

Youth¹ Dialogue 2024

“Click to Progress”² : Youth for a Smarter Sri Lanka

Concept Background:

Compared to the countries in South Asia, Sri Lanka has one of the highest net migrations per its population. The constitution of the country guarantees the right of every Sri Lankan citizen to leave or enter the country in accordance with its laws. Despite migration has happened throughout the post-independence period, literature on migration patterns identify several distinct waves which has made migration a necessity for many of the Sri Lankans who have moved out and residing temporarily or settled in their new destinations, mainly in India, Europe, Americas, and Australia. With recent financial crisis, the number of international migrants from Sri Lanka has been increasing, and the number of Overseas Sri Lankans (OSLs) may have by now far exceeded the commonly cited 2.5-3 million figure.

The prime objective of setting up a dedicated office for engaging with these OSLs (Diaspora)³, is to ensure connectivity, engagement and fostering development. Accordingly, the Office for Overseas Sri Lankan Affairs (OOSLA) is mandated on one hand to improve and facilitate access to services offered by the State and its stakeholders for the OSLs, and in providing required information and guidance as a single stop. On the other, when OSLs wish to be partners in the socio-economic development and empowering the local communities by sharing their knowledge and financial capital, to facilitate such partnerships. Hence, it essentially looks for creating a win-win situation for both OSLs and the people living in Sri Lanka. OOSLA plays the role of a neutral, yet impactful facilitator's role in promoting five thematic areas, namely: Consular services, trade & investment, home visit tourism (exploring nostalgic roots), philanthropic work, knowledge & skills sharing. These engagements can dovetail into open dialogue, better understanding of the multi-faceted nature of Sri Lanka, mutual respect, and reconciliation among communities.

It is observed that many of the young decedents (Y to Z generation) of the OSLs have assimilated themselves fairly well in the host countries through their education, leadership skills, grasp on cutting edge technologies, and by intense social-political engagements. Some have risen as influential individuals with proximity to power /decision making centers of the host countries, renowned entrepreneurs, scientists, and professionals in various fields, social media influencers and idols, enabling them to contribute to the growth, development, and social wellbeing of their host countries. Although some of these youths have been engaging

¹ Youth is any one between ages of 15-29 years: <https://www.parliament.lk/en/news-en/view/2689?category=6>.

The UN definition of Youth is between age of 15-35 and in the international migrant stock it comprises 11% of total international migrants. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/child-and-young-migrants>, accessed 15.06.2024.

² “Click to Progress youth digital pathway for sustainable development”, is the theme for UN International Youth Day 2024.

³ Diaspora: Although there is no internationally agreed upon definition for diaspora, the IOM World Migration Report 2017 defines “migrants or decedents of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background”. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas>

In the context of OOSLA, the terminology used is Overseas Sri Lankans (OSLs) for reasons to avoid any ethnic or political sensitivity related to the term Diaspora. Hence, without prejudice, this Note uses the term OSLs to recognize the population who have migrated from Sri Lanka and either living temporarily or have settled in host countries or transit destinations, maintaining collective memory, connections, kinships, inheritance and/or consciousness towards Sri Lanka.

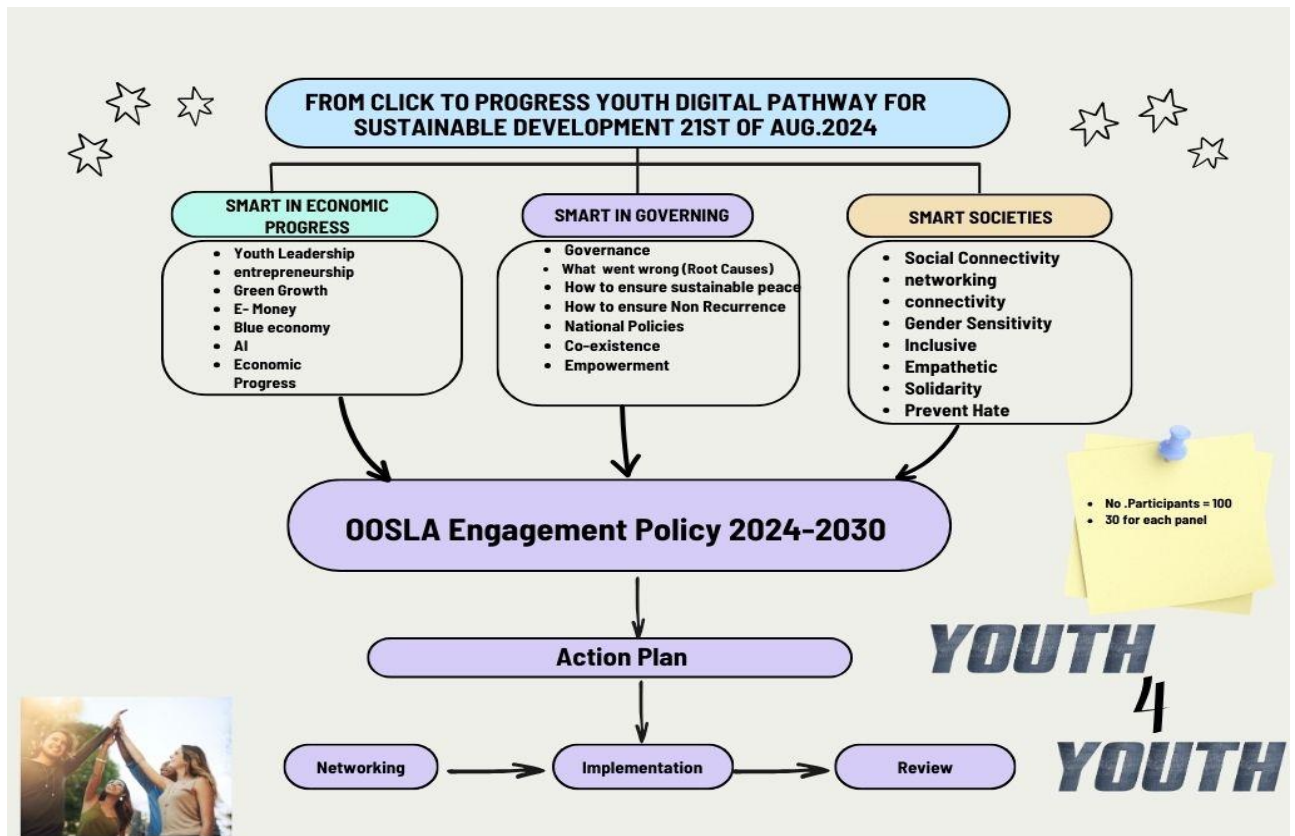
with Sri Lanka as volunteers, the potential is largely unexplored, and it can partly be attributed to lack of trusted mechanisms and incentives to boost regular engagements.

As a result, many young OSLs are yet to fully experience the true facets of Sri Lankan socio-cultural fabric. It is vital to have credible channels to exchange views on the narratives on all sides about the country in general, and on the ethno-religious coexistence in particular. The heavy reliance on social media as the first source of information can lead to rapid dissemination of misinformation. Despite the intense efforts made by the migrant youth to naturalize in their host societies, they too may experience challenges. Hence, it is important that avenues kept open for the OSL youth to self-explore Sri Lanka and to be equal stakeholders, in building peace, economic growth and coexistence in Sri Lanka utilizing their capabilities.

Objectives of the Youth Dialogue:

- 1. Smart in Economic Progress:** Encourage the participation and contribution of overseas Sri Lankan youth in supporting the development efforts of their country of heritage/origin, especially by applying digital solutions in areas such as investments, knowledge sharing, volunteerism and philanthropic work, economic empowerment of local youth through leadership /mentorship initiatives;
- 2. Smart in Governing:** Facilitate an open exchange of views and understanding on root causes for current governance deficiencies, diversity, and its inherent challenges in Sri Lankan context. Ways to ameliorate the associated negative experiences to ensure non-recurrence and sharing views, actions to ensure transparency, through digital pathways that can support building a smart government;
- 3. Smart Societies:** Strengthen the collaboration and partnership between, the youth within the 23 Government Stakeholders of OOSLA, the civil society organizations working on Youth, young academics in universities & higher education institutions, and other private sector youth actors, the UN country teams working on youth, and OSL youth in advancing a sustainable dialogue for peace, coexistence, empathy and solidarity that leads to a reconciled and smartly connected society.

A Mind Map



Expected Outcomes:

1. Develop a platform for sharing experiences of OSL Youth to guide and support local youth to develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills, and to contribute to development using smart digital pathways.
2. Open an opportunity for dialogue among youth on making governance transparent, and accountable, and identifying ways to contribute to develop national policies based on digital solutions that transform decision making and implementation practices.
3. Help build robust networking bridging the OSL and Local youth, for better understanding for inclusive, just and peaceful societies for sustainable development.
4. Gather inputs from youth for developing the 'OSL engagement policy' of OOSLA,
5. Develop an Action Plan for 2025-2030 to implement the outcomes of the Dialogue.

Date/Time/Venue

Wednesday 21st August 2024 (9.00 am to 5 pm) at the National Youth Service Council (NYSC) –Maharagama, Sri Lanka

The local Participants are also invited to join the two-day Program led by National Youth Service Council from 22-23 August on employment and educational fair (Details to be made available shortly)

Format: The Dialogue is held in **hybride mode**. Physical participation of OSL Youth is highly encouraged.

A total of 100 participants (who meet the criteria and selected by OOSLA) will be invited to participate. (Will be inclusive with Government, Non-Government, Private Sector, Civil Society, Academia, Social media influencers, OSL and local youth participants).

Language: English (interpretation in Sinhala and Tamil provided).

Participants in age group 15-19 years will be invited to join the thematic round table on Smart Economy.

Participants in the age of 20-40 years will opt for the thematic round table of their choice and expertise.

Opening Plenary will have three inspiring speakers providing TED talks covering the three thematic areas as “food for thought”.

Two Shepherds each per Round Table (one OSL and One Local Youth), will help the moderators to conduct the three thematic dialogues, and also will take the role of rapporteurs. The outcomes of each Round Table will be presented to the closing plenary, along with proposed actions for implementation. Audience will have an opportunity to provide comments, observations or suggestions.

The Event will be a “**paperless**” event and participants are expected to use their digital devices (laptops, Tablets, etc.)

Outline of Provisional Programme:

Date: 21 Aug	Key Activity	Remarks
8.30-8.45 am	Arrival of Participants and seated in the plenary hall (Auditorium of NYSC)	Registration confirmed digitally thro QR code, on arrival.
9.00-10.30 am	Opening Plenary session and TED Talks	OSL and Local personalities to deliver 3 TED talks related to the overall theme and thematic areas.
10.30-10.45 am	Tea Break	
11.am to 12.50 pm	First Segment of Simultaneous Round Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart in economic growth (leadership, mentoring, entrepreneurial skills sharing) • Smart in Governing • Smart societies
1.00 pm to 1.50 pm	Lunch Brake	Networking

Second segment of Round Tables

2.00- 3.50 pm	Develop proposals for implementation on the identify areas; Provide inputs for OOSLA for developing an engagement policy with OSL Youth.	
4.00-5.00 pm	Closing Plenary : Auditorium The two shepherds from each thematic dialogue and the Moderators present their outcomes. Other participants are expected to engage by raising comments, questions, or suggestions	
5.10 pm Closing Remarks, Announcements		
5.30 pm -7 pm : Socializing Reception at NYSC (with entertainment, traditional Sri Lankan action food station/street food and more)		

Selection of Participants

All applicants must submit an online application via OOSLA Website (<https://www.oosla.lk>), on or before 15 July 2024. Applicants will be required to provide a brief bio data and a letter of intent to join the dialogue (max. 2000 words).

Eligible participants must fulfill all the following criteria:

- a) Must be in the **age group of 15-40 years**
- b) Either Sri Lankan citizens or an overseas Sri Lankan. (Overseas Sri Lankans are expected to produce a valid document to prove their connection to Sri Lanka).
- c) Proficient in English/Sinhala/Tamil (understanding in communication English is desirable)
- d) Have demonstrable commitment to contribute to the dialogue and take forward the actions agreed in the outcome
- e) Participate in conversations, and the interventions respecting all other participants as equals, and follow the Chatham House Rules.
- f) Participants joining via online means must indicate it clearly, and can submit their inputs prior to the Dialogue to facilitate the role of moderators and the two shepherds of each thematic round table.
- g) Information on the logistics related to the Dialogue will be provided to the selected participants individually.

(OOSLA-2024)