

TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE SRI LANKA

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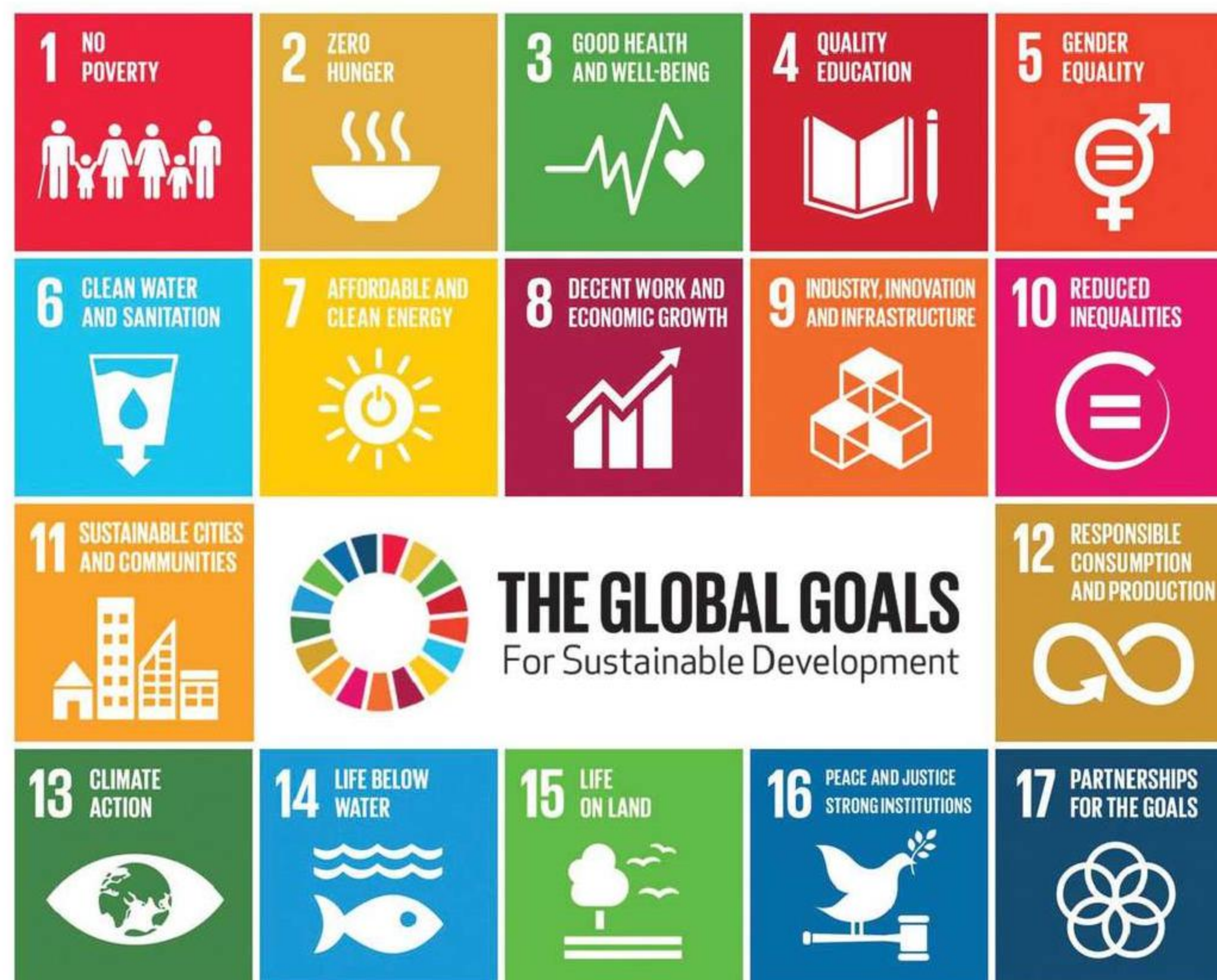
The first rule of sustainability is to align with Natural Forces, or at least not try to defy them. - Paul Hawken, US Environmentalist

As Sri Lanka forgets the past and looks towards the future after taking the lessons from the past Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set for Sri Lanka by the United Nations become significant. The 2018-2022 UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) provides the overarching framework for the work of the United Nations in Sri Lanka, in line with the national priorities, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

It serves as a common strategy with four strategic areas of focus: 1. Towards improved data, knowledge management and evidence-based policy; 2. Strengthened, innovative public institutions and engagement towards a lasting peace; 3. Human security and socio-economic resilience and 4. Enhancing resilience to Climate Change and disasters and strengthening environmental response. The Sustainable Development Goals are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the Earth's environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can achieve joy, peace and prosperity. These are the goals the UN is working on in Sri Lanka.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the earth's environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity. These are the goals the UN is working on in Sri Lanka. These goals are 1, No poverty 2. Zero hunger, 3, Good health and well-being 4. Quality education. 5 Gender equality 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry innovation and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequalities 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities 12. Responsible consumption and production 13. Climate Action, 14. Life below Water, 15. Life on Land, 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions 17. Partnerships for the Goals. (Source: UN website)

Developed by the United Nations (U.N.), these 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to transform our world, ultimately improving lives and spreading prosperity throughout a healthy planet. At its heart, these SDGs are an urgent call for action by all countries — developed and developing — in a global partnership. With the understanding that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-



in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth — all while tackling Climate Change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. It aims to support the Government of Sri Lanka to achieve peaceful, just, inclusive and equitable development with a special focus on leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first.

Sustainable Development Goals

The UN Country Team in Sri Lanka worked in collaboration with the Government, and in consultation with civil society and development partners, to ensure that the framework is grounded in the realities of the country. The UNSDF will support efforts to reduce disparities and make a difference in the lives of people. This coherent sustainable development framework will guide the collaborative work of the UN agencies in the forthcoming period. The UNSDF serves as a common strategy in four strategic areas of focus which are: 1. Towards improved data, knowledge management and evidence-based policy. 2. Strengthened, innovative public institutions and engagement towards a lasting peace 3. Human security and socio-economic resilience and 4. Enhancing resilience to Climate Change and disasters and strengthening environmental management.



UN Headquarters in New York

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) described above adopted by all United Nations Member States including developed and developing countries in 2015 are a collection of 17 interlinked aspirational global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". The SDGs were developed in the Post-2015

Development Agenda as the future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which ended in 2015. These 17 goals encompassing 169 targets and 244 indicators meet the urgent political, economic and environmental challenges facing the world. There are 194 countries including Sri Lanka that have agreed to comply

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with SDGs by improving lives while protecting the planet over the next fifteen years (by 2030). The 17 SDGs or Global Goals are being achieved via initiating and continuing a variety of development-oriented programmes in Sri Lanka. This attempt brings out the prevailing results from the indicators related to SDG progress in Sri Lanka for the first six goals.

The first goal of 'Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere' important to Sri Lanka includes seven targets and 14 indicators. Investments needed to achieve the SDGs are huge, but not beyond reach. Despite the Government's initiatives, financing the SDGs remains a challenge. Relatively low level of tax revenue constrains Sri Lanka's domestic resource mobilization. The country's access to concessional finance (e.g. ODA) has declined given its elevation to Middle-Income status. Its export earnings and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows have remained below potential. Various measures have been taken to attract FDI and boost export earnings including implementation of a new National Export Strategy and easing the business environment by digitalizing company registration and the land registry.

In addition to these measures, improving investment efficiency is critical. ESCAP estimates that the developing Asia-Pacific countries can achieve similar levels of outputs and outcomes in health and education sectors using 30 per cent fewer resources. Among its peer countries, Sri Lanka performs well in health and education sectors; however, its investment effi-

ciency in infrastructure could be improved.

Experts had observed that to enhance infrastructure investment efficiency for the public sector, public financial management institutions — notably project appraisal, selection and management — need to be strengthened. Effective coordination among different government branches for construction permits, environmental clearance and land acquisition is important, as these processes often lead to project delays. Ensuring a steady flow of resources for operations and maintenance is a necessary condition for success. Good maintenance generates substantial savings, reducing the total lifecycle costs of infrastructure projects.

Raising awareness among relevant stakeholders and building capacity of relevant institutions are necessary to achieve the SDGs. Developing multi-stakeholder partnerships provide much room for improvement in Sri Lanka to fully engage the general public and the private sector. An effective mechanism is needed for collaborative engagement in SDG implementation, from policy formulation to monitoring.

Regional cooperation

Furthermore, regional cooperation is an area with great potential that has not yet fully entered the SDG discourse in Sri Lanka. Regional cooperation in South Asia and the broader Indian Ocean economy can help Sri Lanka accelerate its SDG progress in several areas, including Climate Change, renewable energy transition and food security.

Prime Minister and Finance Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe stated some time ago that all measures had been taken to meet Sustainable Development Goals in Sri Lanka. The Premier made the comment addressing the South Asian Speakers Summit, which was inaugurated at the Parliamentary complex. The theme of the Summit was 'Achieving Sustainable Development Goals'.

In conclusion the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development provides a blueprint to achieve a more sustainable future for all. Sri Lanka's efforts in mainstreaming the SDGs into its national planning and budgeting are an interesting case for the rest of the Asia-Pacific region to learn - a country does not need to wait until it achieves economic affluence before tackling social well-being and environmental health. Developing countries should incorporate social and environmental goals into their path towards prosperity. All Sri Lankans may now hope for a prosperous Motherland in the near future.

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