

Youth¹ Dialogue 2024

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

Concept Background:

Among South Asian countries, Sri Lanka stands out with one of the highest net migration rates relative to its population³. The constitution of the country guarantees the right of every Sri Lankan citizen to leave or enter the country in accordance with its laws. Although migration has occurred throughout the post-independence period, literature on migration patterns identifies several distinct waves, making migration a necessity for many Sri Lankans who have temporarily relocated or settled in new destinations, mainly in India, Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and Australia. With the recent financial crisis, the number of international migrants from Sri Lanka has been increasing, and the number of Overseas Sri Lankans (OSLs) may now far exceed the commonly cited figure of 2.5-3 million.

The primary objective of setting up a dedicated office for engaging with these OSLs (Diaspora)⁴, 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, providing necessary information and guidance as a one-stop shop. On the other hand, when OSLs wish to partner in socio-economic development and empower local communities by sharing their knowledge and financial capital, OOSLA facilitates such engagements and partnerships. Thus, it aims to create a win-win situation for both OSLs and the people living in Sri Lanka. OOSLA plays a neutral yet impactful role as a facilitator in promoting connectivity across five thematic areas: consular services, trade & investment, home visit tourism (exploring nostalgic roots), philanthropic work, and knowledge & skills sharing. These engagements can foster open dialogue, enhance understanding of Sri Lanka's multifaceted nature, and pave the way for mutual respect and reconciliation among communities

It is observed that many of the young decedents (Millennials -Y to Z generation) of the OSLs have assimilated 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 personal 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

¹ Youth is anyone 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 “Clicks to Progress youth digital pathway for sustainable development”, is the theme for UN International Youth Day 2024.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/587727/net-migration-rates-in-south-asia/>, accessed 14.07.2024

⁴ 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.

host countries. Although some of these youths have been engaging 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 at times 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 are kept open for the OSL youth to self-explore Sri Lanka and to become stakeholders in building peace, economic growth and coexistence in Sri Lanka utilizing their capabilities, knowledge, and skills.

Objectives of the Youth Dialogue:

1. To provide an open and unbiased platform for youth to explore how their experiences in host countries and in Sri Lanka with digital technologies can be adapted to achieve transformations in Sri Lankan economic growth, governance, and people-to-people engagements as a smart society
2. Build solid networks between the OSL youth and youth in Sri Lanka, providing opportunities for them to explore new avenues for partnerships in developing soft skills relevant as future leaders, entrepreneurs, investors. How the pathways of smart technology and digital tools, could help them to better contribute towards a smarter Sri Lanka.
3. OOSLA to be informed of innovative ideas and insights from youth on developing an engagement policy to enhance its outreach to OSLs, and contribute to reconciliation in Sri Lanka.
4. Sensitize the young professionals in the Government on the perceptions, different narratives of the youth from overseas and in Sri Lanka has on public service, their expectations on the service delivery. Inculcate a sense of volunteer change agents within the Government institutes in enhancing efficiency, and effectiveness of public service.

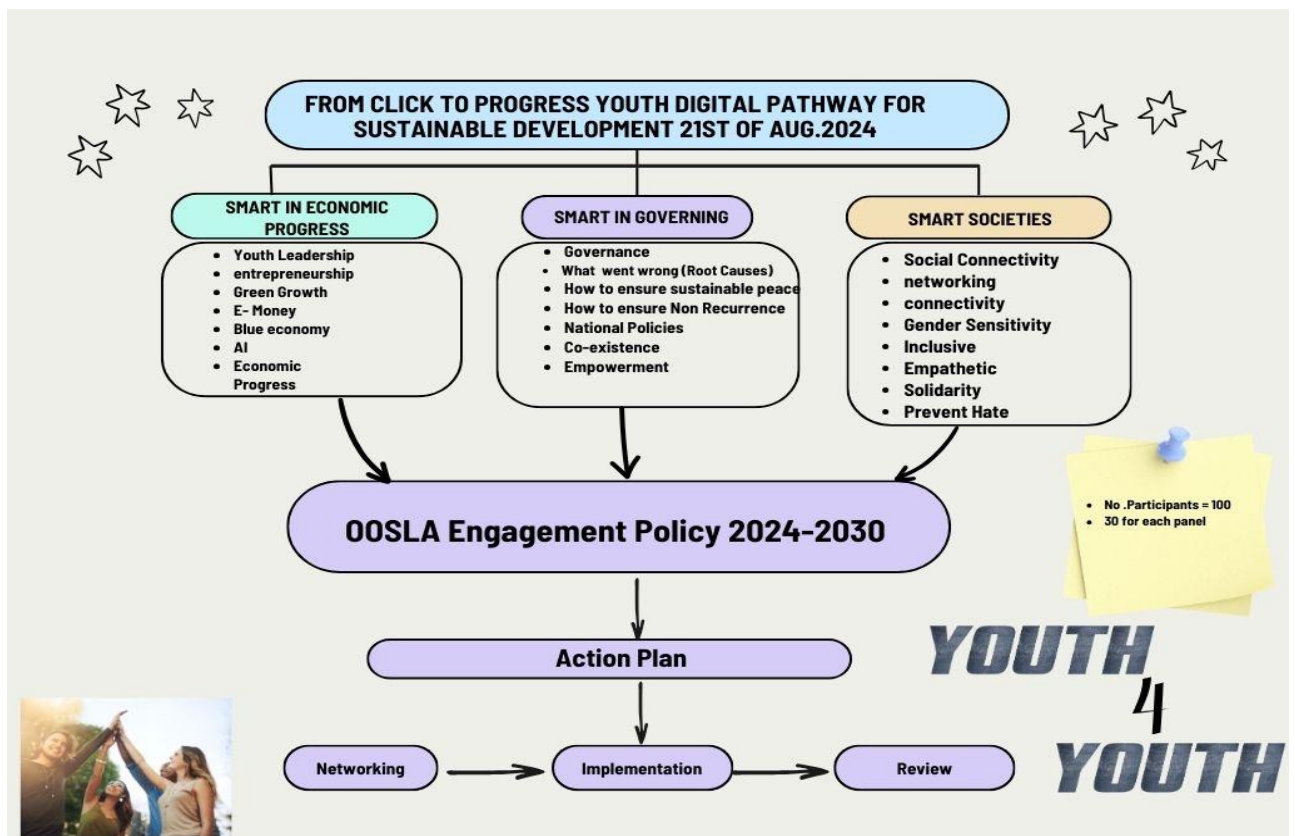
Key Areas in Focus: The Parallel Round Table Discussions

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 deserving local youth through leadership /mentorship initiatives; Similarly, to introduce the outstanding young talent of Sri Lanka in entrepreneurship, leadership and innovations.
2. **Smart in Governing:** Facilitate an open exchange of views to enhance understanding on how deficiencies in governance occur, and its correlation to negative economic

growth, and inherent challenges of ethno-religion and socio-cultural diversity of Sri Lanka. Discuss ways to ameliorate the associated negative experiences to ensure non-recurrence, identify concrete and pragmatic actions to ensure transparency, prevent corruption, through digital pathways that can support building a smart government in Sri Lanka;

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 societies in Sri Lanka.

A Mind Map



Expected Outcomes and Outputs:

1. A constructive and sustainable platform to be formed for networking and exchanging experiences of OSL youth and youth in Sri Lanka, in a mutually rewarding manner, aiming a smart country.
2. Obtain views on potential of using digital pathways and solutions appropriate for Sri Lanka, to develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills of youth, enhancing transparency in governance, and building societies that are at peace and reconciled.
3. Gather inputs from youth for developing the ‘OSL engagement policy’ of OOSLA,

4. Develop an Action Plan for 2025-2030 to implement the outcomes of the Dialogue that enable the youth to stay connected and become stakeholders of building a smarter country.

Date/Time/Venue

Wednesday 21st August 2024 (09 am to 07 pm) at the National Youth Service Council (NYSC) –Maharagama, Sri Lanka

Format: The Dialogue is held in **hybrid 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 15-40 years will be invited to join the thematic round tables of their choice, and as approved by OOSLA based on the letter of intent that the participants are expected to submit.

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

Two Shepherds each per Round Table (one OSL and One Local Youth), will support the moderator in the conduct of the three thematic dialogues, and will take the role of supporting the rapporteurs. **The moderators** and shepherds who have volunteered are expected to develop a brief note containing a background, objectives and few guiding questions related to each Round Table. OOSLA will assign a coordinator to support organizing any preparatory meetings among the moderators and shepherds, or facilitating with any technical needs, fixing speakers lists etc. 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.)

Selection of Participants

All applicants must submit an online application via OOSLA Website (<https://www.oosla.lk>), on or before 31 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. They also have the possibility of submitting recorded videos of not more than 2 minutes duration in horizontal orientation
- g) Information on the logistics related to the Dialogue will be provided to the selected participants individually, via the emails provided.

(OOSLA-2024)