently disabled. Yet in many countries, the ravages of war and political violence have been triggered by the youth population (Punamäki, 2009; Jonas and Morton, 2012). This implies that the institutionalised violent conflicts have been closely associated with youth groups who, at times, choose violence as their only option for erasing social inequalities and deprivation.

This phenomenon is prevalent across the world. Raija-Leena Punamäki (2009: 62) states that the notion 'violence breeds violence seems intuitively tempting to make'. In her view, children who experienced violence are most likely to engage in aggression and antisocial activities. It is explained by Jonas and Morton (2012: 79) that 'the children, including those born after the end of war, may be socialized in a context of persistent intergroup threat and grow up expressing animosity toward the other group'. For this reason also, youth have a potentially powerful role in national reconciliation, as they are one of the most significant social groups that dealt with the past communal agitation. With this backdrop,

there is a need to undertake research in order to understand the attitudes and aspirations of the young people towards the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka.

This research is organised by the British Council in Sri Lanka, along with the Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Learning of Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, to understand how youth have responded to the changes in Sri Lanka, and the process of reconciliation. The insights from the research will ultimately contribute to the design of coherent interventions that address the needs and concerns of the next generation.

Therefore the research is not a standalone product, but, like all Next Generation research, is intended to ensure young people's voices are heard by decision makers who will affect their futures. As part of this wider approach, the British Council and Sarvodaya will engage with young people on advocacy. The Sarvodaya Movement spans across the 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka and holds immense potential to facilitate the Next Generation research. The British Council in Sri Lanka, along with the Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Learning of Lanka, will implement a social media campaign, establish knowledge centres, produce policy papers and engage in a robust advocacy initiative to promote peace and reconciliation harnessing youth agency.

The research framework consists of a preliminary desk review, a questionnaire survey and focus group discussions (FGDs). The desk review was carried out in May 2018; the survey and most of the FGDs were conducted from August to October 2018. Much of the extant literature on youth in Sri Lanka focuses

on two of the main challenges of that age group: education and employment (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Hettige, 1992 and 2002; Mayer, 2002). A significant amount of literature has examined the relationship concerning youth unemployment, youth unrest and conflict (Uyangoda, 1992; Serasundara, 1998; Selvarajah, 2003). The National Youth Survey (2000), the Poverty and Youth survey (Ibarguen and Abdul Cader, 2004) along with reports produced by inter-governmental organisations (Gunatilaka et al., 2010; UNDP, 2014), also provide useful insights on the issues faced by Sri Lankan youth. The Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth in 1990 that looked into the Sinhalese youth uprising in 1988–89 offers a comprehensive picture of the struggles faced by Sri Lankan youth. However, there is a notable dearth of literature that focus on youth and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka and the volume of literature that examines the relationship between youth and reconciliation appears to be limited.

The findings from the research offer fresh insights on post-war youth in Sri Lanka, a country in transition. Some conclusions confirm outcomes from previous studies, while others are rather surprising, highlighting the changes of the next generation in post-war Sri Lanka. The report begins with background to the country and the context, and the composition of Sri Lankan youth. The research looks at key themes such as challenges with education and employment, the experience of violence, young people's politics and agency, and finally reconciliation and youth aspirations. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations.

## Identity: who are the Sri Lankan youth?

The survey shows that young Sri Lankans are proud of their Sri Lankan identity. Being identified as a 'Sri Lankan' is a unifying term for youth from all communities. This finding is unexpected and differs from previous studies. It suggests that youth appear to be influenced by the promotion of 'Sri Lankan Identity' by policymakers. When asked whether all citizens of the country should identify themselves as Sri Lankan, an overwhelming majority of youth gave a positive response. A few Sri Lankan Tamil youth expressed pride about their Sri Lankan identity, but there was also visible discomfort, which hints at the remaining tensions linked to identity and conflict. In the case of Malayaha<sup>1</sup> Tamil youth, they seem not to prefer their Indian Tamil identity, nor being identified by their living in the Estates. Rather, they prefer to identify as Sri Lankan Tamils and rural, rather than Malayaha Tamil, Up Country Tamil, Plantation Tamil or Estate Tamil.

The majority of young people stated they have a close, trusted friend from a different religion, ethnic group and/or from a different part of the country, there remain many who are not familiar with the cultures of different ethnic and religious groups, due to language difference and segregated education systems.

Most Sri Lankan youth state they are religious. Irrespective of their faith, most feel that they have to treat equally people who do not belong to their own religion. They feel cultural and religious biases have been taught to the younger

generation by the older generation, and most young people also see themselves and their generation as different from the older generation. However, an overwhelming number of youth still identify parents as the most influential adults, with teachers and adult relatives coming in next.

## Education

The majority of respondents are currently enrolled at an educational institution. Financial issues, lack of interest and unavailability of schools were cited as the main reasons for dropping out by the respondents who had dropped out of school before completing their primary education (up to Grade 5).

Participants noted that the curriculum does not prepare students for the job market. This is despite the fact that the main reason that most participants seek education is to gain the knowledge and skills to get a good job, with the majority feeling that highly educated youth easily secure better employment than others. Young Sri Lankans believe the education system should start with the very youngest children to include education and learning on social cohesion, in order to promote an inclusive society in Sri Lanka, and which values all cultures of the country.

## Employment

The three most influential factors for job satisfaction were identified as wages, working for a prestigious company and job security. Youth are steering away from state sector employment due to very low remuneration and other

benefits, as well as perceived discrimination and corruption in the recruitment process. They prefer to work in the formal private sector, although some young people prefer to work in informal economic activities, with its high wages, flexibility of time and not needing to resort to political nepotism to secure a job. Those who dropped out of school often see this route, as well as self-employment and entrepreneurship, as possible career options.

Minorities believe upward social mobility is possible for Sinhalese, but not for themselves. Even the graduates from the north and east (Tamil majority) suggested that getting a better job with decent pay is much harder for them.

While reporting some slight improvement in job opportunities, they noted that the economy is stagnating at present, and also that blatant corruption meant that government jobs were effectively 'sold'. They felt that government support for small-scale enterprises for youth and micro-finance schemes lack direction, as they are given without proper training or market analysis.

Malayaha Tamils expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to their wages, which is insufficient to pay for food and daily living. In the most badly war-affected areas in the north, unemployment is highest among ex-LTTE<sup>2</sup> combatants, both male and female.

1 > The majority of Malayaha Tamils are descendants of the workers brought to the estate plantations in Sri Lanka in the 19th century by European planters. They have also been known as Up Country Tamils or Estate Tamils.

2 > The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, sometimes known as the Tamil Tigers.

## Experience of violence

The survey findings indicate that the vast majority of the participants have not experienced violent events in their lives. Nevertheless, from the participants who had experienced violence, the survey shows that Northern and Eastern provinces were the most affected. However, data for those who reported being attacked for ethnic or religious reasons indicate that this is not confined to the north and east. Gang violence was also noted as an issue.

## Politics and agency

A clear majority of youth identified democracy as the best political system for Sri Lanka. They believe it is capable of establishing a strong economy, providing basic welfare, protecting human rights, valuing diversity, building alliances with other countries and even ending corruption. However, only an average of 15 per cent of the survey participants were certain that democracy had been a benefit for them, their families, and to their ethnic and religious communities.

The vast majority of young people feel they have a responsibility to vote as citizens; the main reasons for avoiding voting are dislike of the political candidates and parties, and a general lack of interest in politics. Corruption is a critical issue for young Sri Lankans; they believe being not corrupt is a defining quality of a political leader, and identified ending corruption as the key issue in deciding their vote.

They would like to see more young people in prominent positions in political parties – indicating they are strongly likely to vote for a party with an attractive youth policy – and that more women should be in prominent positions in political parties.

The vast majority believe that peace work needs to continue and that it is the duty of all Sri Lankans to work at it. Eighty-five per cent of young Sri Lankans think their generation is ready to play an active role in peace and reconciliation, but they don't yet know how to fit into the current process. Around 30 per cent plan to help in resolving conflicts in future and most feel that their communities recognise the role of youth in addressing conflict. However, only a limited number have attended programmes (government or otherwise) on reconciliation. This highlights the outreach limitations of current programmes on promoting reconciliation, although lack of support or encouragement from their family and community regarding such work was also cited as an issue. The majority of young Sri Lankans had not heard of the key government initiatives such as the LLRC,<sup>3</sup> ONUR<sup>4</sup> and OMP<sup>5</sup> or the National Policy on Reconciliation.

## Reconciliation and the future

The majority feel there has been an improvement in personal freedom since the end of the war. Yet, during FGDs, some noted the intermittent communal violence still contributes to feelings of insecurity. Female participants noted that in the post-war period women feel unsafe, especially in the north due to

the weak rule of law. Both male and female participants felt that violence against women and children has increased in the north. This was partly blamed on drugs and on gang violence, and there were allusions to corruption here too.

Most feel that their families and friends have observed peace and reconciliation following the end of the civil war. However, the research showed up differences in understanding the nature of reconciliation. Most participants were not clear about whether it was good to discuss past atrocities, as some felt it prolonged the animosities and risked passing them on to the next generation. War memorials were noted to be particularly contentious.

Looking ahead, nearly three-quarters of young Sri Lankans, both male and female, do not believe the country is heading in the right direction. They identify a number of problems for themselves: the inability to complete education due to economic hardships, unemployment, discrimination in the government job sector, the high cost of higher education, and corruption in public institutions, as well as poor governance and political instability.

For the country's constitutional direction, fewer than half of those surveyed said that they believe in the 'unitary state' concept, which is the main theme of drafters engaged in the constitution drafting process. Only 14.5 per cent stated they believe in the 'federal state' – these tended to be from areas dominated by the Tamil minority.

3 > Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission.

4 > Office for National Unity and Reconciliation.

5 > Office on Missing Persons.

## Recommendations

Despite the negative outlook towards the future, young Sri Lankans have a strong sense of pride regarding their country and are willing to come forward to serve as agents of change in the process of reconciliation. It is important to seize and direct that positive energy of the next generation in order to develop sustainable peace, promote reconciliation and establish harmony. As the report shows, youth within Sri Lanka have diverse concerns and needs. Designing policies that address the needs of youth (youth-responsive policies) is key to ensure the next generation's contribution to the country's future.

The core question behind this research was: **How is Sri Lanka's next generation responding to changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process?** We have therefore chosen to centre in on the policy recommendations that address this area.

## Peace and reconciliation

- Working together, the government, civil society organisations, academics and expert practitioners should explore the design of justice mechanisms (such as truth commissions and/or transitional justice mechanisms) that will enable the citizens of this country to move forward to a just and equitable future for all Sri Lankan citizens.

- As part of that, the government and other stakeholders must ensure that these mechanisms meaningfully engage young people, particularly those in remote or other hard-to-reach areas.
- The government, partners and stakeholders should ensure that existing programmes and institutions, such as the LLRC, establish outreach programmes to raise their profile with Sri Lankan youth.
- The government should establish a national dialogue on conflict memorialisation, allowing those who lost their lives to be remembered in a manner that brings communities together, rather than fostering division.
- Along with its reparation efforts, the government should develop economic, social and psychological programmes to reconcile and rehabilitate communities affected by violent conflict, with a focus on mental as well as physical health of those affected, both directly and indirectly.
- The government should train all security forces on peaceful co-existence and genuinely establish measures to increase sense of security for all citizens irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, location or any other factor.

Clearly, the research provided a wealth of data and the participants provided the research team with much to consider. Beyond the issues of conflict, peace and reconciliation – though we observe that these have far-reaching impact – the research examined many facets of the lives of young people, including education, employment and political engagement. From the many findings could be crafted a number of recommendations – too many for this report.

Following discussion with the Next Generation Taskforce, the remaining recommendation is for the formation of a National Action Plan for Youth. Taking the Next Generation research as a springboard, the owners of the National Action Plan – we believe this should be the government – should continue this consultative process, particularly ensuring young people are meaningfully engaged in the process. It should look at the areas identified herein and assign and empower the relevant ministries and departments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to formulate its enactment. We believe this meets the aspirations of Next Generation, which is to 'enable the voices of Sri Lankan youth from all communities to be heard within the wider society... [and] ultimately contribute to policies that address their needs'.



# INTRODUCTION: NEGATIVE PEACE AND AMBIVALENT RECONCILIATION

Nearly a decade has passed since the end of the protracted civil war in 2009, when the government of Sri Lanka militarily defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. However, successive governments have been beset by extreme nationalist sentiments of communal politics, rendering post-war reconciliation at a standstill. Post-war government policies and investments have prioritised economic development and rehabilitation, while conciliation and building sustainable and positive peace remain contentious. This has led to recurrent communal violence and mistrust within the multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. Recent violence between Sinhalese and Muslim communities in the Central Province highlighted the weaknesses of the peace and reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. The need to promote an inclusive reconciliation process that helps to address the grievances of all communities is imperative.

In general, 'peace' and 'reconciliation' have been examined at length in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Each culture and philosophy offers definitions of peace. Of the many understandings, the notions of 'positive' and 'negative' peace are most applicable to the Sri Lankan context. Although the definitions have evolved over time, the basic premise of negative peace is the absence of violence and war, while positive peace is 'the integration of society' (Galtung, 1964: 2). According to this definition, post-war Sri Lanka has negative peace, as the structures and conditions that led to the civil war and other uprisings have not been transformed to establish an

inclusive environment. Furthermore, the study uses the term 'post-war' as opposed to 'post-conflict', to underpin the reality in which violent confrontations based on differences of ethnicity, religion and other factors continue.

In the past, Sri Lanka had witnessed widespread mobilisation of youth, leading to violent protests, extremist factions and political insurgencies. However, there has been no systematic undertaking to understand the Sri Lankan youth experiences regarding the process of peace and reconciliation. Certainly, Sri Lanka's next generation's perspectives on reconciliation will be crucial in ushering in a cohesive future from a divided past. With a rapidly ageing population and declining fertility rates, the country's next generation appears likely to inherit the bulk of responsibility in steering the country beyond the ravages of a protracted civil war and communal tensions.

## Sri Lankan youth at a glance

Across the world, youth appears as an active force in generating an environment conducive to foster real changes at the ground level. The United Nations has already recognised young people as the major energetic force for development, social change, economic growth and technological innovation. A December 2015 UN Security Council mandate, along with the Sustainable Development Goals, recognises the important and positive role of young women and men in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. In particular, participation,

prevention and partnership were emphasised as pillars for action to engage with youth in conflict contexts (United Nations, 2015).

We should remember that existing research suggests that youth is not a homogeneous category with similar needs, but suggest broad variances founded on class, gender, ethnicity, religion and a variety of group affiliations (Alpaslan and Podder, 2015). Furthermore, researchers identify three dominant types of approaches to youth: age-defined perspective (the idea of a single, gender-equal age of maturity), social construct (socially situated and culturally constructed) and psychological perspective (representing a transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood). However, across societies, cultures and times, the understanding and interpretation of age categories largely varies from one to another. In Sri Lanka, the National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development, 2014) defines youth as the population aged 15 to 29 years. According to the United Nations, the persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years are classified as youth. The definition of youth is therefore highly contestable.

According to the 2012 census, the Sri Lankan youth population has been estimated as approximately 4.4 million and to be nearly one-quarter (23 per cent) of the total population.<sup>6</sup>

The National Youth Services (1969) was the first institution established to provide opportunities for youth in 'fulfilling their aspirations in the fields of sports, recreation, artistic and creative

6 > The youth population by sex appears to be an almost equal distribution of 50.2 per cent male and 49.8 per cent female.

work, leadership, social service, education, personal development and participation in decision making' (Jungeling, 1989: 23). In the aftermath of the political insurgencies, the Presidential Commission on Youth was appointed by the government in 1989 to investigate the causes of youth agitation and unrest and to recommend remedial actions to discourage such attitudes and behaviours. However, the recommendations presented by the Commission in 1990 were not fully implemented. Later, the National Youth Corps under the Ministry of Youth Affairs came to exist with the aim of developing competencies to transform youth into a healthy, multi-disciplinary, self-reliant generation through providing guidance, skills and opportunities for youth to excel and contribute to the national prosperity of Sri Lanka. Again, related actions were not correctly implemented and remain limited to reports. The Sri Lankan government set up the National Youth Policy (NYP) with the aim of ensuring, empowering and enabling youth through education, skills development and vocational training, employment, professionalisation, health and welfare, peace, physical fitness and art and leisure. This policy aims to instil 'a sense of social responsibility and social cohesion among young people while recognising and respecting diversities of ethnicity, culture, religion, language and lifestyles in the country' (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development, 2014: 10). In addition, the NYP encourages youth to develop among the youth community the potential to challenge all forms of discrimination.

### Next Generation research contributors

The research strived hard to represent the national averages on almost all key indicators such as gender, ethnicity and religion. There were slightly more females (51.7 per cent) than males (48.3 per cent). The sample was kept to the age range of 18–29 years with three subdivisions of 18–19 (30.5 per cent), 20–24 (39 per cent) and 25–29 (30.4 per cent).

Sri Lanka has a Sinhalese ethnic majority and the sample reflected that in having 65 per cent Sinhalese participants. The second major ethnic group – Tamils – represented 20.2 per cent of the sample. Due to ethno-historical identity formation, this group was subdivided to Sri Lankan Tamils (16.9 per cent) and Malayaha Tamils (3.3 per cent). Muslims, the third largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka, were represented by 14 per cent of the sample. There were a negligible number of Burghers and Malays. Sri Lankans follow four major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The sample was 63 per cent Buddhist, 16.2 per cent Hindu, 14.5 per cent Muslim and 5.6 per cent Christian. This is a slight overrepresentation of Muslims and a slight underrepresentation of Christians and Buddhists; however, the main religious representation of the country has been well captured.

The sample comprised 63 per cent rural participants, representing the rural nature of the country. Urban participation was 23 per cent, with semi-urban making up 12 per cent of the sample, and the estate sector

rounds it off with two per cent.

Finally, the sample was primarily single (83.4 per cent), with only 16 per cent being married. Four (0.15 per cent) participants were divorced and six were widowed (0.23 per cent). Although Sri Lankan youth tend to marry in their mid to late twenties, the 16 per cent number seems to be an underrepresentation of the married category and thereby influencing an overrepresentation of the single category.

### Description of the report

Chapter 1 of the report provides an outline of the country and context, with particular attention to key events. Chapter 2 presents the complex identity issues confronted by Sri Lankan youth. Chapter 3 explores the challenges youth grapple with in the critical areas of education and employment. In Chapter 4, youth reveal their experiences of violence. In Chapter 5, young Sri Lankans share how they view politics and their own role in society as change agents. Chapter 6 discusses the changes youth have observed with the post-war peace and reconciliation process. Key findings of the research are summarised in Chapter 7. In conclusion, the report offers recommendations made by youth in supporting a viable future and promoting peace and reconciliation with their full participation.

Appendix 1 presents details of the research methodology.

# > CHAPTER 1: SRI LANKA'S ROAD TO CIVIL WAR

## The country and its people

The small island of Sri Lanka lies off the southern coast of India in the Indian Ocean and consists of a total area of 65,610 square kilometres. The major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors and Malayaha Tamils, who are also referred to as Indian Tamils and Up-country Tamils. The largest ethnic group, the Sinhalese, make up about 75 per cent of the total population. Sri Lankan Tamils make up 11.2 per cent of the population, 9.2 per cent are Muslim, and 4.2 per cent are Malayaha Tamils (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). The Sinhalese believe they were the first people to settle in Ceylon from northern India during the sixth century BCE. The Sinhalese largely speak Sinhalese, an Indo-Aryan linguistic group, and inhabit the South, West, Central along with the North Central parts of Sri Lanka. The Tamils, whose language belongs to the Dravidian linguistic group, are the principal minority community in the country, and most of them are Hindus. They are subdivided into two groups, namely Sri Lankan Tamils and Malayaha Tamils. The Sri Lankan Tamils have settled in the country for more than a millennium. The majority of Malayaha Tamils are descendants of the workers brought to the estate plantations in Sri Lanka in the 19th century by European planters. Like the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Moors (or Muslims), the second minority community in Sri Lanka, have an ethnological history of more than a thousand years on the island. They were the descendants of Arab traders who came to Sri Lanka for trade between the eighth and 15th centuries. The four main religions on the island are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

## Conflict revisited

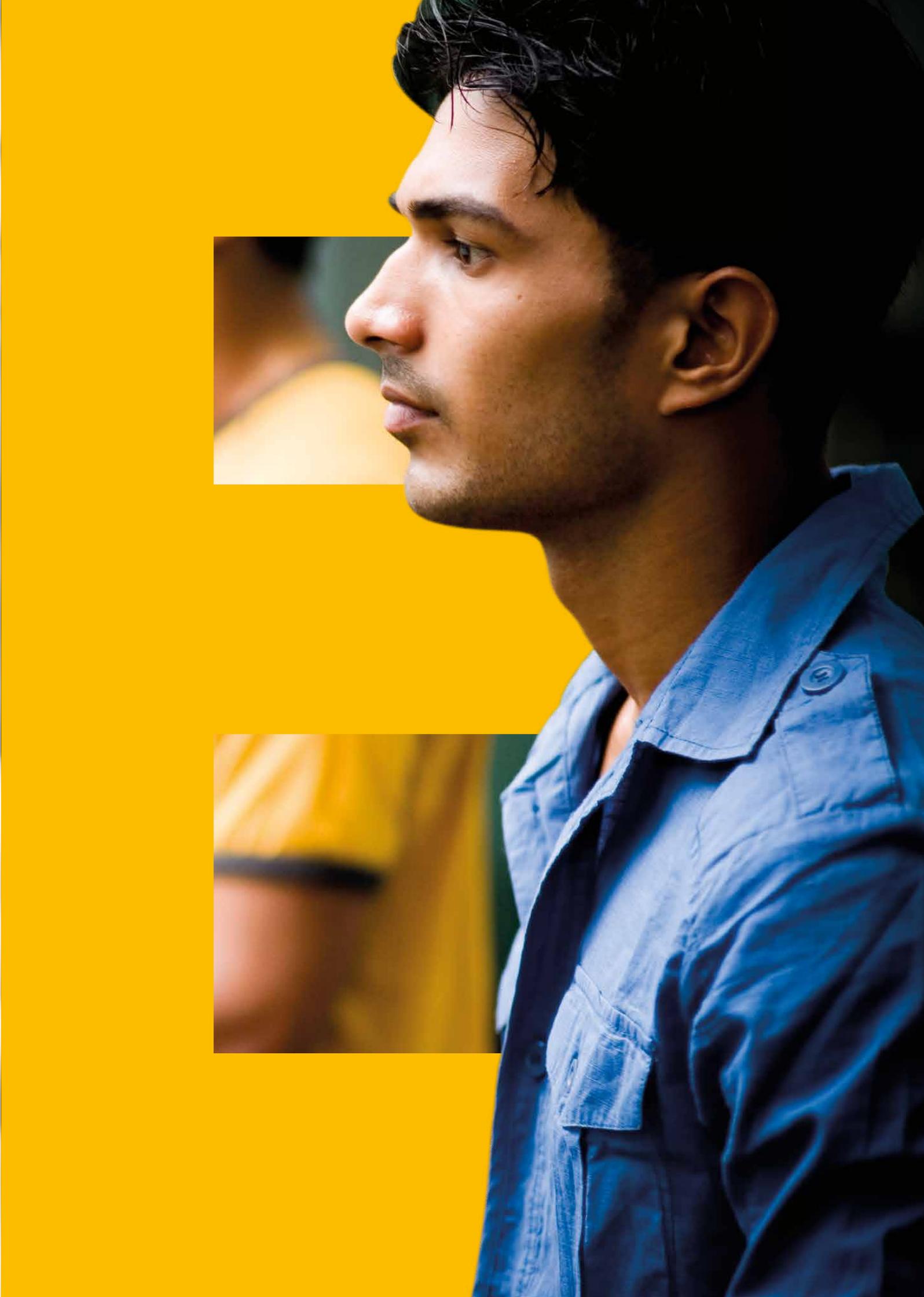
Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon until 1972. The country was colonised successively by the Dutch, Portuguese and the British from 1505 to 1948. The arrival of these three Western powers from the 16th century had far-reaching impact on the relationship between the communities in Ceylon. During British rule, reforms were undertaken, and in 1833 there was established an export-oriented plantation economy based on a capitalist market model. The British profoundly altered the political and administrative structure and introduced a centralised governance system offering places to the political elite that had emerged from the local entrepreneurial class. This eventually led to clashes over power sharing among the elites belonging to different. This struggle and subsequent religious and ethnic violence hindered the formation of Sri Lankan identity.

The United National Party (UNP), a coalition party formed by uniting the right-wing political leaders of the main ethnic communities of the country, won the election of 1947 and eventually became the governing party that accepted independence from the British in 1948. The UNP government enacted parliamentary acts, such as the Citizenship Act (1948), and Indian-Pakistani Citizenship Act (1949), to disenfranchise or curtail the voting rights of Tamils of recent Indian origin.

In the 1950s, the UNP government commenced schemes of colonisation to settle the landless Sinhalese farmers in the North Central and Eastern provinces. This prompted the leaders of Sri Lankan Tamils to resist it by declaring it as a systematic encroachment into the historical homeland of Tamil-speaking

people and an effort to change the demography of Eastern Province, which had been identified as a Tamil-majority area. In 1951, a new political party, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, was established. It came to power in 1956, forming a grand coalition with several political groups that campaigned for the establishment of dominance of majority Sinhalese in the governance process. The new coalition brought in legislation to make Sinhalese the sole official language, creating an uproar among the Sri Lankan Tamils, as it abandoned the 1943 consensus to make both Sinhalese and Tamil official languages. This effectively excluded the minority Tamils, including many English-speaking Sinhalese and Burgher communities, as well as the Tamil-speaking Muslims, from access to state services and employment. This led to the exploitation of ethnic identities in the name of ethnic solidarity by political leaders and brought about a deep animosity between the Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking communities.

Since 1956 the successive governments provided special treatment for Buddhism and the Sinhalese culture by establishing a separate ministry of cultural affairs, ignoring the sensitivities of other ethnic and religious communities. When the first Republican Constitution was inaugurated in 1972, the discriminatory measures introduced in 1948 became entrenched in the basic law of the country.



The 1972 constitution declared Sri Lanka a unitary state, rejecting the demand for a federal state long promoted by the leaders of the Tamil community. Tamil political leaders then formed the Tamil United Liberation Front and declared their desire to establish an independent state in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The Tamil youth formed clandestine groups to commence an armed struggle to establish an independent state for Tamils. The relationship between Sinhalese and Tamils worsened with the culmination of ethnic violence against Tamils that took place in 1981 and 1983, the latter attracting international attention. Gradually, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) became the prominent separatist armed group. Thus began an armed conflict that lasted for more than 30 years, transforming into a full-scale civil war in the 1990s.

### Reconciliation after the defeat of LTTE

Contrary to the economic progress and social harmony anticipated post-war, this period in Sri Lanka has been dominated by the economic and political instability and rise of communal tensions and sporadic violence. Since the end of the armed conflict, the greatest challenge facing Sri Lanka has been in bringing reconciliation and ensuring the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities.

Even since the end of armed conflict, tensions between the communities have been easily aroused by political leaders. Since 2009, successive governments have established mechanisms to lead reconciliation and restore broken relationships. However, there is a widespread feeling that each government has been engaged in the process of enforcing its own brand of reconciliation, ignoring the consensus among the different communities and their leaders.

Soon after the end of war, on the invitation of the Sri Lankan government, the visit of then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the war-affected zones facilitated the creation of a Joint Statement, in which the government of Sri Lanka promised to ensure the importance of the accountability process and to take appropriate

measures to address the peoples' grievances. In May 2010, then President Mahinda Rajapaksa appointed the LLRC with the aim of identifying mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of any conflicts and to promote national integration and reconciliation of all communities in Sri Lanka.

Soon after the establishment of the LLRC<sup>7</sup>, in June 2010 the UN appointed a three-member expert committee to shed light on the issues of accountability related to any alleged violations of international human rights during the final stages of the armed conflict. The panel found credible allegations of human rights abuses by the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka associated with the final stages of the armed conflict. However, the government of Sri Lanka was of the opinion that the humanitarian rescue operation was pursued with zero civilian casualties.

After conducting 57 public sessions and 12 field visits at over 40 locations in the north and west and in other war-affected areas, the LLRC tabled its report to the President on 15 November 2011 and to the public on 16 December 2011. The LLRC recommended systemic changes in the state structures and laws to ensure peace and harmony among individuals and groups of all communities. Yet these recommendations were not implemented due to lack of political will.

In 2013, to investigate the complaints concerning the abductions and disappearances, President Rajapaksa appointed the Udalagama and Paranagama Commissions. The Paranagama Commission report of October 2015 recommended the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a War Crimes Division of the High Court to advance the peace and reconciliation process in Sri Lanka.

The changes in the government composition in 2015 led to a policy shift to introduce mechanisms to undertake broader goals of reconciliation. The Sirisena–Wickramasinghe government established state institutions to undertake and promote the process of national integration at ground level. The ONUR<sup>8</sup> has been delegated with implementation of the mandate of the Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation, with the aim of building a pluralist and inclusive society with equal opportunities to all in all spheres of social life.

In addition, the establishment of the Constitutional Assembly in March 2016 provided a crucial platform for all 225 members of parliament to initiate political reconciliation. The drafting of a new constitution was in this sense an attempt to reform the state and establish a mechanism through which national reconciliation could be worked out.

The OMP<sup>9</sup> was established in September 2017 to locate the whereabouts of those who went missing across the country during the course of the LTTE and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrections. Another significant step towards the process of reconciliation is the bill passed by the parliament in October 2018 to set up the Office for Reparations. This office, an independent entity, aims to offer remedies to individuals and communities, recognising their grievances in post-war Sri Lanka.

### Economy after 2009

Despite the civil war and insurgencies, Sri Lanka has maintained overall high social development standards, although the areas directly affected by violence, including border villages, the estate sector and some rural areas, lag behind. Sri Lanka is categorised as a middle-income country, and is positioned 76 out of 189 countries on the 2018 Human Development Index.

The poverty line of Sri Lanka appears moderate according to South Asian regional standards. Sri Lanka's economy has traditionally been based on agriculture; however, over the years it has diversified into plantation crops and a variety of rapidly growing industries including textiles and tourism. Approximately 81.5 per cent of the people living in rural areas engage in agriculture.

Post-war-era government policies have focused on rapid economic development. During the post-war period 2009–14, Sri Lanka achieved a 6.2 per cent of average annual economic growth. The driving force of this growth was the demand-driven private sector, especially due to private consumption and investment and partly due to agricultural development in the north and east.

The new government from 2015 to 2018 stopped the mega infrastructure development projects implemented by the previous government and focused on foreign direct investments and supply-side factors. The sudden stop to infrastructure projects and lack of foreign direct investment halted economic growth and brought it down to 3.1 per cent in 2017. The average economic growth for the period 2015–18 October is 4.1 per cent.

8 > Office for National Unity and Reconciliation.  
9 > Office for Missing Persons.

# > CHAPTER 2: WHO ARE THE SRI LANKAN YOUTH?

In the post-war era, discussions about national reconciliation have concentrated on political issues. The discussions neglected how people, especially youth, navigate their daily lives, how they interact with different communities and most importantly, how they identify themselves. Next Generation research shows that young Sri Lankans are proud of their Sri Lankan identity. Seventy-one per cent of Sri Lankan youth consider themselves first and foremost as a Sri Lankan citizen and 20.5 per cent stated they consider themselves as a member of the human race. On average, only eight per cent of youth identified themselves first and foremost as a member of their region, ethnic group or religion. For Sinhalese and Muslim youth, religion was more important than for Sri Lankan Tamil youth, whereas caste and ethnicity

were more important for Sri Lankan Tamil youth. For Malayaha Tamil youth their region was important. Some of the Sri Lankan youth during the focus groups discussions acknowledged their multiple identities, which describe their life experiences in changing circumstances.

These findings are somewhat different to earlier studies and rather surprising, demonstrating that youth in the post-war generation have perhaps been influenced by the promotion of a 'Sri Lankan' identity by policymakers after the end of the civil war.

*'As a Muslim, I feel proud about being a Sri Lankan citizen, still the imminent danger from Buddhist religion makes me scared.'*

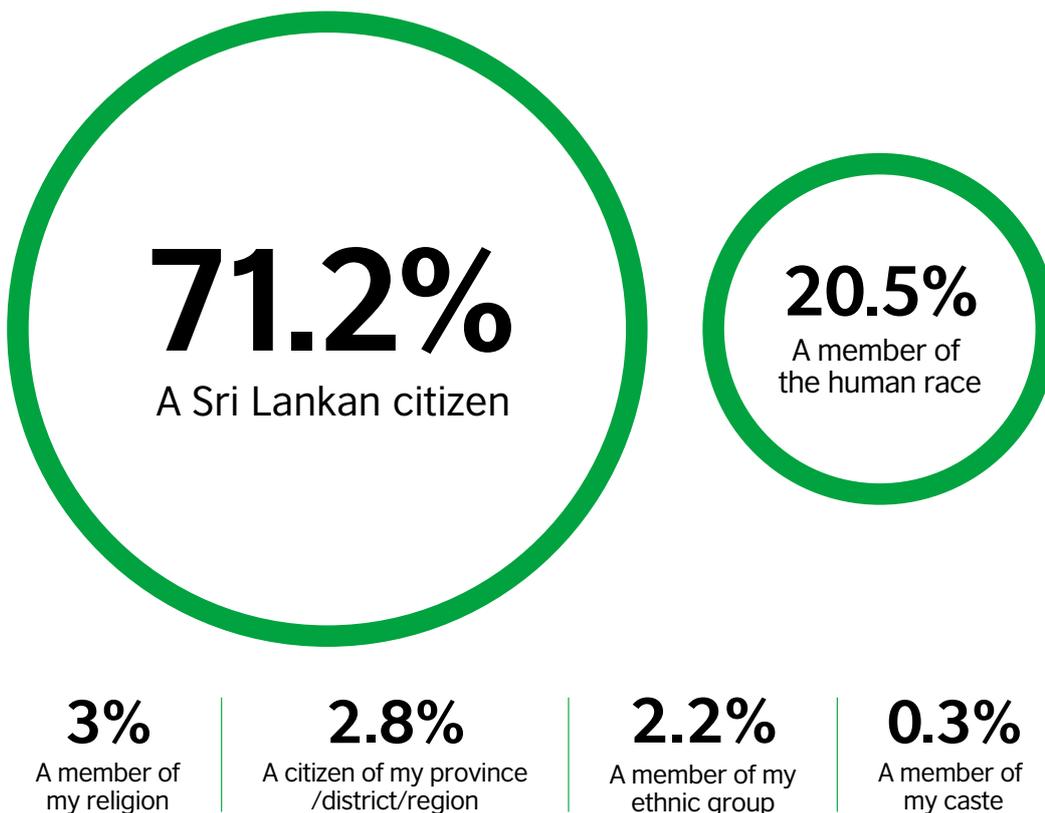
Male FGD participant, Muslim, Matara

Moreover, being identified as a 'Sri Lankan' is a unifying term for youth from all communities and one they are comfortable using. When asked whether all citizens of the country should identify themselves as Sri Lankan, an overwhelming majority – 86.9 per cent – of youth gave a positive response; of them 94 per cent were Muslim, 91 per cent Sri Lankan Tamils, 89 per cent Malayaha Tamils and 85 per cent Sinhalese youth. This shows that minority ethnic groups also overwhelmingly subscribe to a Sri Lankan identity alongside the majority Sinhalese youth.

*I belong to Indian Tamil Community, but prefer to describe myself as a Sri Lankan citizen.'*

Female FGD Participant, Malayaha Tamil, Matale

Figure 1: What do you consider yourself to be, first and foremost?





During the FGDs, a few Sri Lankan Tamil youth from the north expressed pride about their Sri Lankan identity, but there was visible discomfort about stating that. This issue over identity may limit the possibility of reconciliation of societies. During the war, Sri Lankan Tamil youth, like all citizens, felt a sense of frustration and unhappiness. Yet after the war, enhanced security, freedom and social welfare services to facilitate the Sri Lankan citizenship appears to have enhanced their sense of pride in being Sri Lankan. Some youth stated that moving and living in different

places after the war has made them feel that they are Sri Lankan.

*‘During war-time, we never travelled to southern parts of Sri Lanka. In fact, I never have associated with Sinhalese or Muslims. I really had a fear about other Sri Lankan communities.’*

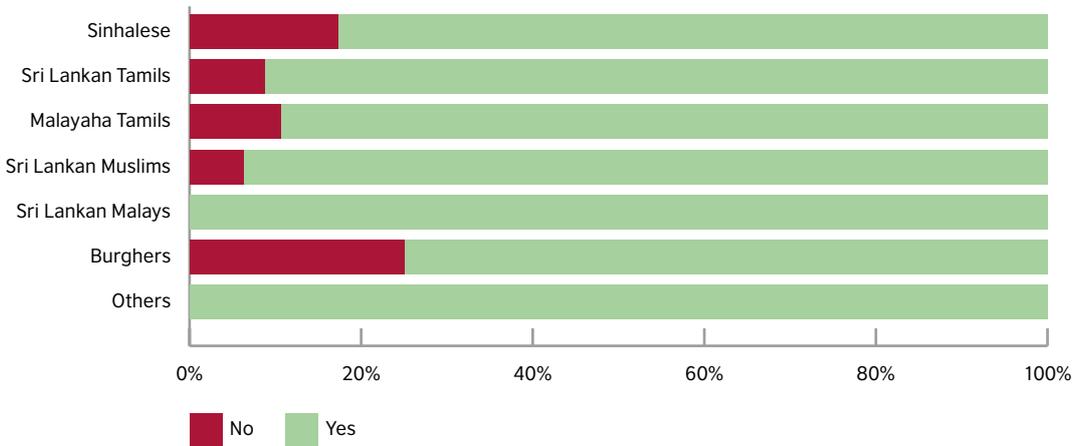
**Female FGD Participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Killinochchi**

Among the survey participants, the majority of youth have a close friend whom they trust from a different religion (78.5 per cent), from a different

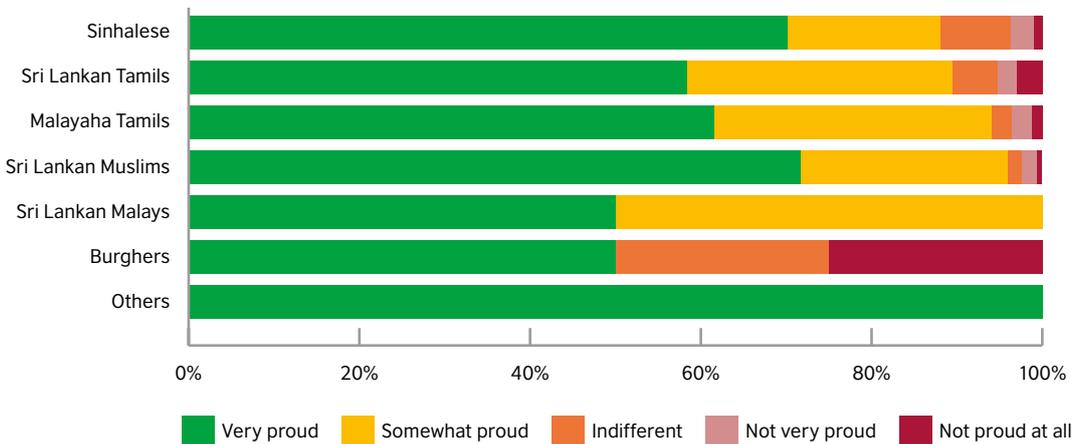
ethnic group (69.9 per cent) and from a different part of the country (77.7 per cent). Yet the FGDs reveal that there are many youth who are not familiar with the cultures of different ethnic and religious groups due to language barriers created by monolingual education and segregated education systems.

A total of 53.8 per cent of youth stated they were strongly religious, while 45.7 per cent stated that they were not. Eighty-five per cent of the Muslim youth state that they consider themselves to

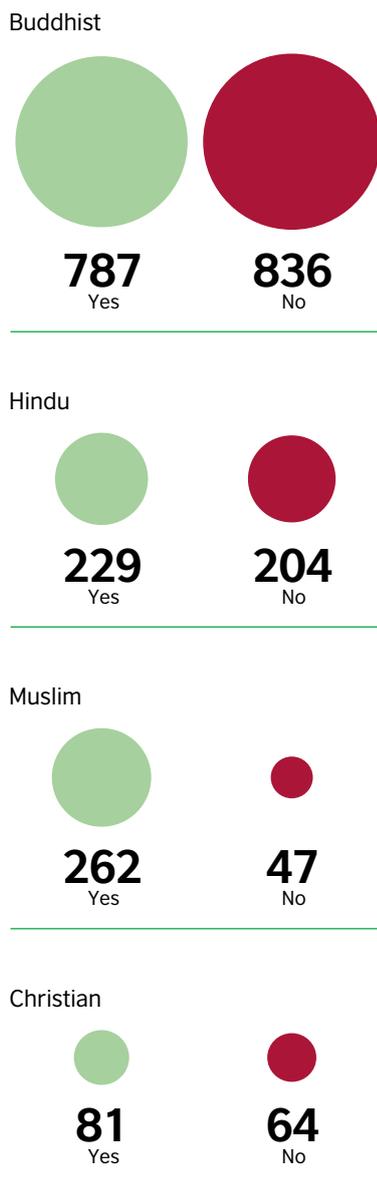
**Figure 2:** Do you think that all the citizens of this country should identify themselves as Sri Lankans?



**Figure 3:** How proud are you of being Sri Lankan?



**Figure 4:** According to your own assessment, 'are you a strongly religious person'?



One further respondent listed 'other' as their religion and answered **yes** to this question.

be strongly religious, which is significantly higher than the overall average. Just under half (44.5 per cent) of young people visit a place of worship of their religion once a month, and only 0.6 per cent said that they never visit a place of worship. Regardless of their religious practice, 84.7 per cent of youth said that they think religion has a role in shaping their national identity.

*'After war, I got some opportunities to travel and talk to Sinhalese. Now I think, I have a soft corner about Sinhalese and have established some Sinhalese and Muslim friends. Even I came to this meeting with a Muslim friend whose family has resettled in Mullaitivu after 30 years.'*

**Male FGD participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Mullaitivu**

Irrespective of their faith, 84.4 per cent of youth stated that they have to treat equally people who do not belong to their own religion. When it comes to religious tenets of forgiveness, 79.4 per cent of youth stated that persons who did some wrong to them in the past should be forgiven, while 11.4 per cent stated that they should forget, and only 0.8 per cent identified revenge as the outcome.

Seventy per cent strongly agree that they feel respected as a Sri Lankan. However, 33 per cent of young people felt that Sri Lankans are less respected than they used to be with. Regardless, 60.5 per cent of youth stated they would rather be a citizen of Sri Lanka than any other country in the world, with fewer than ten per cent disagreeing.

*'I am happy to be a Sri Lankan, but I [have] fears about the future. Constitution does not support the right to life. Religious harmony should be promoted.'*

**Male FGD participant, Malayaha Tamil, Nuwara Eliya**

The difference in Sri Lankan Tamil identity from Malayaha Tamil identity is most directly linked to the time the

ancestors of these communities arrived in the country and has been explained earlier in this report. Yet Malayaha Tamils seem not to prefer their separate Tamil identity, nor to be defined as living in the Estates. They prefer to identify as Sri Lankan Tamils and rural. The discrimination they face in daily activities due to their identity was raised in focus groups.

*'When we go shopping I try to wear jeans and a top rather than Shalwar because the sales girls don't treat us well when we wear Shalwar. They equate Shalwar with Malayaha/Estate Tamils and think of us as less. If we wear jeans and a top, even if they realise we are Tamils they treat us well.'*

**Female FGD participant, Malahaya Tamil, Kandy**

In the future, a more acceptable term may need to be sought, yet one that still distinguishes them. Why? Because the northern Tamils identify themselves as Sri Lankan Tamils and want that label to be exclusively theirs.

### Generational issues

Sri Lankan youth believe the communal issues facing society were created by the older generation. Focus group participants perceive cultural and religious biases as having been taught to the younger generation by the older generation. Yet most youth (79.7 per cent) identify parents as the most influential adults, with teachers much further down the list at 10.4 per cent.

A significant number of the young Sri Lankans (90 per cent) think that people of their own age group are different from the older generations. Nearly half think that their generation will be able to change the current situation in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, there is only a slight difference in the number of youth who think that their generation will make things worse for Sri Lanka (26.1 per cent) and that their generation will make Sri Lanka a better country (25.1 per cent).

# CHAPTER 3: SRI LANKAN YOUTH: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

## Educational development

In Sri Lanka, the term ‘literacy’ is nationally defined as the ‘ability to read and write simple sentences in specified languages in Sinhalese, Tamil or English’ (UNESCO, 2006: 157). Due to the implementation of the free education policy in 1945, the country holds a high literacy rate overall, with a literacy rate of 98.8 per cent among Sri Lankan youth.

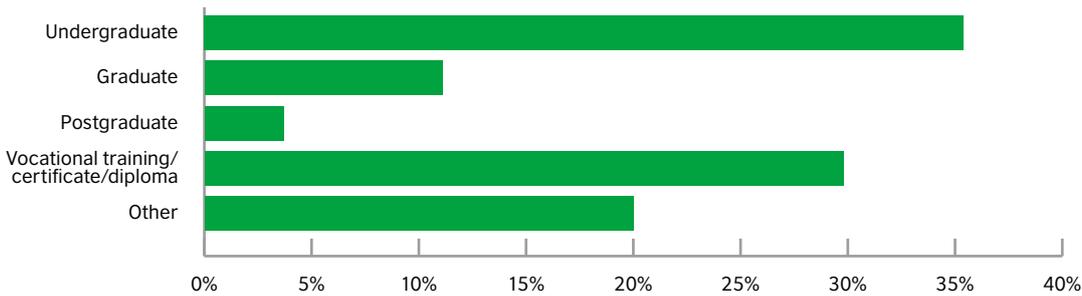
The national educational system is composed of public schools, semi-

government schools, private collages, religious institutions and international schools. The university system is dominated by the government-owned universities, although some private institutions attached to foreign universities are available in the main cities. The government, alongside the private sector, also runs vocational training institutions.

The majority of survey respondents (53.2 per cent) are currently enrolled

at an educational institute and the rest are either working, gaining both academic and professional skills or have completed their studies, or are staying at home. Three per cent of Sri Lankan youth in the age category of 20–24 are in universities. Under half (40.9 per cent) of those surveyed completed their secondary education, with 0.7 per cent having incomplete primary education (up to Grade 5). Only 2.7 per cent have not attended school.

**Figure 5:** Are you currently enrolled in an educational institution?



The youth who have dropped out from formal education before completing Grade 5 cited financial issues as the main reason. The others stated lack of interest in studies and unavailability of schools as the main reasons. Concerns regarding availability of schools in their living areas were brought up by youth from all ethnic groups.

*‘As a Muslim living in a majority Sinhalese area in the Eastern Province, we do not have enough Tamil medium schools. To obtain higher education, especially after Grade 5 we have to follow the Sinhalese medium or we need to move to Tamil areas.’*

**Male FGD participant, Muslim, Ampara**

*‘As a Sinhalese living in a majority Tamil-speaking area, to obtain education in Sinhalese medium we have to move to Sinhalese-majority towns, sometimes even with our families.’*

**Male FGD participant, Sinhalese, Ampara**

When respondents were asked which areas in the Sri Lankan education system need to be improved, the top three answers were improvement in the quality of teaching, improvements in the curriculum, and improvements to the facilities at educational institutions. The lack of qualified teachers in all three languages was also highlighted, noting that there were insufficient Tamil language teachers in majority Sinhalese areas, insufficient Sinhalese language

teachers in Tamil-majority areas, and a lack of qualified English teachers overall, but especially in rural areas. Participants also highlighted the poor administration in government schools and lack of sensitivity to different ethnic and religious groups even at primary level. It was felt, especially at primary schools, that teachers influence children to only value their own language, religion and culture.

Teaching a divided history has been a challenge for the Sri Lankan education system and is common in many societies that have experienced inter-group conflict. It can be argued that content provided in textbooks has a substantial role in accelerating deep-rooted hostilities among ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.



This view has been supported by the qualitative data gathered through a number of FGDs throughout the island. The lack of common historic narratives has exacerbated ‘us and them’ perceptions and has increased inter-ethnic tensions. As an example: young people from the Northern Province require improvement in teaching history and political education because they feel that their history, political movements and culture are left out. However, a Sinhalese youth from the North Central Province stated in an FGD that he would find revisions to history textbooks problematic.

Respondents also noted that the curriculum does not prepare students for the job market. Lack of IT education and English language skills have already been identified as factors that keep youth away from taking advantage of global employment markets (Arunatilake and Jayawardena, 2010). These drawbacks have serious consequences as nearly half the survey participants identified the most important reason for education was to gain the knowledge and skills to get a good job.

During the war, schooling was a challenge for all ethnic groups, especially for children living in directly war-affected areas. Tamil-speaking children in the Northern and Eastern provinces were not able to attend formal schools and universities due to various security concerns and threats. At the conclusion of the war, ex-combatants who were forced to drop out from the formal education have spent a year or two at the rehabilitation camps before re-entering society.

*‘Education is very important for marginalised people to get social protection. I was recruited to LTTE in 2005, so could not have the*

*opportunity to have the formal education. In fact, schooling was a great challenge for many children during the last phase of civil war. When the war came to an end, people like me who did not have education remain unemployed.’*

**Male FGD participant,  
Sri Lankan Tamil, Mullaitivu**

Sinhalese and Muslim children living in the areas close to the Northern and Eastern provinces also had a difficult time in obtaining formal education. Sometimes, schools were closed for long periods and at other times children had to sleep in forests in the night and go to school in the daytime.

*‘As a Sinhalese living in village close to the Northern Province, my near by school did not receive any facilities from government. I remember, my school did not have a water tank due to the war. Because of the shelling from LTTE areas our lives were miserable. Going to school was a real challenge to me. Some of my rich Sinhalese friends with strong financial background managed to escape the village and went to town schools in nearby Sinhalese areas. Unfortunately it did not happen to me.’*

**Male FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Anuradhapura**

### **Unmet employment needs**

Even a decade since the war ended, unemployment is a problem for the youth in Sri Lanka. As mentioned earlier, unemployment among the age group of the survey sample is high, with unemployment among young and educated women being considerably higher than men. The majority of youth are limited to employment in the informal sector (National Youth Survey, 2000; Gunatilaka et al., 2010).

Just under 15 per cent of respondents classified their job as in the government or semi government sector. Of those respondents, ten per cent were from the age group from 18–19, 36 per cent were aged 20–24 and 53 per cent were aged 25–29, indicating that access to employment in the government sector increases considerably with age. A total of 17.8 per cent of survey respondents are employed in the private sector, with a 62 per cent male and 38 per cent female split. Although, government jobs still hold prestige and are preferred by youth, the research reveals, as discussed subsequently, a tendency for youth to seek alternative formal (private sector) or informal employment.

Almost 70 per cent of those employed were satisfied with their current jobs, citing wages (19.3 per cent), working for a prestigious company (ten per cent) and job security (ten per cent) as the main reasons. Wages were by far the main factor for the Sinhalese, with 78 per cent of the Sinhalese indicating it as the most influential, against 12 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils, nine per cent of Muslims and just one per cent of Malayaha Tamils.

*‘During the war youth were able to join the army, but now we are just at home, even with university degrees.’*

**Male FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Hambanthota**

A substantial number of youth stated that they prefer to work in self-run businesses, such as marketing, private teaching, transport activities, media, tourism, fashion and beauty. Respondents noted that these informal activities did not get much attention from policymakers and politicians. Yet, young people prefer to engage in informal activities because they can obtain a higher income, have flexibility in working hours, are not reliant on political nepotism, and face less

bureaucracy and corruption. Those who were unsuccessful in formal education/schooling also perceive self-employment and business creation as possible career options.

*'I could not complete my Advanced Level studies, but I could then easily join a marketing firm as a sales representative. I served for some years there and learned the business. Now I own a small shop and have become the boss of my own business.'*

Male FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Monaragala

Sri Lankan minorities are taught to believe upward mobility is possible for Sinhalese, not minorities, and that upward mobility is impossible for them even if they have higher educational qualifications.

*'I am a graduate from a state university. Now it has been two years, no job is found matching my expectations. This year, I came to know if I pay 400,000 Sri Lankan Rupees, there is a possibility to secure a job. Even I do not know to whom I should pay to get the work done. Also people say that the amount may rise next year as it has increased in the past.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Sri Lankan Tamil, Jaffna

*'Even if I performed the interview well, when they check my residential address which ends with "estate", they change their mind. When an address finishes by estate, they know that I am an Up-country Tamil. So my chance to get the better job goes missing.'*

Male FGD participant,  
Malayah Tamil, Ratnapura

Comparing youth perspectives of all ethnic communities regarding job satisfaction, the Malayaha Tamils expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to their wage, which is minimal and insufficient to pay for food and daily living. They said that the wages do not 'catch up' with the cost of living. According to the survey, 40.7 per cent of respondents reported their satisfaction about the availability of jobs and a sizeable minority of respondents (21 per cent) responded regarding the unavailability of employment. Nearly 27.7 per cent respondents found a few or some job opportunities available to youth.

*'I am a tea-leaf plucker in Kanthapola and been doing it for seven years. I got married at the age of 17 years and now I have three children. My daily wage is around 620 rupees. My alcoholic husband never turns his salary to me to run the family. My family depends on my wage. With 620 rupees, I have to manage three school-going children and provide meals for seven family members including my parents. I feel that there should be a salary hike, at least from 620 rupees to 1,000 rupees.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Malayah Tamil, Nuwara Eliya

In the most badly war-affected areas in the north, unemployment is highest among the ex-LTTE combatants of both sexes. There is a notable increase in the unemployment rate in the district of Jaffna, recording seven per cent in 2016 and 10.7 per cent in 2017. This is the highest unemployment rate by district and more than double the national unemployment level (4.2 per cent) according to the Department of Census and Statistics (2018).

*'In the post-war context, we have the opportunity to access all goods and services which were limited during the war-times. However, many youth depend on foreign remittance which their families get from relatives abroad.'*

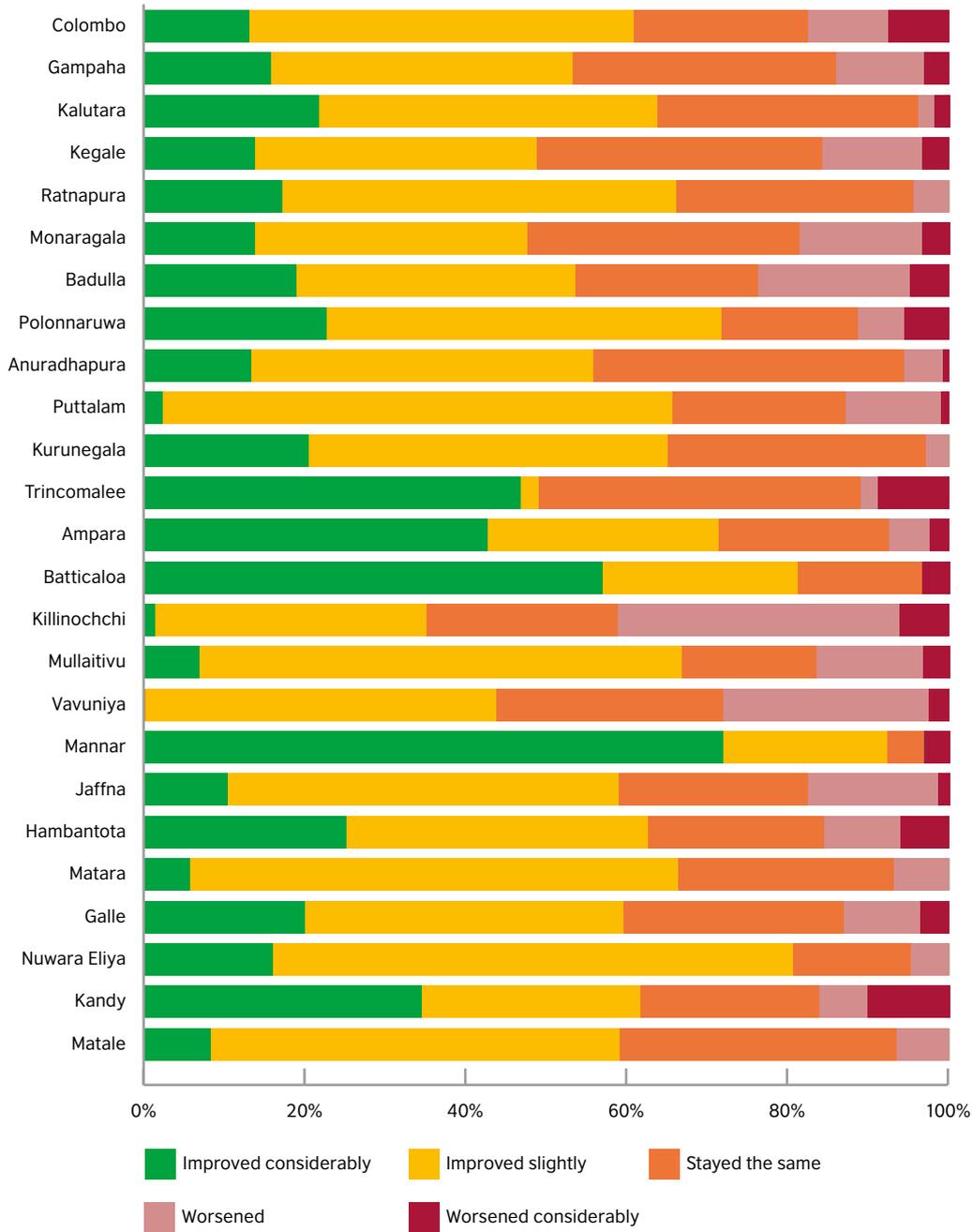
Female FGD participant,  
Sri Lankan Tamil, Jaffna

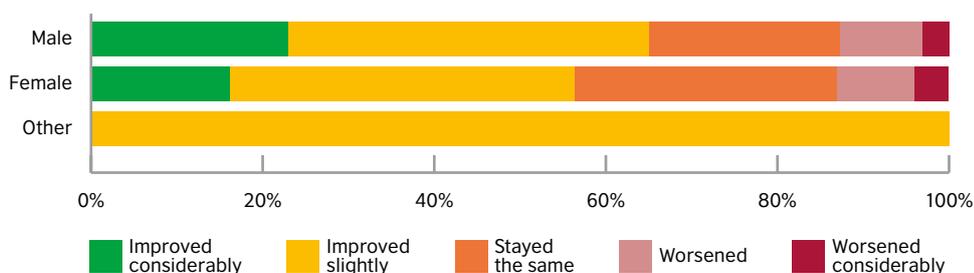
*'You know, I studied in a town school, but I could not enter university because I did not have enough marks. I just cannot go for normal jobs. I will wait until I get a decent job with a good pay. I feel I am lucky since my elder sister who is married and lives in London sends some money for my expenditure.'*

Male FGD participant, Sri Lankan  
Tamil, Jaffna

Youth from Northern and Eastern provinces were unhappy about the Sri Lankans from the southern part of the country being given jobs in the offices and government departments in the Tamil-speaking districts. Their limited or non-existent language competency in Tamil is creating unnecessary issues with Tamils in the districts of those provinces.

**Figure 6:** After the end of civil war in 2009, has your personal/family economic situation...



**Figure 7:** After the end of civil war in 2009, has your personal/family economic situation...

*'After the war, the people easily obtain seed money to start small-scale enterprise and self-employment. However, once they obtain money, they do not know how and where to invest. They use the seed money to settle their bank loans.'*

**Male FGD participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Mannar**

An analysis of labour market imbalances in Sri Lanka suggest that there is a mismatch between qualifications and skills required by employers and qualifications held by jobseekers. The authors of that report also recommend that vocational training should be introduced formally, as many youth waste time gaining skills from unrecognised sources (Arunatilake and Jayawardena, 2010).

There are government strategies that encourage and support employment programmes and small-scale enterprises for youth. The evidence also shows conclusively that opportunities for self-employment appear high in the war-affected areas as the government organisations provide seed money for enterprise start-ups. However, there are no marketplaces identified for making the business profitable.

*'A small-scale enterprise started manufacturing palmyrah fibre brushes in Mullaitivu and started exporting palmyrah fibre to foreign countries. They utilised natural resources and employed war-affected youth into manufacturing activities. Now, we see the company has stopped business as they failed in marketing their product due to lack of government support services.'*

**Female FGD participant, Sri Lankan Tamil, Mullaitivu**

Despite all this, respondents reported that personal economic conditions have somewhat improved in post-war Sri Lanka. Seventy-nine per cent of Malayaha Tamils, 61 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils, 58 per cent of Sinhalese and 55 per cent of Muslims stated that the economic conditions have improved slightly or considerably.

Males (65 per cent) are more optimistic about the improved family economic situation compared to young women (56 per cent). Overall, most youth experience only a slight improvement in their personal economic situation; there has also been a slight improvement in their ability to find good jobs. However, in FGDs youth

were quick to point out that the economy is stagnating at present and that there was no clear direction from the government. They also felt strongly about corruption and the fact that government jobs could be 'bought'.

The concern about lack of access to employment and frustration with this situation is not merely about the loss of productivity. An inability to satisfy youth aspirations, including their desire for a good job, and the notion that it is fuelled by ethnic, religious, class and caste-based discrimination has long been identified as the source of several youth-led insurgencies in both the north and the south of the country (Amarasooriya, 2010; Hettige and Mayer, 2002; Presidential Commission, 1990). We shall turn to youth experience of conflict and violence in the next chapter.

## > CHAPTER 4: YOUTH AND EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

Eighty-seven per cent of the participants have not been involved with any violent incidents in the recent past. Of those who stated that they were exposed to violent incidents in the recent past, the highest percentage was recorded for Sri Lankan Tamils (23 per cent), followed by Sinhalese (12 per cent), Muslims (nine per cent) and Malayaha Tamils (four per cent). These results seem to reflect the current situation of the country. Interestingly, there was no significant gender difference in reporting exposure to violence.

However, this does not mean that violence has not affected them in other ways, even a decade after the end of the war. Around 20 per cent of the participants stated that a member of their family had been hurt by a violent act in the past, with a similar percentage for the friends. Close to ten per cent of the participants experienced the death of a relative or a friend by violence.

*'My uncle was caught by a bomb planted on the roadside close to his house in Kabithigollawa and died. This was near the end of the war in 2008. Yet, no compensation was given for him to his family. It is very wrong because the Tamils are being compensated for their losses during the war. My uncle's family who are very poor are greatly suffering with no help from the government.'*

**Male FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Anuradhapura**

The districts with the highest percentage of family members being killed by a violent act were from Mullaitivu (60 per cent), Batticaloa (31 per cent), Kilinochchi (27 per cent), Trincomalee (23 per cent) and Jaffna (16 per cent), indicating that the Northern and the Eastern provinces have most experience of violent events.

Again, although they may not have personally undergone violent events, young people have fears for their security in some places. The highest

percentage was recorded by Kilinochchi district in the Northern Province, with 87.7 per cent indicating that they had to leave a place due to concerns of safety. This was followed by Mullaitivu (73.3 per cent), Trincomalee (57.4 per cent), Jaffna (55.7 per cent) and Mannar (55.1 per cent). Overall, only 15.8 per cent of young people have felt they had to leave a place due to safety, so the numbers in these Northern and Eastern provinces are high. Again, this reflects the proximity of the civil war to these areas.

These war-affected youth are more likely to be those with direct personal experience of violence. From the overall respondents, three per cent report having been attacked with a knife and five per cent with a gun. Nine per cent had experienced an attack on their house or building, and just under three per cent had experienced being kidnapped. In that latter category, the highest percentage district was Jaffna (15.7 per cent), followed by Mullaitivu (13.3 per cent), Batticaloa (11.1 per cent), Trincomalee (10.6 per cent) and Kilinochchi (8.6 per cent).

Some respondents stated they had been attacked due to ethnicity or religious belief (5.7 per cent). This was a small number overall, yet the district breakdown suggested it was more of a problem for certain districts, with Mullaitivu coming in with the highest percentage (30 per cent) of respondents stating that they were attacked due to ethnic or religious beliefs. This is followed by Jaffna (23 per cent), Batticaloa (16 per cent), Kandy (14 per cent) and Puttalam (13 per cent). These statistics further indicate that attack for ethnicity or religion is not confined to the north and east.

*'Being a Muslim I was very scared when the Digana Riots happened earlier in the year. I never thought that something like this will happen under the present government.'*

**Male FGD participant, Muslim, Kandy**

*'Everyone was talking about Muslims being attacked but no one seems to care about Muslims attacking us. We too were very scared during that time. Although we were not in the Digana area Ambatale is very close to Akurana town and Muslims attacked Sinhalese people at Ambatale.'*

**Female FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Kandy**

Gender was not reported as a factor in experiences of violence, with just 3.1 per cent of the respondents indicating that they were attacked for being a man/woman. Reporting of sexual attacks was low overall at 1.9 per cent, although some district breakdowns were much higher: Mullaitivu (16.7 per cent), Jaffna (8.6 per cent) and Kilinochchi (7.4 per cent). We will return to how this affects young Sri Lankans' sense of personal security in Chapter 6.

Gang violence was raised, with 5.7 per cent of respondents reporting that they had been chased by a gang. Sri Lanka has also seen a number of violent demonstrations recently, many involving university students. As the Next Generation age cohort falls in the average university student age range, it is of no surprise that ten per cent of respondents stated that they had been caught in a riot or violent demonstration. The recent ethno-religious riots in March 2018 may also have contributed to bolster this percentage.

It is important to bear in mind that while few young people have had violence happen to them personally, 33.2 per cent of respondents stated that they think of violent events that they or their friends experienced sometimes, often or very often. This awareness of and sensitivity to violence in their lives or those of friends and family is likely to have an influence on their mental health. And while those who were directly affected by the war have more access to resources, those living with the consequences, or with other sources of violent conflict, risk being left out.



# > CHAPTER 5: YOUTH, POLITICS AND AGENCY

A clear majority of youth (63.2 per cent) identified democracy as the best political system for Sri Lanka. The highest percentage was from Malayaha Tamils (80 per cent), with 75 per cent Sri Lankan Tamils and 73 per cent Muslims. Interestingly, the majority community – Sinhalese – show only 64 per cent believing democracy is the best political system for their country. The young people with a strong preference for a democratic system believe it is capable of establishing a strong economy, providing basic welfare, protecting human rights, valuing diversity, building alliances with other countries and even ending corruption.

It should be noted that the second most popular option – social democracy<sup>10</sup> – was thought to

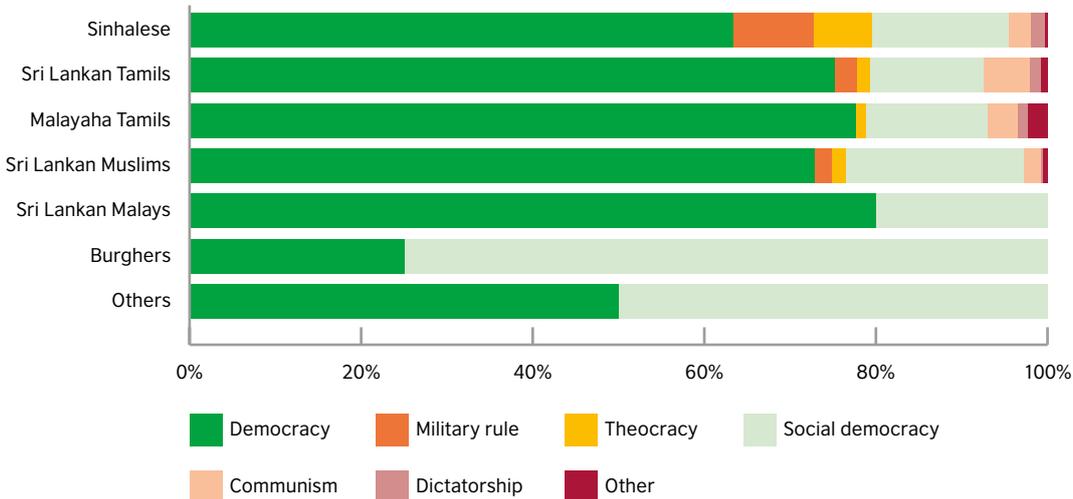
be the best by only 15.6 per cent. More ‘extreme’ views garnered only less support: 5.4 per cent that think theocracy is the best system, 7.4 per cent identified military rule and 1.5 per cent suggested dictatorship.

While they acknowledged democracy and/or social democracy as best to deliver strong economic growth, human rights and cultural diversity, young people identified military dictatorship as best for standing against negative foreign influence and increasing security within Sri Lanka. We should also remember that only an average of 15 per cent of the survey participants were certain that democracy has been a benefit for them, their families, and to their ethnic and religious communities. The majority

were uncertain whether democracy has been good for them; 36.4 per cent stated democracy has ‘probably’ been good for Sri Lanka and only 28.9 per cent were certain of this.

Their uncertainty regarding the benefits of democracy in delivering real benefits stems from a real world that they see as unjust, saturated with nepotism, and discriminating based on ethnicity, religion and class. The sentiment is alarming as several studies for over a decade have illustrated the sense of frustration felt by young Sri Lankans (Presidential Commission, 1990; Hettige and Mayer, 2002; Thangarajah, 2002; Amarasuriya, 2010).

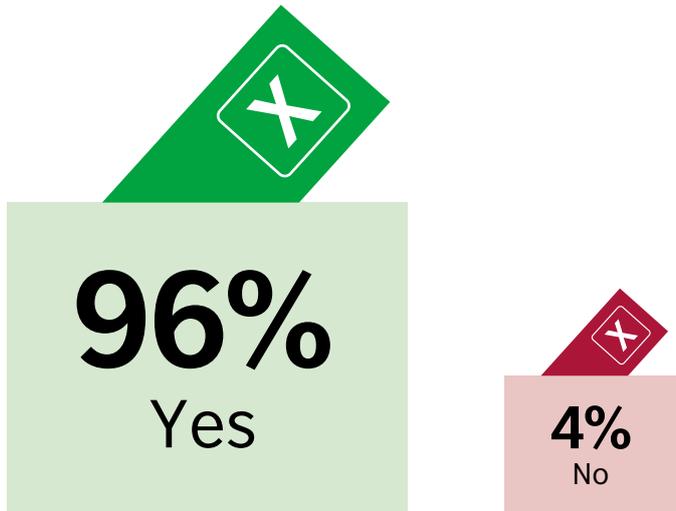
**Figure 8:** What do you think is the best political system for Sri Lanka?



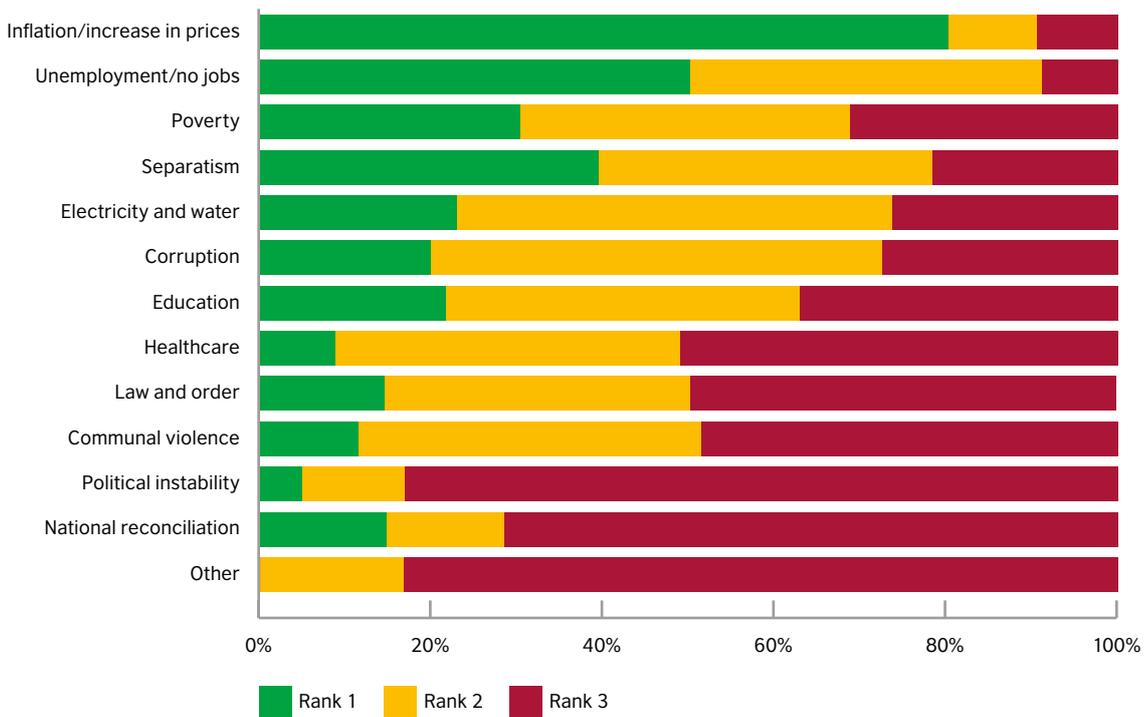
<sup>10</sup> > Defined by Merriam Webster as a political movement advocating a gradual and peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism by democratic means; or a democratic welfare state that incorporates both capitalist and socialist practices <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20democracy>



**Figure 9:** Do you think that you have a responsibility to vote as a citizen?



**Figure 10:** What are the most important issues that Sri Lanka has been experiencing in the post-war context?



Sri Lankan youth feel strongly about their civic duties, with over 90 per cent stating that they have a responsibility as citizens to vote. When it comes to voting, the main reasons some youth avoid voting are dislike of the political candidates or the political parties, and a lack of interest in politics. In the case of the younger respondents, it is linked to not knowing how and where to vote. The spate of financial scandals that have overshadowed the successive post-war governments in Sri Lanka are a significant turn-off.

Many young people are also interested in political events and issues taking place in the country, with 47 per cent stating they are very or somewhat interested in political events and issues. However, 31.9 per cent – no small number – stated that they are neutral regarding political issues.

Corruption is a critical issue for young Sri Lankans and they identify being an honest person as a defining quality of a political leader. Focus group participants shared strong criticism of corruption and expressed their disappointment with current political leadership for failing to uphold such values. Not surprisingly, young Sri Lankans see corruption as a pervasive problem that hinders every aspect of their lives, and they identified ending corruption as the key issue in deciding their vote.

Young people in Sri Lanka identify the most important qualities that they look for when voting for a leader as being honest and free of corruption. They see corruption in the powerful and in the political classes as failing to address the needs of the vulnerable. This is a sentiment that Sri Lankan youth continue to express throughout the generations (Amarasuriya, 2010;

UNDP, 2014). Other concerns include improving education, improving employment and improving healthcare, and these also help to shape their vote, as well as reducing poverty and providing equal opportunities for all.

Sri Lanka's youth would also like to see more young people in prominent positions in political parties, and would likely be attracted to a party with a good youth policy. While each political party has a youth wing, youth on their own have little voice. Although a youth quota was introduced in 1990, it was recently removed in the Local Governments Elections Amendments Act of 2016. There remains strong dominance of older politicians; the absence of youth does not help the situation.

Young Sri Lankans also strongly feel that the country needs more women involved in prominent positions in political parties. Underrepresentation of women in politics has been a contentious issue in Sri Lanka. Although the country produced the world's first female prime minister, currently just under six per cent of seats in parliament are held by women; which is low compared to other Asian countries: Nepal with 33.2 per cent, Bangladesh with 19.7 per cent and India with 10.9 per cent (UNDP, 2014). Following long-term advocacy on the issue by women's groups and other civil society actors, in the 2018 local government elections a quota of 25 per cent of seats for women was introduced.

In the post-war context, youth highlight inflation/increase in prices, unemployment and political instability as the most important issues. FGDs also highlighted religious tensions as a serious problem for the country at present.

## Youth agency and activism

As youth have been at the forefront of violent insurgencies in the past, the survey examined youth activism in their own community, including the use of violence and opportunities to serve as change agents. In the last 12 months, the most popular activities which respondents have been involved with are youth groups, student groups and sports groups. Some are also active members of religious groups and work-related groups, with credit groups, political groups and trade unions coming last. Recreation, emotional comfort and knowledge sharing were identified as the main benefits obtained through these groups.

Young people said they had mainly received support from family, neighbours and friends for these activities, while not receiving support from politicians, community leaders and charitable organisations/NGOs.

Looking at what community action entails, young people reported little involvement in joining with community members to address a communal problem or common issue, with under ten per cent saying they had been heavily involved in this way (although 22.5 per cent said they had been minimally involved).

Nevertheless, many (38 per cent) have played a significant role in resolving conflicts in their communities and just under 30 per cent plan to help in resolving conflicts in future. Only 9.3 per cent thought that the community does not see a role for young people in resolving conflict.

At a national level, 85 per cent of young Sri Lankans think that the next generation is ready to play an active role in peace and reconciliation, yet they do not see a clear place for them in the current process. In some instances, Azmi et al. (2013) note that collective action by youth is viewed with suspicion, especially in directly war-affected areas. Youth would like to learn more about other communities, interact with other communities and be equipped with skills to resolve problems in their own communities. The limited number of young people who are active in this way find that their efforts are being obstructed by various parties.

*'We have spoken and solved the problem of land resettlement for Muslims in Mannar among the youth and with the communities, but the politicians intervened and objected to it.'*

Male FGD participant,  
Muslim, Mannar

*'When we organise activities to support peace and reconciliation such as intercultural events, some people from our communities are asking us why we are getting involved in this, etc. We are not getting any encouragement to continue with such work.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Malayaha Tamil, Badulla

*'Everyone should be given training and awareness on handling conflict. We are a multi-plural society.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Malayaha Tamil, Kegalle

Under 20 per cent of youth have attended programmes organised by the National Youth Council or other government body on reconciliation, highlighting the outreach limitations of current government programmes on promoting reconciliation. Yet the desire to engage is there, with youth suggesting participation in problem-solving forums, multicultural and multi-religious clubs and societies in their neighbourhood, citizenship education at schools and societies, and dialogues with youth of other communities.

Positively, young Sri Lankans do not recognise violence as a viable means of resolving problems, despite the relative closeness of the end of the war. In addition, youth are on average exposed to violence of some sort at least once a week through television and online. Yet, when asked about their tendency to use violence and how society views their use of violence, the majority do not condone the use of violence, with only 4.1 per cent of respondents saying that they participate in the use of force or violence for a political cause.

Also positively, a clear majority – 93 per cent – said they were not encouraged by religious leaders, political leaders or leaders in their village or neighbourhood to participate in or commit acts of violence. While they acknowledge political beliefs as one of the main motivations for youth to commit acts of violence (along with defending the community or ethnic group, and revenge), only a small number (three per cent) put the blame for violence on political leaders. Some (6.5 per cent) also identify friends and colleagues or the media (6.3 per cent).

In general, land disputes, political rivalry, ethnic conflict and religious extremism are seen as the leading causes of disputes in Sri Lanka. Although there is a strong perception among youth that there is a lack of justice, most of the respondents recognise that it is the police or law enforcement that should be primarily responsible for resolving serious disputes in the village or neighbourhood. However, this opposes their view that there is a general breakdown in the implementation of law and justice in the country.

Looking ahead, 80 per cent of Sri Lankan youth state that Sri Lankans still need to work to achieve peace and reconciliation; 90 per cent recognise that responsibility for peace and reconciliation lies with all Sri Lankans. While they recognise the weaknesses in the peace and reconciliation process, they seek roles for themselves in that process. In focus groups discussions, they also restated that there are not enough youth-focused programmes in this area, despite the fact that both the government (National Youth Council – youth exchange programmes, school education on reconciliation) and some leading organisations (Sri Lankan Unites, etc.) run such programmes. What is positive is that they remain optimistic, recognising that conflict between ethnic and religious groups is a threat to peace in Sri Lanka, but that this problem can be solved.

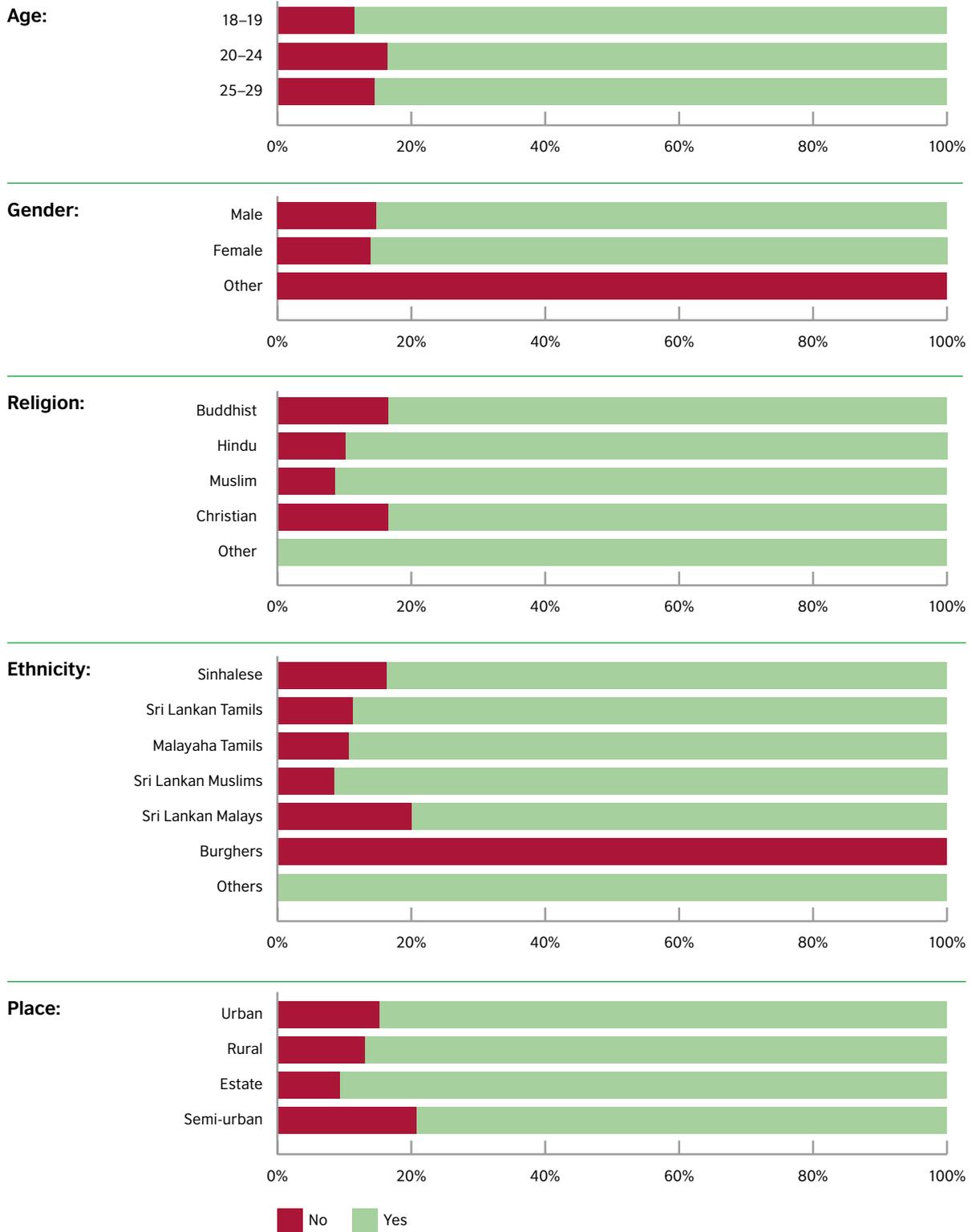
*'Only few young people are selected and only the same group of young people come.'*

Male FGD participant,  
Muslim, Puttalam

*'There is not enough follow-up.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Kurunegala

**Figure 11:** Is the next generation ready to play an active role in reconciliation?





# CHAPTER 6: RECONCILIATION AND THE FUTURE

## Responses to the official peace and reconciliation process

As noted previously, Sri Lankan youth are clearly disconnected from the official peace and reconciliation process, with little awareness of actions taken by the current and the previous governments. The majority of young Sri Lankans had not heard of the key government initiatives such as the LLRC, ONUR and OMP or the National Policy on Reconciliation.

While the latter are relatively new mechanisms, it is alarming that the knowledge on the former is also so low, as they were established in 2010 and 2015 respectively.

And even for the young Sri Lankans who did know about these mechanisms, they had very little trust in them. There is a strong sense of disillusionment towards the government's commitment to peace and reconciliation.

*'These are only for show, these steps are not genuine actions to promote peace and reconciliation.'*

**Female FGD participant, Malayaha Tamil, Matale**

Knowledge of the LLRC was highest in the districts of Mullaitivu, Batticaloa, Kalutara, Polonnaruwa and Matara, with 80 per cent of respondents from Mullaitivu having heard of the commission. Yet in the district of Badulla, 86 per cent had not heard of the LLRC.

A majority of youth have not heard of the OMP Act passed in 2018, with 77.9 per cent unaware of the tasks of the OMP.

## Sense of safety after the end of the war

Central to understanding the next generation's response to the changes in the post-war climate and the peace and reconciliation process is their sense of safety and security. A majority (82 per cent) of youth felt that there had been an improvement in personal freedom since the end of the war. The districts with the highest responses were Mannar, Anuradhapura, Rathnapura, Polonnaruwa and Monaragala, and overall, this was felt by 86 per cent of Malayaha Tamils, 85 per cent of Sinhalese, 83 per cent of Muslims and 72 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils. Just 6.6 per cent of respondents said that personal security conditions have worsened (a little or a great deal), centred around the districts of Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Killinochchi, Puttalam and Jaffna. The ethnic community most likely to think things were worse were Sri Lankan Tamils, at 14 per cent.

While the majority of youth feel safe post-war, and we have already explored in Chapter 4 their direct experience of violence, there are groups of youth who feel unsafe. While more than half say they feel safe when they are at home at night (without much gender variation) those living in Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Puttalam, Killinochchi and Batticaloa were less likely to report this.

Still, the majority also feel safe on the streets and also that life is safer for most people in Sri Lanka. But where there was discussion about why some people might disagree, youth attributed the lack of an overwhelming or sweeping sense of security for young people to the intermittent communal violence observed in post-war Sri Lanka. For Sinhalese and Muslim youth, the end of the war mainly brought about a sense of security, but this has

been undermined by the increase in communal violence across the country. There has been an increase in the number of extremist groups from all ethnic groups. These include Sinhalese nationalist groups such as Ravana Balaya and Bodu Bala Sena, identified by young people in the south of the country. Youth in the north and east identified the paramilitary group Ava.

*'Although we like to live in harmony, there are pressure groups that create problems among the community. The incident in Digana this year was a personal matter. But pressure groups got involved and blew it out of proportion.'*

**Male FGD participant, Muslim, Kandy**

In terms of engagement with the security forces, only a small percentage (under two per cent) said they felt very unsafe, while 44.5 per cent stated they felt very safe. Yet, from those who chose to reply, a very unsafe majority were from Sri Lankan Tamils. Contrastingly, those who chose very safe were the Sinhalese. Another interesting finding was that none of the Malayaha Tamils chose very unsafe – possibly a reflection of not having to deal with the security forces in a conflict situation. Only 10.2 per cent said they feel very safe talking to former LTTE fighters, with 27.2 per cent said they feel very unsafe. It's important to note that most Sinhalese participants were uncomfortable when talking to former LTTE fighters, likely because most Sinhalese have not had direct interactions with them.

Notably, for youth in the estates, the end of the war has brought about a great sense of freedom. During the war, many Malayaha were arrested as many people from their community did not have identity cards.



## Violence against women and children

Although the surveys did not show up significant gender differences in direct experience of violence and in sense of personal security, female focus group participants noted that women do feel unsafe, especially in the north, which they ascribed to the weak rule of law. Some male and female participants noticed that violence against women and children had increased in the north compared to the period of LTTE rule. During LTTE rule, perpetrators of sexual violence were punished immediately, but now there is delay in engaging with democratic and bureaucratic procedures. It should be noted that this view was challenged by others, who stated that the process of enforcing the rule of law is very slow in all parts of the country. Female participants from across the country stated that they feel insecure due to the high prevalence of drug-related violence, and there were discussions about the use of cheap narcotics and the influence of violence in general and sexual violence in particular. The nexus between gangs, politicians and drugs was also highlighted.

*'We have no way of protecting ourselves and it feels like there is a deliberate weak implementation of law. I wonder whether it is an attempt to destroy our culture and values.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Sri Lankan Tamil, Killinochchi

It is important to note that in the north, in response to weak rule of law, there is a rise in gangs such as *Awa*, *Danu Rock* and *Victor*. Some participants showed their disapproval of these gangs, identifying them as a paramilitary groups.

## Changes in ethnic relations

Another element in the reconciliation process is the effort needed to bring people and communities together. The research suggests there is still a way to go on this. When asked how comfortable they are when talking to other ethnic groups, around 50 per cent of the young are comfortable, and this was highest in the districts of Mannar, Killinochchi, Nuwara Eliya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Only 2.9 per cent of youth reported being very uncomfortable when talking with other ethnic groups, particularly those from Hambanthota, Matara, Kalutara, Monaragala and Polonnaruwa. It is interesting to note that youth from the north who were directly involved in the civil war are more comfortable interacting with other ethnic groups than the predominantly Sinhalese areas.

The majority of youth did not find it difficult to engage with strangers or with the practices specific to a cultural group. During focus groups, youth clearly stated that when they actually interact with youth from different ethnic and religious backgrounds it is easy for them to understand each other. They are also aware of what keeps the

difference alive, and in the focus groups many clearly stated that due to a school system that segregates them ethnically, they have little chance to get to know the other communities. Teaching with available history textbooks that have divided histories, language and segregated schooling are impediments to peace and reconciliation. In the post-war context, efforts are being taken to rectify this challenge.

*'I studied at the Kandy Girls High school, we have all three language mediums and students from all communities interact with each other unlike in schools that have only one medium.'*

Female FGD participant,  
Malayaha Tamil, Kandy

Despite this, 75 per cent felt there had been an improvement in ethnic relations after the end of the civil war in 2009, with the districts of Trincomalee, Ratnapura, Mannar, Monaragala, and Killinochchi leading the way. Yet 11.2 per cent thought relations have worsened, mainly in the districts of Badulla, Kegalle, Matale, Vavuniya and Anuradhapura.

## Responding to post-war mechanisms

A majority of youth state that their families and friends have observed peace and reconciliation since the end of the civil war. But the FGDs reveal that reconciliation means different things to youth from different backgrounds. For Sri Lankan Tamil youth directly affected by the war, reconciliation is gaining equal rights, along with compensation or reparations. For Sinhalese youth from villages closer to the north and east who were directly affected by the war, it is the ability to move forward with their lives and also to obtain equitable compensation or reparations. For Sinhalese youth in the south, it is with the demand for a separate homeland by the northern Sri Lankan Tamils. For Muslim youth in Mannar, it is getting back their land from the north. For Malayaha youth, it is being accepted in one Tamil identity and achieving economic dignity.

In terms of addressing the war through remembrance, there was no agreement as to whether it is good to discuss past atrocities. In the FGDs, some participants felt that talking about the past was only prolonging the animosities and passing them on to the next generation. War memorials were a particularly sensitive topic.

*‘Sinhalese historical sites in the post-war Sri Lanka have been removed with the aim of building national reconciliation. I am sure that by removing them, reconciliation will not happen in the near future.’*

**Male FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Polonnaruwa**

War memorials built to celebrate the military’s victory are viewed as heroic by youth from Sinhalese backgrounds, but for Sri Lankan Tamil youth, there are no war memorials to celebrate the LTTE, whom they see were fighting for the rights of their community. While they would like to see memorials that can be commemorated by all communities, during the island-wide final FGD, the general consensus was in not having any memorials, as they view these as a dividing factor rather than unifying Sri Lankans.

There was more agreement on reparations, with 85.9 per cent believing that reparations should be given to those affected by war. They identified financial compensation and physical rehabilitation as the main forms of reparations. However, focus groups participants pointed out that compensation should be allocated in an equitable as well as in a consultative manner.

*‘We were also directly affected by the war, not only the Tamil community in the north and east.’*

**Female FGD participant,  
Sinhalese, Trincomalee**

Around 75 per cent were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the government’s action on the release of detainees of war and the rehabilitation work done for them after their release. Yet challenges do remain that go beyond compensation. For many LTTE ex-combatants, some of whom were recruited as children, re-entry into society has not been smooth. Women ex-combatants in particular have faced problems due to some of the

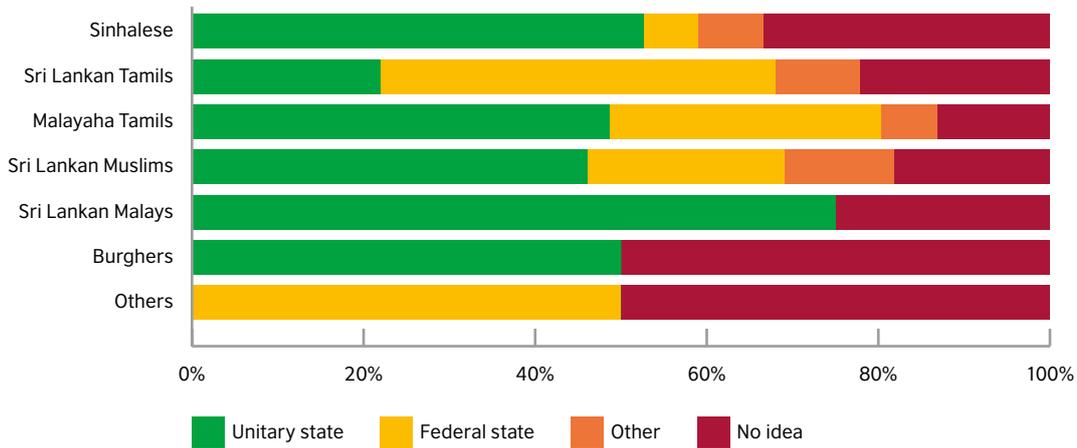
rehabilitation mechanisms (such as social enterprise programmes introduced by the government in the post-war era), lacking social acceptance by the rest of their own community.

## Areas of improvements after the war

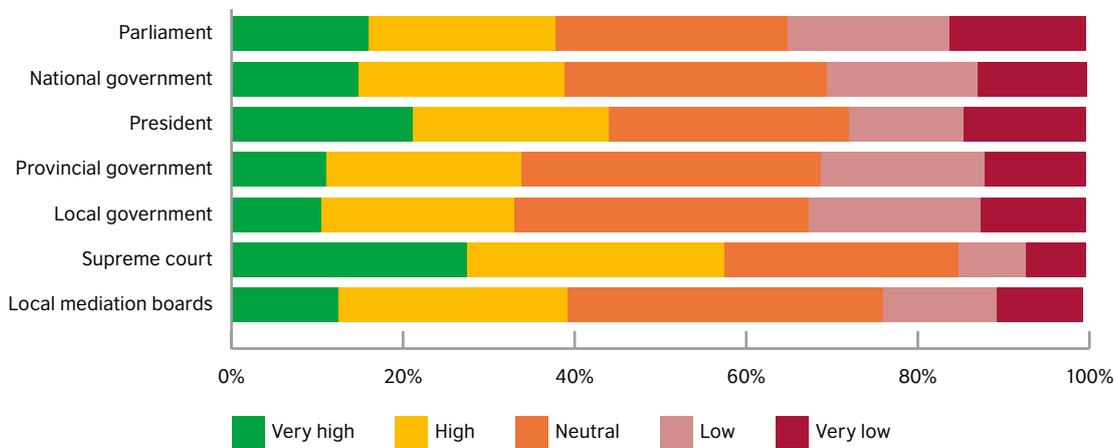
Overall, Sri Lankan youth observe a slight improvement in the country’s situation after the end of the war, with nearly 70 per cent noting that there is a slight or considerable improvement in the way the country is governed. However, around 15 per cent say governance has worsened. Around 50 per cent of youth state that the provision of equal rights improved slightly after the end of the war. They also note a slight improvement in other social aspects such as the judiciary, police and religious institutions. Many respondents stated that there is a slight improvement in performance of the police and in the performance of the justice system. However, there was strong criticism on the performance of the police and rule of law during the FGDs.

Young people also noted that access to resources such as food, clean water, electricity and basic services have improved following the end of the war. Yet they were critical of the ad hoc development projects introduced by politicians and felt that the requirements and resources of the local communities had been ignored. Many also said prices of fuel and consumer goods along with government services have worsened as well.

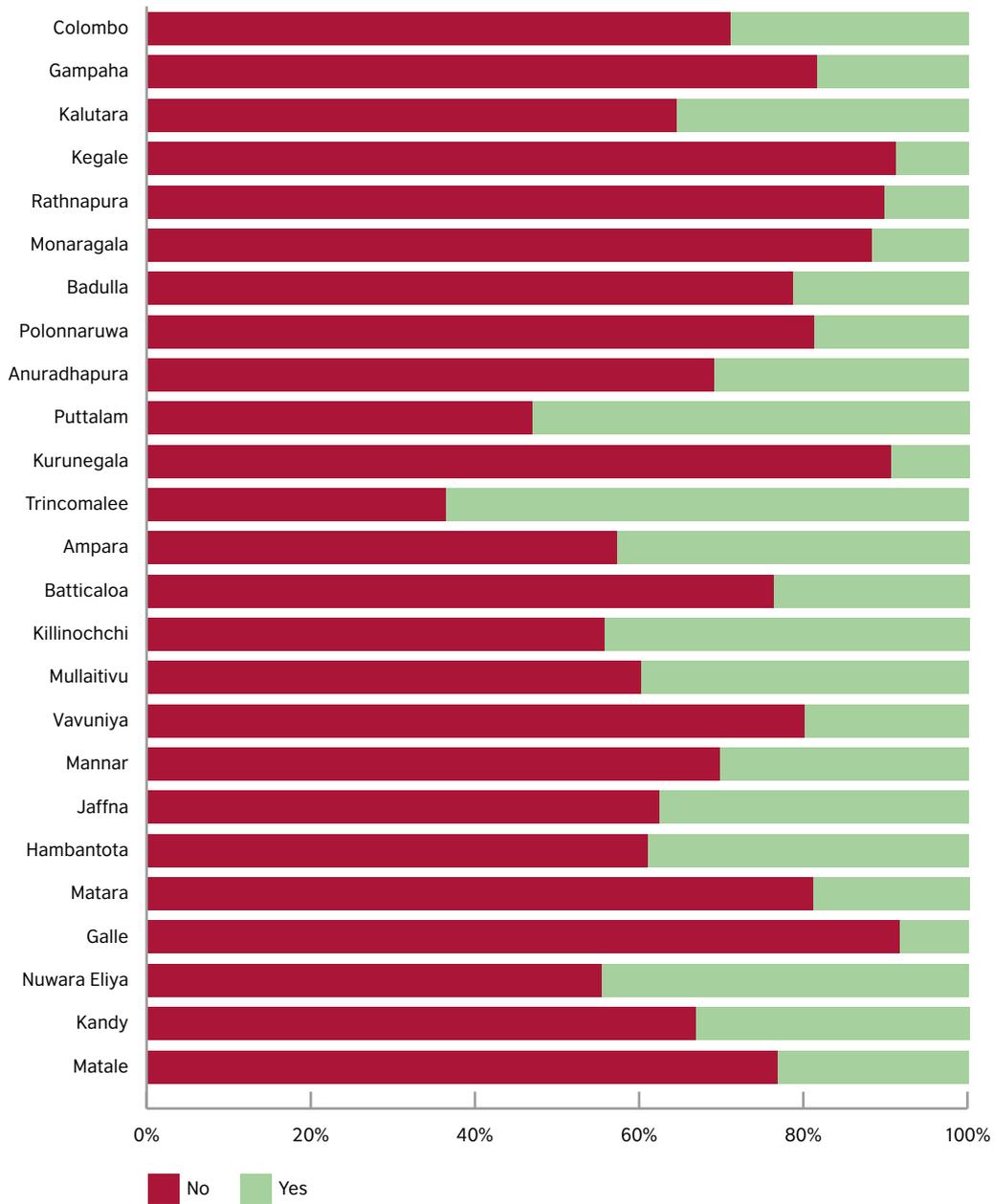
**Figure 12:** Do you believe in...



**Figure 13:** Confidence in institutions towards the process of peace and reconciliation



**Figure 14:** Do you believe things in Sri Lanka are heading in the right direction?



In addition, while they see some improvements for Sri Lanka post-war, young people are highly disappointed with the political crisis in the country that took place on 26 October 2018. During the final FGDs, they responded negatively to the President's actions in appointing a new Prime Minister and setting in place a constitutional crisis. They noted that trust in the democratic system had been greatly undermined and saw the crisis as further deterioration of political stability. Yet some participants retained faith in the judiciary, with others wanting to find out how the crisis would unfold, and to see how the principles of checks and balances in a democracy would work out.

### Constitutional reform

On constitutional reform, youth were split in the survey responses as to whether Sri Lanka needs a new constitution to share power among all the national communities, as part of establishing a reconciliation process supported by all: 49.3 per cent agreed that such a constitution was needed while 50.1 per cent disagreed.

Notably, nearly 70 per cent said they are not happy with the much-publicised constitution reform process, as well as the nature of government and power sharing initiated by the 2015 government. Only 43 per cent said that they believe in the 'unitary state' idea, which is the main concept of those

engaged in the constitution drafting process; 14.5 per cent say that they believe in the 'federal state'. More youth from the Sinhalese-majority areas support the unitary system, while the youth who prefer the federal system are from the Tamil-majority areas.

As well as this suggesting that young people are in some way following the example of the older generations in splitting along party and community lines, we also see that more than one-third of those who participated in the survey did not support either political frame. While eight per cent had other ideas or solutions to the system of government, 26.5 per cent said that they have 'no idea', so while this remains a core issue for the future of the country, more than a quarter of young people are not engaged with it.

### Next steps for peace

Despite the lack of engagement with reconciliation mechanisms previously discussed, Sri Lankan youth do believe that national institutions, such as parliament, national government, president, provincial government, local government, the Supreme Court and local mediation boards have a positive role to play in the peace and reconciliation process. However, they do not seem to have a lot of confidence in these institutions.

In addition to 'formal' reconciliation mechanisms, the ability to participate in economic development (through

employment) was identified as the most important step needed to mobilise youth to achieve a peaceful, united and stable Sri Lankan society. Next was providing equal opportunity to find employment without political discrimination, with reducing poverty among young people in third. Eradicating discrimination was also identified as an important step. This highlights the findings of this report and previous studies that youth feel discriminated against when it comes to economic opportunity, based on various dimensions such as ethnicity, class, gender and religion, as well as the prevalence of corruption and nepotism.

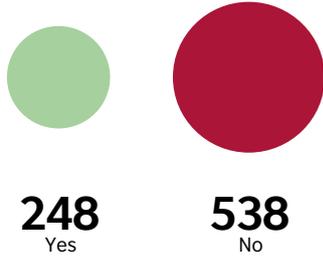
### Future direction

Most youth believe that the rest of the world views Sri Lanka somewhat favourably. However, 73.7 per cent of young Sri Lankans, both male and female, do not believe that Sri Lanka is heading in the right direction. Most prominent are the Sinhalese, at 82 per cent; the numbers drop to 59 per cent for Sri Lankan Tamils, 58 per cent for Muslims and 50 per cent for Malayala Tamils. They identify the inability to complete education due to economic hardships, unemployment, discrimination in finding a job in the government sector, and the high cost of higher education and corruption in public institutions as the core problems faced by the next generation in Sri Lanka.

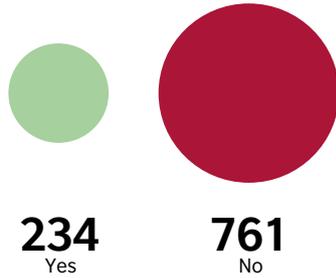
**Figure 15:** Do you believe things in Sri Lanka are heading in the right direction?

**Age**

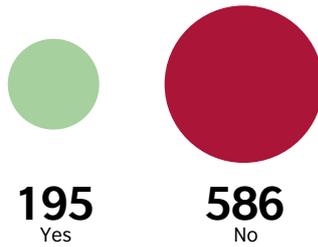
18–19



20–24

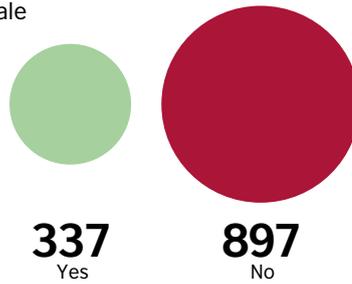


25–29

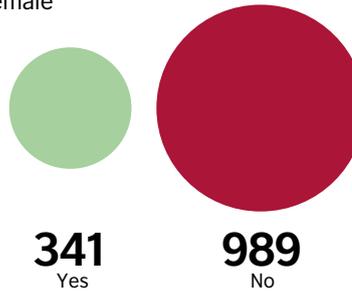


**Gender**

Male



Female



# > CONCLUSION

While a decade has passed since the end of the civil war in 2009, young people in Sri Lanka still live in a period of transition. Youth voices and participation in this period are critical for sustainable peace and reconciliation. *Next Generation Sri Lanka* examined how Sri Lanka's youth has responded to the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process and these changes were analysed through personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions (Lederach et al., 2007). The British Council and Sarvodaya are working to provide a platform for young people to voice their concerns and to effect policy changes during this crucial period. With a main focus on conflict, peace and reconciliation, the research has produced many findings; some confirm existing research, while others are new insights to the changing facets of Sri Lankan youth.

Even though they harbour doubts and concerns, young Sri Lankans have a strong sense of pride in their country and are ready and willing to serve as agents of change in the process of reconciliation. It is important to seize and direct that positive energy of the next generation in order to develop sustainable peace, promote reconciliation and establish harmony.

Young people in Sri Lanka hold a mix of positive and negative attitudes and experiences regarding the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process. They have a positive outlook regarding their own experience of peace and reconciliation, noting that personal safety, security and freedom of movement have improved. Nevertheless, security concerns remain

in the north and east as well as in the rest of the country due to weak rule of law and intermittent religion based communal violence. For women and girls from the north and east, personal safety in the post-war era is more of an issue; the prevalence of cheap drugs and the presence of gangs also present security concerns.

They are proud of their Sri Lankan identity, but apprehensive concerning their future, with issues such as unemployment, corruption in public institutions and rise of religious tensions playing a role. They do see a strong role for themselves in Sri Lanka's electoral process, and while they may find it hard to see the direct benefits of democracy, most see it as the best political system for post-war Sri Lanka. This is despite the fact that corruption remains a critical issue for young Sri Lankans, and there are significant trust issues between youth and government institutions because of this.

Importantly, our research suggests that youth in post-war Sri Lanka do not see violence as a means to achieve their ends. They are mainly positive towards other communities, which has the potential to support a change in inter-community relations. They see themselves as different to previous generations, whom they characterise as holding cultural and religious biases, and are willing to play an active role in their own communities – if they had improved direction and support.

The research reveals the structural dimensions that led to the civil war and other unrest are still in place and have not been transformed significantly – if at all. The official instruments of peace and reconciliation have not included

youth in a meaningful way, which has meant they have not been able to engage in a way that our research suggests they want to. A clear gap exists in opportunities for youth to actively and positively contribute to the official peace and reconciliation mechanisms in post-war Sri Lanka. This research suggests there is untapped potential; that young Sri Lankans are ready to play an active role in the peace and reconciliation process, but need avenues to be opened up by the government, relevant ministries, policymakers and civil society. The diversity of aspirations regarding reconciliation should be factored into the reconciliation mechanisms that are currently being designed and implemented.

Beyond the peace and reconciliation process, we believe that youth volunteerism (in areas such as promoting intercultural understanding, education, environmental protection and understanding fundamental rights) are potential areas for youth engagement and participation, and will encourage the development of young people as civil and political actors.

We believe Next Generation has opened up avenues for further research; this study uncovered a number of areas beyond the scope of our focus. This includes the suggestion that frustrations related to education, employment and social media have significant impact on the mental well-being of modern youth. Mental well-being is an underlying yet crucial issue for young Sri Lankans, and the potential impact of negative mental well-being on the country's youth merits urgent exploration.

The evolution of Sri Lankan identity should also be further investigated, as responses to the question of identity threw up a number of issues. The next generation of the country's youth is growing up in an environment where the civil war may be a matter of the past, but its impact is still felt on their sense of self and community. This may well affect peace and reconciliation efforts and requires sensitive research.

The suggestion of a shift in job preference away from the state sector is worth further exploration, bearing in mind the potential impact of growing strength in English language uptake, social media and technology and an increase of job opportunities in the private sector – and also the continued pull of the informal sector.

All of the above should aim to provide research to support policies that reflect the needs of Sri Lanka's next generation, and will add to the rich material that has been produced through this report. Designing youth-responsive policies is key to ensure the right and proper contribution of young people to their country's future.

## Recommendations

The core question behind this research was **How is Sri Lanka's next generation responding to the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process?** Therefore we have chosen to centre in on the policy recommendations that address this area.

## Peace and reconciliation

- Working together, the government, civil society organisations, academics and expert practitioners should explore the design of justice mechanisms (such as truth commissions and/or transitional justice mechanisms) that will enable the citizens of this country to move forward to a just and equitable future for all Sri Lankan citizens.
- As part of that process, the government and other stakeholders must ensure that these mechanisms meaningfully engage young people, particularly those in remote or other hard-to-reach areas.
- The government, partners and stakeholders should ensure that existing programmes and institutions, such as the LLRC, establish outreach programmes to raise their profile with Sri Lankan youth.
- The government should establish a national dialogue on conflict memorialisation, allowing those who lost their lives to be remembered in a manner that brings communities together, rather than fostering division.
- Along with its reparation efforts, the government should develop economic, social and psychological programmes to reconcile and rehabilitate communities affected by violent conflict, with a focus on mental as well as physical health of those affected, both directly and indirectly.

- The government should train all security forces on peaceful co-existence and genuinely establish measures to increase sense of security for all citizens irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, location or any other factor.

Clearly, the research provided a wealth of data and the participants provided the research team with much to consider. Beyond the issues of conflict, peace and reconciliation – though we observe that these have far-reaching impact – the research examined many facets of the lives of young people, including education, employment and political engagement. From the many findings could be crafted a number of recommendations – too many for this report.

Following discussion with the Next Generation Taskforce, the remaining recommendation is for the formation of a National Action Plan for Youth. Taking the Next Generation research as a springboard, the owners of the National Action Plan – we believe this should be the government – should continue this consultative process, particularly ensuring young people are meaningfully engaged in the process. It should look at the areas identified herein and assign and empower the relevant ministries and departments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to formulate its enactment. We believe this meets the aspirations of Next Generation, which is to 'enable the voices of Sri Lankan youth from all communities to be heard within the wider society... [and] ultimately contribute to policies that address their needs'.

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# > APPENDIX 1: NEXT GENERATION SRI LANKA METHODOLOGY

A multi-dimensional approach was adopted to understand how youth have responded to changes in a post-war context, along with understanding their attitudes and aspirations. A mixed method, composed of both qualitative and quantitative tools to obtain primary and secondary data, was used. Thus, the research framework consisted of a preliminary desk review, a comprehensive survey, FGDs and in-depth interviews. To obtain frank opinions of youth from diverse communities, all data-gathering tools were translated into Sinhalese and Tamil languages, the two main local languages.

## The research question

As part of the Next Generation research series in Sri Lanka, the British Council's objective was to understand *Sri Lankan youths' aspirations/knowledge/attitudes/behaviour/political participation/engagement with the government and how they identify themselves with the post-war context and reconciliation process*. The research findings will be used to advocate for policies and conditions that support the next generation in becoming creative, fulfilled and active citizens. The baseline survey design, implementation and analysis focused specifically on these dimensions. The focus of the baseline was carefully narrowed down to the question **How is Sri Lanka's next generation responding to the changes brought about by the peace and reconciliation process?**

## Research tools

- **Desk review:** a preliminary desk review was undertaken from 15 April to 15 May 2018. The main objective of the desk review was to understand the extant literature related to youth and reconciliation in post-war Sri Lanka to develop the baseline research. The review was preliminary in nature and the research team examined documents located on the web, published books, journal articles and other available reports. These documents were drawn from various backgrounds: academic researchers, international donor agencies, inter-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, practitioners and government reports.
- **Field questionnaire and FGD open questionnaire guideline:** questions and tools used in Next Generation research studies in other countries in the South Asian region such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, along with the studies from Kenya and the UK, were helpful in designing the field research questionnaire. The questionnaire attempted to understand how young Sri Lankans view the quality of their education and economic conditions, their identity, attitudes towards diverse groups, vision for the country and how they respond to the changes related to the peace and reconciliation process. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections: *About you, socio-economic background, peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka,*

*politics in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka yesterday: violence and conflict, Sri Lanka today: responding to change and Sri Lanka tomorrow: conflict prevention.* A set of open-ended questions to be used for the FGDs and in-depth interviews were also developed along similar themes.

- A pilot test of the field questionnaire was completed among all age, gender and ethnic strata of the research sample. Through the pilot test, the enumerators were able to identify areas to improve in the questionnaire. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the team went through several rounds of final revision of questions for both questionnaires. After the revisions, the field questionnaire and the open-ended questions were shared with the British Council and Sarvodaya for feedback. Once the British Council and Sarvodaya provided their feedback, the questionnaires were translated into Sinhalese and Tamil.

## Sampling

- The field questionnaire survey was carried out among a representative national sample of 2,636 youth in the age group of 18–29 from the total population of 22,409,381 people in Sri Lanka. A stratified random sampling technique was used to identify the sample. The size of the sample for each district was based on proportional allocation of urban, rural, age, ethnicity and gender. The youth population in Sri Lanka (18–29 years) is approximately 3,847,914; equivalent to 17.2 per cent of the total population. The sample size as a percentage of the youth population in Sri Lanka is 0.068 per cent. The age group of 18–29 was divided into subgroups of 18–19, 20–24 and 25–29 to ensure significance. A minimum of 250 youth from each of the nine provinces were selected, and they represented all 25 districts of Sri Lanka.
- FGDs were held in each of the nine provinces of the country to gain insight on regional variations. This variation is particularly important due to the history of war, exposure to violence and recent communal riots experienced in the country. In-depth interviews were undertaken with youth identified during the questionnaire survey based on their interest in participating.

## Confidentiality

- All participants were informed of the modalities of the research tools. They were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of full confidentiality.

## Analysis

- The analysis was an iterative process that involved several rounds of reflective discussions. Both qualitative and quantitative data were segregated by socio-economic background, type of education, ethnic identity, gender and age, experiences of ethnic and other conflict to mirror a comprehensive picture of Sri Lanka's youths' attitudes and aspirations. Quantitative data was analysed using the statistical packages RStudio. The qualitative data from focus groups was examined through a thematic analysis to illustrate the trends and unique characteristics in the thinking patterns of Sri Lanka's next generation. Notes were taken in Sinhalese and Tamil language for each FGD and these were compared with notes taken by the research team. Several of the FGDs were carried out in both languages. Brainstorming sessions were held among the research team members and regular feedback sessions with field enumerators were helpful for data verification and identifying important trends.

## Limitations of the study and general comments

- The study does not include views of youth in prisons and youth from indigenous groups in Sri Lanka.
- The shadow of imminent elections and the background of political instability were a drawback for the study in some instances. Several enumerators were asked whether they were trying to find out how the next generation will vote in the upcoming election.
- While the majority of participants were open and pleased with the organisers of the research, a few refused to participate, stating that NGOs were interfering in the functioning of the country.
- A number of respondents thought that the economy of the country should be prioritised rather than spending time on this type of research.
- Some youth refused to participate in the survey and some even started filling out the questionnaire but stopped halfway through.



## University of Peradeniya

The University of Peradeniya is a state university in Sri Lanka located at the foothills of the Hanthana mountain range in Kandy, Sri Lanka. First established as the University of Ceylon in 1942, the first university of Sri Lanka, it is now one of the 15 state universities administered by the University Grants Commission. The University of Peradeniya consists of nine faculties, of which the Faculty of Arts is renowned for its academic and research excellence.



## Sarvadoya

Established in 1958, Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya – popularly known as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement – is the largest non-government development organisation in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya has a focus and impressive track record on community empowerment, mobilisation, development and national reconciliation. With its holistic approach, nurtured by Buddhist and Gandhian philosophy, embracing a multi-ethnic and multi-religious context, it promotes development and educational solutions that simultaneously cater to social, cultural, economic and political needs of the people in all regions of Sri Lanka. Over a period of 60 years, Sarvodaya’s programmes and initiatives have reached over 15,000 villages in the entire country, with over 3,000 villages being empowered to serve as self-governed focal points for development (*gram-swaraj* – ‘self-governing villages’).



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[www.britishcouncil.org/research/next-generation](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research/next-generation)

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