

UNDP Funding Windows
Guidance on Results Reporting (2021)

One of the key objectives of the Funding Windows (FWs) is to leverage greater impact for UNDP projects on the ground. Thus, annual reporting on projects supported by FW allocations, aims to capture how the contributions had a catalytic effect in terms of achieving transformative results, expanding partnerships, attracting other donors/resources, scaling up initiatives, etc. Reports should be uploaded in English into the [online FWs platform](#), following the reporting instructions, to be shared shortly.

2021 Annual Reporting (Draft Word reports due by **Monday 17 January 2022**)

To facilitate results reporting, project outputs funded through the FWs must: a) be properly linked to the Strategic Plan relevant outputs in Atlas; and b) be reported against the project output indicator aligned with the relevant SP output indicator. The online reporting tool will guide you in linking the following information:

Quantitative Report				
Relevant SP output (2018-2021)	Relevant SP output indicator	Project output	Project output indicator	Achievements against indicators (quantitative only)
Constitution-making, electoral and parliamentary processes and institutions strengthened to promote inclusion, transparency and accountability	Country has adopted and implemented, with UNDP assistance, legal and regulatory frameworks that enable civil society to function in the public sphere and contribute to sustainable development			
	Country has strengthened institutions and systems supporting fulfilment of nationally and internationally ratified human rights obligations			
	Country has adopted and implemented, with UNDP assistance, upon request, constitutional, statutory and/or			

	policy guarantees for public access to information			
		Output 1: Capacitated Parliamentary committees engage with citizens and CSOs on achieving SDGs.	<i>% of CSOs were engaged actively with committees on the implementation of SDGs.</i> <i>Target: 40%</i>	50% of target CSOs engaged actively with committees on the implementation of SDGs.
			<i># of SDG pilot joint monitoring by committees</i> <i>Target: 1</i>	Two field visits that incorporated the SDG pilot joint monitoring conducted by the Women's Parliamentarians Caucus and the Select Committee on Women and Gender
		Output 2: Capability of key ministries and institutions improved on proactive disclosure of information	<i>Availability of communication strategy for target ministries.</i> <i>Target: Yes</i>	Yes [State Ministry of Women and Child Development, development of Inquiry Management System for Department of Labour & Development of Tax-payer information portal for the Inland Revenue Department (IRD)]
			<i>% of information proactively disclosed by target ministries and departments.</i> <i>Target: Increase in percentage from 0%</i>	26% of the information disclosed proactively by the target ministries and institutions (State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of Labour and development and RTIC)
		Output 3: Platforms for stakeholder engagement (specifically women) on SDGs localization established	<i># of platforms for stakeholder engagement established that carry out policy actions.</i> <i>Target: 1</i>	Five District Platforms initiated with active participation of CSOs specifically women headed organizations, the elected members (women) of the Local Government Authorities and members of the Women and Child Development Committees of the Divisional and District Secretariats. In addition, the platform of Select committee on Women and Gender has provided space for CSOs and activists to

				raise and discuss gender-related issues ensuring gender equality in Sri Lanka
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Narrative Report

1. **RESULT:** Please describe the key Output¹ results achieved with Funding Window (FWs) resources in 2021. Provide measurable results related to the critical objectives of the project. Describe the positive impact on target beneficiaries with disaggregated data.

Output 1:

Capacitated Parliamentary Committees' engage with citizens and CSOs on achieving SDGs

Increased Parliamentary openness was achieved, through the continued provision of updates and [telecasting of proceedings](#)² of the Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) and the Committee on Public Accounts (COPA) conducted via virtual platforms, which ensured greater awareness among the public on core functions of Parliament. Similarly, disability inclusion was established through support that culminated in the historic sign language interpretation for the 2022 Budget reading by Parliament which allowed 4% of the total population (the hearing impaired community) to benefit from sign language interpretation of the budget proceedings. This emanated from recommendations provided by citizens and the [Women Parliamentarians' Caucus as \(WPC\)](#)³. First time field visits by the WPC and the Select Committee on Women and Gender (SCWG) and their consultations with CSOs and elected Local Government members resulted in the commitment made by these parliamentary committees to direct the relevant government authorities to address pressing issues faced by women, especially sexual harassment in universities, SGBV cases and economic challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. The Chairperson will present these concerns to the Committee during the next scheduled meeting.

The Ministerial Consultative Committee on Justice (MCCJ) was set up, [technically supported by UNDP](#)⁴ that deliberates on inter-alia criminal justice reforms. The MCCJ conducted wider consultations and solicited input (in person and via Parliament's social media platforms) from CSOs, especially women CSOs and Disabled Persons Organizations (DPO), experts, and relevant government officials into a Draft-Report on a Community Based Correction System in Sri Lanka that will complement the government's wider prison reforms agenda as confirmed by the Hon. Minister of Justice.

Output 2:

Capability of key ministries and institutions improved on proactive disclosure of information

Sri Lanka currently ranks 4th in the Global Right to Information rating in 2021 and has consistently ranked in the top 10 since 2018 ([rti-rating.org](#)). This is indicative of the continued CO support in maintaining and advancing the efficiency of proactive disclosure mechanisms through the establishment of guidelines for accurate record management by public authorities and digital maintenance of documentation introduced through the CO's support to the Right to Information Commission. Over 2000 officers, including 66% of female officers, attached to 15 government institutions including the Department of Labour, The Inland Revenue Department, and the

¹ Outputs are defined as the first level of change in development context which UNDP takes full accountability for. It can be demonstrated change in capacities; knowledge and policy context.

² <https://www.parliament.lk/en/committee-news/view/2370?category=33>

³ <https://twitter.com/ParliamentLK/status/1458643294414458880?cxt=HHwWgMCimaOWkr4oAAAA>

⁴ <https://www.dailynews.lk/2021/10/09/local/261446/draft-report-open-public-suggestions-justice-minister>

Sri Lanka Police, have improved their knowledge and skills on the proactive disclosure of information to achieve maximum efficiency. This includes training on record management guidelines and a training conducted by the Department of National Archives on document conservation and record management. 90% of the participants stated that they had not followed any RTI trainings previously, while 95% confirmed that they have acquired adequate knowledge and skills, measured through the ex-post participants evaluation. The restructuring of websites, following international standards relating to proactive disclosure of two Government institutions (the State Ministry of Women and Child Development and Department of Labor and Development), the development of web portals, information management systems and an RTI dashboard that tracks the status of RTI applications online, have improved efficient and effective proactive disclosure of information which has increased to 26% in 2021. The restructured web portals of the aforesaid institutions are visited approximately 120 times a day by public for their informational needs.

Output 3:

Platforms for stakeholder engagement (specifically women) on SDGs localization established

Continued engagement and advocacy with the Government resulted in securing buy-in to strengthen women's voice and engagement in decision-making and SDGs implementation at the local level confirmed through an MoU with UNDP and the State Ministry of Women and Child Development (SMWCD). The female councilors identified a number of gender inequalities existing in the Local Government authorities in the respective areas, for example gender equity in the transport sector includes the need for constructing gender friendly bus terminals/ stations. This initiative will be discussed in the annual budgeting and planning forums and will ensure budgetary allocation construct such facilities. Similarly, the need to increase in female political engagement by increasing women councillors at local government level in target district and facilitating space for the voice of women leaders to be heard in the development discourse was achieved through capacity development on gender responsive planning and budgeting at divisional and district levels. This facilitated multi-stakeholder discussions on SDGs 5 and 16, which secured endorsement by the SMWCD which highlighted the need for greater awareness on the national SDG agenda among women leaders at local government level and the need to focus on developing a national policy on Gender with an action plan⁵ to support SDGs 5 and 16 in Sri Lanka.

(400 words, mandatory)

2. **RESULT:** Please describe the key outcome level results achieved with FWs resources in 2021. *Explain how the project results contributed to higher level results (i.e. CPD outcomes).*

CPD Outcome 1: By 2022, people in Sri Lanka, especially the marginalized and vulnerable, benefit from more rights-based, accountable, inclusive and effective public institutions, to enhance trust amongst communities and towards the State

The FW resources helped improve the engagement of marginalized and vulnerable groups, using established platforms which ensured more rights-based, accountable, gender-responsive, and effective involvement of CSOs and Local Government authorities with parliamentary committees and government institutions in terms of achieving SDGs including the proactive disclosure of information.

The Select Committee on Women and Gender and Women Parliamentarian Caucus provided scope for citizen and CSOs engagement that facilitated the submission of recommendations related to gender inequalities for

⁵ <https://slwpc.org/2021/09/23/parliament-select-committee-focuses-on-formulating-a-national-policy-and-action-plan-to-ensure-gender-equality-in-sri-lanka/>

specific [gender responsive budgetary](#)⁶ allocations which increased to LKR 19.1 million for gender empowerment in the 2022 Budget. It is an increment allocated specifically towards women empowerment as a result of the advocacy efforts which contributed along with technical assistance and continuous engagement of the SCWG and WPC by UNDP, which facilitated the information flow from the grassroots to the legislature

Through digitization of public services, the CO enhanced the proactive disclosure of information achieving greater transparency and openness in government as it received a ranking of #4 in the Global Right to Information Rating in 2021. This support ensures that information seekers receive immediate access to public information and avoid time wasted in engaging in lengthy administrative procedures. The State Ministry of Women and Child Development and Department of Labour and Development) received assistance for the development of web portals which facilitate a more improved inquiry management system. The web-portals provide a search function which enable users to find specific information, and are accessible for PWD's, allowing vulnerable communities to access rights-based and accountable services of public institutions.

The Project has significantly contributed to the country programme outcome of Sri Lanka, improving engagement of marginalized and vulnerable groups in governance and service delivery mechanisms to benefit from more rights-based, accountable, inclusive, and efficient public institutions by engaging them in SDG driven development priorities.

(400 words, mandatory]

3. DEMONSTRATED CHANGE: Please tick the applicable change and substantiate.

[when COs tick a box, explanation is required]

Enhanced digitization

Through the FW resources for digital tools, Parliament improved its citizen engagement (e.g- digital storage capacity was improved facilitating the storage of all parliamentary documents, Hansards and committee reports. Public access to core functions of Parliament was enabled through uninterrupted committee proceedings held through virtual platforms facilitated via digital tools). The revamping of websites of Government institutions, following internationally approved standards relating to proactive disclosure and the development of web portals, information management systems and an RTI dashboard which tracks the status of RTI applications online, has contributed to the improved efficient and effective proactive disclosure.

Innovative ways of working [please explain]

Mobilized additional resources [please explain]

Improved or initiated policy frameworks [please explain]

Strengthened capacities

CSOs including PWD Organizations, Parliamentary officials and government officials (including Department of Labour, Department of Inland Revenue, Registry General's Department, Sri Lanka Police, State Ministry of Women and Child Development) were sensitized to improve their role in the SDGs implementation and proactive disclosure mechanisms (more than 18 workshops and over 2000 participants). In addition, multistakeholder capacities in five districts were enhanced on gender responsive planning and budgeting and incorporation of SDGs 5 and 16 in the respective District Plans.

More responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making

Sign language interpretation for Budget debates and field visits by parliamentary committees enabled Parliament to be more responsive and inclusive. The capacities of the District level planning staff on gender related issue analysis and incorporation of SDGs 5 and 16 indicators were strengthened. More resource

⁶ <https://www.parliament.lk/committee-news/view/2185>

allocation for addressing gender specific issues was enhanced through increased capacities and engagement of the elected female councilors of the Local Government Authorities.

Expanding coalitions & galvanizing political will [please explain]

Strengthened UNDP's integrator role

The CO leveraged its partnerships with the national and decentralized government institutions, the local authorities, parliament MPs, Committees, and CSOs to position the SDG agenda at national and local level. The project interventions were paralleled with continued advocacy with the Sustainable Development Council for greater government ownership and sustenance. UNDP harnessed its integrator and convenor roles to facilitate parliamentary engagement with CSOs against a backdrop of diminishing space for CSO engagement – thereby addressing a key governance deficit within the country (SDG16). Additional partnerships with academia, commissions were leveraged to advocate for and facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement by and with the Government on SDGs.

Collaborate with UN Agencies

UNDP as the lead development agency in supporting Parliament facilitated in connecting UN Women and UNFPA with the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus and the Parliament Secretariat to assist the same committee in reformulating a National Policy on Gender Equality.

4. **LNOB:** Select all beneficiaries targeted with the FW resources?

[mandatory]

- Unemployed persons
- Minorities (e.g. race, ethnicity, linguistic, religion, etc.)
- Persons with disabilities
- Women
- Youth
- Sexual and gender orientation
- People living in vulnerable areas
- Persons affected by disasters
- Persons affected by armed conflicts and violence
- Internally displaced persons, refugees or migrants
- People living in multi-dimensional poverty
- People living under the national poverty line

- **GENDER:** For GEN1 and GEN2 projects, describe how the initiative supported women's empowerment and gender equality. *Provide information and analysis on how the project ensured rights of women, both as beneficiaries and participants, were improved by the interventions.*
(GEN3 projects will have addressed this aspect in Questions 1 and 2. If you reporting on a GEN3 project, mention 'GEN3 project' below).

The CO mainly worked with WPC, advocating for the establishment of a Select Committee on Women and Gender as a platform with more parliamentary powers for the engagement of women and other relevant vulnerable communities. WPC with SCWG has increased the contribution of women's voice and influence in into the national budget preparation for 2022 in consultation with the women centered CSOs that enabled the increased budget allocation for women empowerment in the 2022 Budget. Additionally, field visits provided by the Women Parliamentarian Caucus and the SCWG to an SGBV shelter in Batticaloa for the first time ever, provided the committee members with evidence which would be useful in effectively advocating for the policy

level measures to ensure gender equality and criminal justice response through parliamentary committees with the special emphasis on SGBV and gender-based discriminations.

The national machinery on women (State Ministry of Women and Child Development) was supported through the development of an information portal that provides information required such as serviced rendered to Women and Children. Similarly, the standards for women safety in shelters was strengthened through the formulation of Shelter Guidelines as an SOP by the State Ministry which were reviewed and updated to include COVID-19 safeguards, the final version once approved will be submitted for Cabinet endorsement and roll-out.

(200 words, mandatory]

5. **CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED:** Describe one challenge faced in delivering the planned activities and reaching the intended beneficiaries. What were the lessons learned?

- Suspension of Sectoral Oversight Committees (SOC) to reintroduce the previous Ministerial Consultative Committees.
- Lack of commitment by Parliament to form a dedicated committee on SDGs acknowledging Parliament's unique contribution for achieving the 2030 Agenda.
- Travel restrictions, lockdowns, limited parliamentary sittings owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Difficulties setting up shelters as the allocated places have been taken over by the Ministry of Health for COVID-19 isolation, hence funds have been reallocated to address shortage of funds for the expansion of a shelter for pregnant girls who are subjected to SGBV.
- COVID-19 pandemic significantly delayed the implementation of development initiatives, however projects have continued in maintaining close dialogue with CSO's and Government remotely with the use of digital tools during the pandemic.
- Lack of an established mechanism for monitoring of inclusive and gender responsive budgeting that could support the SCWG in raising their voices for resource allocation to address gender equality related issues.

(200 words, mandatory]

6. **CATALYTIC VALUE OF THE FWs:** [when COs tick a box, explanation is required]

Please tick the applicable boxes under the following categories and substantiate for each:

Strategic positioning:

The FW resources have enabled the CO to respond strategically to a request from the government, which would not have been possible otherwise (e.g. restructuring of website of the State Ministry of Women and Child Development). The CO has been able to remain engaged as the preferred development partner for Parliamentary initiatives, especially in the development of the Parliamentary Development Action Plan (PDAP) and carry out key priority actions identified. The FW's flexible resources have enabled the CO to invest in thematic areas otherwise under-prioritized by traditional donors.

Speed:

The FW resources were allocated swiftly enough that they allowed to quickly position UNDP as a critical actor, on an emerging/complex issue. Digital tools and virtual meeting facilities provided to Parliament through FW resources helped ensure business continuity.

Catalytic investment:

The FWs have allowed the CO to leverage additional resources and scale up an initiative.

Interventions by the CO aided in mobilizing further resources for its SDG16 Portfolio on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions from the RNE. Provision of sign language interpretation has resulted in initiating discussions between Parliament and the Ministry of Mass Media in absorbing this as a mandatory service by Parliament. Establishing an interactive and strong mechanism by bridging the Legislature (SCWG and WPC) and Executive (State Ministry of Women and Child Development) arms of the Government in a more coordinated manner to advocate for gender equality measures through national plans and budgets including PWD inclusions. Successful results gained through this mechanism could be modeled in other parliamentary committees especially on issues relating to access to justice and climate change.

Partnerships:

The FW investment enabled the CO to form new partnerships in 2020 (national and sub-national government entities, UN agencies, International Financial institutions (IFIs), private sector, NGOs, innovative partnerships, other.)

Visibility:

The FWs' investment enabled the CO to create additional visibility for UNDP - First ever sign language interpretation provided by Parliament through FW resources created additional visibility by the public as well as the donors (RNE)

Humanitarian, development and peace nexus:

The FWs' investment enabled the CO to engage with humanitarian, development and peace actors.

7. **RISK MANAGEMENT:** Throughout the project life cycle, how were social, environmental and other risks identified and managed by the project?

The main risk hindering implementation was identified as the lockdown and the travel restrictions imposed by the Government as a measure of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the country. UNDP used innovative methods using digital tools such as virtual training, online meetings and forums to mitigate this risk.

Political uncertainty and lack of interest by government in involving multiple stakeholders, including CSOs in policy making which restricts collective policy and decision-making efforts impacted and created additional challenges. This includes engaging with multiple political actors, institutions and CSOs on policy advocacy and advisory services. This risk was mitigated through effective action taken by the CO by leveraging its existing partnerships, advocating for, facilitating and supporting the convening of a more synchronized, coordinated and inclusive approach to policymaking and implementation across multiple actors, institutions and mechanisms.

(200 words, mandatory)

8. Finally, let us know how the Funding Windows mechanism can be improved.

Follow up support to ensure the sustainability of results achieved and link projects with expertise in related areas at head office or regional office. Maintain ongoing dialogue and engagement with funding windows steering committees where regular updates on lessons learned and key results can be shared, giving us a chance to benefit from presenting interim results and gain feedback on lessons learned and challenges.

(optional: 100 words)

As reference, take a look at our [2020 Annual Report](#).

Annex 1

Success Stories

Working towards inclusive governance through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Provincial level stakeholder consultations with Members of Parliament, Civil Society Organisations and Local Government Authorities in Sri Lanka

Historical evidence suggests that vulnerable populations have always had to bear a greater burden in the face of any large-scale disaster. Women, who often fall into the vulnerable category, have faced severe socio-economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka, heightening pre-existing vulnerabilities and exacerbating deep-rooted gender inequalities.

From the loss of livelihoods, lack of access to reproductive health services, to rising cases of gender-based violence and the immense struggle to meet basic needs of food and shelter, women and girls find themselves marginalized and vulnerable every step of the way. In Sri Lanka, the pandemic has disproportionately affected women, given that many are often in insecure and low paid informal jobs.

Another alarming reality was the rise in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during the lockdown, caused by confinement at home. The physical and emotional abuse women experienced was further intensified by economic instabilities and insecurities about the future brought about by the pandemic. As a result, it became clear that a collaborative effort in policymaking was crucial to be actively responsive to pressing community needs.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda has gained significant momentum in Sri Lanka, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka closely engages with Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Local and Provincial Governments, and Civil Society Organizations in advancing the WPS Agenda in their Functions of Law-Making, Oversight, and Representation.

In December 2021, UNDP Sri Lanka initiated three Provincial level stakeholder consultations on the WPS Agenda, which were carried out in Polonnaruwa, Batticaloa and Colombo. The objective of these consultations was to identify the challenges faced by women political leaders and women CSO leaders at grassroot levels and build linkages between national level female political leaders with grassroot level women leaders.

The three Provincial level stakeholder consultations were attended by Hon. Dr. (Ms) Sudarshani Fernandopulle, who is a Member of Parliament and the State Minister for Primary Health Care, Epidemics and COVID Disease Control. Hon. Fernandopulle is also the Chairperson of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus in the Parliament and the Select Committee on Women and Gender which conducts inquiries into and reports its recommendations to Parliament, to ensure gender equity and equality with special emphasis on looking into gender-based discrimination and violations of women's rights in Sri Lanka.

These stakeholder consultations allowed community engagement and provided participants with the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making and legislative processes. It was also important for policymakers such as Hon. Fernandopulle to understand the ground level realities faced by women in the country.

UNDP Sri Lanka also facilitated a visit by Hon. Fernandopulle to an SGBV shelter in Batticaloa for the first time. Having received opportunity to witness ground level issues, Chairperson emphasized the importance of *having* a closer connection to people's *concerns* as field visits provide a deeper understanding of the development context and a first-hand look at how development projects are implemented.



the
the
MPs

The Chairperson stressed that all members of Caucus/Committee should undertake such to ensure lasting and meaningful development outcomes as national level legislators.

Hon. Fernandopulle with CSOs, LGA's at a stakeholder consultation held in Polonnaruwa

the
visits

Hon. Fernandopulle, stated, "my visit to a shelter run by a local CSO, "Women in Need", enabled me, as a legislator, to obtain first-hand experience and to understand certain crucial ground realities. I gained a better understanding of what type of services were required to protect vulnerable women and girls in Sri Lanka and the type of care which was being provided to them. This allowed me to report back to the Select Committee on Women and Gender where the Members can discuss with relevant officials and better direct them on what we can do to support and improve these services."

It is imperative that MPs have access to public opinions the same way that the public must have access to core functions of Parliament. MPs offer a crucial channel of communication, with consultations and field visits paving the way as valuable assets for CSO women political leaders to have a chance to make their concerns heard.

Some of the key challenges raised during these consultations were:

- The prevalence of GBV in the three provinces particularly against elected women council members of local government authorities.
- Women council members also highlighted that their voices are not heard in the local government, and they have no support to advocate for change.
- Another issue highlighted by participants was the lack of local government budget allocations for gender equality issues. They noted the necessity to facilitate gender mainstreaming into local government activities, especially to develop gender-responsive budgeting.



Consultations in Batticaloa, with grassroots level CSOs and LGAs, attended by Hon. Fernandopulle

Dr. Fernandopulle suggested that women councillors should invest resources to improve soft areas such as activities aimed at women’s economic empowerment, GBV prevention and women’s skills development. She emphasized that in order to facilitate this, both male and female council members should be trained on gender mainstreaming in Local Governments.

She also discussed how women councillors should take an active role to integrate women’s rights issues into local government decision-making processes, by representing all women in their electorate. She further highlighted the importance of working together as a network of women in their own Local Government Authorities and then district-wise, without any party politics. She expressed the view that such a network will increase women’s participation in leadership roles.

She also agrees on the importance of providing necessary mentoring support from the national level to women in the districts to improve their skills and opportunities to network. She stressed the need to identify and connect with other service providers in the district to empower and support women.

Hearing stories first-hand can be a very powerful tool, as a result, these meetings allow elected representatives to go into detail about their circumstances and experiences. Local Government elected members want their voices to be heard and opinions considered. Therefore, it is crucial that MPs in Sri Lanka recognize the value of grassroots level participation in shaping public policy.

An elected Local Government member stated, *“Dr. Fernandopulle’s leadership as a woman in Parliament, has been a source of great strength to us as local government elected members in standing against sexual harassment or gender-related matters in Local Government Authorities, keeping political differences aside”.*

Similarly, a women’s CSO leader stated that *“It’s nice to see legislators visiting SGBV shelters to see what services we offer to victims of SGBV and vulnerable women, as well as having the opportunity to discuss CSO’s concerns in our local areas, and have our voices heard.”*

Addressing and identifying the impact of the pandemic, its effect on vulnerable and marginalized women, and finding solutions to rebuild a better future is dependent on an understanding that active involvement with national legislators, grassroots level organisations and community engagement is vital for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Right to Information: A key to Democracy



Ms. Rita Solomons was a women's rights activist residing in village inhabited by 8,000 people in Morawewa in the Trincomalee District. Rita came to learn that Government issued farming subsidies for widowed women were being unfairly allocated to those who were not entitled to their benefits, to the detriment of

those who genuinely qualified for the aid. The subsidy was set up to aid small-scale female farmers in the village including war widows and women heads of households.

The subsidy covered the costs of seeds such as mango and coconut seeds needed to cultivation which helped widowed women earn a livelihood and support their families. Requiring further information on the beneficiaries of such subsidies, Rita submitted an RTI request form to Pradeshiya Sabha on the matter. Within 14 days, she received a response, including detailed records of beneficiaries receiving the subsidy including those who were not eligible to receive it. She is now a RTI trainer in the area, empowering women to use their right to information to hold public authorities accountable for their actions.



Mr. Nanayakkara, a parent of a young child was seeking to admit his child into Grade 1 at a public school in his locality. Having gone through the interview process for admission, while child's name appeared among the shortlisted candidates, his child was subsequently omitted from the final list. Mr. Nanayakkara had reason to believe that up to 10 candidates received preferential treatment due to their parent's influence over the Education authorities. Subsequently he filed an RTI request to the Ministry of Education requesting for the student's test scores, applications, records of permanent residence and the names of the students concerned. Having received no response within the allotted timeframe, Mr. Nanayakkara then appealed to the RTI Commission in May 2017.

The RTI Commission addressed the case in July 2017, following which the Principal of the School was obliged to provide the relevant information within his possession. Having inspected the records, it appeared to Mr. Nanayakkara that his child was unfairly omitted from the final list of candidates. He has since filed a Fundamental Rights petition in the Supreme Court, on the basis that his child's right to equality and education was infringed as per Article 12 of the Constitution.

As witnessed, the Right to Information Act is one of the most powerful tools available to the citizens of Sri Lanka. The RTI Act was enacted in 2016 and rules and regulations issued under the RTI Act became fully effective in February 2017. This law had a major democratizing impact on how the government functions and how it interacts with the citizens of the country as it empowers citizens to hold the Government directly accountable by giving them the right to ask for and receive information from Public Authorities.

The Act allows citizens to exercise their democratic rights and facilitate greater participation in decision making processes. It is also instrumental in reducing corruption and preventing the abuse of public power by limiting arbitrary decision making by public authorities. This paradigm shift of governance from secrecy to transparency results in improving the daily lives of citizens by making the Government accessible and accountable.

One of the key features of the RTI Act is that it requires all public authorities to maintain and archive records to ensure that the authority's functions and activities are adequately and properly documented in order to facilitate the citizen's right of access to information. Such records serve as proof that public authorities are serving in public's best interests.

In response to strengthening Right to Information in Sri Lanka, UNDP Sri Lanka through its flagship portfolio on SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions provides focused technical support to the Right to Information Commission (RTIC) to operationalize Proactive Disclosure Guidelines and Record Management Guidelines in Government Institutions. UNDP also supported these institutions with regards to *digital* maintenance and organization of management of *information records by setting up* guidelines for the proper record management for public authorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of the proactive disclosure of information in all three official languages and in a format accessible by all citizens when it comes to the implementation of safety protocols and the provision of relief and assistance to people. In such a crisis, citizens have the right to receive accurate and timely information, and the Government has a corresponding obligation to disseminate information which is in the public interest.

UNDP assisted the promotion of digitization of RTI as a tool to enhance information dissemination effectively during COVID 19 pandemic, as part of UNDP's ongoing support. Measures were taken to restructure existing websites of certain Government institutions in accordance with the guidelines and internationally acclaimed

standards relating to proactive information disclosure on the Right to Information. Similarly, the development of web portals, information management systems and an RTI dashboard which tracks the status of RTI applications online have supported in the public disclosure of information efficiently and effectively.

UNDP also supported Government Institutions to eliminate gender inequalities which exist in the exercise of RTI rights by women by raising awareness among community leaders on the structural obstacles and barriers that women face which undermine their ability to fully exercise their information rights and how these can be overcome.

Speaking on the importance of RTI and its key role in strengthening democracy and good governance, the Chairman of the RTIC states:

“Information is fundamental to the functioning of a modern democracy and a principal element of open government. The guarantee of access to right to information facilitates the meaningful operation of many human rights. As such Right to information is a key to achieving democracy. The UNDP initiatives to improve the capacity of government institutions in proactively disclosing information to general public including their support in restructuring of web sites, development of web portals and information management systems as well as establishing record management guidelines enhances the scope of easier access to information and helps to ensure a citizens proper access to RTI. For example, there are a large number of state officials who benefit every year from RTI training provided by the pool of trainers developed by UNDP and the Ministry of Mass Media. I believe that such access to information is fundamental to democratic participation in the country.”

RIGHT TO INFORMATION
STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY
AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

UNDP Sri Lanka supports selected Government institutions by strengthening their capacity to disclose information to the general public through the following

- Capacity development of public officials on RTI through e learning platforms
- Establishment of digital information management systems
- Sensitizing community leaders on the importance of gender sensitive right to information
- Revamping websites of Government institutions improve access to information
- Policy development including guidelines to ensure effective disclosure of information