

# **Goal 16 of Agenda 2030 -Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: A Case Study of Sri Lanka**

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## **Abstract**

The world community restated its commitment to sustainable development by advocating the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015. This agenda is an action plan for people, the planet and prosperity. Therefore, this paper deals with 2030 agenda sustainable development goal 16 as a necessary support for achieving peace, justice and building strong institutions in Sri Lanka. The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of Sri Lanka's the current status and progress of Sri Lanka in relation to the SDGs goal 16 of Agenda 2030. The research problem will therefore seek to identify the unexplored challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve the implementation in goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda. This study will also discuss initiatives to achieve the goal 16 of SDGs in implementing the 2030 agenda. To ensure optimal reflection and evaluation, this paper uses a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection for analytical methods. Hence this paper argues that, it is essential to strengthen law enforcement institutions and appropriate monitoring mechanisms to ensure peace and justice in Sri Lanka.

**Key Concepts:** 2030 Agenda, SDGs goal 16, Peace, Justice, Strong Institutions and Sri Lanka

## **Introduction**

2030 agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN in September 2015 takes into account the role of local and regional governments in respect of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which now replace the old Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for the period 2015 to 2030. In this context, the new consensus that has emerged is that paths and strategies for development and public welfare are no longer appropriate, and governments and global institutions must therefore explore more appropriate strategies and paths for development.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of Sri Lanka's current status and progress with respect to the SDGs 2030 goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions in Sri Lanka. Goal 16 measures broad concepts that cannot be adequately captured by a single indicator. Therefore, the research problem aims to identify unexplored challenges faced so far in the implementation of goal 16 of the 2030 agenda. Also this study will discuss initiatives taken to achieving SDGs 16 goal in implementation of the 2030 agenda. This paper uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection for analysis methods to ensure optimal reflection and evaluation. Both primary and secondary data collections tools will obtain from national and sectoral policy documents, statistical data and review of literature on SDGs. The SDG 16 goal much crucial since Sri Lanka confronted many setbacks as a result of the war that lasted almost three decades.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declared by the United Nations in 2000, which Member States were expected to pursue in order to address the persistent problems of human development and persistent or even increasing political conflicts. The SDGs imply a transformation of social, economic and environmental conditions in across countries.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which are announcing demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental (2030 Agenda Preamble, UN Resolution A/RES/70/1).

As reflected above 2030 agenda preamble, currently the promotion of sustainable development has become crucially important to address several key global and local challenges, namely climate change, increasing inequality in countries and across countries<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Also see; Government Offices of Sweden. (2015). Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions. Retrieved from <http://www.government.se/government-policy/the-global-goals-and-the2030-Agenda-for-sustainable-development/goal-16-peace-justice-and-strong-institutions/>

## **Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

Under the Goal 16 of Agenda 2030 introduced that the threats of international homicide, violence against children, human trafficking and sexual violence are important to address to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. They pave the way for the provision of access to justice for all and for building effective, accountable institutions at all levels (UN Resolution, A/RES/70/1).

While homicide and trafficking cases have seen significant progress over the past decade, there are still thousands of people at greater risk of intentional murder within Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and around Asia. Children's rights violations through aggression and sexual violence continue to plague many countries around the world, especially as under-reporting and lack of data aggravate the problem (UN Resolution, A/RES/70/1).

To tackle these challenges and build more peaceful, inclusive societies, there needs to be more efficient and transparent regulations put in place and comprehensive, realistic government budgets. One of the first steps towards protecting individual rights is the implementation of worldwide birth registration and the creation of more independent national human rights institutions around the world (UN Resolution, A/RES/70/1). SDG 16 represents a great opportunity for ensuring multilateral action, focused on the people and founded in development, to prevent future violent conflict (Max, 2016)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Also see: Bennett, W., and Wheeler, T. (2015). Justice and peace go hand in hand – can't have one without the other. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/26/justice-peace-conflict-affected-societies>.

### ***Goal 16 Targets***

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- 16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
- 16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.A Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime
- 16. B Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (UN Resolution, A/RES/70/1).

UN facts demonstrate that among the institutions most affected by corruption are the judiciary and police. Corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion cost some US \$1.26 trillion for developing countries per year; this amount of money could be used to lift those who are living on less than \$1.25 a day above \$1.25 for at least six years. Approximately 28.5 million primary school ages that are out of school live in conflict-affected areas and the proportion of prisoners held in detention without sentencing has remained almost constant in the last decade, at 31% of all prisoners (UN SDG 16, 2018). Therefore, rule of law and development have a significant interrelation and are mutually reinforcing, making it essential for sustainable development at the national and international level.

### **Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka the Sustainable Development Act enacted in October 2017 provides for formulating a national sustainable development policy and strategy. According to UN, 2018 voluntary national review Sri Lanka has placed “transformation towards a sustainable and resilient society” (UN member states report, 2018). The poverty rate has dropped to 4.1% in 2016 and country is reaching towards the upper middle income status with a per capita GDP of USD 4,066 in 2017. Unemployment rate stood below 5% for last seven years. Free education and health policies have resulted in high life expectancy (75 years) and high youth literacy (98.7%) rates (UN member states report, 2018). UN has recognized Sri Lanka among “high human development” achieved countries (UN member states report, 2018).

The Economic Policy of the Government outlines the vision setting the ‘stage for a sustainable development journey’ (Department of Statistics: 2017). Sri Lanka has taken a number of steps since the adoption of the

SDGs in 2016 to integrate and prioritize the implementation of the SDGs across sectors. This includes the establishment of a Parliamentary Select Committee on the Sustainable Development 2030 agenda, the establishment in 2015 of the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, which serves as a focal point for the coordination and facilitation of the implementation of the SDG in Sri Lanka, and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Act in 2017. As a mark of Sri Lanka's commitment to achieving the SDGs, the country expressed its interest to present its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the July 2018 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2017. The review was carried out by the Sri Lankan Institute for Policy Studies on behalf of the Government and in accordance with the UN Secretary - General's guidelines, which require a multi - stakeholder approach. The Parliamentary Select Committee also organized a conference on the use of data for SDGs. Sri Lanka's VNR assesses the current state of implementation of SDGs in the country, but also raises awareness and creates ownership of SDGs and VNR. While global SDG indicators have been defined for each of the goals, they are limited in scope. The Census and Statistics Department (DCS) is responsible for collecting data on SDG targets. In order to present the status of SDG indicators in Sri Lanka, the DCS published a report entitled "Sustainable Development Goals Indicators in Sri Lanka: 2017." This report provides a brief overview of the SDGs, the list of SDGs and the list of SDG targets and indicators for the 17 SDGs, proxy indicators and data on the availability of data on these indicators (Department of Statistics, 2017). The Sri Lankan government anticipates that the SDGs will be achieved by 2030 in order to meet the basic needs of the people, gradually alleviate poverty, eliminate all forms of discrimination and inequality, and establish a society based on social justice and human security.

As regards the 2030 agenda 16 objective, in recent years, the government has been increasingly critical of the effectiveness of public institutions in reversing negative trends and practices in relation to abuse of power, corruption, national reconciliation and justice. Also Sri Lanka, despite the end of the war in 2009, still struggles to achieve national reconciliation and the number of important steps has been taken to bring about much-needed institutional changes, paving the way for the establishment of a number of oversight bodies in such areas as human rights, law and order, public administration and elections in Sri Lanka. Therefore, below selection will examine how Sri Lanka up to present initiatives taken to achieving SDGs 16 goal in implementation of the 2030 agenda.



## ***Goal 16 Current Status and Trends***

This section provides details on the SDG 16 with respect to the Sri Lankan context. The Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) provides status of SDG goals Indicators in Sri Lanka in order to investigate current status and trends. SDG 16 includes 12 targets and 23 indicators (Department of Statistics, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, analytical evaluation this study will be obtaining statistical data from DSC and Police Department. Moreover, literature on SDGs national and sectoral policy documents also will be reviewed. However, data and information gap is a critical issue with related to Goal 16 as hidden data and unreported cases are quite high. The respective ministries are supposed to set their reform policies based on the data and information, data collection and reporting is crucial while going forward on achieving SDG 16 (Sri Lanka VNR Report, 2018)

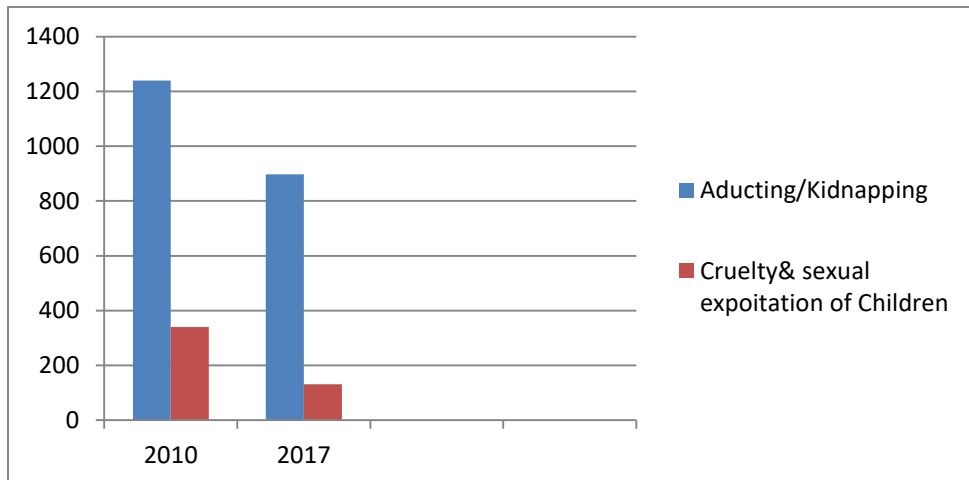
Objective 16.1 of the SDG requires a significant reduction in all forms of violence and associated death rates. The number of grave crimes in 2017 decreased compared 2010 from 57560 to 35,987 (Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends data, 2009) Homicide/Abetment to commit suicide cases 2010 are 745 decreased in 2017 up to 452 (Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends data, 2009).

Target 16.2 calls for an end to abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children. The number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population was 0.12 in 2016 (Department of Statistics, 2017). Abducting/ Kidnapping have dropped from 1239 in 2010 to 897 in 2017. Kidnapping has dropped from 1239 in 2010 to 897 in

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<sup>3</sup>See for more details: The Department of Census and Statistics (December 2017) *Status of Sustainable Development Goals Indicators in Sri Lanka: 2017*.

2017. Cruelties to children and sexual exploitation of children have fallen from 340 in 2010 to 131 in 2017 (Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends data, 2010 & 2017).



Sources: Author prepared-data from Department of Census and Statistics and Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends

On 15 June 2015, Sri Lanka ratified the Palermo Protocol on the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children, and through coordinated efforts by a task force of stakeholders led by the Ministry of Justice, substantial progress has been made in raising awareness, assisting victims and bringing due processes against the perpetrators. Sri Lanka has also made an active bilateral and regional contribution through mechanisms such as the "Bali Process" (Sri Lanka VNR Report, 2018).

Intended target 16.3 enables promoting the rule of law at national and international level and ensuring that everyone has equal access to justice. The judiciary's work has regained credibility through the adoption of the

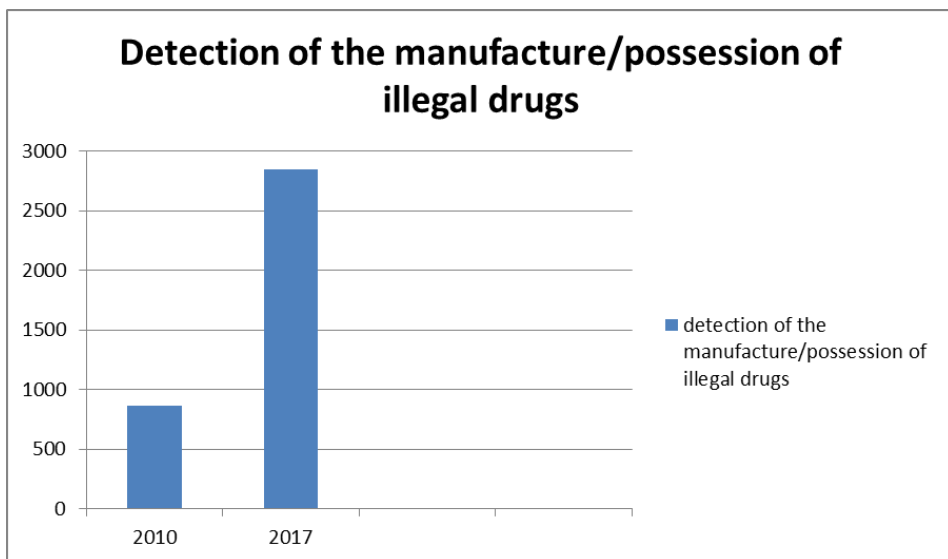
19th amendment and the introduction of independent institutions such as the Police Commission, the Judicial Service Commission and capacity building, such as forensics, investigation. The recent certification of the National Human Rights Commission to "A Grade" by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Commissions (GANRI) is a clear evidence of increased institutional capacity, which has helped to improve the rule of law in the country. According to Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission said that,

The announcement is an achievement of the whole country and not that of the Commission only. The reason is due to the people's agitation and support to ensure that the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was adopted which in turn assured the independence of the commissions (*Sunday Observer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018).

The number of charges served increased due to the empowerment of investigators, and in 2016 the number of detainees who were not sentenced as a proportion of the total population in prison was 0.5 (Department of Statistics,2017). The Government also works closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve conditions in the Prisons. Senior delegate of ICRC expressed that, "We are committed to working closely with the authorities and to supporting their efforts to improve conditions of detention (ICRC, 2016).

Target 16.4 proponents a significant reduction in illegal financial and arms flows, the recovery and return of stolen assets and the fight against all forms of organized crime. In 2016, the proportion of small arms and

light weapons seized and traced in accordance with international standards and legal instruments per 100,000 population was 0.4 (Department of Statistics, 2017). Furthermore, the detection of illegal drug production / possession increased from 862 in 2010 to 2845 in 2017, which could be treated positively by strengthening law enforcement authorities (Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends data, 2010 & 2017).



Sources: Author prepared- data from Department of Census and Statistics and Sri Lanka Police Crime Trends

With the establishment of the Financial Criminal Investigation Division (FCID) in 2015, Sri Lanka has taken a decisive step towards establishing systems and policies to combat corruption and financial fraud. In addition, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka introduced new guidelines for money laundering and terrorist financing in 2018 to keep records and report suspicious transactions under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Under the Trust Ordinance (Amendment) Act no 6 Of 2018 measures have been taken to minimize

the misuse of legal arrangements/ trusts in money laundering by increasing the transparency of trusts created in Sri Lanka (Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Trusts (Amendment) Act, No. 6 of 2018).

According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2016 of Transparency International, Sri Lanka ranked 95 out of 176 countries with a score of 36 compared to 2015, when it ranked 83 out of 168 countries (Transparency International Civil Society Report SDG 16, 2018, p.3-4). According to Transparency International Civil Society Report SDG 16 recommendations they provide stating that In order to prevent financial crime, enact laws that would ensure adequate, accurate and timely information on beneficial ownership such as establishing a beneficial ownership register (Transparency International Civil Society Report of SDG 16, 2018) Credible and trustworthy institutions built on principles of transparency and accountability (Target 16.6) and inclusive/representative decision making (Target 16.7) are key principles of good governance which is being embraced through the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Transparency International recommends that, finalize the National Procurement Guidelines that will strengthen the function of the National Procurement Commission and procurement practices at both a national and local level (Transparency International Civil Society Report SDG 16, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.

The country's remarkable success is the restoration of peace and the right to life since the end of the conflict with the defeat of the Tamil Eelam

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<sup>4</sup> See more details: A Civil Society Report on Sri Lanka's Sustainable Development Goal 16 Transparency International Sri Lanka (June 2018)

Liberation Tigers (LTTE) in 2009. Sri Lanka is also a classic example of SDGs for peace, justice and strong institutions. Since 2009, Sri Lanka's state reforms and peace - building policy have focused on 4Rs; reconciliation, rebuilding, rehabilitation and recovery. The 4R policy is to address the causes of the prolonged conflict, promote a peaceful and inclusive society, establish accountable institutions and guarantee a free and fair society. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has been implementing the "Peace through Development" policy since 2009 (Hoglund and Orjuela, 2012). Sri Lanka's peacebuilding policy immediately after the end of the conflict was to develop infrastructure that generated new trends in peacebuilding. Sri Lanka has long grappled with sequencing dilemmas relating to the balancing of growth and equity and perceived trade-offs between inclusive democratic institutions and economic development (Walton, 2015).

While the government promoted peace through development, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)<sup>5</sup> were appointed to build sustainable peace and security. The Office for National Unity and Reconciliation launched a national policy on reconciliation and coexistence in Sri Lanka to emphasize the need for reconciliation. The Sri Lankan government passed two significant acts to strengthen democracy in the country; the Right to Information Act, No 12 of 2016, and the Office Act on Missing Persons, No 9 of 2017.

The Government has invested in a number of projects in the north and east, including reconstruction programs in the north, including housing

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<sup>5</sup> See more details: Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and reconciliation (2011). Available from <http://slembassyusa.org/downloads/LLRC-REPORT.pdf>

and human settlement, road development, water supply and irrigation, education and management (Performance Report, 2010). The Mine Action Programme, which began in the midst of the conflict in 2002, continued over the years and the government continued to support a substantial part of the financing of the National Mine Action Programme, as well as support from partner countries and organizations. Since its inception in April 2002, the UNDP, UNICEF International INGOs and NGOs in Sri Lanka have been designed to strengthen national capacities for the management, implementation and coordination of activities in support of the National Mine Program (GICHD, 2018)<sup>6</sup>. Sri Lanka was able to ratify the Ottawa Convention on Mine Bans as a result of the efforts of these partners and Sri Lanka forces and aims to free Sri Lanka from mines by 2020.

It is indicated that since 2009, the government has implemented 65 major development projects with an investment of US \$ 2,494 million, while 125 major development projects are implemented with a committed investment of US \$ 2,659 million to meet the needs of various ministries for post-conflict development with the help of international donors. In addition, a large number of projects have been carried out directly by some donor agencies through local NGOs / partner organizations. The total investment in this respect was approximately US \$ 1,430 million (VNR 2018 report). The Norwegian government has entered into a partnership agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sri Lanka to promote peace, justice and strong institutions

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<sup>6</sup> See details: <https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/GICHD-resources/rec-documents/NMAS-SriLanka-2016-2020.pdf> The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) assisted with facilitating a four-day strategy and prioritisation workshop in Colombo in June 2015, bringing all key stakeholders together

under Sustainable Development Goal 16 for the period of December 2018 to December 2020 and the partnership agreement amounting to NOK 12.6 million or US \$ 1.5 million (UNDP, December 2018).

According to SDG Target 16.10 the 19th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution recognized the right to information as a basic right. The law is currently considered by the Center for Law and Democracy to be the third best law on the right to information in the world (*cited* in Transparency International Civil Society Report SDG 16, 2018). Accelerate resettlement efforts and its role as a measure to build trust plays an important role in the country's reconciliation efforts.

## **Conclusion**

Notwithstanding the Government's efforts to maintain lasting peace one of the main challenges for those committed to the 2030 agenda goal 16th objective of integral human development is to understand the profound obstacles facing efforts to alleviate poverty, prevent violent conflicts and promote justice and the rule of law. In order to ensure peace and justice in the Sri Lanka, it is crucial to strengthen law enforcement institutions and appropriate monitoring mechanisms. Weak governance and institutional mechanisms continue to undermine the long - term potential for growth in Sri Lanka. Among other things, weaknesses in the rule of law, corruption and lack of democratic freedom have continued to have a negative impact on the Sri Lanka position in global governance indices.

This study attempts to provide some recommendation for achieving goal 16 of the 2030 agenda by strengthening institutions of law enforcement and proper monitoring mechanisms which are crucial to ensuring the



country's peace and justice. Education on values, attitudes and behavioral modes which are designed to enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respecting human dignity and tolerance and non-discrimination. The democratization process that focuses on institutionalizing justice and accountability for a society free of violence recognizes the importance of reinforcing the role of civil society. Regulatory mechanisms, legal frameworks and policies to ensure peace and justice are in place. The inclusion of democratization in development dimensions must be focused more on ensuring Goal 16 of Agenda 2030 for long - term peace and justice.

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