



# Overview: National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition

*Towards Zero Hunger*



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*February 2017, Colombo*

*An independent review commissioned by the World Food Programme*

*Photo Credit (coverpage): Earl Jayasuriya (UNICEF)  
Matthew Williams*

The National Strategic Review was designed as an analytical, inclusive and multi-stakeholder consultative exercise to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the existing food and nutrition context and challenges in Sri Lanka. The strategic review adds to the government’s initiative to nationalize Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report was formulated with the consultation and active involvement of a multi-stakeholder group participation representing an inclusive view of; the government sector, represented by line ministries and including provincial and district officials; the academia and professional organizations; private sector; civil society and non-governmental organizations; and the United Nations.

It is envisaged that the National Strategic Review will provide a timely and meaningful contribution to the ongoing dialogue on the 2030 Agenda in Sri Lanka and the efforts to address the significant challenges of food security and nutrition.



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**Supported by:**

United Nations World Food Programme



# H. E. President Maithiripala Sirisena



It gives me great pleasure to release this message on the occasion of the launching of the Report of the National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition, leading to Zero Hunger. This event is the culmination of a dedicated and arduous process led by the Government of Sri Lanka, supported by the World Food Programme (WFP), and coordinated

by the South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI), towards ensuring food security and nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture in Sri Lanka.

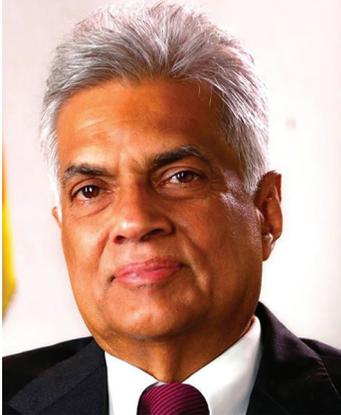
Sri Lanka has endorsed the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, containing 17 goals, foremost of which are Goals 1 and 2 that relate to Poverty Eradication and Zero Hunger respectively.

The Government of Sri Lanka has declared 2017 as the Year of Poverty Eradication, targeting human development through the alleviation of poverty. Therefore, the release of the report containing recommendations towards Zero Hunger is timely and significant as

they will contribute to accelerating the human development process.

I extend my sincere thanks to former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Chair of SAPRI, for the dynamic leadership given to this endeavor as its Lead Convener. I also express my gratitude to the WFP for the assistance provided, and thank everyone involved in the process for their contribution.

# Hon. Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe



Against a background in which Sri Lanka is seeking to affirm its place within the international community, initiatives that empower human development of this nature are critical. Within this context, I note with pleasure the role played by former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga by assuming the responsibility of leading the strategic review towards a successful conclusion.

processes such as action planning and related sectoral policy reviews and formation.

I take great pleasure in acknowledging the Report of the National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition, leading to Zero Hunger.

I would also like to offer my thanks to the World Food Programme for the generous support extended towards this initiative.

I am pleased to extend my congratulations and appreciation to all those who participated and contributed to the review process.

I am certain that the findings and recommendations of the report will contribute immeasurably towards a greater level of development via

# Mmd. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga

## Lead Convener



I am happy to see that the journey which began in September last year related the Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Sri Lanka leading to Zero Hunger has ended successfully and the report

of the strategic review is now being launched.

I am glad to have been a part of that process in the capacity of Lead Convener and follow the progress of its step-by-step approach. The most significant feature of this task was its inclusivity, the stakeholders having included the Government as well as the non-government at national, provincial and district levels.

The findings of the review and the recommendations that emerged will undoubtedly contribute to the national development planning and programmes in the multi-sectors of the country, leading towards achieving Zero Hunger, and

complement the national unity and reconciliation initiatives currently underway.

I deeply appreciate the patronage extended to this programme by the President and the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and thank the World Food Programme for its support.



Photo Credit: Nguyen Duc Hoang

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# 2 ZERO HUNGER



**End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

# National Framework for the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015.

The Government of Sri Lanka pledged to support the 17 goals to be completed by 2030, with an emphasis on poverty, hunger, education, energy, inequalities, urban development, and climate change at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 in New York.

As the initial action towards achieving the SDGs, the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife was established in 2015 mainly to develop and implement the roadmap towards achieving the Global Goals in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, Sri Lanka's National Sustainable Development Act has been gazetted and is due to be tabled in Parliament. The proposed Sustainable Development Act will provide the necessary legal framework to establish a National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development.

The bill also will provide the basis for establishing a legal and institutional framework for implementing the 2030 Agenda through different sectoral line agencies and other actors including civil society and private sector to facilitate achieving national, regional, and international commitments.

Further, the Presidential Secretariat has set up a new Office of Strategic

Development Evaluation, which will assess Sri Lanka's development performance and provide the President with key information on development status and prospects of SDGs process in Sri Lanka.



*Sri Lanka's National Sustainable Development Act Gazetted*

# Positioning National Food Security and Nutrition in SDG2 Agenda



**Global Hunger Index**  
84 out of 118 countries

**1**

Despite having made significant progress on several of human development and health indicators, Sri Lanka continues to struggle with respect to food security and nutrition. The Global Hunger Index and Global Food Security Index rank Sri Lanka 84 out of 118 countries, and 65 out of 113 countries, respectively.



**Global Food Security Index**  
65 out of 113

**2**

H. E. the President of Sri Lanka declare  
**2017 AS THE  
YEAR OF  
ALLEVIATING POVERTY**

Poverty, with its intrinsic link to food security and nutrition, remains high in certain income and social strata despite impressive progress made over the last 20 years.

This led H.E. the President of Sri Lanka to declare 2017 the Year of Alleviating Poverty.



## Sri Lanka Achieved Significant Progress in Lowering Poverty

While Sri Lanka achieved significant progress on the Millennium Development Goals by lowering poverty, emerging concerns of malnutrition, low agricultural productivity, and climatic shocks, show no sign of abating, presenting a threat to poverty.



## Government has a Major Role to Play in Achieving SDG2

3

H. E. President Maithripala Sirisena launched the Government's Sustainable Era Initiative in January 2017. National and local governments have a major role to play to ensure that Sri Lanka successfully achieves SDG2 by 2030.

2 ZERO HUNGER



## Achieve the Targets of SDG2 in Sri Lanka

4

The major objectives of the National Strategic Review are to: analyse the food security and nutrition situation of the country; evaluate the policy and programmatic responses aimed at improving food security and nutrition; identify the gaps in accelerating progress towards SDG2; and to provide key recommendations.

# Recent Progress of Food Security and Nutrition Situation in Sri Lanka

## 1. Food Security

Food security is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. This definition by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlights the multi-dimensional nature of food security and includes food availability, access, food use, and stability.

## 2. Food Availability

Domestic food availability in Sri Lanka is dependent on local production and the import of crop, livestock, and fish products. National-level food availability in Sri Lanka is currently not of great concern because it has been on the rise due to increased domestic food production and importation. At present, 80 percent of Sri Lanka's annual food requirement is produced domestically and 20 percent is imported.

## 3. Domestic Food Production

Sri Lanka is nearly self-sufficient in rice, the staple diet. Local production of other main supplementary food items such as vegetables and green leaves, pulses (except dhal and chick peas), root crops (except potato), spices and fruits exceed 70 percent of total availability. Fish and poultry are the major animal protein sources of the Sri Lankan diet; self-sufficiency rates of animal protein products exceed 97 percent except for processed products such as dried fish, canned fish, and powdered milk.

#### 4. Food Imports

The staple food (rice) and other supplementary foods are normally imported when they are in short domestic supply due to different crises (e.g. droughts, floods, pest and disease attacks, etc.). Although food imports have been increasing in absolute terms, their share in total imports and total exports has been slightly declining or has remained constant in recent years.

While the share of agricultural exports in total exports was 25 percent, food imports as a percentage of total exports remains around 15 percent, which means the total value of food imports is sufficiently covered by the value of agricultural exports without putting much pressure on the balance of payments.



## 5. Access to Food

The availability of adequate food at the national level does not necessarily ensure economic and physical access to food at the household level. Per capita income has registered substantial increases over the last ten years, increasing threefold from Rs. 124,862 in 2000 to Rs. 533,398 in 2014. This, along with the long term downward trend of overall poverty levels, gives an indication of improved economic access to food.

Road networks in Sri Lanka have significantly expanded during the last ten years, improving the physical access to markets.

## 6. Nutrition

Child and maternal nutrition status has shown some progress over time. The stunted and underweight population among children under 5 declined from 21.2 percent to 13.1 percent and 27.3 to 23.5 percent respectively during the period 1995/96 to 2012.

Anaemia in children has declined from 25.2 percent in 2009/10, to 15.1 percent in 2012. The combined effect of improved availability, access to food and utilization along with the continuous progress in health services and Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programmes is reflected in enhanced nutrition levels at the national level.

## 7. Challenges

Despite the recent progress, food and nutrition insecurity outcomes are reflected in major immediate concerns - high levels and disparity of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. The causes for the above immediate concerns are many and could be either current or emerging.

These concerns include yield stagnation, rising food prices, income inequality, poor infrastructure, high informal sector labour force, gender inequality, land fragmentation and degradation, urbanization, population aging and climate change.



Photo Credit: Nguyen Duc Hoang

# Current Concerns

## 1. Malnutrition

The National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey (2012) of the Medical Research Institute indicates that wasting has increased from 11.7 percent in 2009 to 19.6 percent in 2012, indicating a serious public nutrition situation according to the WHO's global benchmark.

In addition, about a quarter of the children 6-59 months are underweight. Low Birth Weight (LBW) (birth weight < 2500 g) rates remain stagnant over the last decade, with almost 1 in 5 new births in Sri Lanka having low birth weight, indicating a vicious cycle of malnutrition and the need for improved maternal nutrition.

## 2. Disparity in Malnutrition

Stunting among the poorest quintile (18 percent) is two times higher than the wealthiest quintile (9 percent) and ranges from 23.8 percent to 6.8 percent between districts.

The level of stunting in the estate sector children (Nuwara Eliya: 23.8 percent, Badulla: 22.3 percent) is nearly three times higher than in urban areas (8 percent in Colombo). The districts of Kilinochchi (34.9 percent) and Monaragala (28.8 percent) show the highest wasting rates.

## 3. Micronutrient Deficiency

Micronutrient deficiencies remain pervasive in Sri Lanka, with the average prevalence of anaemia in children aged 6-59 months and women of reproductive age found at 15.1 percent and 26 percent respectively; 50 percent of this is attributed to iron deficiency.

The highest prevalence of anaemia (34 percent) is found during 6-11 months of age and then the second year of life (24 percent). In a recent nutrition survey (2015), 31.8 percent of women were found to be anaemic.

## 4. Yield Stagnation

The yield levels of domestically grown food crops, including rice, have stagnated during recent times. Yield levels are unimpressive even by developing country standards. For example, only sorghum and cowpea have shown over 5 percent average yield growth, while rice and black gram have had negative yield growth during the last 5 years primarily due to a lack of investments in research and development.

This yield stagnation has restricted the potential of increasing domestic food supply in the country. With the present levels of stagnation and low yield increases,

## 5. Rising Food Prices

The nominal prices of all food commodities show an increasing trend and this is attributable, on the demand side, to increasing food demand given the growing population and income, shift of consumer preference, and the net taxation of the food sector. On the supply side, fluctuations in domestic production as a result of erratic weather and haphazard changes of import duties and non-tariff barriers have been sources of short run price variations. Higher food prices may lead poor households to limit their food consumption and shift to less nutritious diets, with negative effects on health and nutrition.

## 6. Income Inequality

Income disparities are strongly evident between sectors, across provinces, particularly between the Western Province and other provinces, including a marked divide between the previously war-affected districts and the rest of the country. Also showing a similar trend, the affordability of a nutritious diet varies widely from 22 percent to 59 percent geographically.

## 7. Poor Road and Marketing Infrastructure

There is significant district inequality in road density, where the density is relatively lower when moving beyond the Western Province.

The Eastern Province; Mullaitivu and Mannar Districts in the Northern Province; and Monaragala refrigeration and canning facilities have not improved much over the years, restricting the access to nutritious food.

## 8. High Informal Sector Labour Force:

Over 60 percent of employed persons are in the informal sector with little or no social security benefits (e.g. retirement and maternity benefits, sick leave, among others). The share of informal sector workers, especially women, is particularly high in the agriculture sector.

## 9. Gender Inequality and Inequity:

According to the Gender Gap Report 2016, Sri Lanka's gender equality ranking declined from 84 in 2015 to 100 in 2016 out of 144 countries, showing an increasing gender gap. The report highlights that despite high educational attainment and public health by Sri Lankan women, low economic and political participation are major contributing factors for declining gender equality.



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# Emerging Concerns

## 1. Land Fragmentation and Degradation

Out of the total land mass of Sri Lanka, only 50 percent is arable due to unsuitable terrain, inland water bodies, and forest conservations. The expanding population has exerted much pressure on the land mass, limiting its per capita availability.

Moreover, population growth, urbanization, land fragmentation, and consequent small-holder cultivation, are likely to have negative effects on productivity and are becoming a major concern in Sri Lanka.

## 2. Urbanization

A growing number of women employed outside their homes; the increased number of two-income households; higher incomes; more affordable and convenient fast-food outlets; and increased advertising and promotion by large food chains tend to influence the way in which household food habits change.

The impact of changing food habits is reflected in increased obesity, overweight, and non-communicable diseases (NCD), such as high blood pressure and diabetes, particularly in the more educated, urban, high income and high social strata of society.

## 3. Population Ageing

As highlighted in the MDG Country Report 2014, the share of the population over the age of 60 will double and become one fourth of the total population by 2041. Population ageing raises concerns about the ability of the social protection system to cater to the needs of the growing number of elderly persons.

Due to female longevity relative to that of men, there will be a larger proportion of aged women which adds to existing gender related concerns.

## 4. Climate Change

While farmers have been in a continuous struggle to adapt to frequent climate shocks, predictions on the changes in Sri Lanka's climate parameters and its likely scenario are not conducive for positive agricultural growth.

Temperatures are continuously increasing, while the distribution and the variability of rainfall has been changing, negatively impacting food security. Increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events (droughts and floods) have also led to crop losses due to moisture stress and excess water.

## 5. Food Safety

Given changing consumption patterns, people - especially in urban areas - will tend to buy more convenient food products and traditional fast foods from catering enterprises. Many such food products are considered to have additives such as preservatives that exceed permitted levels.

Even though Sri Lanka has food safety regulations for preparation (colouring, sweetness, iodized edible salt content, etc.), food packaging and labelling, the extent to which these regulations are implemented and enforced is questionable.





Photo Credit: Charith Gunarathna

# Gaps in Policy and Programmatic Response

Historically, actions and strategies focused on ensuring food security and nutrition in Sri Lanka were handled separately through the National Agricultural Policy of the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Nutrition Policy of the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medicine, and several other policy documents of various ministries that are directly and indirectly related to food security and nutrition.

Despite the multitude of different policies and programmes being implemented, the food security and nutrition objectives of the country are yet to be achieved due to the fragmented nature of the approach, insufficient coordination among the

institutions and the absence of a central theme. Moreover, uncertain policy environments, conflicting policy objectives, extreme political ideologies and lack of financial and human resources could be extreme political ideologies and lack of financial and human resources could be considered as the gaps in policy and programmatic responses for addressing the current and emerging issues.

Currently, Government is in the process of developing national targets for all SDGs, coordinated by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife. The World Health Assembly has set the following targets in line with Target

2.2, end all forms of malnutrition, to be achieved by 2025: 40 percent reduction in the number of children under 5 who are stunted; 50 percent reduction of anaemia in women of reproductive age; 30 percent reduction in low birth weight; no increase in childhood overweight; reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5 percent.

# Policy Recommendations and Strategies proposed to achieve the targets of Food Security and Nutrition in Sri Lanka

The following list of specific policy and strategy recommendations presented are based on a large volume of information and consensual viewpoints collected from a variety of stakeholders involved in the extensive consultation process, analysed using the most recent and available research.

1. Adopt a cohesive sustainable agricultural approach by swiftly aligning the current agricultural practices and policies with the other food security and nutrition related policies to achieve the targets of SDG2 and to better face the serious contextual and climatic challenges ahead.
2. Undertake innovative and integrated strategies to address stagnant levels of acute malnutrition and low birth weight levels, along with micronutrient deficiencies, and trends of increasing levels of overweight and obesity linked to diet-related chronic diseases.

3. Address the major gaps and weaknesses in current social protection systems and existing safety net programmes to ensure the poorest and most vulnerable groups, especially women, children, and elderly, are targeted and institutional coordination is improved.
4. Embrace public-private partnership approaches to create a facilitatory environment, especially to improve healthy food preferences and efficient and stable supply chains.
5. Strengthen public investment allocations for socially profitable interventions, particularly agricultural infrastructure development and agricultural research and extension while transitioning from output and input price subsidies.
6. Develop a national strategic food reserve to ensure the food availability and guarantee buffer stocks of essential commodities to stabilize prices for optimal consumption and sustenance of nutrition security.
7. Prioritize the implementation of the national climate adaptation plan, community-based resilience building, and emergency preparedness, together with livelihood diversification initiatives to better withstand repeated natural disasters and impacts of climate change.
8. Strengthen existing indemnity-based insurance programmes by focusing on improved affordability, accessibility, and trust of such programmes and promote index-based agricultural insurance programmes.



# 1

***Adopt a cohesive sustainable agricultural approach by swiftly aligning the current agricultural practices and policies with the other food security and nutrition related policies to achieve the targets of SDG2 and to better face the serious contextual and climatic challenges ahead.***

1.1 National Agricultural Policy and Action Plan (2016-2020) and National Nutrition Policy, should be implemented in tandem and with other relevant policy documents, targeting long term sustainability of food and nutrition security to ensure cohesion and correlation.

1.2 Improve the Total Factor Productivity of crop production which would result in lowering production costs, increasing market competitiveness and meeting self-sufficiency in selected food commodities with a comparative advantage.

1.3 Create attractive climate-smart agricultural models in agricultural production.

1.4 Promote entrepreneurships in agriculture to encourage youth participation and to increase income among small-scale agricultural holders.

1.5 Strengthen relevant meteorological forecasting and early warning and real time surveillance systems for evidence-based agricultural production planning.

1.6 Promote modern technological interventions to increase agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability.

1.7 Promote use of technology in the fishing sector targeting productivity, quality certification and compliance with international standards.

1.8 Promote sustainable agricultural practices with the main focus to minimize use of agrochemicals and to encourage organic fertilizers for all crops.



## 2

*Undertake innovative and integrated strategies to address stagnant levels of acute malnutrition and low birth weight, along with micronutrient deficiencies, and trends of increasing overweight and obesity linked to diet-related chronic diseases.*

2.1 Coverage and quality of on-going evidence-based nutrition-specific interventions need to be strengthened.

2.2 Update / strengthen behavior change communication strategies, targeting the vulnerable population to address the underlying causes of malnutrition through multi-sector partnerships.

2.3 Create an enabling environment to promote and implement nutrition-sensitive programmes to address malnutrition at household and community levels.

2.4 Undertake systematic casual analysis of malnutrition, particularly for acute malnutrition to better inform nutrition response planning.

2.5 Implement the national micronutrient strategy, considering evidenced-based short-, medium, and long-term interventions.

2.6 Strengthen and implement a health-medical-nutrition model to address the double burden of malnutrition.

2.7 Strengthen surveillance, and monitoring and evaluation using real-time data for nutrition programming while focusing on institutional capacity development.

# 3



*Address the major gaps and weaknesses in current social protection systems and existing safety net programmes to ensure the poorest and most vulnerable groups especially women, children and elderly, are targeted while institutional coordination is improved.*

3.1 Address gaps and weaknesses in current social protection system and existing programmes, such as low coverage, targeting errors, inadequate benefits, and lack of coordination among institutions and programmes.

3.2 Increase the priority given to poor and marginalized groups in designing safety net programmes.

# 4



*Embrace public-private partnership approaches to create a facilitatory environment, especially to improve healthy food preferences and efficient and stable supply chains.*

4.1 Promote public-private partnerships to re-structure value chains, focusing on the concept of agricultural mega-zones.

4.2 Develop farmer-centric, large-scale, agro-organizations and cooperatives with respect to value addition, processing, and facilitating market interventions.

# 5



*Strengthen public investment allocations for socially profitable interventions, particularly agricultural infrastructure development and agricultural research and extension while transitioning from output and input price subsidies.*

4.3 Improve market information systems and dissemination mechanisms to ensure the timely delivery of reliable information.

4.4 Promote the model of “small producer-large purchaser” through public-private partnerships in all agricultural sectors.

4.5 Encourage private sector to improve the use of renewable energy to meet power and energy requirements.

5.1 Develop rural agricultural infrastructure specifically irrigation (micro-tanks, anicuts and canals), roads and transport and post-harvest storage facilities.

5.2 Increase government focus on agricultural research and extension in areas where private sector does not venture, e.g. agricultural research and development including bio-fortification, climate adaptation, and sustainable agriculture, and information management.



# 6

*Develop a national strategic food reserve to ensure food availability and guarantee buffer stocks of essential commodities to stabilize prices for optimal consumption and sustenance of nutrition security.*

6.1 Based on the SAARC Food Bank model, establish and maintain food reserves with adequate stocks of staple products at provincial level.

6.2 Implement improved systems to minimize post-harvest losses and promote value addition through food processing, with a focus on enhancing the supply chain and promotion of agribusinesses

6.3 Encourage the establishment of non-profit, charity-based, community-level food banks



# 7

*Prioritize the implementation of the national climate adaptation plan, community-based resilience building, and emergency preparedness, together with livelihood diversification initiatives to better withstand repeated natural disasters and impacts of climate change.*

7.1 Minimize the risk of crop and health damage due to biological agents using improved germ plasm, strengthened support services and promotion of best practices.

7.2 Enhance the resilience of communities to adapt to climate shocks through improved capacity in emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction

7.3 Enhance the resilience of crops, animals, fish and agro-ecosystems to extreme weather events by promoting varieties tolerant to extreme weather events.



# 8

*Strengthen existing indemnity-based insurance programmes by focusing on improved affordability, accessibility, and trust of such programmes, and promote index-based agricultural insurance programmes.*

8.1 Develop and improve data infrastructure and increase availability and accessibility to information to promote index-based insurance programmes.

8.2 Improve community awareness of index-based risk insurance programmes among farming populations.

8.3 Initiate cooperation with parastatal or non-government organizations to reduce the cost of product design and implementation



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