

Sri Lanka Army Women's Symposium
Women: the bedrock of peace and sustainable development
04 December 2018, BMICH, Colombo

Talking Points:

Simrin Singh, Country Director, ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives

Impact of Women's Participation in Decision Making for Sustainable Peace

As ILO turns 100 years old, one must remember the reason we came into being – it was with a mandate to promote sustainable *peace, security and stability* as the world emerged from the ravages of World War I. A just and equitable world of work was seen as a solution to the drivers and ravages of conflict, helping people rebuild their lives, communities and nations.

Women, half the world population, are a much marginalized yet incredibly crucial actor in the world of work. As women overtake men in education, they are running a third of the world's businesses. However, women business owners are concentrated in small and micro-businesses, and still only 5 per cent or less of CEOs of the largest global corporations are women.

Context

- Peace depends on a wide range of measures: political, economic and social. Critical among them is access to decent work, livelihoods and economic participation, which improve peoples' material welfare and reduces poverty, social exclusion and disintegration. The failure of access to economic resources and livelihoods opportunities has been one of the key drivers of conflicts in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.
- Conflict and disaster have severe implications for the world of work, while poverty, unemployment and decent work deficits can themselves become triggers of vulnerability and fragility. Promoting a long-term peace agenda by

means of a livelihoods approach – or economic participation - for vulnerable and conflict-affected women and men is crucial for a sustainable economic development.

- The ILO has always been in the forefront in promoting decent work for women and men across continents with extensive experience in working in conflict affected and disaster hit regions of the world including Sri Lanka.
- It's worthwhile to highlight ILO's flagship programme on 'Jobs for Peace and Resilience'. The Programme on Jobs for Peace and Resilience focuses on employment generation, especially for young women and men, in conflict affected and disaster prone countries.
- The Jobs for Peace and Resilience flagship programme (JPR) adopts a strategic approach that aims to contribute to more peaceful and resilient societies through employment, decent work and social dialogue (or industrial/workplace peace). Guided by ILO's Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation (No. 205), the JPR combines employment-intensive investments, technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills training, employment services and private sector and local economic development approaches in a coherent and context-specific manner. The programme builds on ILO's decade-long experience and added value in promoting employment, decent work and structural transformation of the economy.

ILO's work in Sri Lanka

Impact of women's participation in decision making for sustainable peace

- ILO Sri Lanka works for the economic empowerment of people in the conflict affected regions in the North and East, plantation communities, migrant workers, children and and for thier rights.
- LEED, EGLR (Employment Generation through Livelihoods and Reconciliation), LEED+ and LED Tourism in the East are few examples.

- In the North, women are empowered through our diverse interventions. They are taking leading roles in managing cooperative enterprises as presidents of coops and Coop board members, and as General Managers. They are the producers of agricultural crops, marketers, dealing with buyers, meeting the export demands and requirements. They grow papaya, moringa, passion fruit, ginger and many more as cooperatives and engage in collective sales and marketing. They started small, weak, marginalized, under resourced, but overcame hurdles, barriers, community resistance, cultural barriers, to grow stronger. PTK coop which was started merely with the effort of about 15 FHH, is an enterprise of 1000 members. 100 percent women's endeavour.
- Women own social enterprises which allow them to not only engage in economic activities but also to look after the welfare of their fellow producers and employees, their children's education, etc.
- Women own SMEs. To give an example, they even make detergent powder in one corner of Puthukkudiyiruppu division of Mullaitivu and successfully marketing it. They have also organized themselves as a Women Entrepreneurs' Association.
- Coop members contested in local government elections. Elected to Local Councils. Their cooperative represents itself in divisional, district and provincial level committees, forums coordinated by the government.
- Awarded by NCE for their contribution to local economic development and making successful business linkages with the South as a symbol of peace and reconciliation.
- In the East, through ILO's tourism development project ended in 2016 women run homestays, safari associations, souvenir shops, etc. The incidence of gender based violence decreased as a result of their economic participation and management leadership.

- Aside from the amazing impact stories from Sri Lanka, the ILO has been very thoroughly assessing also the impact of women in management in factories around the world. Through our flagship BetterWork programme, 15,000 workers and 2000 managers were surveyed, and the findings speak for themselves:
- **Female supervisors trained through SST achieved a 22% increase in productivity on their line.**
- **Worker-Management Committees are most successful when women's representatives are equally represented and freely elected. Their participation and voice creates better working environment, reduced sexual harassment, verbal abuse and discrimination.**

In Summary:

- Women including female headed households are in a better position to make economic decisions in the family, in their businesses, cooperatives. They own their income and have liberty of making decisions on spending them.
- They have proved that their collective action could produce results through cooperatives and social enterprises.