



National Symposium

Catalyzing change - Making Local Governance Future Fit

10-11 June 2024, Galadari Hotel Colombo

Background

Across the region, public demand and expectations are on the rise for more effective governance systems and delivery of high-quality public services. UNDP's Capacity Development of Local Government Project (2019-2024), funded by the European Union, has achieved significant results that have positively impacted communities. CDLG is part of a larger efforts, financially supported by the European Union, which includes The World Bank, and the British Council, to strengthen the local governance system in Sri Lanka. The project is implemented in four provinces – North, North Central, Eastern and Uva, alongside the Local Development Support Project (LDSP) implemented by the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, within the framework of a World Bank loan and an EU grant.

CDLG was able to leverage the strong groundwork already in place in terms of capacity development support provided to local government authorities to facilitate more inclusive, accountable, and effective service delivery, responsive to the emerging needs on the ground. CDLG ensured and advocated that all planning and implementation processes of local government were gender responsive, particularly focusing on gender responsive budgeting, integrated plans and investment plans and strengthened social, environmental and gender impact assessment of the interventions at the grassroots level. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on regions and local areas was highly asymmetrical within countries. Beyond the health and human tragedy of the pandemic, the crisis profoundly affected economies, employment, and the sustainability of public finances. Sri Lanka further faced an unprecedented crisis due to economic mismanagement and corruption, as well as an agricultural crisis.

Through strategic initiatives, UNDP has identified local champions who have successfully made services more accessible to communities and these can serve as examples for others. These champions play a crucial role in disseminating their experiences and fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing. From conflict, ecological decline, and climate change to shrinking civic spaces, gender inequality, the collective challenges that we face have grown in complexity, scale, and urgency. The nature of these challenges demands concerted action at all levels of governance - from the grassroots to regional and national levels—and from all stakeholders. The perennial question is how a more sustainable future is to be achieved. As we look ahead to solutions, future-fit governance' needs to feature front and center.

CDLG has successfully engaged the central government, ensuring that the lessons learned at the grassroots level are integrated into broader policy frameworks. However, to further amplify the impact and facilitate cross-cutting collaboration, the planned forum will bring together stakeholders from various levels of government together with others.

The Symposium

The CDLG Symposium on "*Catalyzing Change: Making Local Governance Future-Fit*", co-organised with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Minister of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Government, will serve to encourage horizontal and vertical sharing of lessons, promote a more inclusive and people centric approach to development initiatives. The Local Authorities in Sri Lanka need to be further capacitated face emerging new challenges posed by economic crisis and disasters, particularly on financial and environmental sustainability.

The overarching goal of the Symposium is to amplify shared lessons learned from the local government level and explore opportunities to scale these initiatives. The symposium envisages creating an intentional space where knowledge transfer and collaborative efforts will be formulated and scaled up. By leveraging the experience of experts, practitioners, and multiple stakeholders, the symposium aspires to play a pivotal role in shaping the future trajectory of governance in Sri Lanka, ensuring it remains adaptive, resilient, and well-positioned to meet the challenges of tomorrow's development landscape.

By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the event will explore best practices, sharing valuable lessons learned, and facilitating the potential for widespread impact across various tiers to effectively tackle development challenges, but also to proactively identify and discuss practical solutions, fostering a collaborative environment for meaningful discourse. It aims to bring together policymakers, local and central Government officials, representatives from the diplomatic corps, the donor community, civil society, and grassroots level practitioners, including members of community centres and youth groups.

Thematic focus of the Symposium centers on Accountable, Anticipatory, Agile and Adaptive Governance (AAAG), application of Artificial Intelligence and digital transformation, data and planning for Inclusive governance, renewable energy & sustainable waste management, tax and revenue management, and societal change through empowered communities. Attendees of the symposium will have the unique opportunity to engage in insightful discussions, exchange ideas, and contribute to the identification of innovative solutions, building upon the knowledge gained through CDLG, and similar conversations conducted at the grassroots level.

Objectives of the Symposium:

1. Bridging Knowledge: Facilitate the exchange of insights and best practices to foster a connected and informed network.
2. Synergy: Explore strategies for harmonizing local governance with national priorities, addressing multi-dimensional vulnerabilities, and propelling sustainable development.
3. Learning and Scaling: Evaluate existing gaps in governance initiatives, discuss effective replication models, and explore avenues for scaling up successful practices to ensure continuous advancement.