

Cover Story



Female leadership in community development

Chamath Lavinda Wickramarathna

Vice President, Young Professionals' Alliance for Health, Sri Lanka

*Correspondence: chamathlavinda@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4160-6574>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/jccpsl.v29i1.8603>

Received on 2 Mar 2023

Accepted on 3 Mar 2023

International Women's Day was held on 8th March 2023 (1). Women play various roles in the community. The capture in our cover portrays a group of boys led by a relatively older two girls in a traditional game called *Athuru Mithuru* in Sri Lanka. This was captured during a community development programme of the Young Professionals' Alliance for Health (YouPAH) that aims in empowering women to improve nutrition of their community. These kids who accompanied their mothers were looked after by the two teenaged girls of the household that hosted the discussion, allowing the discussion to be undisturbed while entertaining and providing much needed stimulation for these toddlers.

As of 2021, 51.8% of the Sri Lankan population were women (2). Literacy rate of the female population in 2021 was 92.3% (3). Except for Engineering and Technology, all the other undergraduate admissions for major academic programmes are predominated by women (4). In 2021, the Garment industry accounted for 42% of foreign income (5) and the women workforce accounted for around 78% (6). Foreign employment accounts for 7.8% of the national economy (7). In 2021, female foreign employment was 33%, that is one third (8). In the Plantation sector, female plantation workers make up for more than 65% in the tea industry, which accounts for more than 14% of the Sri Lanka's total exports (9). However, in 2020, the female labor force participation rate of Sri Lanka was 32% (10).

At the midst of an economic crisis, Sri Lanka is at a crucial point where our resources should be invested in its full capacity, effectively and efficiently to face this economic challenge. In that case, low cost, sustainable methods of generating revenues should be considered a priority while minimizing the expenses that draw money out of the country. In such circumstances, a timely discussion is instrumental as to what kind of a role women play in the economic crisis-stricken Sri Lanka, as leaders in community development.

Empowered women in leadership have a potential to contribute on a large scale to the development of their family, neighbourhood and communities. However, a supportive environment for that process needs to be created by the active involvement of the relevant officials and professionals. A first step would be having discussions with communities that would enhance their insight on the potential of women getting involved in developing their own

village/town communities. “Women’s Societies” such empowered, have the potential to become the stakeholders in this process at the community level without limiting themselves to just be participants of various programmes and activities that target them. The economy starts at home. Therefore, women in mother-centered family units like ours, have an unparalleled and yet to be fully discovered power over a country's economy. Empowering them would reveal this power. How women can contribute to country’s economy by managing their economy in the households is only the tip of the ice burg which symbolises their potential as leaders in their communities. Thus, the potential of empowered women still largely remains a sleeping giant, a resource that is yet to be tapped fully by the national level policymakers and implementers.

References

1. International Women’s Day. #Balance for Better. Theme for International Women’s Day 2019. Available from: <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/theme>.
2. data.worldbank.org. (n.d.). Population, female (% of total population) - Sri Lanka Data. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=LK>.
3. Statistics.gov.lk. Available at: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StacticalInformation/Education/LiteracyRateOfPopulation-10YearsAndAbove-ByRecentYearAndSex>.
4. Statistics.gov.lk. Available from: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StacticalInformation/Education/UndergraduateAdmissionsByAcademicProgrammeAndSexAcademicYear>.
5. Economic Statistics of Sri Lanka. (n.d.). Available from: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Publication/Economic-Statistics-2021>.
6. Securing Women’s Place in Sri Lanka’s Apparel Industry. Development Asia, 2020. Available from: <https://development.asia/insight/securing-womens-place-sri-lankas-apparel-industry>.
7. www.ft.lk. (n.d.). Role of foreign employment in Sri Lanka’s economic revival: challenges and opportunities. Daily FT. Available from: <https://www.ft.lk/Opinion-and-Issues/Role-of-foreign-employment-in-Sri-Lanka-s-economic-revival-Challenges-and-opportunities/14-702756>.
8. Registration with the SLBFE by Gender 2014-2021 Table 1. A Registration with the SLBFE by. (n.d.). Available from: <http://www.slbfe.lk/file.php?FID=696>.
9. www.historyofceylontea.com. (n.d.). Beyond Women’s Day: the Long Road to Gender Equality | History of Ceylon Tea. Available from: <https://www.historyofceylontea.com/ceylon-publications/ceylon-tea-articles/beyondwomensday-the-long-road-to-gender-equality.html>.
10. Statistics.gov.lk. (2023). Available from: http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PressReleases/LFS_Annual_Bulletin_2020. Accessed 2 May 2023.