How youth contribute to sustainable solutions in Sri Lanka

"The active role played by UN Volunteers in supporting their communities, especially in times of crises, shows how young people can lead and become agents of change. Their involvement is essential if we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." The words of Ramaaya Salgado, Country Focal Point at UN Women in Sri Lanka, attest loud and clear to the positive contribution of UN Volunteers in Sri Lanka's peace and development.

Oshan Gunathilaken is a national UN Volunteer Specialist serving as Volunteer Management and Community Engagement Specialist with the project Youth Participation and Engagement for a Healthier, Equitable, Safer and United Sri Lanka.

Over the past four years, he has served in multiple assignments with different UN agencies, contributing to transitional justice and reconciliation, education for innovation and sustainability, youth participation in peacebuilding, community development and governance. In his current role, he contributes to the
development of strategic partnerships that enhance youth participation in community development, enhance capacities for impactful participation in communities and help them take collective action for sustainable development.

"I invite fellow youth and adults alike to take action and meaningfully participate in the development of our communities. This is one certain way we can ensure intergenerational solidarity in our time, leading to a more inclusive future. --Oshan Gunathilaken, Volunteer Management and Community Engagement Specialist, UNV Sri Lanka.

Dinithi Wijayasekera is a national UN Volunteer Specialist who serves with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Sri Lanka as Project Support Officer for Training and Development.

Both Oshan and Dinithi work with the joint programme between WHO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNV in partnership with the National Youth Services Council of Sri Lanka.

Under the project titled Youth Participation and Engagement for a Healthier, Equitable, Safer and United Sri Lanka, the duo contributes to the overall development of strategic
partnerships for youth participation in community development.

The project aims at promoting a Healthy Settings Approach, and guides young people to identify how they can contribute to an inclusive, sustainable and peaceful society. The engagement empowered 540 youth parliamentarians and youth community leaders from civil society and youth-led organizations across all nine provinces in Sri Lanka.

“Being a volunteer with the United Nations has allowed me to contribute towards the 2030 Agenda by ensuring youth participation and engagement in a united Sri Lanka. --Dinithi Wijayasekera, Project Support Officer for Training and Development with WHO in Sri Lanka

Alejandra Ines Alvite, international UN Youth Volunteer Specialist serves with UN Women Sri Lanka as Strategic Partnerships Assistant.

Her focus area of intervention is SDG 5, because gender equality is a crucial journey – it’s her journey as well.
A big part of her work requires her to research issues related to women, peace and security, women’s political participation, and women’s economic empowerment. She assists her team in designing policies and projects that enable the meaningful participation and contribution of all genders from an early age.

“It might take a lifetime to deconstruct every social construct about gender stereotypes but as a UN Volunteer, I look forward to continuing pushing for gender equity, both in and outside my work. What are you doing to contribute to the SDGs? -- Alejandra Ines Alvite, Strategic Partnerships Assistant, UN Women Sri Lanka.”

Ramaaya Salgado, Country Focal Point at UN Women Sri Lanka affirms that Alejandra’s expertise in human rights law and research, coupled with her interest in advocating for gender equality makes her an excellent addition to the team in Sri Lanka.

“The work of UN Volunteers is a testament to how young people can play a significant role in transforming communities. Over the years, we have seen how both national and international UN Volunteers have brought new perspectives and ideas to the table. Their creativity and energy have influenced the way we communicate and design solutions to address social and development issues – paving the way for innovating thinking and innovative solutions. --Ramaaya Salgado, Country Focal Point, UN Women Sri Lanka.”
UN Volunteers support communities at the forefront and at the grassroots, many in times of crises. Through this, they become changemakers and are able to achieve sustainable solutions – just like Alejandra, Dinithi and Oshan in Sri Lanka.

Asia and the Pacific

• International Youth Day

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals**