Gender Responsive Climate Security Assessment for Sri Lanka

May 2025



Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention

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adelphi RESEARCH

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Odile Stabon;
Alexandra Steinkraus (adelphi research)
Cover image:
Odile Stabon
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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
UN Compound, 202-204,
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Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

Tel: +94-112-580691
Fax: +94-112-581116; 2501396
Email: registry.lk@undp.org

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Gender Responsive Climate Security Assessment for Sri Lanka





Foreword

Climate change in Sri Lanka is no longer an abstract threat but a daily reality, reshaping lives, deepening inequalities, and testing the resilience of communities still healing from decades of conflict. Yet, Sri Lanka stands uniquely poised to chart a different path—one that combines strong human development gains and low carbon emissions with an innovative, gender-responsive vision for climate security. This report offers precisely that: a roadmap for ensuring that mitigation and adaptation efforts reinforce social cohesion, empower every individual, and sustain the fragile peace that has taken generations to build.

This assessment is the first-of-its-kind in Sri Lanka to integrate an intersectional, gender lens with the twin imperatives of climate resilience and peacebuilding. By examining how gender roles, norms, and identities intersect with ethnicity, age, disability, religion and location, the analysis reveals the hidden fault lines along which climate risks and social vulnerabilities align. These insights pave the way for policies that repair social rifts rather than deepen them.

In a post-crisis context such as Sri Lanka, linking climate action with social cohesion is not just aspirational, but essential. Too often, well-meaning adaptation projects have hardened old fault lines. This study illustrates how climate adaptation—if designed without sensitivity to local tensions—can deepen divisions. At the same time, it offers concrete strategies for conflict-sensitive adaptation, demonstrating how investments in resilient infrastructure, equitable resource allocation and management, and participatory planning can rebuild trust in institutions and transform environmental challenges into opportunities for shared recovery.

By focusing on four distinct districts—Badulla, Batticaloa, Hambantota, and Mullaitivu—the report dives into the lived realities behind the data. In these regions, we see firsthand how ethnic and religious minorities face compounded hardships especially when intersected with factors such as gender and class: Tamil farmers facing restrictive regulations in Mullaitivu, plantation workers in Badulla juggling unpaid care with diminishing livelihoods and eroding lands, and coastal communities in Hambantota whose fishing livelihoods vanish with each bleaching reef. The study also unpacks the gendered dynamics, for instance, of climate-driven migration—revealing patterns of women facing exploitation as domestic workers abroad, and men navigating precarity in search of work in urban settings.

These localised insights underscore the urgent need for sub-national strategies tailored to each community's unique intersection of climate stressors, socio-political dynamics, and cultural contexts. These stories remind us that resilience must be tailored—one size will never fit all.

While this study offers vital preliminary insights, it is an initial foray into Sri Lanka's diverse landscapes. A comprehensive national assessment remains the critical next step—one that will build on these findings to inform targeted interventions across all nine provinces and further refine the integration of gender-responsive, conflict-sensitive climate strategies.

This research demonstrates how climate action and post-conflict recovery can reinforce one another. By adopting the gender-responsive framework outlined here, Sri Lanka can lead the way in showing how climate adaptation not only reduces risks, but also promotes equality, empowers communities, and sustains peace.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the research team at adelphi who worked along with UN colleagues. We sincerely thank the Ministry of Environment/Climate Change Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs for their insights, alongside those from civil society organisations, community leaders, and research participants—their frank reflections have shaped this pioneering work.

It is our sincere hope that the evidence and recommendations presented here will inspire bold action, spark innovative solutions, and foster genuine partnerships among policymakers, practitioners, and development partners. Together, we can leverage these climate challenges into opportunities—where every Sri Lankan, regardless of gender or background, can thrive in a world where both our planet and our peace are protected in equal measure.



Marc-André Franche
UN Resident Coordinator
Sri Lanka



Azusa Kubota
Resident Representative
UNDP Sri Lanka



Ramaaya Salgado
Head of Office
UN Women Sri Lanka

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List of Acronyms

CCKP	Climate Change Knowledge Portal
CDR	Carbon Dioxide Removal
CKDu	Chronic Kidney Disease
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
FBR	Family Background Report
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MVIs	Multidimensional Vulnerability Indices
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NEP	National Environment Policy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



Tea plantation in Sri Lanka © Austin Curtis/Unsplash

1 INTRODUCTION

Climate change is intensifying environmental and social vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka, threatening livelihoods, deepening inequalities, and posing risks to the country's fragile post-conflict peace. Yet the country stands uniquely positioned to lead by example in addressing the intertwined challenges of environmental fragility and societal resilience. With its relatively high human development indices and carbon emissions well below the levels required to meet the Paris Agreement targets, the country has made significant strides in climate mitigation and adaptation. However, the human security risks posed by climate change remain deeply gendered, with men, women, boys, girls and gender-diverse people experiencing these challenges in profoundly different ways.

WHY THIS STUDY MATTERS?

Integration of Gender, Climate, and Security

Whilst some of the findings of the analysis may come up in anecdotal accounts, this is the first gender-responsive climate security assessment for Sri Lanka and the Asia-Pacific region, offering a novel intersectional approach that integrates gender, climate resilience, and peacebuilding. It critically examines how gender roles, norms, and inequalities intersect with climate and security challenges, which is a significant gap in existing studies. By integrating an intersectional gender lens – examining how identity markers such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and religion interact to shape vulnerabilities and resilience – the report aims to ensure that Sri Lanka's climate action does not inadvertently exacerbate existing gender inequalities, but instead maximises opportunities for building and sustaining peace. This approach is critical to ensuring that climate adaptation and mitigation efforts are inclusive, equitable, and transformative, address the unique vulnerabilities and strengths of all demographic groups and contribute to building sustained peace. This nuanced lens is rarely applied in climate security studies and it is hoped that this study can illustrate the vital importance of such an approach.

Linking Climate Action with Peacebuilding

- Post-Conflict Dynamics and Climate Change: The study uniquely connects post-conflict recovery with climate resilience, emphasising how climate adaptation can serve as a tool for peacebuilding in Sri Lanka's fragile post-war context. This dual focus on reconciliation and climate action is a fresh perspective.
- Conflict-Sensitive Climate Adaptation: It underscores how poorly designed climate responses can deepen inequalities and undermine peacebuilding, offering conflict-sensitive strategies that could transform climate adaptation into a mechanism for fostering national unity.

Localised and Context-Specific Insights

- Subnational Focus: By focusing on four diverse districts (Badulla, Batticaloa, Hambantota, Mullaitivu), the report provides localised insights into how climate stressors interact with socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. This subnational perspective allows for tailored policy recommendations, which are often missing in national-level assessments.
- Ethnic and Religious Marginalisation: The study highlights how ethnic and religious minorities in climate-vulnerable regions face compounded challenges due to governance gaps and systemic neglect. For example, Tamil farmers in Mullaitivu report inequities in agricultural support and restrictions on constructing elephant fences, which are rarely discussed in broader climate-security literature.

Focus on Gendered Livelihoods and Migration

- Gendered Livelihood Disruptions: The report sheds light on how climate-induced livelihood disruptions disproportionately affect women, particularly female-headed households, plantation workers, and rural women balancing unpaid care work with economic responsibilities. Specifically, women's workforce participation is constrained by systemic barriers including expectations

of unpaid care work, inadequate transportation and childcare, restrictive legislation, and sexual harassment. Employed women are heavily concentrated in the education, health, textile, agriculture, and office administration sectors. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread in the country, while discriminatory customary laws further limit women's rights regarding marriage, divorce, and property. Intersectional vulnerabilities present particularly acute challenges for female-headed households, war widows, women from minority communities, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

- Climate-Driven Migration: It explores the gendered dynamics of migration as a coping strategy, revealing how men and women experience migration differently. For instance, women from the North and East are more likely to migrate to Gulf states as domestic workers, often facing exploitation, while men migrate to urban centres for low-wage labour.

Governance and Social Cohesion

- Perceptions of Marginalisation: The report highlights how unequal service provision and governance failures exacerbate climate vulnerabilities and erode trust in institutions, particularly in the North and East. This link between governance and climate resilience is underexplored in existing research. It emphasises the need for inclusive governance and participatory approaches to address perceptions of bias and ensure equitable access to resources, which is a critical but under-discussed aspect of climate adaptation.

Methodological Innovations

- Storytelling and Grounded Theory: The study employs a storytelling approach and semi-structured interviews to capture the lived experiences of diverse groups, avoiding narrow framings of "climate change" or "gender." Combined with rigorous quantitative climate risk analysis, this methodology offers a richer, more inclusive understanding of resilience pathways.
- Intersectional Data Analysis: By disaggregating data by gender, age, ethnicity, and other identity markers, the report provides granular insights into differential vulnerabilities, which is a methodological strength compared to many aggregate-level studies.

Climate Change and Post-Conflict Recovery

In Sri Lanka, the intersection of climate change and post-conflict recovery presents both critical challenges and transformative opportunities. Climate-induced disruptions—such as erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather—exacerbate historical grievances and deepen inequalities, particularly in conflict-affected regions like the Northern and Eastern provinces. Marginalised groups, including women-headed households, youth, and rural communities, face compounded vulnerabilities due to systemic marginalisation, governance gaps, and unequal access to resources. These dynamics risk undermining fragile social cohesion and eroding trust in institutions, particularly when climate adaptation efforts are perceived as inequitable. However, if approached with conflict-sensitive and inclusive strategies, climate adaptation can serve as a powerful tool for peacebuilding, fostering reconciliation and building a stronger sense of national unity through equitable development and shared resilience.

A Preliminary Analysis

This assessment is a preliminary analysis, focusing on four districts—Badulla, Batticaloa, Hambantota, and Mullaitivu. These districts were selected for their diverse socioeconomic, geographic, and climate vulnerabilities, as well as their post-conflict dynamics. While the findings provide valuable insights, they are not comprehensive. A full national analysis, encompassing all provinces, is envisioned as a critical next step to develop a thorough and nuanced understanding of climate security risks across Sri Lanka. Such an expanded assessment would provide the foundation for more targeted and effective climate action at the national level.

A Pathway for Resilience

Sri Lanka's experience illustrates how climate action can intersect with post-conflict national unity and reconciliation processes. The country's ongoing efforts to rebuild social cohesion while addressing climate vulnerabilities provide valuable lessons for other conflict-affected regions. By adopting a gender-responsive approach, Sri Lanka has the opportunity to lead by example, demonstrating how climate action can be a tool for promoting equality, reducing vulnerabilities, and fostering peace.

The gender lens has been largely absent from climate security and resource conflict analyses in Sri Lanka. This gap has hindered the development of inclusive policies that address the unique vulnerabilities faced by different demographic groups. For instance, women in Mullaitivu struggle with limited access to resources and support systems, exacerbating their vulnerability to climate shocks. Meanwhile, youth in Badulla face growing disillusionment with traditional livelihoods, viewing them as unprofitable and unsustainable in the face of erratic rainfall and soil degradation.

This report marks an important first step in that journey. By integrating gender and intersectionality into the analysis, this assessment reveals the complex interplay between climate change, socioeconomic factors, and human security. It underscores the importance of tailoring climate action to the specific needs and capacities of different groups, ensuring that no one is left behind.

It highlights the need for inclusive climate policies that not only mitigate risks, but also empower all members of society to build resilience. With a focus on intersectional gender dynamics, the assessment provides a roadmap for integrating climate action with efforts to address national unity, equality, and multidimensional risk reduction.

1.1 Research Questions

- **Climate and Environmental Stressors**: What are the key climate change impacts on resilience, including effects on health, food, agriculture, mobility, infrastructure, and the economy? How do gender, disability, and social inclusion norms influence and interact with these impacts?
- **Peace and Security Context**: What are the main security risks, such as corruption, organised crime, governance issues, and social cohesion? How do factors like gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and religion shape contributions to, and experiences of, insecurity and conflict?
- **Contextual Vulnerabilities**: What contextual factors exacerbate vulnerability and resilience to climate and security risks? How do identity markers (e.g., gender, age, disability, ethnicity) intersect to shape risks at individual and community levels?
- **Climate-Related Security Pathways**: How do climate stressors and security risks interact to undermine human security? How are different groups affected by and responding to these dynamics?
- **Responses to Climate-Related Security Risks**: What policies and frameworks address these challenges? How are they financed, implemented, and how could they be improved?



Fishing boats © Sheila C/Unsplash

2 METHODOLOGY

This assessment uses the Weathering Risk methodology, adapted to Sri Lanka, to explore how climate change interacts with gender, peace, and security. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, it identifies key pathways through which climate hazards influence social, economic, and political factors affecting peace and cohesion.

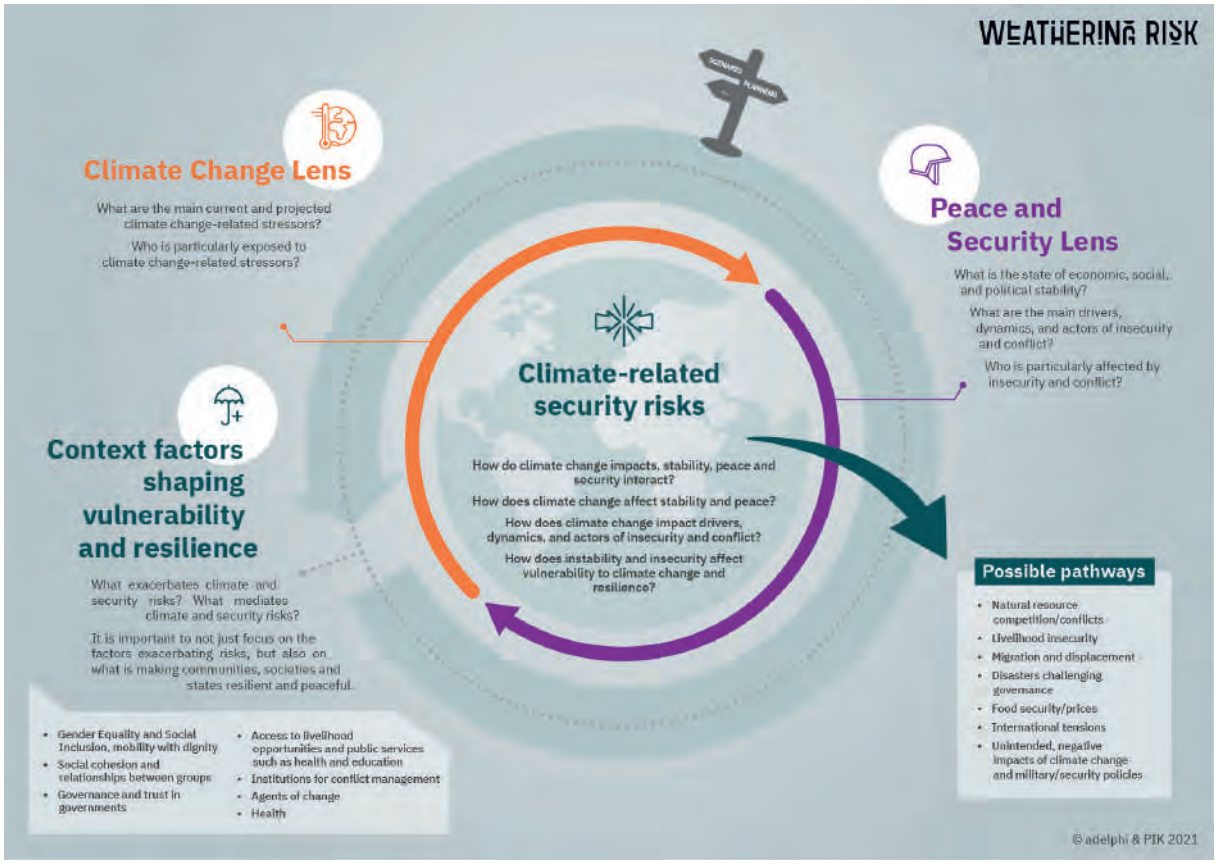


Figure 1: Weathering Risk methodology

This analysis combines newly commissioned climate impact data under Weathering Risk with desk and field-based sociopolitical research on resilience across diverse groups.

Fieldwork, led by Sri Lankan researchers, included interviews and consultations in Tamil or Sinhala with stakeholders such as government actors, UN agencies, civil society organisations, NGOs, and community members.

Importantly, the field research avoided using the term 'climate change' and instead asked respondents about a broad range of risks and opportunities to capture diverse perspectives and avoid limiting potential insights. Similarly, terms like 'gender' and 'peace' were deliberately minimised in favour of broader inquiries into the experiences of diverse community groups, with prompts focusing on cohesion and collaboration to prevent overly narrow framing or interpretations. Using a storytelling approach and semi-structured interviews, the research explored a broad range of risks and opportunities to capture all interacting climate security risks and resilience pathways.

Data were coded and analysed using a grounded theory approach, incorporating a gender-sensitive and intersectional perspective. Disaggregated data collection enabled analysis by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, and other identity markers, offering nuanced insights into risk and resilience across different societal groups.

2.1 Data Collection Methods

Desk Review

adelphi conducted an extensive literature review of scholarly work and grey literature to synthesise existing information on the intersections of gender, climate, peace, and security in Sri Lanka. Literature, reports, policy documents, and other relevant materials were reviewed to gather data before conducting fieldwork, enabling improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Weighted consideration was given for knowledge produced by Sri Lankan and South Asian individuals and institutions. Researchers collected and organised the data, then used coded analysis to find patterns, trends, and gaps in the existing knowledge. The findings from this review guided more desk research and helped shape topics and insights explored further through fieldwork.

This assessment, while incorporating national-level data from a literature review, is primarily based on field research conducted in four districts across four of Sri Lanka's nine provinces. As such, it is not fully representative of the diverse climate security challenges facing the entire country. A comprehensive national assessment with broader coverage of all provinces would enable a fuller understanding of the complex interplay between climate change and security dynamics and to develop more targeted guidance for action.

State-of-the-art climate modelling and projections were provided by Climatepedia, in collaboration with adelphi, based on data from the Climate Change Knowledge Portal (CCKP), the World Climate Research Programme's CMIP6, and the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6.

Subnational Hotspot Identification

The analysis of localised climate-vulnerability hotspots was included to shed light on the structural and social factors driving uneven risks and enable a deeper intersectional analysis of the factors driving differential vulnerability. In Sri Lanka, the geographical distribution of poorer ethnic and religious minorities often places them in regions more susceptible to climate impacts, such as coastal areas and drought-prone zones.

The research team applied the following systematic multi-criteria approach to identify sub-national hotspots for field-level data collection:

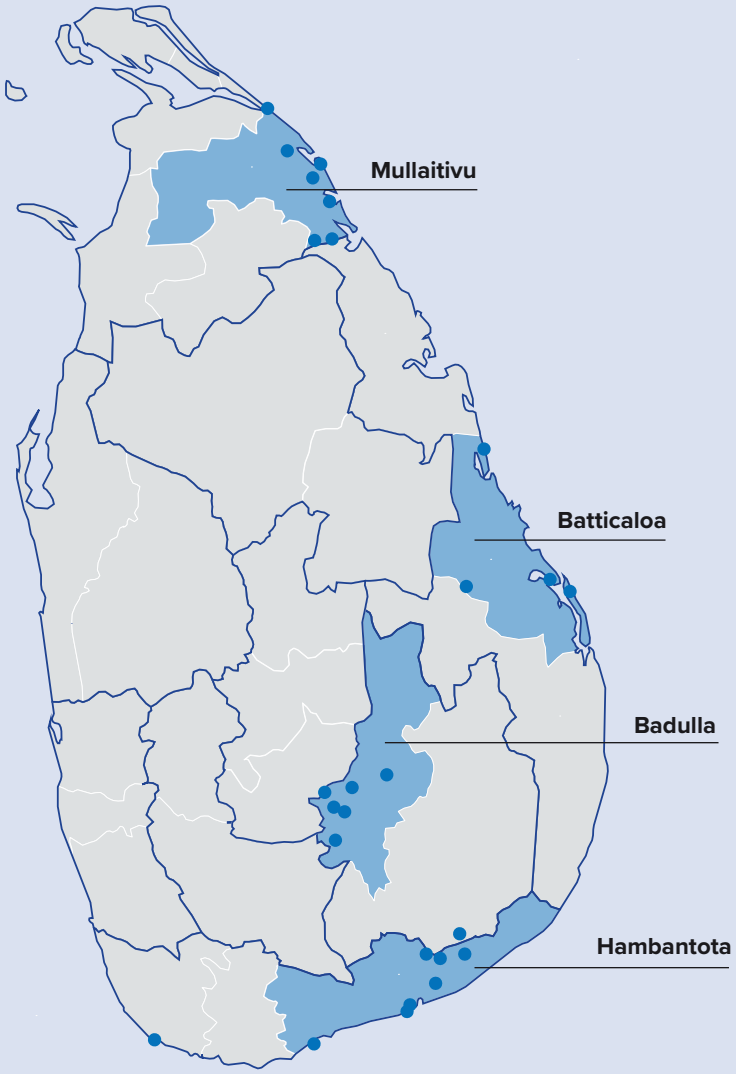
i. Climate vulnerability (magnitude and nature)
ii. History of/ongoing conflict
iii. Ethnic and religious diversity
iv. Agro-ecological livelihood zones
v. Existing or historical UN/I/NGO projects
vi. Gaps in the data
vii. Accessibility for research teams

TABLE 1. DISTRICT-LEVEL HOTSPOT SELECTION

Based on these criteria and in collaboration with the UN programme team and stakeholder consultation to ensure adequate coverage and diversity, the following districts were chosen:

Province	District	Explanation
Northern	Mullaitivu	Mullaitivu experienced high displacement and destruction from the civil conflict and the 2004 tsunami. The population is primarily Sri Lankan Tamil with Sinhalese and Indian Tamil minorities. The mixed agriculture and fishing livelihoods are affected by rising temperatures and erratic rainfall.
Eastern	Batticaloa	Batticaloa experienced high displacement and destruction from the civil conflict and the 2004 tsunami. It has a primarily Sri Lankan Tamil and Sri Lankan Muslim population. The main agriculture and fishing livelihoods are highly vulnerable to heat, floods, and drought.
Southern	Hambantota	Hambantota is affected by sea level rise and erratic rainfall, impacting its coastal tourism, fishing, and agriculture livelihoods. The population is primarily Sinhalese with Sri Lankan Tamil minorities.
Uva	Badulla	Badulla experiences high vulnerability to landslides, as well as erratic rainfall and heat. It has an ethnically diverse population of Sinhalese, Indian Tamil, and Sri Lankan Muslim communities. The upstate tea plantations face distinct climate and governance challenges.

FIGURE 2: FIELD RESEARCH LOCATIONS

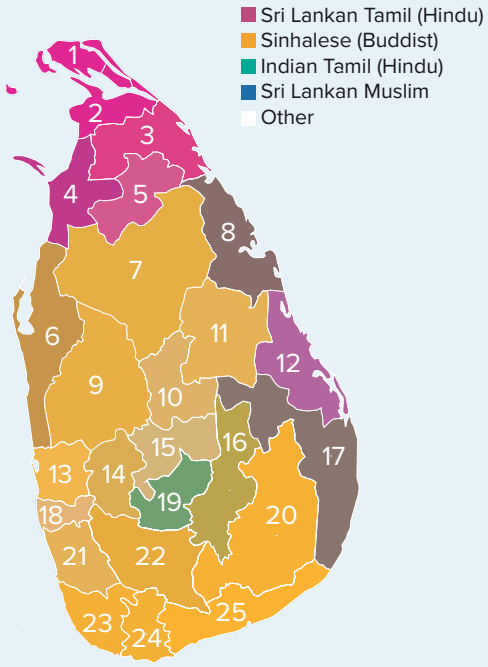


See annex I for the complete list

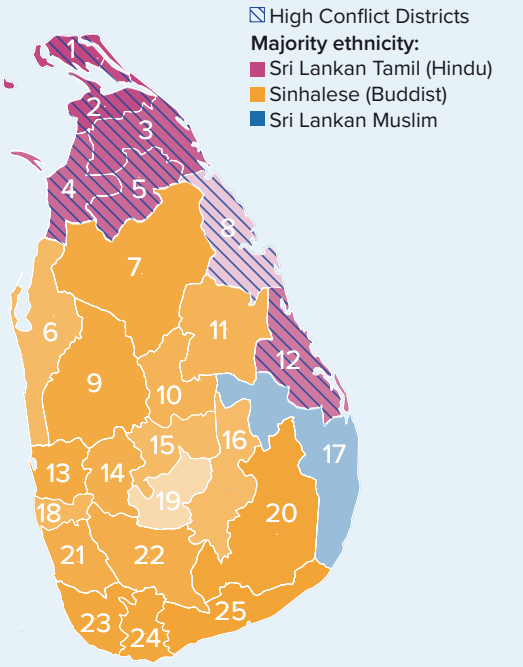
Field Data Collection

The local researchers were accompanied by adelphi to conduct the field research across the identified hotspots, leveraging local expertise and ensuring that the research is culturally attuned and resonates with the communities involved. To ensure cultural sensitivity and improve data collection, researchers were selected to cover different geographies according to appropriate ethnic and religious makeup and comprised of female, male, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim team members.

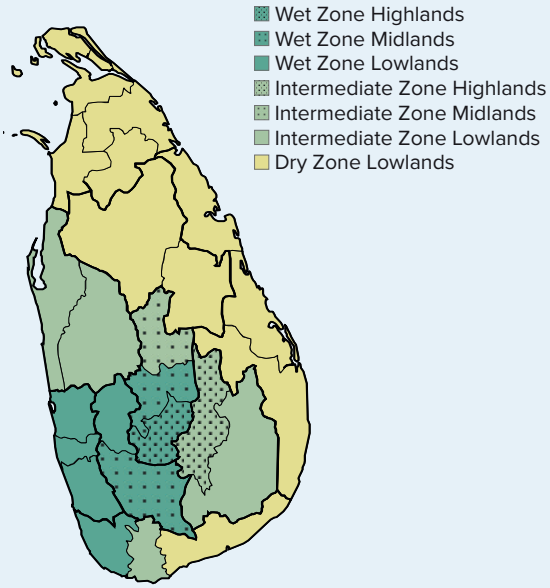
ETHNICITY AND MAJOR RELIGION



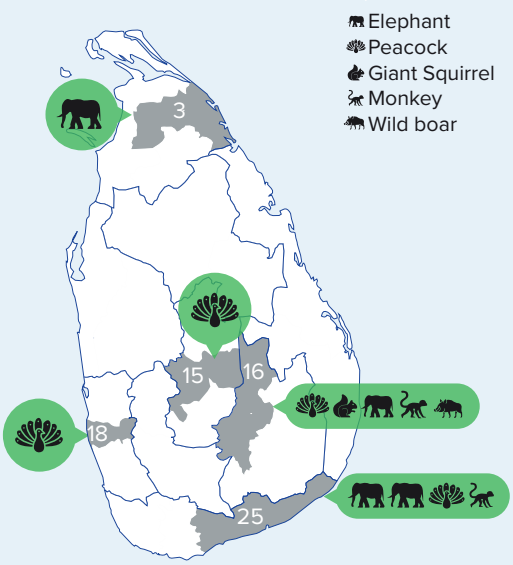
HISTORICAL CONFLICT



CLIMATIC ZONES



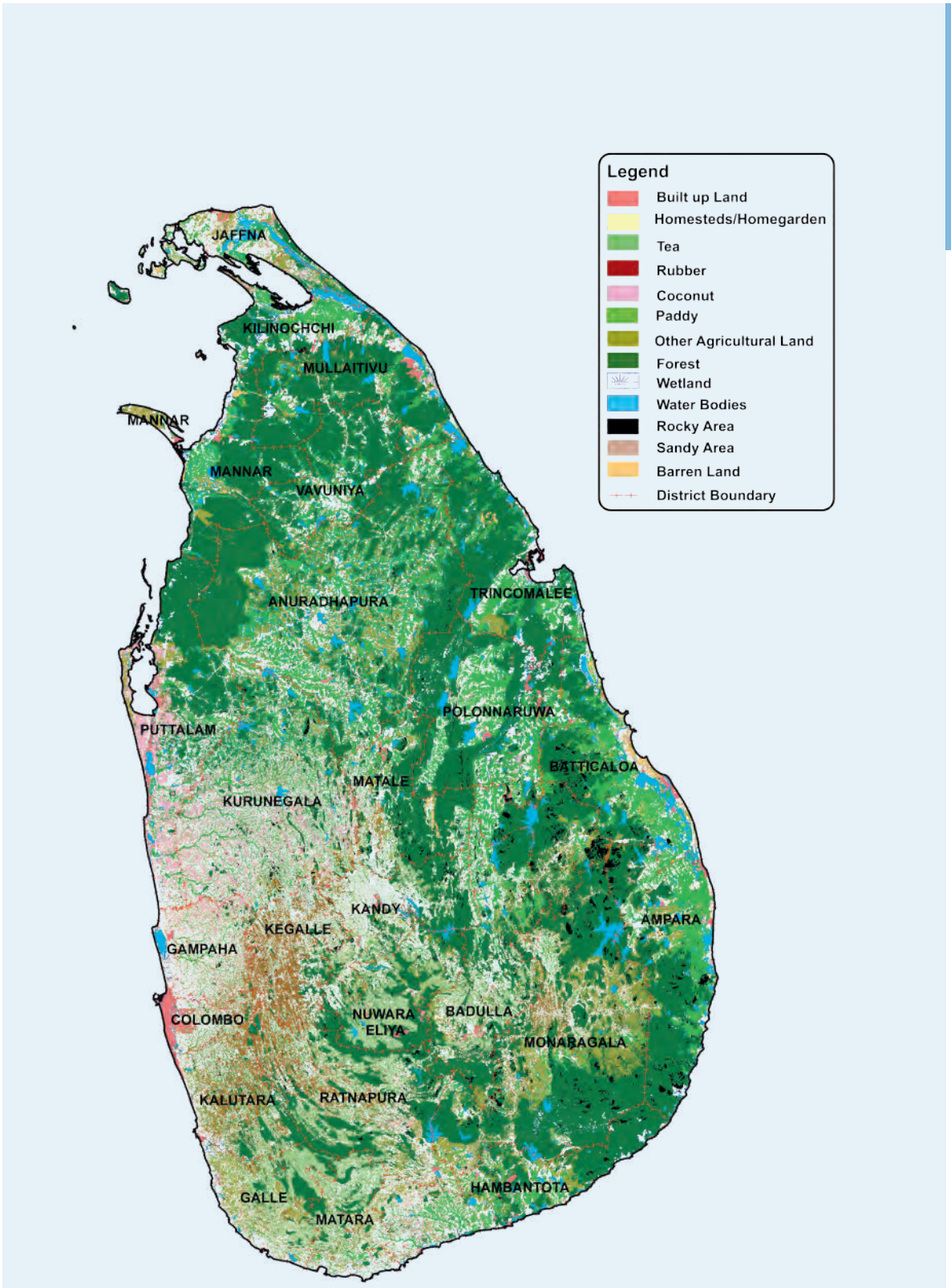
HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT



DISTRICTS:

1. Jaffna
2. Kilinochchi
3. Mullaitivu
4. Mannar
5. Vavuniya
6. Puttalam
7. Anuradhapura
8. Trincomalee
9. Kurunegala
10. Matale
11. Polonnaruwa
12. Batticaloa
13. Gampaha
14. Kegalle
15. Kandy
16. Badulla
17. Ampara
18. Colombo
19. Nuwara Eilya
20. Moneragala
21. Kalutara
22. Ratnapura
23. Galle
24. Matara
25. Hambantota

Figure 3 continues in the next page



This figure presents a series of maps of Sri Lanka illustrating: (1) ethnicity and major religion (Department of Census and Statistics 2012); (2) historical conflict zones, which combine ethnicity and religion data with areas identified from the UNCP conflict dataset. Color saturation corresponds to the percentage composition of the majority ethnic group (Sharma 2024); (3) climatic zones (Geldin 2025); (4)The map of human–wildlife conflict reflects dynamics and cases observed during field research and is not intended to be comprehensive; (5) crop and land use patterns (Land Use Policy Planning Department 2018).

Through remote consultations and a sensitisation workshop held in March 2025 in Colombo prior to data collection, adelphi ensured all members of the research team were trained and competent in conflict, gender and disability-sensitive and intersectional research approaches.

TABLE 2. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS BY DISTRICT AND GENDER

Research teams consulted 167 people from 53 towns across the four districts. Within the districts, community respondents were selected to reflect diversity of perspectives such as livelihoods, gender, religion, ethnicity, and age group.

More than half of respondents were female, 26% were youth (under 30) and 12% were elderly (over 65). The research included some focus group discussions (FGDs) but prioritised key informant interviews (KIIs) with local government, CSOs, UN and community members across a range of perspectives, ensuring appropriate representation of all social demographics, including socioeconomic brackets. KIIs were prioritised as they offer more scope for marginalised voices to be heard and facilitate a participant-led storytelling approach, compared to FGDs. To safeguard the security and privacy of respondents, all names in the report have been changed in accordance with our conflict-sensitive research methodology.

		Respondents:			
Province	**District**	**Male**	**Female**	**Other gender**	**Total**
Northern	Mullaitivu	22	24	1	47
Eastern	Batticaloa	19	29	0	48
Southern	Hambantota	14	17	0	31
Uva	Badulla	22	19	0	41

Validation

To ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of initial findings, a series of data validation workshops were held online and in person in Sri Lanka in April and May 2025. The stakeholder consultations provided an opportunity to further ground truth findings and check the relevance of programming and policy leverage points to support building resilience to climate and security risks.



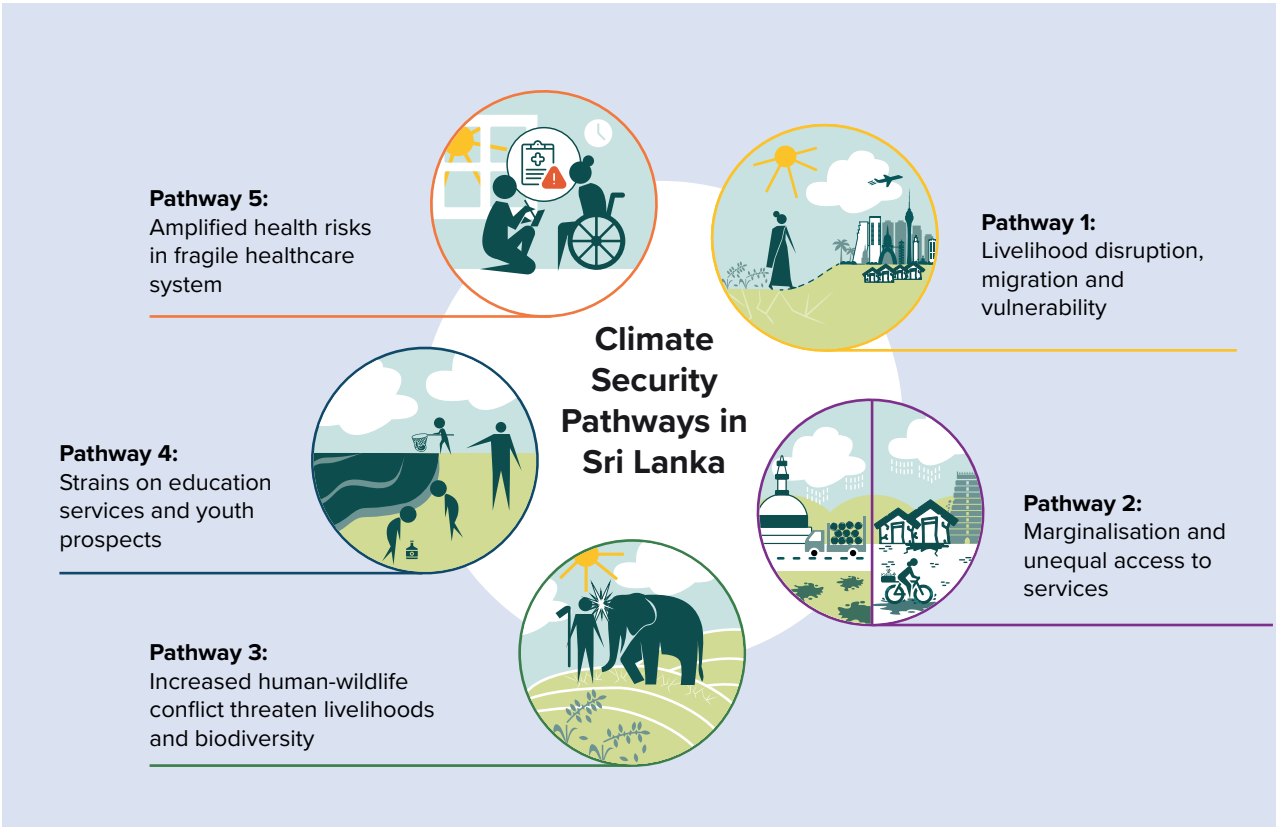
Fishermen © Ekaterina Boltaga/Unsplash

3 CLIMATE SECURITY PATHWAYS

The following five pathways show how climate stressors and security risks undermine human security in the four districts studied: Badulla, Batticaloa, Hambantota, and Mullaitivu. The districts face similar challenges in intensifying climate stressors including erratic rainfall patterns, extreme weather events, human-wildlife conflicts, and agricultural disruptions. These challenges manifest in distinct ways: landslides and soil degradation are particularly acute in Badulla, and tea plantation workers face unique challenges. Flooding in Batticaloa heavily affects rain-fed agriculture, while sand mining by powerful actors causes environmental degradation and resentment in the district. Hambantota's fishing and coastal tourism industry is particularly affected by sea level rise and coral bleaching. In Mullaitivu, erratic precipitation, illegal logging, and wildlife damage all negatively affect agricultural livelihoods. An overview of climate and environmental stressors in Sri Lanka is found in Chapter 4.

While the climate-related challenges were similar, the severity and communities' ability to respond varied greatly, shaped by access to resources, governance, and social cohesion. Batticaloa and Mullaitivu contend with continued militarisation following the civil war, systematic neglect, ethnic marginalisation, and weak service delivery that limits their adaptive capacity. Meanwhile, Hambantota has benefitted from greater infrastructure development and farmers in Badulla have demonstrated innovative agricultural adaptation strategies, yet unequal access to services limits many communities' ability to adapt.

The order in which the pathways are presented does not reflect any prioritisation. The various risks impact members of society in distinct ways, making them uniquely significant to different actors. Each district has its own story of resilience, influenced by gender roles, economic disparities, and unequal opportunities. In some areas, these factors deepen vulnerabilities, while in others, they create new challenges. Addressing these issues requires solutions tailored to each district's unique social and economic context. A full description of the district profiles is presented in Chapter 6.





3.1 Climate Impacts Disrupting Livelihoods and Driving Migration and Vulnerability

PATHWAY SUMMARY: Sri Lanka faces mounting climate security challenges as erratic rainfall and rising temperatures disrupt traditional livelihoods, drive migration, and exacerbate inequalities. Farming, fishing, and livestock rearing are becoming increasingly untenable, shrinking rural incomes. In the North and East, military occupation of increasingly scarce productive land and military use of this land for agricultural and fishery income generation further puts a strain on livelihood options for communities. Migration serves as a coping strategy for both men and women, varying in form depending on gender, ethnicity, and religion. While remittances offer short-term financial relief, they seldom contribute to long-term resilience, leaving communities vulnerable to future climate shocks. Irregular migration, in turn, brings protection risks that differ by gender and fuels challenges such as substance abuse, crime, and domestic violence among disillusioned migrants and returnees. The departure of working-age adults is also hollowing out rural economies, placing disproportionate burdens on women, children and elderly left behind. By integrating climate adaptation into migration policies and offering targeted support to affected groups, Sri Lanka has an opportunity to transform these challenges into pathways for greater resilience and inclusion.

Sri Lankan livelihoods are increasingly under threat as erratic rains flood crops, prolonged droughts dry them out, and rising temperatures with violent storms drive up costs and reduce productivity. Coastal areas are losing shorelines to rising seas, while inland communities face flooding, landslides, and water shortages. Farmers are being forced to reduce paddy harvests or abandon fields altogether due to extreme heat. Women, in particular, face added challenges as they balance agricultural work with household responsibilities, often spending long hours under the sun. Limited access to cooling resources, cultural clothing norms, and the needs of pregnant or nursing women increase their vulnerability to these harsh conditions.

Transportation challenges further limit people's ability to adapt. Breakdowns in public transport during extreme weather—and the lack of safe transport options for women—create significant barriers to economic activities and mobility. Many small entrepreneurs, especially women, depend on travelling to urban centres like Colombo to sell their products or source raw materials. Without reliable transport, their livelihoods are further strained, compounding the economic pressures caused by climate-related shocks and inflation. These combined challenges are driving poverty and pushing many in search of better opportunities.

> **"When it's the rainy season it is sunny, and in the dry season we get floods. We simply cannot trust the weather anymore."**
>
> - Farmer, male, 35, Mylambaweli, Batticaloa

In Mullaitivu, recurrent droughts and flash floods have forced farmers, especially women-headed households, to abandon traditional crops like paddy and peanuts. Despite abundant coastline, few communities engage in marine fishing, with almost all Tamils engaged in agriculture.

One female farmer, 42, stated: **"Sea work is being taken by Sinhalese and Colombo workers. We now just still do farm work."**

Reliant on rain-fed agriculture and lacking irrigation or financial resources, many have turned to low-paying informal labour. Transport challenges—



Fishing boats, Southern Province, Sri Lanka © Zoshua Colah/Unsplash

such as limited vehicle availability, poor public transit, and difficult conditions during rains and extreme heat—have pushed many women to depend on "home work" and subsistence kitchen gardens. This shift is undermining long-term resilience and deepening poverty. These issues are further compounded by the region's legacy of conflict, minimal investment in infrastructure, education, and industry, which restricts access to land, markets, and non-agricultural or value-added livelihoods.

In Batticaloa, erratic rainfall and rising temperatures have hit fishing and agriculture hard. Lagoon fishers report declining stocks due to ecosystem degradation and salinity intrusion, while smallholder farmers, particularly from marginalised communities, struggle with shifting planting cycles and lower yields. Women bear the brunt, managing strained household budgets alongside caregiving responsibilities.

One mother explained that **"young people no longer wish to go into agriculture. They want government jobs, but there are none available for them."**

In Hambantota, coral damage and shifting ocean currents have made artisanal fishing increasingly unviable. Traditional net fishing (*ma dal*) yields have plummeted, and even larger trawler boats must stay at sea longer for smaller catches. While fishing is predominantly carried out by men, women also participate, though in much smaller numbers, often engaging in post-harvest activities like drying and processing. High equipment costs and declining fish stocks render alternative methods unsustainable for many small-scale fishers. Communities in Tangalle reported an increasing trend of fishermen using LED light fishing techniques to maximise their catch, a practice that raises concerns about long-term sustainability of local fish stocks.

In Badulla, unpredictable rainfall and soil degradation have reduced agricultural yields, pushing farmers toward alternative crops like flowers or driving them to abandon farming altogether. Efforts to adopt drought-resistant crops and mulching techniques are hindered by limited access to inputs and knowledge. Wildlife conflicts, including crop destruction by elephants and monkeys, further strain rural incomes.

Economic Pressures and the Rise of Rural Migration

Environmental and climate-driven changes have made traditional livelihoods increasingly unsustainable, forcing many Sri Lankans to migrate. In Batticaloa, recurrent droughts and flash floods have pushed people to urban centres or abroad, while in Hambantota, youth, predominantly men, are leaving agriculture for daily wage labour in cities or overseas employment. A survey of labour migrants in Kuwait found that 63% had experienced climate-related impacts influencing their decision to migrate (SLYCAN 2022). Migration often provides temporary relief, helping families cope with economic stress and improve living standards.

> **"I don't want my children to suffer our hardships; I want my children to study and get government jobs which are security for life. But the children want to go abroad."**
>
> - Jyothi, mother, 39, Kathiraveli, Batticaloa

In 2024, 313,642 Sri Lankans migrated for foreign employment, with 72% classified as skilled workers and 28% as low-skilled (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2025). Migration patterns vary by gender, ethnicity, and religion. Sinhala men and women from Southern and Uva provinces often migrate to countries like the Republic of Korea under government programmes that provide legal safeguards and protections. By contrast, respondents from poorer communities in the North and East spoke of labour migration to Gulf states, where women are frequently recruited as domestic workers. Notably, no respondents from the North or East referred to government-supported migration programmes, including with the Republic of Korea.

Tamil and Muslim men from the North and East typically migrate to cities like Colombo for low-wage work, while women from these regions, particularly from poorer rural areas, are more likely to migrate to Gulf states as domestic workers.

Despite the existence of official migration systems, illegal migration is rising due to high costs, structural barriers like language tests, and limited awareness of legal options. Illegal migrants face heightened risks, including exploitation, human trafficking, imprisonment, and potential surveillance in Sri Lanka upon return. This trend disproportionately affects women, low-income individuals, and youth. The government does not provide support to those who migrate illegally and are deported; instead, they face imprisonment or surveillance, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

Migration has led to a significant rise in remittances, which remain a critical financial lifeline for families. In 2023, remittances totalled 6.02 billion USD (World Bank 2025b), with Gulf states serving as key sources. These funds are primarily used for essentials like food, healthcare, and education, acting as a disaster mitigation tool. Unlike formal relief efforts, remittances are transferred rapidly and efficiently, enabling quicker recovery, as seen after the 2004 tsunami (Ober 2019).

However, remittances are rarely invested in long-term climate adaptation or resilience-building activities. Families consulted in Welimada (Badulla district) highlighted material goods they had purchased with remittances, such as refrigerators and televisions, but noted that funds were seldom used for projects like irrigation systems or renewable energy, leaving communities vulnerable to future climate impacts (Bhandari 2020).

Migration can also generate social remittances, such as the transfer of knowledge, skills, and networks that strengthen disaster resilience. However, evidence of these benefits remains limited and highly context-dependent (SLYCAN 2022).



Street in Colombo © Brian Kyed/Unsplash

Inequalities Deepened

Labour migration often deepens existing inequalities, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable populations. Migrants frequently face exploitation due to unequal power dynamics in destination countries, lack of access to accurate information on wages and working conditions, and exposure to abusive employers. Migration related challenges not only harm migrants' health and wellbeing, but also marginalise their families left behind, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and exclusion (SLYCAN 2022; FDG 2025).

Moreover, remittances, while offering short-term relief, often exacerbate inequities. In Southern and Uva Provinces, wealthier households are better able to afford the upfront costs of migration and enjoy its rewards, while poorer families—those most exposed to climate risks—are often left with few avenues to adapt. In the North and East, migration patterns diverge sharply along gender lines, with poor women more likely to migrate to Gulf states as unskilled domestic workers, often through labour agencies that cover their costs. However, policies like the Family Background Report (FBR), which restricts migration for women with young children, have disproportionately affected poor women nationwide, limiting their opportunities. Although the FBR is now being relaxed, it has not been fully repealed, leaving many women still unable to pursue this pathway. Poor men and boys gravitate toward urban centres like Vavuniya or Colombo to take on low-paying daily wage labour.

These urban centres face compounding challenges of climate and conflict, with issues such as strained governance, inadequate housing, inefficient waste collection, and rising crime exacerbating vulnerabilities. On the climate front, rising temperatures are particularly severe in combination with the urban heat island effect. Urbanisation in Colombo is estimated to have increased land surface temperatures by 1.6°C (World Bank Group 2021b). Climate-induced migration to cities often overloads urban infrastructure, leaving many migrants in informal settlements with poor access to services. According to the Sri Lanka Urban Development Authority, more than half the population in the capital live in underserved housing, including informal settlements and dilapidated housing (Urban Development Authority 2023). Inadequate drainage and sewage systems in cities increase vulnerability to waterborne diseases, particularly after floods (World Bank Group 2021b).

These conditions contribute to social issues like alcoholism, drug abuse, and gender-based violence, creating cycles of instability that ripple back to the rural communities when migrants return home. For instance, returning men and boys may bring with them behavioural changes linked to substance abuse or involvement in urban crime, which destabilise family dynamics and community cohesion.

Women and girls, on the other hand, often face heightened risks of exploitation and abuse in urban settings, including harassment in overcrowded housing or workplaces. Upon returning to rural areas, women may experience stigma or reduced social standing, particularly if they have been involved in informal or precarious work. Additionally, women in sending communities often bear the brunt of managing the consequences of male migration, such as increased caregiving burdens, while also dealing with the social and economic fallout of returning migrants. These gendered dynamics highlight the need for targeted policies that address not only urban challenges but also the reintegration of migrants in ways that mitigate risks and promote resilience in both urban and rural settings.

These migration trends underscore how climate vulnerability and economic opportunities are shaped not only by geography and ethnicity, but also by gender, with men and women in different provinces facing starkly unequal risks and rewards.

The impacts of climate change on livelihoods are similarly unequal, with marginalised groups bearing the brunt of its consequences. Women in rural Sri Lanka, for example, earn significantly less than men in agricultural work, despite often shouldering additional caregiving and household responsibilities. Climate-induced livelihood disruptions further widen this gap, forcing women into precarious and low-paying forms of labour to make ends meet. Single-headed female households, youth, and plantation communities are particularly vulnerable. In the North and East, widowhood and high divorce rates exacerbate women's vulnerabilities, leaving them with limited access to resources and support systems.

Youth, meanwhile, are increasingly disengaged from traditional livelihoods like farming and fishing, viewing them as unprofitable and labour-intensive. This trend is particularly pronounced in districts like Badulla, where young people are migrating to urban centres or abroad, leaving rural communities with a declining labour force and weakened social cohesion. In plantation communities, structural inequalities such as low wages, poor housing, and limited access to services further restrict resilience, pushing families into debt traps and negative coping mechanisms like substance abuse.

Despite Sri Lanka's comprehensive institutional framework for labour migration, which includes key bodies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, it fails to address the critical link between climate change and migration flows (SLYCAN 2022). This gap disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, who are most likely to migrate due to climate stressors, but remain unsupported by existing policies.

Challenges for Communities Left Behind

**"Now women do men's work.
Now women do all the work."**

- Shamila, female, 29, Kokuthodduvai, Mullaitivu

The departure of working-age adults has profound social and economic consequences for rural communities, weakening social cohesion and, in some cases, contributing to grievances that threaten community stability. Women, who often remain to manage households, face increased workloads and psychosocial stress. When husbands migrate, women who remain behind and provide unpaid agricultural labour on family farms are often classified as economically inactive and labelled as housewives in legal documents. This not only diminishes their contributions, but also leaves them without formal recognition as economic actors, limiting their access to resources, decision-making power, and support systems (Gowtham 2023). In Mullaitivu, for example, women-headed households struggle with limited access to land, markets, and public services, leaving them trapped in cycles of poverty.

Across all districts, children in migrant households are particularly vulnerable, with many lacking adequate supervision and support, leading to emotional challenges for children, including feelings of neglect, stress and social isolation. These dynamics can weaken family bonds and aggravate community cohesion. The strain of unpaid care work disproportionately affects women, further limiting their ability to engage in income-generating activities or community resilience efforts. This imbalance not only perpetuates gender inequalities, but also undermines broader efforts to rebuild trust and cohesion in post-conflict settings.

Women in plantation communities, and in the North and the East especially, reported an increase in alcoholism and domestic violence associated with increased circular migration of men to and from urban centres. With limited protection options, there is an increase in divorce, psychological illness, and suicide.

Parental or caregiver migration often leads to social instability, with children left behind at risk of dropping out of school, early marriage, and substance abuse. Vulnerable groups, including women and children, face heightened risks of exploitation, abuse, and trafficking due to insufficient supervision and support systems (Yatawara 2023; FGDs and KIIs March 2025). Poorer families in the North and East reported an increase in early marriage, including child marriage, of girls due to the economic strain on the families.



3.2 Marginalisation and Unequal Access to Services Undermining Resilience

PATHWAY SUMMARY: Unequal access to services and governance failures are eroding Sri Lanka's resilience to climate risks, exacerbating social tensions along ethnic, religious, and rural-urban lines. Disparities in infrastructure investments, agricultural support, and wildlife management have left marginalised communities feeling excluded from national development priorities. For instance, farmers in the East struggle with agricultural calendars and fertiliser allocations designed for the South, while military actors face fewer restrictions on logging than local villagers collecting wood for fuel. Meanwhile, predatory microlending traps rural women in cycles of debt, preventing them from building economic resilience. Without transparent governance, equitable service delivery, and stricter regulation of microfinance, these inequalities will deepen, undermining trust in institutions and efforts to adapt to climate change.

Unequal Service Provision in a Changing Climate

Sri Lanka's vulnerability to climate change is shaped not only by its exposure to environmental hazards, but also by the varying capacities of its communities to adapt. These capacities are influenced by differences in access to services, governance practices, and social dynamics. While the government has undertaken efforts to address climate risks, perceptions persist among some communities that access to services and resources is uneven, contributing to feelings of exclusion. Perceived disparities in service provision, particularly in the North and East, have eroded trust in institutions and exacerbated post-conflict grievances. For example, respondents in Mullaitivu felt that, while the Northern Province received government resources, Mullaitivu itself was disproportionately neglected—particularly in areas like road reconstruction and bus services. Many respondents strongly believed that the lack of permits for constructing elephant fences, which significantly affects farmers, is due to the region's predominantly Tamil population.

> **"We just want permission—not even money—from the government to build elephant fences. But they have not been granted for over a year. I believe it's because they want to keep the Tamils here down."**
>
> - Murali, male, 31, Chemmalai, Mullaitivu

Climate change interacts with these perceptions and realities, amplifying vulnerabilities and creating challenges for resilience-building.

Perceived disparities in the allocation of services and infrastructure are a recurring concern across Sri Lanka. These perceptions are particularly acute in sectors critical to climate resilience, such as agriculture, water management, and transport infrastructure. For example, farmers in the Eastern Province feel disadvantaged by agricultural calendars and fertiliser allocations that are aligned with the harvest cycles of the South and Central zones.

This mismatch, coupled with increasingly erratic rainfall, disrupts planting and harvesting cycles, making it harder for farmers in the East to adapt to climate variability and sustain their livelihoods. In the Southern and Uva Provinces, perceived disparities in access to services fell along lines of social status and political and financial influence, rather than geography or religion.

The lack of solid waste management in Uva, Northern and Eastern provinces is a critical issue, with inadequate infrastructure and limited recycling schemes. Solid waste management issues were particularly acute among the plantation communities consulted. Unmanaged waste, including plastic and hazardous materials, pollutes water sources, harms ecosystems, and poses significant health risks to local communities, undermining both environmental and human security. This disparity in service provision deepens perceptions of marginalisation and weakens the social contract, as residents in the North and East in particular, feel excluded from national development priorities and equitable resource allocation.

Similarly, the rehabilitation of irrigation tanks and the allocation of permits for constructing elephant fences are often perceived as favouring wealthier or more influential communities. These perceptions are not limited to geographic disparities, but also intersect with class and social status. For instance, a Sinhalese poultry farmer in Badulla noted that discrimination in accessing government services is often tied to social status rather than ethnicity or religion. Such perceptions highlight the need for greater transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes to build trust and ensure equitable access to resources.

Governance and Perceptions of Inequality

Governance plays a central role in shaping how services are delivered and how communities perceive their access to resources. In some cases, individuals reliant on natural resources, such as wood for fuel, feel disproportionately penalised compared to other actors, such as those engaged in (legal or illegal) commercial logging. This perceived inequality is based on identity and is compounded by climate-induced resource scarcity. While regulations are essential for sustainable resource management, communities have expressed a desire for more participatory and equitable approaches that engage them in policy development and provide viable alternatives.

> **"If we were a Sinhalese area or a Muslim area, we would be receiving so much more government support. Tamil areas face the worst of everything – roads, hospitals, drinking water, education. It's all politics."**
>
> - Muthusa, female, 24, Kathiravelli, Batticaloa

Perceptions of bias in service delivery also extend to interactions with government officers. Some minority groups feel discriminated against due to the attitudes of certain officials. For example, Tamil farmers in the North have reported feeling excluded from agricultural support programmes, while some Muslim communities in the East perceive inequities in the allocation of disaster relief. These experiences are not solely based on ethnic and religious lines, as others point to class-based biases that cut across ethnic and religious lines. Additionally, while women make up 11% of local deliberative bodies, communities consulted did not report differing levels of satisfaction with male or female representatives (UN Women 2023b). Addressing these perceptions through inclusive governance and capacity-building for local officials could help foster trust and social cohesion.

Respondents from across all four districts expressed hope and positive sentiments towards the new national government. One Tamil female respondent in Batticaloa stated **"we feel they are looking at all districts equally."** This optimism was largely directed toward the potential for long-term change expressing hope in the government's commitment to begin addressing inequalities over time.

But some Tamil and Muslim respondents expressed concerns that, while the President and national government in Colombo may support more equitable measures, their implementation could face challenges at the local level, where administration is predominantly managed by Sinhalese officials.

Food Security Challenges and Marginalised Groups

Food security is a growing concern for many communities in Sri Lanka, particularly as climate change disrupts agricultural production and increases the frequency of extreme weather events. Marginalised groups, including rural farmers, plantation workers, and women-headed households, are particularly vulnerable to these challenges. In post-conflict regions, such as the North and East, these vulnerabilities are compounded by the lingering impacts of war, including damaged infrastructure, unresolved land disputes, and limited institutional support. These factors not only exacerbate food insecurity, but also risk stunting post-conflict recovery and undermining fragile peacebuilding efforts.

In the North and East, prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall have reduced crop yields, forcing some farmers to abandon traditional crops for less profitable alternatives. Women-headed households, which often lack access to land and financial resources, are disproportionately affected. For example, in Mullaitivu, women farmers reported limited access to capital and loans to invest in irrigation systems, which are critical for sustaining crops during dry seasons. These challenges are further compounded by rising food prices, which strain household budgets and limit dietary diversity.

Plantation workers in Badulla face unique food security challenges linked to structural inequalities. Low wages and limited access to services leave many families reliant on subsistence farming or market purchases for their food needs. Women are particularly affected, with their work in labour-intensive tea plucking undervalued compared to men's roles in mechanised or more general manual operations, and wages based on daily plucking quotas necessitating women work longer hours to earn comparable wages to men. Unpredictable weather patterns and soil degradation have reduced the viability of home gardens, increasing dependence on external food supplies. This has led to cycles of debt as families borrow money to cover basic needs, leaving them vulnerable to both economic and climate-related shocks. In these contexts, the lack of systemic support not only perpetuates poverty, but also risks layering additional grievances, particularly if these communities perceive themselves as neglected by national development efforts.

Poorer ethnic and religious minorities in coastal regions, such as Hambantota, face additional pressures from declining fish stocks and saltwater intrusion, which threaten their livelihoods and food security. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions—such as climate-resilient agriculture and fisheries, and equitable resource distribution—offer an opportunity to not only improve food security, but also strengthen social cohesion. By addressing these vulnerabilities through inclusive and conflict-sensitive approaches, climate action can foster trust, reduce grievances, and contribute to long-term peacebuilding in marginalised communities.

Gender-related Marginalisation and Climate Impacts

Women are particularly affected by the intersection of climate change and unequal access to services. In rural areas, women are often responsible for managing household resources, which are increasingly strained by climate impacts. This strain not only deepens existing inequalities, but also heightens tensions within communities, creating challenges for social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts. For example, prolonged droughts require women to spend more time collecting water, reducing their ability to engage in income-generating activities. These challenges are especially pronounced in women-headed households, which are prevalent in conflict-affected regions like Mullaitivu. Ensuring that women have access to resources and support systems can significantly enhance their ability to adapt to climate risks.

MICROLENDING AND DEPT TRAPS

Microfinance, promoted as a tool to empower rural women and reduce poverty, has trapped many in cycles of debt. Across Sri Lanka, predatory lending practices, high interest rates, and limited financial literacy have made women particularly vulnerable. Private microfinance institutions, requiring minimal documentation and offering loans with little oversight, target women who lack access to formal banking. Loan agreements, often not in borrowers' native languages, further exacerbate these risks (Arambepola and Romeshun 2019).

In Batticaloa, a young woman unknowingly signed over her property deeds as collateral for a loan while her husband worked abroad. On his return, she faced domestic violence and community shame, highlighting how microfinance can exploit social vulnerabilities. In Badulla, another woman took out a loan to support her home garden, as childcare responsibilities prevented her from seeking formal employment. Heavy rains and poor drainage destroyed her crops, leaving her unable to repay the loan and deepening her financial insecurity.

Climate change is compounding these challenges. Unpredictable weather patterns and extreme events are increasingly undermining rural livelihoods, making it harder for borrowers to meet repayments (Attanayake 2024). Women are increasingly taking loans for consumption rather than income-generating activities, further reducing their ability to escape debt (Arambepola and Romeshun 2019). Aggressive debt collection practices—such as harassment through phone calls and text messages, sexual bribery, or agents waiting outside borrowers' homes—add to the psychological and social toll of indebtedness (Borham 2019). Respondents spoke of increase mental health issues and suicides linked to debts.

While regulatory measures, including moratoriums and interest rate caps, have been introduced, gaps remain. For instance, a 2018 Finance Ministry initiative provided temporary relief for women in 12 districts who owed less than 100,000 rupees, with interest rates exceeding 35%, and had been unable to repay for three months (Arambepola and Romeshun 2019). Enhancing financial literacy programmes, ensuring fair lending practices, and improving oversight are crucial to help women manage resources effectively and invest in resilience-building activities, even amid climate variability. Broader reforms, including greater access to formal banking, are essential to ensure microfinance empowers women rather than reinforces existing inequalities.

Geographic Marginalisation and Vulnerability

Sri Lanka's geographic diversity creates unique climate challenges across its regions. Coastal areas like Hambantota face risks from rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion, which threaten fishing and agricultural livelihoods. Inland regions such as Badulla contend with erratic rainfall and soil degradation, reducing agricultural productivity and forcing farmers to adopt alternative livelihoods. While some regions have benefited from targeted interventions, others, particularly in the North and East, face additional challenges due to the legacy of conflict and underinvestment in infrastructure.

For example, drought-prone areas in the North often lack sufficient irrigation infrastructure, making it difficult for farmers to adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. Expanding access to such infrastructure and aligning service delivery with local needs can help these communities build resilience to climate impacts. These efforts would also demonstrate the government's commitment to addressing regional disparities, further strengthening social cohesion and trust.



Tuk-tuks © Swastik Arora/Unsplash

Rural communities across the consulted districts also expressed feeling more marginalised due to limited access to essential services like irrigation, transport, and agricultural support, which are critical for adapting to climate impacts. In rural areas, limited access to essential services and perceptions of unequal resource allocation deepen feelings of exclusion, particularly in regions with a history of conflict, or those relocated because of development projects or climate disasters. These disparities can erode social cohesion and exacerbate divisions along ethnic and geographic lines, threatening the fragile peace that communities are striving to rebuild. Perceptions of unequal resource allocation, favouring wealthier or urban areas, and governance challenges exacerbate their vulnerability to erratic rainfall, droughts, and food insecurity.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities and Opportunities

The ways individuals and communities experience climate impacts are deeply shaped by their gender, age, ethnicity, class, disability status, and other aspects of identity, creating uneven opportunities for resilience. Among poorer youth, the erosion of traditional livelihoods like farming and fishing—no longer reliable under erratic rains and dwindling resources—has left many adrift. With few alternatives, some turn to desperate paths, falling into cycles of crime and substance abuse. This unsettling trend cuts across all four districts, but runs deepest in the North and East, where the scars of conflict and marginalisation amplify the struggles of a generation seeking stability in an increasingly unstable world.



3.3 Human-Wildlife Conflict Threatening Human Security, Livelihoods and Biodiversity

PATHWAY SUMMARY: Human-wildlife conflict in Sri Lanka has escalated into a crisis, threatening livelihoods, human security, and biodiversity. Climate change, deforestation, and human encroachment into wildlife habitats have intensified clashes. Rural communities, particularly women and marginalised groups, bear the brunt of these conflicts, facing crop destruction, physical danger, and economic strain. Governance gaps exacerbate the issue, as outdated systems and ineffective government responses leave communities vulnerable. Some affected communities feel animals and forests take policy priority over their lives. Without targeted interventions—such as electric fences, coordinated land-use planning, and a balanced enforcement of conservation laws which acknowledge human and wildlife needs—both human and wildlife security will continue to deteriorate, deepening social, ecological and political fractures across the country.

Human-Wildlife Conflict

Humans-wildlife conflict is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka, but in recent years, its frequency and severity have escalated, placing livelihoods, security, and biodiversity at greater risk. Farmers now face the devastation of crops overnight, homes are damaged by roaming animals, and the toll on human life is rising. Between 1974 and 2019, animal attacks reportedly damaged nearly 800 homes and indirectly affected over 80,000 people, leading to close to 1,000 deaths.

Between 2020 and 2024 alone, over 700 people lost their lives due to human-elephant conflict. In 2023, 470 elephant deaths were reported, marking a twofold increase compared to deaths recorded in 2010 (The Guardian 2024; Kopke et al. 2024).

The escalation of human-wildlife conflict is fuelled by a volatile mix of climate change, environmental degradation, and human encroachment into shrinking wildlife habitats. Wild animals now disrupt 30–35% of agricultural output in key districts like Badulla, with elephants, peacocks, monkeys, wild boars and giant squirrels leaving a trail of destruction (Jayathilaka et al. 2021). Nationally, these attacks account for 35% of agricultural losses, and in 2022 and 2023, the damage was estimated at 55.3 billion rupees (approximately 648 million USD). Uva Province has borne the heaviest burden with 45,000 hectares of farmland ravaged (Gunathilake 2024).

The granting of elephant fence permits by the Central Environment Agency is perceived by some to prioritise animal welfare over human wellbeing, with residents in the North and East also expressing concerns that these permits disproportionately favour Sinhala-majority regions and their interests, further deepening feelings of marginalisation.

ECONOMIC AND AGRICULTURAL IMPACTS

The impacts of human-wildlife conflict are deeply unequal, with women and marginalised communities bearing the brunt of its consequences. Women in rural areas, often responsible for farming, food security, and household management, face risks in daily tasks like tending crops or collecting water bring. In Moneragala, women farmers reported frequent crop raids by wild boars and elephants, destroying their harvests and exposing them to physical danger.

Wildlife destruction hits women hardest, stripping away their harvests and often leaving them without compensation or other ways to make a living.



Elephant and grassland © Oleksandr Pidvalnyi/pixabay

In Badulla, ethnic minorities face even steeper odds, with limited resources and systemic barriers keeping recovery out of reach.

When wildlife encounters result in injury or death, women often bear the brunt of caregiving, further constraining their ability to participate economically. In Weerawila (Hambantota district), a mother and worker finds herself grappling with the aftermath of a wild elephant attack that left her husband hospitalised. Now the sole manager of her household and its primary breadwinner, she juggles overwhelming responsibilities. Yet, she resists seeking financial help, held back by vulnerability and systemic barriers, leaving her family increasingly isolated and precariously exposed. The unspoken mental health toll of such conflicts weighs heavily, especially on women, who must navigate the crushing intersection of economic survival and emotional strain.

The systems that once managed human-wildlife interactions—whether through traditional practices, community cooperation, or government intervention—are increasingly strained or ineffective. As a result, human-wildlife conflict has become a critical issue, threatening livelihoods, safety, and social cohesion.

Drivers of Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

Sri Lanka, a global biodiversity hotspot with over 9,000 known species, faces growing challenges as climate change alters habitats and disrupts wildlife behaviour. Under a high-emission scenario, rising temperatures are expected to seriously affect species in higher elevations, shifting their distribution, altering breeding cycles, and increasing extinction risks—particularly for amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals already vulnerable to habitat loss and fragmentation (Geldin 2025).

Shifting rainfall patterns, intensifying droughts, and rising temperatures are reshaping ecosystems and driving wildlife into human settlements. In Hambantota, changing weather patterns have destabilised agriculture and reduced natural food sources, forcing elephants, monkeys, and peacocks to raid farms, devastating crops. Similarly, in Badulla, the loss of predators like jackals has led to unchecked peacock population growth, compounding agricultural challenges and leaving farmers struggling to protect their livelihoods. These challenges disproportionately affect women and minorities, who often lack access to resources, land ownership, and decision-making power, leaving them more vulnerable to the economic and social impacts of wildlife incursions.

While Sri Lanka has performed well in maintaining forest cover—nearly 30% of its land area remains forested (World Bank 2025)—deforestation and environmental degradation continue to threaten ecosystems and human security. Between 2002 and 2023, Mullaitivu lost 430 hectares of humid primary forest, accounting for 3.9% of its total tree cover loss (Global Forest Watch 2025). This loss of habitat drives wildlife, such as elephants and monkeys, into villages and farmland in search of food and water.

In Batticaloa and Mullaitivu, additional strains on land include the continued military occupation of vast tracts of highly fertile plots – one stretch of over two kilometres of prime coastal land in Batticaloa is the site of a military run cashew grove. Respondents noted that only two locals are employed by military in low skilled work, while the rest of employment and thus income remains within the military's closed loop economy. In Mullaitivu, uncleared landmines still poses risks to humans and wildlife.

The government's resettlement of Sinhala families into Mullaitivu (see Chapter 6.4) poses a range of challenges, including the lack of clear demarcation of boundaries which complicates grazing of livestock. Tamil herders noted that they could previously just allow their animals to graze freely on existing vegetation, but now, if the animals graze into Sinhala lands, they will be harmed or killed. Tamil respondents note that ethnic tensions between Tamils and Sinhalese are being piqued by land and related livelihood encroachment. Respondents noted that the government 'seized' land that was abandoned due to the conflict and gave it to Sinhalese. No grievances over land were mentioned between Tamil Hindus and Muslims or Christians.

Soil degradation further exacerbates these challenges, with over 44% of Sri Lanka's soil suffering from erosion, nutrient loss, and salinisation. These issues are particularly acute in Uva Province, where steep terrain and intensive farming accelerate damage (Dharmakeerthi et al. 2015). In Badulla, pine plantations have worsened soil erosion and reduced water retention, further degrading ecosystems and forcing wildlife to encroach on human settlements.

To sustain biodiversity while addressing human security needs, Sri Lanka must balance its forestry and conservation goals with priorities such as livelihoods, food security, and climate adaptation. Achieving this balance is critical to protecting both the country's rich ecosystems and the wellbeing of its people.

RELOCATION AND RESOURCE COMPETITION

Human populations are increasingly moving into areas previously dominated by wildlife, driven by climate-induced disasters and large-scale infrastructure projects, and the burgeoning peace:

- Climate-Induced Disasters: Events like the 2004 tsunami and recurrent flooding have displaced thousands, forcing resettlement in wildlife habitats. In Mullaitivu, communities displaced by flooding frequently encounter elephants and monkeys, which destroy crops and threaten safety.

- Infrastructure Projects: Developments like the Hambantota Port and road networks have displaced both humans and wildlife, forcing them into shared spaces. In Hambantota, fishing communities relocated for development now live along elephant migration routes, facing frequent crop raids and property damage.

- In Mullaitivu, the return of Muslim communities who were displaced over 30 years ago due to the conflict has placed new pressures on land and natural resources, driven by the growth in the size of returning families. Families that left in the 1990s have since tripled over three generations, now facing challenges such as limited land, depleted natural resources, and inadequate government services.

"When we left 30 years ago, we were 1,000 families. Now we are more than 3,000 families, but we only have land rights for 1,000 families. We also don't have enough service such as school places for our children."

- Mohammed, male, schoolteacher, 31, Mullaitivu

The convergence of climate change, environmental degradation, and human relocation has intensified competition for shrinking resources. Relocated communities are often ill-equipped to manage wildlife risks, particularly where governance systems have weakened, or government interventions fall short.

CROP DAMAGE BY ANIMALS

Human-wildlife conflicts vary by species and region, damaging crops, threatening livelihoods and endangering lives:

Elephants: The Asian elephant, an endangered species, has the highest population density among range countries. Habitat loss driven by urbanisation, infrastructure expansion, and agricultural land clearing has brought elephants into frequent and often deadly encounters with humans, with over 70% of elephant ranges overlapping human settlements (Gunawansha et al. 2023; Nizam 2025). Climate change, by altering water and food availability, has further intensified these conflicts. Despite being responsible for fewer human deaths than accidents or snakebites, elephant-related incidents provoke disproportionately negative reactions, fuelled by media sensationalism (Prakash et al. 2020).

Peacocks: The Indian peafowl, once confined to dry zones like Hambantota, has expanded into wetter areas such as Kandy and Colombo due to habitat changes and reduced predators. Their population growth, influenced by cultural protections and seasonal climate shifts, has led to increased crop damage during the Maha cultivation season, as they migrate to villages in search of food (Danasekara 2020).

Monkeys: The toque macaque, endemic and endangered, has become a major agricultural pest. In the first half of 2022, toque macaques and giant squirrels destroyed an estimated 92 million coconuts, threatening coconut cultivation (Ministry of Agriculture 2025). Balancing conservation efforts for this species with the need to protect livelihoods remains a significant challenge.

CROP DAMAGE BY ANIMALS

Wild boars: The wild boar, increasingly displaced by deforestation and urbanisation, has become a frequent intruder into agricultural fields and home gardens, causing extensive crop damage. Wild boars are now among the most reported animals in domestic gardens and are a notable constraint on rice production in plantation areas near wilderness zones (Thalgaspitya and Wijerathne 2023; Kumara et al. 2023; Horgan and Kudavidanage 2020).

Giant squirrels: The grizzled giant squirrel, considered locally as Sri Lanka's national animal and a near-threatened species, has become a growing source of conflict. These squirrels damage crops, particularly coconuts, prompting planters to call for population control. However, conservation efforts and the symbolic importance of the species complicate these demands (Rodrigo 2023).

Human-wildlife conflicts in Sri Lanka highlight the complex interplay between conservation, climate change, and livelihoods and the need to balance sometimes competing wildlife conservation, climate change and social policies. Without targeted interventions which are fully cognisant of the trade-offs and which find an acceptable balance for affected communities, these tensions are likely to escalate, further straining rural communities and ecosystems.

Gaps in Governance Compound Social Strains

Historically, Sri Lankan communities relied on informal systems like *Aththam*[1] (mutual labour exchange) to collectively manage wildlife risks and protect crops. These practices, which fostered resilience and cooperation, have largely disappeared, leaving few examples of collaboration today.

One notable exception is the use of coordinated networks of watchtowers in some farming communities, where farmers take turns keeping watch for elephants at night. Equipped with mobile phones for communication and loud noisemakers to deter elephants, this system demonstrates resourcefulness and collaboration, reflecting the community's adaptive capacity to address human-wildlife conflict. Women also play a critical role in this system by preparing food for the night guards and managing household responsibilities in the absence of male family members, highlighting the gendered division of labour in adaptation strategies.

However, this practise is not without its challenges. Men must stay awake all night guarding against elephants, only to resume their daily work, leading to exhaustion and further strain on their livelihoods. This exhaustion not only reduces productivity, but also limits their ability to engage in longer-term resilience-building activities, such as crop diversification or soil conservation. With men increasingly planning overseas migration, as seen in one household consulted, this adaptive capacity may be further weakened, leaving women to shoulder even greater burdens or forcing communities to abandon this practice altogether.

The loss of social collaboration, combined with limited government support, has increased communities' vulnerability to wildlife threats. Farmers in Lunugamwehera (Hambantota district), for instance, express frustration over the Department of Wildlife Conservation's slow and ineffective responses to the growing elephant crisis. Additionally, many in the North and East perceive that local government forest, wildlife, and conservation officials offer preferential support to Sinhalese communities over Tamils. For example, Tamil farmers report being denied permits for elephant fences, which they believe are more readily granted to Sinhalese farmers. These perceptions of bias not only exacerbate existing ethnic tensions, but also risk reigniting

1 Aththam, also known as "Atham," is a traditional labour-sharing practice in Sri Lanka, particularly common in rural areas. Rooted in reciprocity and community solidarity, it involves individuals or families working together on agricultural tasks or other forms of labour without monetary exchange. Instead, the system operates on mutual assistance, where one household contributes labour to another with the expectation that the favour will be returned when needed.

grievances in marginalised regions, including those still recovering from conflict. Such inequalities in resource allocation undermine trust in governance and hinder efforts at national unification.

Communities in the North and East also believe they are facing more frequent elephant incursions due to increased development in the South, such as the construction of the new Mattala International Airport in Hambantota. These developments have displaced elephant populations, pushing them into areas already struggling with limited resources and inadequate infrastructure to manage wildlife risks.

The government acknowledges that no structured programme exists to manage wild animals, as the Department of Wildlife Conservation's mandate focuses primarily on protecting wildlife rather than mitigating risks to human livelihoods. This governance gap puts both human lives and wildlife at risk. Over the past 13 years, 149 wild elephants have been killed in train collisions, a direct result of poor coordination between the Railways and Wildlife Departments (Jayawardena 2025). Elephants scavenging in garbage dumps, ingesting plastic and other waste, often die from fatal health conditions—post-mortems frequently reveal stomachs filled with trash (Wijesinghe 2018). Despite awareness of the issue, the Department of Wildlife Conservation has failed to implement measures such as electric fences around garbage sites or reserve boundaries, leaving ecosystems and wildlife in peril.

This lack of accountability perpetuates illegal killings and the use of explosive traps like "*hakka patas*" ('jaw breaker'). Rural communities, already struggling with weakened social cohesion and limited resources, are left to bear the brunt of these issues, often at the expense of biodiversity. Without targeted interventions to address governance gaps and ensure equitable support, both human livelihoods and wildlife conservation remain at risk.



3.4 Climate Change and Poor Education Services Negatively Affect Youth in Sri Lanka

PATHWAY SUMMARY: The intersection of climate change, poor education services, and socioeconomic pressures presents a significant challenge for youth in Sri Lanka. Seasonal agricultural labour, disillusionment with education, and the financial burden of private tuition exacerbate already limited access to quality education, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. Girls face additional barriers, including caregiving responsibilities and early marriage, while boys are more likely to drop out of school to engage in labour or migrate for work. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that consider the unique needs of youth across Sri Lanka's provinces, ensuring that education becomes a pathway to resilience rather than a casualty of climate and socioeconomic stressors.

Climate Change and Educational Disruptions

Youth in Sri Lanka face a confluence of challenges, with climate change and inadequate education services undermining their resilience and future opportunities. Climate-induced disruptions such as erratic rainfall, floods, and droughts disproportionately impact rural and marginalised communities, where access to quality education is already limited. These challenges are compounded by socioeconomic pressures, gender disparities, and growing disillusionment among youth about the value of education.

Impact on School Attendance and Seasonal Labour

Seasonal agricultural work, often necessitated by climate variability, forces many children to miss school during critical periods. In Hambantota and Badulla, boys are frequently pulled out of school to help with farming or daily wage labour during planting and harvesting seasons, while girls are tasked with additional household responsibilities or agricultural work. These absences leave students lagging academically, making it harder for them to catch up and increasing the likelihood of dropping out altogether. In Batticaloa and in Mullaitivu, teachers report that students who miss weeks of school for seasonal work often lose interest in their studies, further widening the educational gap between rural and urban youth.

Disruptions to School Infrastructure and Curriculum

Extreme weather events, such as floods and landslides, frequently damage school infrastructure and disrupt transportation, particularly in Batticaloa and Badulla. Prolonged closures due to these events interrupt the academic calendar, making it difficult for schools to deliver a consistent curriculum. In drought-prone Hambantota, water shortages force students to spend hours fetching water, leaving them too exhausted to focus on their studies. Girls are disproportionately affected, as caregiving responsibilities during crises often fall on them, further limiting their ability to attend school regularly.

Socioeconomic Barriers to Education

THE COST OF PRIVATE TUITION

The poor provision of state education has led to a growing reliance on private tuition, which places a significant financial burden on low-income families. In Mullaitivu and Badulla, where state schools often lack adequate teaching staff and learning materials, parents feel compelled to invest in private tuition to ensure their children's academic success. This cost is unsustainable for many families, particularly those already struggling with climate-induced income losses. Boys are more likely to drop out of school entirely, citing the high cost of education and the perception that it offers little return on investment.

The Grade 5 Scholarship Examination in Sri Lanka represents one of the few pathways for children from poor or rural communities to access high-quality education. This opportunity comes at a significant cost, as families and children face high stress while preparing for the competitive exam. Even for those who succeed, the financial burden and the emotional strain of being separated from their families can be overwhelming. For instance, researchers met a family in Hambantota who chose not to send their child to a better school far away, as the distance and expense were too great. Instead, they opted to enrol their child in a lower-quality local school, a decision that reflects the broader challenges of balancing aspirations with economic realities in marginalised regions.

DISILLUSIONMENT WITH EDUCATION

A pervasive sense of hopelessness about the value of education is growing among youth, particularly boys. In Hambantota and Mullaitivu, many young people believe that continuing their education is futile, as there are few livelihood opportunities available to them, even with qualifications. This sentiment is exacerbated by the lack of vocational training and job placement programmes, leaving many youth disengaged from formal education and unprepared for the workforce, which could otherwise serve as a bridge to meaningful employment and social integration. Girls, while more likely to remain in school, face similar frustrations, particularly in regions where early marriage or caregiving responsibilities cut short their educational aspirations.

Social and Behavioural Challenges

DISTRACTIONS AND RISK BEHAVIOURS

The rise of mobile phones and social media is increasingly distracting young people from their studies, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas like Batticaloa and Badulla. Teachers report that students are distracted from their academic responsibilities by social media online, leading to declining performance and disengagement from school alongside other behaviours like early marriage and teen pregnancies.

In addition, social and economic pressures have contributed to a rise in risky behaviours among youth. In Hambantota and Mullaitivu, communities reported increases in alcoholism, crime, teen pregnancy, and suicide among young people, particularly those who have dropped out of school. Boys are more likely to engage in substance abuse and criminal activities, while girls face heightened risks of early pregnancy and exploitation. These behaviours not only undermine individual wellbeing, but also weaken social cohesion and community resilience.

Differential Impacts on Young People

GIRLS: CARE BURDENS AND EARLY MARRIAGE

Girls in Sri Lanka face unique challenges in accessing education, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. In Mullaitivu and Batticaloa, the burden of caregiving responsibilities often falls disproportionately on girls, especially during climate crises when families face heightened economic strain. Seasonal labour requirements further limit their ability to attend school consistently, leaving many girls academically behind. Respondents noted that girls would be more likely to be sent to work in the Gulf in poorer, rural Mus-

lim and Tamil households than in more financially stable, urban Muslim households. Respondents in the North and East were aware of the risks of human trafficking, sexual abuse, forced marriage and slavery through word of mouth accounts, but explained that people go anyway as they have no alternative.

Early marriage, often occurring as young as 14, remains a significant barrier for girls in these regions – particularly amongst Tamil and Muslim families struggling with economic hardship who view marriage as a way to reduce financial burdens. In Badulla, girls from plantation communities are particularly vulnerable to early marriage, which effectively ends their educational journeys. Respondents noted an increase in early marriage in both poorer rural and Muslim households.

> **"The main challenge for our youth is that there is no one to show them the way. Parents don't or can't anymore. And so they drop out and girls go for early marriage and the boys go to the city and get mixed up with drugs."**
>
> - Yalini, female, 28, Kathiravelli, Batticaloa

BOYS: LABOUR PRESSURES AND DISENGAGEMENT

For boys, the primary challenge lies in the gendered expectations as household breadwinners and providers. In Hambantota, where climate impacts on agriculture and fishing are severe, boys are often pulled out of school to engage in daily wage labour or migrate to urban centres. This not only disrupts their education, but also fosters a sense of disillusionment about its value. In Badulla, boys from plantation communities are more likely to disengage from formal education due to the perception that it offers limited economic returns. This trend is particularly pronounced among older boys, who often leave school to take on full-time work in tea plantations or other labour-intensive sectors.

Boys in Batticaloa and Mullaitivu face a bleak local employment outlook and many 14-15 year olds drop out of school to work as daily labourers. Through work they get introduced to 'kasipu' an illegal local alcohol, often getting addicted and then engaging in illegal activities such as kasipu production or selling drugs to fund their habit.

Many respondents described the drug and alcohol crisis in the North and East as an epidemic, directly impacting boys and young men while indirectly affecting women and girls through increased violence, divorce, and rape. Several highlighted the complete absence of police action or judicial prosecutions for drug-related crimes. This lack of response was widely seen as evidence supporting a common belief among Tamils and Muslims in the region: that drugs are being deliberately introduced in Tamil areas to undermine the education, progress, and future prospects of the next generation. This perspective reinforces feelings of unfair treatment by the government, further eroding social cohesion and trust in public institutions.

> **"Very few young people can escape through this trap they have laid to keep our people down."**
>
> - Kethes, male, 24, Mullaitivu

Regional Disparities in Educational Outcomes

NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES (MULLAITIVU AND BATTICALOA)

In Mullaitivu and Batticaloa, the legacy of conflict continues to shape educational outcomes. Schools in these regions often lack adequate infrastructure and teaching staff, creating significant barriers to learning. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by increasing the frequency of floods and droughts, which disrupt school attendance and force children to prioritise household responsibilities over education. Girls in these regions face additional challenges, including early marriage and caregiving burdens, while boys are more likely to migrate to urban centres for work, leaving rural schools with declining enrolment rates.

SOUTHERN PROVINCE (HAMBANTOTA)

In Hambantota, climate change has had a profound impact on education, particularly for boys who are often required to leave school to support their families through fishing or agricultural work. Girls in this region face fewer economic pressures, but are still disadvantaged by poor access to secondary schools and gender-insensitive facilities. Seasonal water shortages further disrupt education, as school sanitation facilities can become distributed, and students are forced to spend time fetching water instead of attending classes.

UVA PROVINCE (BADULLA)

In Badulla, the plantation economy creates unique challenges for youth education. Boys are frequently pulled out of school to work in tea plantations, while girls face early marriage pressures and limited access to secondary education. Climate change compounds these issues by reducing household incomes and increasing the need for child labour, particularly during periods of agricultural stress.



3.5 Climate Change Deepening Fault Lines in an Already Fragile Healthcare System

PATHWAY SUMMARY: Sri Lanka's healthcare system, marked by chronic underfunding, fragmentation, and inequality, is under increasing strain, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. Districts like Mullaitivu and Batticaloa face severe shortages of medical staff, medicines, and diagnostic equipment, forcing many to rely on costly private pharmacies or forgo treatment altogether. These systemic gaps, identified as key drivers of multidimensional poverty (UNDP 2023), leave the healthcare system ill-equipped to meet routine needs, let alone adapt to climate-related challenges. Climate change exacerbates these vulnerabilities by intensifying health risks such as vector-borne diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues. Overburdened and under-resourced facilities struggle to respond to these emerging pressures, while extreme weather events disrupt healthcare infrastructure and access. This fragile foundation leaves Sri Lanka's healthcare system increasingly unable to absorb external shocks, further compromising care quality and resilience.

Climate Change Amplifying Health Risks

Sri Lanka's healthcare system faces significant challenges, with underfunding, staff shortages, and unequal access leaving it increasingly strained. Climate change exacerbates these pressures, as rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and water scarcity contribute to the spread of diseases like dengue and chronic kidney disease (CKDu), while extreme heat poses risks to agricultural workers and rural families. Economic difficulties and the migration of skilled doctors further impact vulnerable groups, such as plantation workers and women-led households, limiting their ability to cope with growing health demands.

Climate Impacts on Health

Climate change is amplifying vulnerabilities, unleashing new health risks and worsening old ones. Prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and rising temperatures are driving water scarcity and heat stress, while also fuelling the rise of CKDu. Floods and droughts bring both immediate dangers and long-term health impacts, costing Sri Lanka an estimated 19 million USD annually in related healthcare expenses (De Alwis et al. 2019). As these events grow more frequent and severe, their toll—both human and economic—will only escalate, trapping the most marginalised, including women and minorities, in a relentless cycle of risk, where fragile healthcare systems and climate impacts feed into one another.

CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED HEALTH HAZARDS

Vector-Borne Diseases: Erratic rainfall and poor waste management in districts like Batticaloa have contributed to a rise in mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue and malaria. Higher temperatures, monsoon rainfall, and increased humidity create ideal conditions for mosquito populations to thrive. However, severe and widespread outbreaks are often driven by the complex interplay of multiple environmental factors, including inadequate solid waste disposal and poor drainage systems. Among the vector-borne diseases expected to pose significant risks under future climate conditions are dengue, leptospirosis, and leishmaniasis (Geldin 2025).

Increased Disease Transmission: Studies also highlight that climatic conditions strongly affect diseases transmitted through insects, snails, or other cold-blooded animals, with climate change likely to lengthen transmission seasons and alter geographic ranges.

Water Scarcity and CKDu: Sri Lanka not only faces high flood risks, but severe water scarcity at the same time, due to uneven regional and seasonal precipitation patterns. Water shortages frequently impact Sri Lanka despite its high annual precipitation volumes. Under a high-emissions scenarios, Sri Lanka is expected to maintain medium to high levels of water stress through mid-century. Already, prolonged droughts in regions like Badulla and Mullaitivu force communities to rely on unsafe water sources, contributing to the rise of CKDu. Agrochemical contamination further exacerbates this issue, making CKDu a silent epidemic among farming communities.

CKDu affects between 8% and 21% of Sri Lanka's population, with some farming communities reporting that 1 in 5 young men are affected. Alarmingly, 5-10% of children in these communities show early signs of kidney damage (Mandavilli 2024). A notably vulnerable group comprises at least 10% of the population in North Central and North Western districts (Geldin 2025). Women, for example, face heightened risks due to their caregiving roles and limited access to health care. During disasters, they often prioritise the needs of their families over their own, leaving them more vulnerable to health complications.

Similarly, rural agricultural workers, who are already exposed to harsh working conditions, face increased risks of heat stress and CKDu due to prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures and contaminated water.

Extreme Heat: Daytime temperatures combined with high humidity, measured by the Heat Index, pose significant health risks, particularly when they exceed 35°C. These conditions are projected to increase sharply in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone, particularly in the North Central Province. Stifling indoor heat is already impacting work in urban spaces and has forced schools to suspend sports activities. Meanwhile, outdoor workers, particularly women, bear the brunt of these extreme conditions, struggling with prolonged exposure during agricultural and household tasks.

Under a high-emissions climate scenario, the North Central Province could experience an additional 1.5 months of days with a Heat Index above 35°C in the near term, rising to 4 months in the medium term. The most dramatic increases are expected during the summer months, signaling an unprecedented shift toward hotter and more humid conditions in the region, further exacerbating the lived challenges of those most vulnerable.

Economic Challenges Exacerbating Fragility

The 2022 economic crisis dealt a blow to Sri Lanka's healthcare system, leaving it ill-equipped to tackle climate-driven health threats. The worsening economy has also triggered an exodus of skilled doctors, creating a dire shortage of medical staff and deepening the strain on an already fragile system.

For Sri Lankan medical students studying abroad, the appeal of staying in their host countries was driven by higher salaries, better living conditions, and greater job opportunities. At the same time, push factors such as political and economic instability, coupled with a shortage of employment opportunities in Sri Lanka, further motivated their decision to remain overseas (Abeysooriya et al. 2023; FDG 2025).

In 2023, 2,000 consultants were employed in the country—half of the required national number (Madhavi 2023). In plantation communities in Badulla district, many estates do not have access to qualified doctors and instead depend on dispensaries run by medical assistants, who are often regarded as lacking proper qualifications. These systemic weaknesses constrain the ability of communities to build resilience to climate change, as they lack access to preventive care, timely diagnoses, and affordable treatments.

RECOVERY AND PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Sri Lanka's recent stabilisation of its economic situation, including measures to address inflation and improve fiscal management, bodes well for strengthening the health sector by potentially improving resource availability and addressing critical shortages. While per capita healthcare expenditure stood at 145 USD in 2022, the government's 2025 budget allocation for the health sector of Rs. 604 billion (approximately 2 billion USD) offers some hope for improvement. Persistent structural issues — including inefficiencies in resource distribution, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas — continue to hamper progress.

Unequal Access and Marginalised Communities

Many of Sri Lanka's climate-related health risks are projected to worsen over the short- and medium-term, and raise mortality and morbidity risks in the near-term for particular demographic groups, especially outdoor laborers, the elderly, pregnant women, children, and people with pre-existing health conditions (Geldin 2025). As well as direct risks, indirect risks include mental health problems and suicide.

Marginalised groups, including women-led households, plantation workers, and ethnic minorities, face severe healthcare inequities that leave them vulnerable to climate-driven health risks. Women, balancing work and household responsibilities, endure relentless stress with limited support, often leading to deteriorating mental health. While men may turn to social circles or alcohol, women are left to shoulder these burdens alone.

Tea plantation communities face rising social challenges, including alcohol abuse, drug use, and gender-based violence. Basic social facilities provided by some plantation owners, such as kindergartens and medical centres, are often criticised as inadequate and designed to keep workers tied to the plantation. Medical centres, typically little more than dispensaries, lack trained staff and fail to provide proper care. As plantations are private property, government services struggle to reach these communities, further isolating them. Women, disproportionately affected by domestic violence and the absence of safe spaces, are particularly vulnerable, while youth face high levels of psychosocial stress from overwork and isolation, underscoring the urgent need for mental health interventions.

Respondents in Batticaloa highlight poor hospital waste management as an issue, posing environmental and health challenges.

Disaster response mechanisms often fail to address the specific needs of marginalised groups. Women report inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products during crises, and persons with disabilities face significant barriers to healthcare facilities. These gaps in healthcare delivery deepen vulnerabilities and hinder recovery from climate shocks, highlighting the critical need for inclusive health policies and services.

Coping Mechanisms and Local Initiatives

Despite systemic gaps, communities have demonstrated resilience in addressing health challenges. In Mullaitivu, families pool resources to secure clean water during droughts, while local NGOs lead waste management campaigns. Some turn to organic farming to protect their health and land from toxic chemicals. However, without robust government support, these efforts remain vulnerable amid a worsening crisis.



Badulla District, Sri Lanka © Filiz Elaerts/Unsplash

4 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SRI LANKA

This section explores the current and future impacts of climate change in Sri Lanka, focusing on the near-term (2020-2039) and medium-term (2040-2059). The observed climate data is drawn from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts' Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) Data Store (CDS), both accessed through the World Bank's Climate Change Knowledge Portal. The projected climate data is drawn from the World Climate Research Programme's CMIP6, the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6. For a complete methodology and detailed review of Sri Lanka's climate and trends in the near-term and medium-term, adelphi commissioned a complementary Climate Impact Profile for Sri Lanka.

4.1 Air Temperature

In Sri Lanka's hot, tropical climate with its regionally varied precipitation patterns, rising temperatures pose significant threats to livelihoods. Under a high emissions scenario, the country faces projected mean temperature increases of up to 0.84°C in the short-term (2020-2039) and potentially 1.64°C by mid-century (2040-2059), with Heat Index days above 35°C increasing by up to 4 months (Geldin 2025).

These scientific projections are already becoming reality for vulnerable producers. **"We already feel the temperature increasing and it is impacting growth of chickens,"** shared a chicken farmer in Himbiliyagaha Madiththa (Badulla district), who fears that continued warming will further reduce his profits. For his small-scale operation, adaptive measures like cooling systems remain financially out of reach. Such localised experiences align with broader economic forecasts, with studies suggesting climate impacts could reduce living standards by up to 10% in northern regions like Jaffna (World Bank 2021b).

4.2 Changing Precipitation

Drought

The Dry Zone and lowland Intermediate Zone of Sri Lanka face recurring droughts that disrupt livelihoods and exacerbate vulnerabilities. During the Yala agricultural season (March–September), the southeastern Dry Zone experiences prolonged dry spells, while the northwestern Dry Zone faces similar challenges during the Maha season (October–February). These droughts severely impact rain-fed agriculture, particularly paddy cultivation, leading to crop failures and economic strain. Farmers in Hambantota have been forced to shift to drought-resistant crops like millet, but limited access to affordable seeds and technical knowledge has hindered widespread adoption. Climate projections under high-emission scenarios indicate that drought risks will intensify, particularly in the Dry Zone, where water scarcity during the Yala season is expected to worsen. Similarly, the Maha season may see increasing precipitation variability, further threatening agricultural productivity.

The impacts of drought are particularly severe for women, who often bear the dual burden of managing household water needs and contributing to agricultural labour. In Monaragala, women farmers report walking longer distances to fetch water during dry spells, reducing their time for income-generating activities and exposing them to physical risks like wildlife encounters and gender-based violence.



Flooding in the Northern Province © Eswaran Arulkumar

Flooding

Sri Lanka faces recurring challenges with flooding, exacerbated by heavy monsoon rains, climate change, and inadequate meteorological observation. They are a recurring natural disaster in the country and are expected to intensify further. Sri Lanka is exposed to tropical cyclones in the Eastern, Northern and North Central Provinces (Geldin 2025). There is also a high riverine flooding risk.

Between May–June 2024, heavy rains, flooding, strong winds, and landslides caused widespread damage affecting 20 out of 25 districts, damaging over 12,000 homes, and forcing 6,000 people to evacuate (OCHA 2024). These floods disrupted education, displaced thousands, and caused fatalities, while also submerging key roads, damaging paddy fields, and spilling reservoirs, which worsened the flooding. The overflow of reservoirs and lack of proper infrastructure have compounded the problem, disrupting transportation, livelihoods, and daily activities.

The impacts of these extreme weather events are deeply gendered. Women, particularly in rural areas, face heightened vulnerabilities as they are often responsible for caregiving, securing water, and managing household resources, all of which become more challenging during floods. Pregnant women and nursing mothers face additional health risks and mobility challenges, while girls are more likely to drop out of school when education is disrupted. Men, on the other hand, often take on physically demanding tasks such as rebuilding infrastructure or rescuing stranded individuals, which can expose them to physical risks. Adaptive capacities also differ — women's ability to respond is often constrained by limited access to resources, decision-making power, and mobility, while men may have more access to financial resources or external networks, but face the pressure of being primary income earners.

4.3 Soil Degradation

Soil degradation, including changing soil pH levels and erosion, is an escalating challenge in Sri Lanka. Farmers in Badulla report unpredictable rainfall and poor land management practices have accelerated soil erosion, reducing agricultural productivity and forcing many to abandon traditional crops. In Batticaloa, unregulated sand mining along rivers and coastal areas has destabilised riverbanks, depleted water resources, and worsened soil erosion. In Mullaitivu, deforestation driven by illegal logging and land clearing has exacerbated soil degradation. Consulted communities reported a lack of support to study and address soil degradation has left farmers without the tools or knowledge needed to implement sustainable solutions (FGD 2025).

Climate projections indicate that these challenges will likely intensify. Under high-emission scenarios, increasing variability in rainfall patterns and more frequent extreme weather events are expected to exacerbate soil erosion, particularly in hilly regions like Badulla.

4.4 Extreme Weather Events

Landslides

Since 1992, the National Building Research Organisation has undertaken landslide hazard zonation maps in Sri Lanka, which enable the identification of high-risk areas (Jayathilake and de Silva 2018). The Central Highlands region, as well as slopes in the Wet and Intermediate Zones, are at particular risk of landslides, primarily during and immediately after the Second Intermonsoon period, as well as the beginning of the Southwest Monsoon period (Geldin 2025). In a survey of 24,419 buildings in Badulla District, situated in the Central Highlands, 22,436 buildings were in areas where landslides are to be expected, while 1,170 were identified as being in a high-risk zone (Jayathilake and de Silva 2018).

Nearly 72% of houses in landslide-prone areas are in rural regions, with 18% in estate sectors and 10% in urban areas (Jayathilake and de Silva 2018). Further, the majority of houses in landslide hazard areas were built without formal approval and roughly 44% were built on steep slopes (Jayathilake and de Silva 2018). Coupled with this high exposure to landslides is inadequate disaster preparedness: 81% of residents in hazard-prone areas reported inadequate disaster preparedness instructions, with 38% of residents unaware of whether disaster management committees existed in their villages (Jayathilake and de Silva 2018).

Tsunamis

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had devastating impacts on Sri Lanka, with 30,000 casualties and more than one million people displaced (Geldin 2025 & FGD 2025). Estimates indicate that four times as many women than men were killed in the tsunami-affected areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India (MacDonald 2005). The impacts of the tsunami were regionally distinct, with two-thirds of damages occurring in the Northern and Eastern Provinces where Tamil and Muslim minority populations are concentrated (Kuhn 2009). Community-level data indicates that of the homes destroyed in the disaster, 48% belong to Tamils, 23% to Muslims, and 29% to Sinhalese households (Kuhn 2009).

Aid distribution and post-disaster reconstruction looked very different to the damage distribution, with donors hesitant to fund LTTE-controlled areas (Kuhn 2009). Indeed, two years after the disaster, only 20% of destroyed homes in Ampara had been rebuilt, 30% in Batticaloa, while in Hambantota—the home district of then-President Rajapakse—more than three times as many houses were built as had been destroyed (Kuhn 2009). Between the tsunami and subsequent relief efforts, there was an effective 150 million USD transfer to the southwest in comparison to the northeast (Kuhn 2009).

Many post-tsunami reconstruction projects were shaped by political affiliations, power dynamics, and preferences. Consequently, these efforts exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created new ones through unfair and conflict-insensitive aid delivery, resource distribution, and policy-making processes. This mismanagement not only deepened inequalities, but also heightened tensions in already-fragile communities.

Over the past 20 years, Sri Lanka has improved disaster preparedness through early warning systems, evacuation plans, and community-based programmes, with schools integrating disaster education and drills. However, gaps remain, particularly for marginalised groups, including women, who face limited access to resources and evacuation routes. Women's caregiving roles and restricted mobility during disasters exacerbate their vulnerabilities, while ethnic and socioeconomic disparities further hinder equitable disaster response.

4.5 Sectoral Implications of Climate Change through an Intersectional Gender Lens

The impacts of climate change in Sri Lanka are deeply intersectional, disproportionately affecting women, youth, the elderly, and marginalised communities. The intersection of gender, socioeconomic status, and regional disparities has created uneven vulnerabilities and opportunities for resilience. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that prioritise inclusivity and resilience, ensuring that no group is left behind as the country grapples with escalating climate pressures.

Labour and Care Burdens

Climate change has disproportionately increased labour burdens across diverse groups in Sri Lanka, with women, youth, and the elderly particularly affected. Prolonged droughts in 2024 forced women to spend additional hours fetching water and tending to crops, while declining agricultural incomes pushed many to seek supplementary work (Arulingam et al. 2024). In Mullaitivu, women-headed households, already marginalised by limited access to irrigation and markets, have resorted to subsistence farming, which deepens long-term poverty (FGD and KII interviews 2025). Subsistence farming, whilst often seen as a traditional coping mechanism for climate variability, deepens long-term poverty by limiting income generation and economic mobility. Farmers grow primarily for their own consumption, leaving little surplus to sell or invest in better tools and techniques. Highly vulnerable to climate shocks, such as droughts or floods, subsistence farming often forces families into debt and restricts access to education, healthcare, and other opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty across generations.

In the Northern Province, where female labour participation is only 25%, heat stress has severely impacted opportunities in seaweed aquaculture. In Batticaloa, women and girls engage in catching prawns and fish in shallow waters, but with increased rain and flooding it becomes harder for them to remain engaged and this is increasingly left to men and boys. Women who culturally would be less likely to swim in deeper waters, are excluded from operations that have relocated to cooler depths (Arudpragasam 2025). Similarly, the Vanni Cashew operation, designed to empower women, has seen productivity decline due to oppressive indoor temperatures that limit working hours (Arudpragasam 2025). Youth in districts like Badulla and Batticaloa increasingly view agriculture as unviable, with erratic weather patterns making traditional livelihoods less attractive (FGD and KII interviews 2025). If left unchecked, this trend could disrupt an entire sector that accounts for approximately 30% of the labour force. With such a significant portion of workers affected, the resulting economic instability could undermine peace and social cohesion, particularly in already vulnerable regions.

Milling flour and grinding chilies for chili powder were suggested as livelihood options for girls, but only for those with access to grinding machines. Similarly, drying fish, chilies, ginger, and turmeric were identified as alternative income sources for women in the North and East, though these

options were rarely pursued. When asked why, women often explained that they face significant barriers, such as limited access to markets, difficulty securing fair prices even when they reach markets, and a general lack of motivation to invest in their future due to feelings of hopelessness when they can barely manage with the tasks they already face around childcare and domestic work.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities in Natural Disasters

Natural disasters disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including women, children, the elderly, and poorer households due to cultural norms and unequal access to resources. Men are more likely to know life-saving skills such as swimming and climbing trees, while women's limited internet access reduces their ability to receive timely warnings (Caballero-Anthony et al. 2023). On the other hand, some sources allege that more men may die during disasters as a result of taking riskier actions than women, painting a context-specific picture (BBC 2024).

In Badulla, elderly residents reported feeling isolated during extreme weather events, citing inadequate infrastructure and limited evacuation support (FGD and KII interviews 2025). Meanwhile, in Kilinochchi, women highlighted caregiving responsibilities as a barrier to timely evacuation during floods, further endangering families (FGD and KII interviews 2025). In Batticaloa, where legacies of forced relocations during the conflict remain fresh, disaster relief efforts implemented by the Sinhala-dominated army face significant trust issues among Tamil communities. Respondents expressed reluctance to be relocated during floods, even though only relocated households were eligible for food and financial disaster relief, further limiting their access to critical support.

Food Insecurity

Sri Lanka's food security is under increasing strain. Rice, the country's staple crop, is nearing its upper temperature threshold, with yields in the Dry Zone projected to decline by up to 34% by 2080 (Esham et al. 2018). Coconut production, vital for both consumption and export, is expected to fall below domestic demand by 2040, exacerbated by a devastating coconut disease (Esham et al. 2018).

Wildlife incursions further threaten agricultural productivity. In Mullaitivu, elephants frequently destroy crops, while in Badulla, monkeys wreak havoc on smallholder farms. These incursions not only reduce yields, but also escalate conflicts over agricultural land (Geldin 2025; FGD and KII interviews 2025). Youth and poorer farmers, who lack resources to mitigate these losses, are particularly vulnerable.

Food insecurity in Sri Lanka disproportionately affects women, who often manage household food supplies but face limited access to land, resources, and decision-making power, leaving them vulnerable to climate shocks and rising food prices. Men, as primary income earners, are often pushed to migrate for work during food crises, increasing women's caregiving and agricultural burdens, while gender inequalities deepen as women prioritise family needs over their own, risking malnutrition and health issues.

Energy

Sri Lanka's energy infrastructure is increasingly fragile in the face of climate change. Hydropower, which generates 40% of the country's electricity, is undermined by droughts that lower reservoir levels and heavy rains that accelerate sedimentation (IEA 2022). Rising temperatures also drive up energy demand, with cooling needs expected to increase by 10% by the 2040s (World Bank 2022a). Coastal power facilities face additional threats from sea-level rise and storm surges. Communities in Hambantota expressed concerns about the resilience of local energy infrastructure during extreme weather events (FGD and KII interviews 2025).



Arugam Bay, Batticaloa District © Etienne Boulanger/Unsplash

Fishing

The fishing sector, a vital source of livelihood for nearly one million Sri Lankans, faces a projected 20% decline in fish catches by 2050 due to ocean warming and acidification (World Bank 2021b). Women, who primarily work in post-harvest processing, are seeing their incomes dwindle as fish stocks decline.

In Tangalle, small-scale fishers have turned to LED light fishing to maximise their catch, raising concerns about the sustainability of fish stocks (FGD and KII interviews 2025). Meanwhile, in Batticaloa, lagoon fishers reported declining yields due to salinity intrusion, further threatening their livelihoods (FGD and KII interviews 2025). Youth in fishing communities are increasingly abandoning the sector, opting instead for urban migration or daily wage labour (FGD and KII interviews 2025).

Health

Rising temperatures and altered rainfall patterns are increasing the prevalence of vector-borne diseases such as dengue and leishmaniasis, particularly in northern and southern Sri Lanka (Geldin 2025). Women, elderly individuals, and those with pre-existing conditions are disproportionately affected by heat stress. Heat exposure has been linked to increased risks of preterm delivery and miscarriage, while traditional caregiving roles often delay women's access to medical care (ADB nd; Arudpragasam 2025).

Chronic kidney disease is another growing concern, particularly in farming communities. High temperatures and pesticide exposure have been linked to kidney damage, with shallow wells in agricultural areas serving as a key source of contamination (Rajapakse et al. 2016).

Displacement

Displacement due to climate-related disasters is on the rise. In 2024, the prolonged south-west monsoon displaced over 13,000 people in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, up from 10,000 in 2022 (IDMC 2025). Poorly planned development projects have also forced communities to relocate without adequate support, compounding their vulnerabilities.

Youth migration is accelerating as traditional livelihoods become less viable. In Batticaloa, young people are increasingly abandoning agriculture in favour of urban employment, with one mother lamenting, **"Young people no longer wish to go into agriculture. They want government jobs, but there are none available for them" (FGD 2025).**

Tea Plantations

Tea, Sri Lanka's second-largest export, supports around 10% of the population, with female workers primarily engaged in plucking and weeding (United Nations Sri Lanka 2021; Mohotti and Mohotti 2020). Most plantations are rain-fed, making them highly vulnerable to changing rainfall patterns, including droughts and heavy precipitation (Mohotti and Mohotti 2020). Rising temperatures pose additional risks, with the optimal suitability of tea-growing regions projected to decline by 14% by 2050 and nearly 30% by 2070 (Mowbray 2024).

Rising temperatures and the declining suitability of tea-growing regions threaten the economic security of plantation workers, who rely heavily on tea cultivation for their livelihoods. Workers face reduced job security, lower incomes, and heightened economic vulnerability. This could exacerbate existing challenges such as poor wages, inadequate housing, and limited access to education and healthcare, further entrenching cycles of poverty within plantation communities.

Tourism

In 2023, the tourism sector in Sri Lanka supported nearly 430,000 livelihoods, including over 200,000 direct jobs, while generating 2 billion USD in foreign exchange earnings and contributing 2.5% to GDP (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority 2024). International arrivals returned to 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with most tourists visiting Colombo and the south coast, while the north remains underdeveloped as a destination (Kiringoda 2022).

The tourism sector employs both women and men. However, women's participation in Sri Lanka's tourism sector is low due to systemic and societal barriers. Despite being 55% of the population, only 30-35% are economically active, with even fewer in tourism employment (Gunatilaka and Chandrasiri 2022). Many lack awareness of tourism-related job opportunities, while factors like social stigma, job insecurity, unequal pay, and limited career growth discourage involvement. Practical issues such as poor transport, safety concerns, lack of accommodation, and long hours further limit access, especially for women with caregiving duties.

Key attractions such as beaches, tea plantations, and wildlife face growing threats from climate change. Coastal tourism is impacted by sea level rise, erosion, and coral bleaching, while wildlife tourism is disrupted by changing migration patterns (Arachchi 2024). Adventure tourism, including mountaineering, is increasingly at risk due to heavy rainfall and landslides (SLTDA 2024). Safeguarding Sri Lanka's tourism industry will require significant investments to protect its natural attractions, critical for sustaining revenues and supporting coastal communities.

The perceived disparity in this and the obstructed potential of tourism in the North and East was flagged by a number of respondents in Mullaitivu and Batticaloa. The potential benefits of creating an equitably enabling environment for tourism to flourish across Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese areas by ensuring adequate investments in infrastructure, improved access to finance, and targeted policy incentives that promote inclusive growth in Tamil and Muslim areas could reduce this grievance.



Shell damaged, abandoned buildings, Mullaitivu District © adelphi research

5 SRI LANKA CONTEXT AND TRENDS

5.1 Demographics

Sri Lanka has a population of 21.8 million as of 2025 (Department of Census and Statistics 2025). The majority (74.9%) identifies as Sinhalese, with significant minorities including Sri Lankan Tamils (11.2%), Muslims (9.3%), and Indian Tamils (4.1%) (Bunse and Murugani 2023). The country's religious diversity reflects its ethnic composition, with Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity as the main faiths.

Administratively, Sri Lanka is divided into nine provinces and 25 districts, governed by District Secretaries who oversee local administration, development, and disaster management. Below this level, divisional secretariats and local government bodies handle community-level governance.

Urbanisation is rising, with 28% of the population classified as urban, while 72% remain in rural areas (Department of Census and Statistics 2025). Colombo, Gampaha, and Kurunegala are key urban migration hubs, driven by economic opportunities. Population growth has slowed to 0.5% annually, reflecting trends of declining birth rates and an ageing population. Children under 14 account for 24% of the population, while 12.5% are aged 65 and above (Department of Census and Statistics 2025). These demographic shifts, alongside urbanisation patterns, influence governance and development priorities.

5.2 History of Conflict

Sri Lanka's civil war (1983–2009) between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the predominantly Hindu Tamil minority left deep scars, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The conflict, driven by grievances over language, education, economic opportunities, and political representation, resulted in approximately 100,000 deaths (Anandakugan 2020).

Historical policies, such as the 1956 Sinhala Only Act and affirmative action favouring Sinhalese students, marginalised Tamil communities, limiting access to government services and education (Anandakugan 2020). The 1979 Terrorism Act and other measures exacerbated tensions, with widespread human rights abuses contributing to radicalisation (Bunse and Murugani 2023).

Th legacy of the conflict persists, with unresolved grievances and structural inequalities deepening divisions. The continued heavy militarisation in the North and East of Sri Lanka exacerbates the grievances of Tamil and Muslim communities, undermines social cohesion, weakens national unity, and hampers efforts to build climate resilience in these regions given the restrictions to land access. Tamil families in the North and East continue to face barriers, including land disputes and the lack of death certificates for disappeared relatives, which limit access to loans and legal rights (Gowthaman 2023, FGDs and KIIs March 2025).

Since 2012, there has been a rise in Sinhalese and Buddhist ultra-nationalism, targeting Tamils as well as Muslims and Christians and leading to sporadic violence (Bunse and Murugani 2023). Anti-Muslim rioting and violence occurred in 2014, 2018 and 2019 (Global Centre for Pluralism 2023). Social cohesion in Sri Lanka was further damaged by the 2019 suicide bombings of churches and hotels by an Islamist extremist group (Bunse and Murugani 2023). Respondents from Muslim and Tamil communities noted that rather than appeal for unity, the government at the time used this incident to fuel anti-Muslim sentiment, despite it being attributed to ISIS and having nothing to do with local Muslims.

Majoritarian tendencies in Sri Lanka contribute to deep inequalities and conflict, as evidenced by the overwhelming Sinhalese representation in the bureaucracy at over 90% and military at around 96% (Global Centre for Pluralism 2023). Minorities seldom hold key government positions, leading to decision-making dominated by the majority. In 2021, none of the 32 national government ministries were headed by individuals from ethnoreligious minorities (Global Centre for Pluralism 2023). Furthermore, only one out of 42 state-level ministries at the subnational level were led by a member of a minority community (Global Centre for Pluralism 2023). These barriers constrain opportunities to enhance resilience for all, by excluding diverse groups from decision-making processes. Whilst there is optimism under President Dissanayake's administration, which has pledged to address grievances and promote reconciliation, systemic inequalities remain. The appoint-



War destroyed building in northern Sri Lanka © Vidu Gunaratna

ment of Harini Amarasuriya as Prime Minister, the first woman in this role without ties to political dynasties, marks a shift in leadership. However, reconciliation efforts face challenges, particularly in addressing accountability for alleged war crimes and ensuring equitable representation for minorities (Keenan 2024).

Climate change exacerbates Sri Lanka's post-conflict vulnerabilities by deepening existing inequalities and grievances rooted in decades of structural discrimination and ethnonationalist policies. In conflict-affected regions, unresolved grievances over land rights, militarisation, and resource allocation intersect with climate-induced livelihood disruptions, further eroding social cohesion and risking renewed tensions. Similarly, in marginalised communities, populations face compounded challenges from climate variability, economic precarity, and systemic neglect, which perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion, undermining broader efforts toward reconciliation and peacebuilding.

5.3 Economic Crisis and Political Unrest

Sri Lanka's economic crisis, culminating in 2022, stems from decades of financial mismanagement, compounded by global shocks. Persistent budget deficits, reliance on foreign loans, and policy missteps, such as the 2021 ban on chemical fertilisers, weakened the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 Easter bombings further devastated key sectors like tourism, which saw its GDP share drop from nearly 5% in 2018 to 0.8% in 2020 (Perera 2023).

By 2022, Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time, triggering widespread protests over food and fuel shortages, inflation, and power cuts. Women from low-income households, disproportionately employed in foreign currency-generating industries, played a central role in these protests, which led to the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (Mashal and Waravita 2025).

The current government under President Dissanayake has introduced welfare measures, including expanded social protection and healthcare funding, to address public discontent. However, austerity measures tied to a 3 billion USD IMF loan have raised concerns about their disproportionate impact on low-income households and the sustainability of welfare programmes (Shaheid 2025).

5.4 Changing Media Space

Sri Lanka's media landscape is shaped by linguistic and cultural divides, with Sinhala, Tamil, and English media often operating in silos. Sinhala media primarily focuses on issues affecting the Sinhalese majority, while Tamil media highlights concerns of Tamil-speaking minorities. English media, though more balanced, largely caters to urban elites (Global Centre for Pluralism 2023).

Recent legislation, such as the Online Safety Act, has raised concerns about press freedom. Critics argue that provisions allowing government removal of "false statements" could suppress dissent, particularly in the lead-up to elections (Ng 2024). Social media, while a vital communication tool during the 2022 protests, has also escalated ethnoreligious tensions, with localised conflicts amplified to national audiences (Koralage 2024).

5.5 Gender, Disability, and Intersectionality

Gender grievances have received inadequate attention in Sri Lanka, despite positive social development indicators for women in health and education. Barriers to political participation persist both at the local and national level.

Despite progress in health and education, gender inequalities persist. Women's workforce participation remains low at approximately 30% in 2024 (Department of Census and Statistics 2024). Women's employment is constrained by systemic barriers such as limited childcare, restrictions on night work, and pervasive sexual harassment in public spaces (Gunatilaka and Chandrasiri 2022).

Customary laws and cultural norms further limit women's rights in areas like marriage, inheritance, and property. Tamil widows in the North and East face unique challenges, including the inability to access pensions or transfer land deeds due to the lack of death certificates for disappeared family members (Bunse and Murugani 2023).

Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Sri Lanka, with significant gaps in consistent data collection. The latest data from the Department of Census and Statistics on grave crimes, covering the period of 2015–2019, shows a reduction in total instances of grave crimes from 8,830 incidents in 2015 to 6,831 reported in 2019, with women consistently representing half the victims (Department of Census and Statistics 2019). Broken down by types of crime, women are overwhelmingly the victims of abduction and rape, as well as the majority of victims of grave sexual abuse (Department of Census and Statistics 2019). The Sri Lanka Police Department has since published a 2023 overview of grave crimes, disaggregated by sub-district, though not by gender (Sri Lanka Police 2024).

Intersectionality reveals compounded vulnerabilities for marginalised groups, such as female-headed households, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Households with persons with disabilities face higher multidimen-

sional vulnerability, with average rates of 60.4% compared to 54.4% in other households (OPHI and UNDP 2023). Meanwhile, same-sex relations remain criminalised, and the LGBTQ+ community faces violence and discrimination, often without legal recourse (Kolundzija et al. 2020).

Despite these challenges, the government has made some progress in recognising gender equality in policymaking. The 2025 budget marks a significant step toward gender equality, with Rs. 45 billion (approximately 150 million USD) allocated to the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, a 12% increase from the previous year. Key provisions include Rs. 10 billion (approximately 33.3 million USD) for women's economic empowerment through microfinance, entrepreneurship grants, and skills development. However, these initiatives largely focus on low-paying, small-scale businesses, falling short of integrating women into high-value sectors like technology and engineering, which offer greater financial stability and growth. Additionally, Rs. 1.4 billion (approximately 4.7 million USD) has been allocated to provide sanitary napkins to schoolgirls, a critical measure to improve menstrual hygiene and reduce absenteeism, thereby promoting gender equity in education. However, significant gaps remain in addressing unpaid care work, discriminatory laws, and systemic barriers to women's political and economic participation.



Crop destroyed by wildlife, Wirawila, Hambantota District © adelphi research

6 CASE STUDIES

6.1 Badulla

Badulla, located in Sri Lanka's Uva Province, is highly vulnerable to frequent landslides during the Second Intermonsoon and Southwest Monsoon seasons. Its diverse but fragile livelihoods—ranging from tea estates and irrigated farming to tourism and smallholder cultivation—leave its predominantly poor population exposed to severe climate shocks (Geldin 2025). The district's rich ethnic and religious diversity, encompassing Sinhalese, Indian Tamils, and Sri Lanka Moors practicing Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, underscores the need for inclusive and context-specific resilience strategies.

Agriculture dominates the local economy, with tea, vegetables, and paddy as staples. Yet climate change is straining the region. Erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events have disrupted farming cycles. Over five decades, Uva has seen minimum temperatures rise by 0.12°C per decade and increased rainfall during the Northeast Monsoon, while other seasons have grown less predictable (Geldin 2025). Poor resource allocation, weak government services, and economic hardship are driving migration and altering gender roles, amplifying vulnerabilities for women, marginalised groups, and those with limited means.

TOURISM IN ELLA

Ella, a mountain village in Uva Province, has emerged as a tourism destination known for its mountain landscapes, cloud forests and tea plantations. The tourism sector contributes to the local economy through foreign currency generation, employment opportunities and infrastructure development.

The rapid expansion of tourism in Ella coincides with increasing climate and hydrological risks. The area faces growing threats from landslides and soil erosion. These natural hazards are exacerbated by unregulated construction, expanding infrastructure and inadequate waste management practices. The combination of climate vulnerabilities and development pressures is degrading the environmental conditions that initially attracted visitors.

Security concerns have also emerged at the community level. Residents report disruptions to established community patterns as initiatives like the Pekoe Trail bring substantial numbers of tourists through residential areas. Current sustainability efforts have not adequately addressed the intersection of environmental risks, community security needs, and concerns about safety and intrusion, particularly for vulnerable groups.

The situation presents a significant challenge: the economic value of tourism now exists in tension with mounting environmental vulnerabilities and community concerns. The climate-related risks, particularly landslides intensified by development patterns, represent a direct security threat to both residents and the tourism industry itself.

Climate and Environmental Challenges in Badulla

Sudden downpours flooding fields one week, parched soil cracking under relentless sun the next, and unseasonable temperature swings that confuse crop cycles disrupt planting knowledge passed down through generations. Between 1974 and 2022, Badulla district experienced the most severe crop damage caused by flooding in any province (Alahacoon et al. 2024). Potato farmers in Welimada have reported that inconsistent rainfall and wind patterns are impacting their harvests, while crop farmers elsewhere shift from traditional crops to flowers to adapt to changing water availability.

The district's hilly terrain makes it particularly vulnerable to landslides, a recurring hazard exacerbated by deforestation, unregulated construction, and unsustainable agricultural practic-



Ella, Badulla District, Sri Lanka © Etienne Boulanger/Unsplash

es. Soil degradation, worsened by the extensive planting of pine trees, further exacerbates these issues. In post-conflict Sri Lanka, where trust in governance remains fragile, the failure to address these environmental risks equitably can deepen existing grievances, particularly in regions like Badulla where ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities persist.

Pine plantations, historically established for industrial purposes, reduce water retention capacity, exacerbate water scarcity, and contribute to soil erosion. In Paranagama, community members shared details of a dispute over dwindling water access straining community relations, particularly between majority and minority groups. Such disputes highlight how environmental degradation intersects with social inequalities and ethnic lines of division, risking further erosion of social cohesion in a country still grappling with the legacies of war. This dispute, however, was resolved with the support of a local civil society organisation, demonstrating the critical role of community-led initiatives in addressing these challenges.

IMPACTS FROM WILDLIFE

Adding to these challenges is the growing issue of human-wildlife conflict. Farmers report increased crop destruction caused by peacocks, monkeys, wild boars, and porcupines, while the decline of jackals—natural predators of peacocks—has worsened the situation.

Elephants also pose a significant threat to crops and human safety in some areas. Biodiversity challenges in Uva Province, such as the threat to species in the Intermediate Zone due to climate change, may indirectly exacerbate human-wildlife interactions. Women, often responsible for managing household food supplies, bear the brunt of these crises, as they compensate for crop losses through additional labour or resource management.

Socioeconomic and Gender Dynamics

In Badulla, deep-rooted inequalities—shaped by class, gender, and the harsh realities of climate change—define daily life. Women now shoulder the burden of agriculture and small businesses, stepping into roles once dominated by men as economic pressures and migration pull family members away.

> **"It's like a dream still... our country is still looking for 'the equal protection of everyone.'"**
>
> - Uva Shakthi Foundation

The recent economic crisis and the abrupt ban on chemical fertilizers have hit rural communities hard, leaving families scrambling to find new ways to survive as traditional livelihoods struggle under the weight of these challenges.

> **"I think it would be easier and better paid to have a government job, but this [farming] is the only job I know how to do."**
>
> - Amal, male, farmer, 57, Buttala

Migration has become a coping strategy for many households, offering opportunities for income generation and improved material well-being, but also creating new vulnerabilities. For instance, the absence of men often leaves women with the dual burden of managing households and agricultural activities, while also limiting access to male-dominated decision-making spaces and financial networks. The erosion of traditional knowledge systems due to displacement, loss of elders, or fractured community networks—has made it harder for some to adapt effectively, further widening the gap between more and less resilient communities.

The migration of young people has left rural communities struggling, with traditional systems of helping each other diminishing and poverty growing deeper. In places like Rahangala, some youth are staying and showing interest in modern farming methods, offering hope that with the right support, they can build stronger, more sustainable livelihoods.

Women, in plantation communities and those with young children and limited childcare, remain disproportionately affected by these socioeconomic shifts. They face unequal pay, exploitative working conditions, and limited access to financial resources or decision-making spaces. Microcredit schemes often lead to debts due to high interest rates and poor financial literacy.

RESILIENCE FOR SOME

> **"The Department of Agriculture provided us with training and knowledge for the new method, but to qualify, you had to be recommended by the farmers' association and own at least half an acre of land."**
>
> - Ravi, male, farmer, 60, Sapugolla

These bureaucratic requirements often exclude small-scale and marginalised farmers, particularly in post-conflict areas where land ownership remains inequitable and unresolved disputes over land rights persist. Such exclusions not only limit access to vital resources, but also risk deepening grievances and reinforcing perceptions of neglect among already vulnerable communities.

For those who managed to navigate financial barriers—primarily men, though some women as well—the outcomes were markedly different. Farmers in Badulla who secured financial and technical assistance, often after taking private loans to prove the viability of new ventures, demonstrated improved resilience through modernised and diverse farming approaches.

A farmer in Welimada, for instance, shifted to flower farming, securing a loan to purchase land and achieving financial stability, though declining government support and seed import restrictions since 2019 have created barriers for small-scale farmers.

Similarly, other farmers have diversified into mushrooms and spices or adopted techniques like polytunnel farming, mulching, and smart farming to mitigate risks from erratic rainfall and soil degradation. Many shared these techniques must be combined with traditional and local knowledge for improved outcomes. A potato farmer noted the benefits of a newly provided cold storage fa-

cility, but emphasised the lack of initial support for greenhouses and advanced technologies, which could further enhance productivity.

Despite these successes, farmers face uphill battles with skyrocketing input costs, lack of government support, and monopolies controlling seed and fertilizer supplies. Many have voiced the urgent need for fair access to resources, ongoing support, and better infrastructure to keep their hard-won progress from slipping away.

Government Services: Gaps and Biases

In Badulla, deep inequalities run along lines of ethnicity, class, and gender, shaping who gets access to resources and opportunities. Uva Province scored just 19.67 out of 100 in a gender responsiveness assessment, highlighting the lack of female participation and the failure to integrate gender and social diversity into governance (UNDP 2021).

A Muslim poultry farmer shared how government resource allocation often favours those with money and social connections, leaving poorer communities struggling to access services or have their voices heard. This reflects a harsh reality where financial status, more than ethnicity or religion, determines who gets support and who is left behind.

In Badulla, communities are eager for more effective government support to address persistent challenges such as inequitable resource allocation, limited outreach, and a lack of awareness about available programmes.

> **"The agriculture officer told us to plant tomato rows 18 inches apart, instead of the usual 25 we've always used. This has severely stunted their growth. Next time, I'll stick to the traditional method."**
>
> - Pradeep, male, farmer, 54, Sapugolla

Farmers have voiced the need for practical, locally informed guidance from agricultural officers and fairer access to essential resources like affordable fertilizer.

Rising costs have pushed many to create homemade fertilizers—an approach born out of necessity, but one that often comes with significant health and environmental risks. These issues highlight the urgent need for technical assistance and better communication to ensure farmers can adopt safe, sustainable practices while easing the financial burden they face.

Health and Social Issues

Environmental and socioeconomic challenges in Badulla are closely tied to rising health and social vulnerabilities. Kidney disease is a growing concern, particularly in plantation communities, where poor water quality and changing agricultural practices have altered soil's chemical makeup. Communities reported limited access to affordable and effective health care. Many rely on private providers, which are often prohibitively expensive, leaving vulnerable groups without adequate medical attention.

Alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and early pregnancies are also on the rise, particularly in plantation and remote village areas. Economic stress, social isolation and limited road infrastructure exacerbate these problems. Women in these communities face significant psychosocial stress, as they juggle the burdens of work, household management, and caregiving. Adding to these challenges, rising costs of farming have led to changes in food choices. **"As it becomes more expensive to grow and sell our own food, we've noticed changes in what people eat. Villages are turning more to fast foods like noodles, bread, and biscuits,"** shared one community member, reflecting a shift in diets driven by economic pressures.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BADULLA

1. **Strengthen Agricultural Resilience:**
   - Promote drought-resistant crops and sustainable farming practices such as mulching and agro-forestry to mitigate the impacts of erratic rainfall and soil degradation.
   - Establish community-led irrigation systems and rainwater harvesting to reduce reliance on rain-fed agriculture, especially for smallholder farmers.
   - Expand access to climate-smart agricultural training for women, youth, and marginalised groups to ensure inclusive participation.

2. **Improve Waste Management:**
   - Develop community-based solid waste management systems, including composting and recycling programmes, to address waste accumulation in plantation communities.
   - Provide subsidies or incentives for waste-to-energy initiatives that reduce environmental pollution while generating clean energy.

3. **Address Wildlife Conflicts:**
   - Implement community-managed wildlife deterrent systems, such as elephant fences, with transparent governance to ensure equitable access to permits and resources.
   - Provide compensation schemes and alternative livelihood opportunities for farmers affected by crop damage from wildlife.

4. **Youth Engagement and Livelihoods:**
   - Promote gender-sensitive youth entrepreneurship programmes in non-agricultural sectors (e.g., eco-tourism, renewable energy) to reduce migration and create local economic opportunities.
   - Introduce culturally-sensitive vocational training for young men and women in sustainable industries such as solar panel installation or organic farming.

5. **Empower Women and Marginalised Groups:**
   - Provide financial literacy programmes, fair microcredit schemes, and entrepreneurship training to economically empower women.
   - Support diversification into high-value crops, such as flowers or mushrooms, to enhance financial stability and reduce climate risks.
   - Promote women's participation in decision-making spaces to ensure their needs are addressed.

6. **Blend Traditional and Modern Farming Practices:**
   - Improve access to affordable greenhouses, irrigation systems, and cold storage to scale up modern farming practices like mulching, polytunnel farming, and drought-resistant crops.
   - Integrate traditional knowledge with modern techniques to enhance agricultural resilience.
   - Ensure equitable access to farming resources, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status.

7. **Strengthen Social Cohesion:**
   - Facilitate inter-community dialogues and collaborative projects, such as water-sharing initiatives, to build trust among diverse ethnic and religious groups.
   - Revive traditional mutual labour exchange practices, such as "Aththam," to strengthen social bonds and reduce reliance on paid labour.
   - Address stigma and improve access to documentation, such as birth certificates, for plantation workers to integrate them into broader society and improve access to essential services.

8. **Improve Access to Services:**
   - Address perceived inequities in government resource allocation by tailoring agricultural support to local conditions and ensuring transparent resource distribution.
   - Provide gender-sensitive public services that address women's specific needs, such as childcare and healthcare.
   - Improve healthcare access in tea plantations through mobile clinics and address language barriers for Tamil speakers, particularly for women and children who face disproportionate health risks.

9. **Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing:**
   - Establish community-based mental health support systems and provide gender-sensitive counselling to address psychosocial stress among women and youth.
   - Create safe spaces for dialogue to alleviate mental health burdens and promote social cohesion. Destigmatise mental health issues and integrate mental health support into healthcare services to enhance community resilience.
   - Address the isolation of tea estate workers in line housing and improve social support systems to reduce mental health burdens exacerbated by physical and social marginalisation.

TEA PLANTATIONS

Tea plantation communities in Sri Lanka face a distinctive convergence of historical marginalisation, administrative neglect, and restricted economic opportunity that creates vulnerabilities unmatched elsewhere in the country. Despite decades of fragmented interventions, plantation communities' living and working conditions remain largely unchanged from colonial times, heightening exposure to climate-driven risks.

Daily life within the plantations is characterised by physical isolation and substandard living conditions. Often, multiple families, across several generations, share overcrowded plantation-owned line houses, with minimal access to basic services including sanitation, clean water, and waste management. Inadequate government waste collection services leave communities faced with persistent waste-related environmental hazards that further compromise health.

QUALITY OF CARE

Among these basic service deficiencies, healthcare access represents one of the most critical challenges. Many estates lack qualified physicians, relying instead on dispensaries staffed by medical assistants widely perceived to be unqualified. Geographical isolation creates severe barriers to obtaining proper medical care, as community members must secure their own transportation across difficult terrain to reach adequate facilities, even during life-threatening emergencies like snake bites—a common hazard in remote highland areas. Upon reaching these distant facilities, they face additional challenges due to language barriers, further compromising quality of care. The health consequences of this systemic neglect are stark: estate populations show dramatically elevated malnutrition rates, with underweight children 2.9 times more common and underweight adult women 3.4 times more prevalent than in urban centres (World Bank 2017).

Women and girls bear disproportionate burdens in these contexts, confronting additional hardships related to hygiene and menstrual health, particularly during weather extremes when isolation becomes even more pronounced. These cascading health inequalities are compounded by limited access to education and other essential services. Consulted communities reported only sending their children to estate schools to access free lunch.

While isolated government initiatives have occasionally offered glimpses of alternative possibilities—such as a programme in Uva Province that provided young plantation workers with ownership of small 7-perch land plots, allowing them to move out of line houses and build their own homes with gardens—these efforts have not translated to improvements for the broader community. Community members noted that this initiative, which took place more than 20 years ago, remains an exception rather than a catalyst for systematic change in living conditions or quality of life.

Women in tea estates face a triple burden of responsibilities: labour-intensive tea plucking, household management, and caregiving. The wage structure in plantations perpetuates inequality, as women's work in plucking is undervalued compared to men's roles in mechanised or more general manual operations. The wage system, based on daily plucking quotas, perpetuates economic vulnerability, particularly for women, who must work longer hours to earn comparable wages to men despite performing physically strenuous tasks.

HIGH EXPOSURE TO CLIMATE RISKS

Tea estate communities are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their dependency on tea cultivation and exposure to geophysical hazards. The plantations, located primarily in the Wet and Intermediate Zones, are highly sensitive to changing weather patterns and in Uva Province, the growing risks of landslide due to heavy rains. Prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and rising temperatures have caused significant declines in tea productivity, with 2020 witnessing a 25-year low (Sidhakaran et al. 2022). These climate impacts not only threaten the livelihoods and safety of tea estate workers, but also exacerbate existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

The ageing workforce—predominantly over 50 years old—adds another layer of vulnerability, as physically demanding labour becomes increasingly unsustainable for older workers.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of tea estate workers seeking temporary economic opportunities outside the plantations. Women are increasingly migrating overseas as unskilled labourers, often taking up domestic work in the Middle East. This migration provides a critical source of remittances for their families, but also exposes women to new vulnerabilities. '*Many women, especially because of limited education, fall victim to scams by recruitment agencies, losing money and hope in the process*.' Communities referenced the concept of 'missing generations' as grandparents were forced to take on caregiving roles for children whose parents sought work abroad.

Young men are also seeking economic opportunities outside of estates, often migrating to urban centres for temporary employment in construction, transportation, and other informal sectors. While these opportunities offer short-term financial relief, they often result in the weakening of community cohesion within tea estates and increased risks of alcohol and drug abuse. The absence of younger generations leaves older workers, notably women, to shoulder the burden of labour-intensive tea plucking, further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

These migration trends reflect the growing economic precarity of tea estate communities and their struggle to adapt to changing socioeconomic and environmental conditions.

CONSTRAINED RESILIENCE

Despite these challenges, tea estate communities have developed coping strategies to navigate their vulnerabilities. Women are increasingly taking on additional roles in informal entrepreneurship, such as small-scale farming or home-based businesses, to supplement household incomes. While this can provide families with much-needed financial support, it may also place an additional burden on women, who are often already managing household responsibilities and caregiving duties,

potentially leading to increased stress and time poverty. These efforts are further constrained by structural barriers, such as limited access to markets and financial resources or literacy. In response, an increasing number of women are turning to predatory microfinance schemes with high-interest rates. In Badulla district, estate communities shared that many women fall into debt traps, unable to repay loans due to their low and unstable incomes.

CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION

The challenges facing tea plantation workers extend well beyond estate boundaries. Their ethnic and linguistic identity as predominantly Indian Tamil origin creates fundamental barriers to integration into broader Sri Lankan society. Pervasive stigma associated with plantation labour follows them when they attempt to engage with external institutions or pursue opportunities outside the estates.

This multilayered exclusion directly restricts access to essential rights and services. Consulted communities reported significant obstacles when attempting to obtain basic documentation like birth certificates—hindering mobility beyond plantation life. Women also reported experiencing acute vulnerability when interacting with formal institutions, including local police, which discourages them from seeking justice for violence or crimes.

Together, these factors create a self-reinforcing cycle that systematically denies community members their fundamental right to full social and economic citizenship and limits opportunities for upward mobility and meaningful participation in national development pathways. This entrenched system of exclusion undermines their resilience to emerging climate-related challenges, perpetuating vulnerabilities that have persisted for generations.

6.2 Batticaloa

Batticaloa, a district in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, faces a complex array of challenges at the intersection of climate change, socioeconomic marginalisation, and governance gaps. Situated in a region heavily reliant on agriculture and fishing, Batticaloa is particularly vulnerable to climate-induced hazards such as floods, droughts, and environmental degradation. These vulnerabilities are compounded by systemic inequalities and the lingering impacts of Sri Lanka's civil conflict, which have left the region's Tamil and Muslim population feeling excluded from national development priorities. Gender dynamics further shape these challenges, with women disproportionately affected by climate impacts and governance failures. This case study examines the specific vulnerabilities and resilience pathways in Batticaloa, highlighting the critical role of inclusive, gender-sensitive policies in addressing the district's challenges.

Climate and Enviromental Challenges

FLOODS AND RAIN-FED AGRICULTURE

Batticaloa has experienced three major floods in recent years, severely affecting rain-fed agriculture, the backbone of the district's economy. Flooding disrupts planting and harvesting cycles, destroys crops, and pushes households into cycles of poverty. Women, who are primarily responsible for household food security, bear an uneven burden when agricultural losses occur. In focus group discussions, women farmers noted that floods increase their unpaid care responsibilities, including sourcing alternative food supplies, managing household repairs, and caring for sick family members.

The UNDP Climate Vulnerability Risk Assessment (2023) and the Weathering Risk Sri Lanka Climate Risk Profile (2025, forthcoming) highlight that the frequency, intensity and unpredictability of extreme weather events in Batticaloa are expected to increase due to climate change. However, the district lacks adequate flood management infrastructure, leaving communities, particularly women-headed households, vulnerable to repeated losses.

SAND MINING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Unregulated sand mining along Batticaloa's rivers and coastal areas has become a critical driver of environmental degradation, destabilising riverbanks, depleting water resources, and accelerating soil erosion. The practice is often linked to powerful local interests, including political actors and sand mining mafias, who operate with impunity, ignoring environmental regulations and the concerns of affected communities. Residents report that enforcement by local authorities is weak, with illegal miners frequently bribing officials to avoid penalties. A community member from Batticaloa shared, **"We see the trucks coming every day, taking away the sand, but no one stops them. It feels like the rules don't apply to them because they have connections."**

The environmental impacts of sand mining have far-reaching consequences for livelihoods and water security. Reduced water retention in riverbeds has worsened seasonal water scarcity, forcing women—who are primarily responsible for collecting water for household use—to travel longer distances to find clean sources. This not only increases their physical burden, but also exposes them to risks of harassment or violence during these journeys. Additionally, the depletion of sand resources has disrupted agricultural productivity, as unstable riverbanks and poor water availability make it harder for farmers to irrigate their fields.

The culture of impunity surrounding sand mining has fostered resentment and mistrust within the community. Many residents feel powerless to challenge the entrenched networks that profit from this exploitation, further deepening their sense of marginalisation. This dynamic not only undermines social cohesion, but also exacerbates vulnerabilities to climate shocks, such as erratic rainfall and flooding, which disproportionately affect poorer households. Addressing this issue requires not only stricter enforcement of environmental regulations, but also greater transparency and accountability in local governance to ensure that the voices of affected communities are heard and acted upon. Integrating climate resilience measures into governance reforms could help mitigate these risks while fostering trust and long-term stability.

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

The intensification of human-elephant conflict in Batticaloa has become a critical issue, with higher human death rates in the district compared to the national average (Gunawansa et al. 2023). Elephants also frequently destroy crops and property. Contributing factors include sand mining in forested areas degrading habitats, as well as poorly maintained forest ponds driving elephants to seek water outside and increasing contact with humans.

Farmers report significant economic losses, while women face heightened risks as they tend to crops and manage household food supplies. A farmer from Mylambaweli stated during a discussion, **"We are constantly afraid to go to the fields alone. The elephants come at night, and we have to stay awake to protect what little we have left."**

Despite the severity of the issue, residents perceive that government interventions, such as elephant fencing, are concentrated in the South, leaving Batticaloa's communities to manage the conflict on their own. Women, who often lack access to compensation schemes, are particularly disadvantaged. While the Department of Wildlife Conservation manages a scheme to compensate farmers for crop losses, as well as community members for deaths, injuries, and property damage, concrete action plans are urgently needed to pre-empt damage.

Residents further report crocodile attacks as a growing concern. The areas surrounding lagoons in Batticaloa are particularly vulnerable, with 28% of human-crocodile incidents in Sri Lanka between 2010-2024 occurring in and near lagoons (Wijesundara and Karawita 2024). Flooding can also bring crocodiles to areas outside their normal range and trap them when water recedes (Rodrigo 2024). One suggested solution by residents is to explore the establishment of crocodile parks as a tourism initiative, which could help manage the population while generating income. Such a park also exists in Matara in Southern Province, another district with a high concentration of human-crocodile incidents.

COASTAL ZONE

Coastal erosion is a major concern in Batticaloa. Mangroves in Batticaloa, which offer coastal protection through shoreline stabilisation and flood control, have declined in area by 26% between 1995 and 2022 (Veettil 2022). The Batticaloa Lagoon, a productive ecosystem that supports biodiversity and livelihoods, urgently requires attention. Siltation has reduced lagoon depth, which affects fishing and water flow and impedes the lagoon's flood control capabilities. A feasibility study and funding support for dredging is needed to restore the lagoon.

COCONUT DISEASE

Coconut cultivation, a key agricultural activity in Batticaloa, is under threat from a new climate-related disease spreading across the region which is decimating coconut production. Women play a significant role in coconut harvesting and processing, yet they lack access to technical support and disease-resistant crop varieties or pursue alternative income generation activities. With coconut production falling, value addition to coconut-based products, which could provide alternative income streams, remain underdeveloped due to limited investment and market access.

Land and Resettlement Challenges

Batticaloa is home to a sizeable Muslim community, comprising approximately 25% of the population. However, relations between Tamils and Muslims are often strained, with respondents from both communities reporting frequent incidents of violence, particularly among youth. While some noted that Tamils and Muslims can collaborate in areas such as business or rice farming, Tamil respondents expressed concerns about grazing cattle freely in areas where Muslims have settled, with some stating they would prefer to leave rather than live alongside Muslims. At the same time, Tamil farmers acknowledged that Muslims dominate most trade in the region, making it necessary to maintain relationships to ensure access to markets for selling their goods.

Muslim communities expressed concerns about unresolved resettlement and land issues, despite government claims that the resettlement process has been completed in most areas. A recurring grievance is the alleged acquisition of lands belonging to Muslims by the state, a practice that rerpondents say has persisted for years. This has left many unable to return to their lands and rebuild their lives after the war, effectively denying them their legitimate rights and disregarding their livelihood needs.

One resident highlighted the plight of farmers, stating, **"Even during the war, we cultivated these lands with great difficulty. Now, we are being prevented from cultivating them by the government."** Muslim community members also pointed out that land disputes should be addressed through civil administration mechanisms. However, they allege that in the Eastern Province, the military has been actively involved in land acquisition processes, further exacerbating tensions.

The challenges extend beyond land disputes to livelihood restrictions. Muslim fishermen reported being denied access to certain areas of the lagoon for fishing, while other boats are allowed to operate freely. **"People feel they are being discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity,"** noted one respondent, reflecting the broader perception of systemic inequities.

Marginalisation and Governance Gaps

Residents of Batticaloa frequently express feelings of neglect by the central government, citing inequities in resource allocation and governance attention. Respondents felt that the government has done little to ensure that communities in Batticaloa benefit from the peace established after the war.

> **"15 years after the war, people have still not seen improvements in their individual livelihoods."**
>
> - Gayathri, female, 27, Batticaloa

> **"Most investment for Tamils goes to Jaffna and then to Trincomalee – because of the harbour. Batticaloa is neglected."**
>
> - Sujitha, 50, Batticaloa

Sri Lanka's national crop calendar, which dictates the timing of paddy cultivation, is perceived to prioritise the South and Central zones, leaving Tamil and Muslim farmers in the East at a disadvantage. The calendar is designed around the predictable rainfall and robust irrigation systems of the South and Central zones, but these conditions do not align with the erratic rainfall and underdeveloped irrigation infrastructure in the East.

Tamil farmers, reliant on rain-fed agriculture and poorly maintained tanks, often struggle to adhere to the prescribed schedule, leading to lower yields and higher costs. In a post-conflict context, these disparities deepen existing grievances, as Tamil farmers view the crop calendar as yet another example of systemic marginalisation rooted in historical inequities.

Government support, such as the allocation of fertiliser, seeds, and water for irrigation, is tied to the crop calendar, further disadvantaging farmers in the East. Fertiliser and seed distribution often arrives too early or late for Tamil farmers, making it difficult to maximise productivity. This perceived bias reinforces feelings of exclusion, as Tamil farmers believe their needs are overlooked in favour of Sinhalese-majority regions. These frustrations are compounded by the increasing unpredictability of rainfall due to climate change, which further undermines the ability of Tamil farmers to adapt and thrive. The intersection of climate insecurity and governance failures risks eroding social cohesion, as communities feel abandoned in their struggle to cope with overlapping challenges. A Tamil farmer from Batticaloa explained, **"The calendar is made for them, not for us. They don't understand our problems or listen to what we need."**

NATIONAL CROP CALENDAR

The perception that Sri Lanka's national crop calendar prioritises the South and Central zones while disadvantaging Tamil and Muslim farmers in the East stems from several structural, climatic, and governance-related factors. The crop calendar, which dictates the timing of paddy cultivation, is designed based on climatic conditions, water availability, and historical agricultural practices. However, its implementation often fails to account for the diverse regional variations in these factors, particularly in the Eastern Province, where Tamil and Muslim farmers are concentrated.

1. **CLIMATIC AND HYDROLOGICAL DIFFERENCES**
   The South and Central zones of Sri Lanka benefit from more predictable rainfall patterns and better irrigation infrastructure, which align closely with the national crop calendar's timeline for planting and harvesting. In contrast, the Eastern Province has more erratic rainfall patterns, with a heavier reliance on rain-fed agriculture and tanks for irrigation. The timing dictated by the national crop calendar often does not align with the region's actual water availability, leaving farmers in the East struggling to follow the prescribed schedule.

2. **IRRIGATION INFRASTRUCTURE DISPARITIES**
   The South and Central zones generally have more developed irrigation systems, including large-scale tank rehabilitation projects and canals, which allow farmers to adhere to the crop calendar more effectively. In the East, however, the lack of government investment in tank rehabilitation and irrigation infrastructure means that farmers are often unable to access sufficient water during critical planting and harvesting periods. This disparity exacerbates the challenges faced by Tamil and Muslim farmers, who feel excluded from national agricultural priorities.

3. **GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION**
   Farmers in the East perceive that the government disproportionately allocates resources and attention to the South and Central zones, which are predominantly Sinhalese areas. This perception is rooted in historical and political grievances, as Tamil-majority regions have often been marginalised in national development plans. For example, decisions about when to release water for irrigation are often made without consulting local farmers in the East, leading to mismatched schedules that hinder productivity.

4. **IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND LIVELIHOODS**
   The mismatch between the crop calendar and the realities of farming in the East means that Tamil and Muslim farmers often face lower yields and higher costs. Planting too early or too late due to water shortages can expose crops to pests, diseases, or unfavourable weather conditions, reducing the overall productivity of paddy cultivation. This directly impacts the livelihoods of Tamil farmers, who are already struggling with poverty and limited access to markets.

5. **PERCEIVED ETHNO-RELIGIOUS BIAS**
   The crop calendar is seen by some as an example of systemic bias against Tamil-majority areas. Farmers in the East believe that the government prioritises the needs of Sinhalese farmers in the South and Central zones, further entrenching feelings of exclusion and marginalisation.



Elephant on rural farmland © Alexpunker

Women farmers, in particular, face challenges due to the lack of tailored agricultural support. One participant noted, **"The government decides when we should plant and harvest, but they don't understand our needs. We are always left behind."**

STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Systemic governance challenges further exacerbate Batticaloa's vulnerabilities. Hospitals are understaffed, and medical consent forms are often available only in Sinhala, creating barriers for Tamil-speaking patients. Women, who are more likely to seek healthcare for their families, face additional challenges navigating these systems.

The Forest Department and Archaeology Department are also perceived as biased, with allegations of religious appropriation through the installation of Buddhist statues/temples in Tamil areas. These practices deepen mistrust and exacerbate ethnic tensions, with women often at the forefront of community resistance.

DISPARITIES IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The perception of unequal distribution of elephant fencing further highlights feelings of governance disparities. While precise figures for the number of elephant fences by province in Sri Lanka are not readily available, respondents believed that government investments in wildlife management are concentrated in the South. Interview respondents explained that they feel they are left to manage human-elephant conflicts with limited support. Women farmers, who are disproportionately affected by crop destruction, express frustration over the lack of protective measures for their livelihoods.

Gendered Livelihood Challenges

AGRICULTURE AND FISHING

Agriculture and fishing are the primary livelihoods in Batticaloa, but both sectors face significant challenges. Farmers struggle with poor marketing facilities, limited access to resources, and the absence of value addition for crops and milk products. Women, who often manage small-scale farming and dairy production, report that they are forced to sell their products at low prices to large companies like Nestlé, leaving them with little profit. Fishing communities face similar challenges, with illegal fishing practices and encroachment by other communities undermining sustainability. Women involved in fish processing and market-

ing are particularly affected, as they lack access to the resources and networks needed to compete in the market.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

In response to these challenges, some residents have turned to alternative livelihoods, such as small-scale honey production and handcrafting brooms and woven goods. Women play a central role in these activities, but their efforts are often limited by a lack of technical support, market access, and investment.

For example, coconut-based products could offer significant economic opportunities, but women lack the resources and training needed to scale up production. A woman entrepreneur explained, **"We have the skills to make coconut oil and other products, but we don't have the machines or the money to expand. If we had support, we could do so much more."**

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Women in Batticaloa face unique challenges in accessing livelihood opportunities. While Hindu and Tamil communities are more accepting of women working outside the home, Muslim communities are more restrictive. A garment and dye factory in the area provides employment for some women, but inadequate transport infrastructure limits participation of rural women. Additionally, the lack of vocational training and skilled labour opportunities further constrains women's economic empowerment such as value addition to primary food production.

Social and Economic Issues

LEGACY OF CIVIL CONFLICT

The legacy of Sri Lanka's civil conflict continues to shape socioeconomic dynamics in Batticaloa. The war remains a key reference point for the community, overshadowing more recent crises such as COVID-19 or the economic downturn. Many residents feel that reconciliation efforts have been superficial, with limited attempts to address the needs of Tamil communities. Women, in particular, bear the emotional and economic burden of the war's aftermath. Female-headed households face significant barriers to accessing resources and support, leaving them trapped in cycles of poverty.

MIGRATION AND SOCIAL STRAIN

Economic hardships in Batticaloa, exacerbated by climate change and limited livelihood opportunities, have driven a significant rise in migration, particularly among women from middle- and low-income families. Many women migrate to the Middle East for employment as domestic workers, caregivers, or in other low-wage sectors, seeking to support their families financially. While remittances sent back home provide critical income for households, the social costs of migration are profound and disproportionately borne by women and children.

For women who migrate, the journey is often fraught with risks. Many rely on informal recruitment agencies or brokers, who charge exorbitant fees and provide little information about working conditions. A lack of financial literacy and legal protections leaves many women vulnerable to exploitation, wage theft, and abuse in their host countries. A migrant worker from Batticaloa, who returned after working in Kuwait, shared her experience: **"I went to earn money for my children's education, but I was treated like a slave. They didn't let me rest, and when I wanted to come back, they took my passport."**

The decision to migrate is rarely an easy one, especially for mothers. Many women report feelings of guilt and anxiety about leaving their children behind, but they see no alternative given the lack of local employment opportunities. A woman preparing to migrate to Saudi Arabia explained during a focus group discussion: **"I don't want to leave my children, but what choice do I have? My husband's income is not enough, and the debts are piling up. If I don't go, we will lose everything."**

For those left behind, the absence of a mother or wife creates a vacuum that is difficult to fill. Wom-

en who remain in Batticaloa to manage households often face the dual burden of caregiving and income generation, with little support from extended family or community networks. This additional workload can lead to physical exhaustion and mental health challenges, particularly for women in female-headed households. In a region still grappling with the legacies of conflict, these pressures are compounded by the erosion of traditional community support systems, which were already weakened by years of displacement and social fragmentation.

Children in migrant households are particularly vulnerable to neglect, poor educational outcomes, and emotional distress. Research participants reflected on how without a mother's presence, children were perceived to lack adequate supervision, leading to behavioural issues, school dropouts, or early marriages. A schoolteacher in Batticaloa noted: **"We see many children from migrant families struggling in school. They miss their mothers, and some even stop coming to class because there's no one to guide them at home."** The absence of stable caregiving structures also risks perpetuating cycles of vulnerability, as children in these households face limited opportunities for upward mobility and resilience-building.

The absence of mothers also places additional responsibilities on fathers, who may not be accustomed to managing household tasks or caregiving. In some cases, this dynamic leads to increased frustration and tension, contributing to domestic violence or substance abuse. A community leader explained: **"When the mother is away for three years in the Gulf to work, the father often feels lost. Some forget their jobs and turn to alcohol, locking the women into having to go abroad again and the family suffers even more."**

Migration has also been linked to rising divorce rates in Batticaloa. Long periods of separation strain marital relationships, and in some cases, men remarry or abandon their families altogether. Women who return from abroad often find themselves in precarious situations, with no financial security or social support. A returnee migrant shared: **"I worked for years to send money home, but when I came back, my husband had married someone else. Now I have nothing."**

The broader community also feels the impact of migration. The departure of working-age adults, particularly women, weakens social cohesion and leaves gaps in community resilience. Traditional support systems, such as informal childcare or shared agricultural labour, are eroded, making it harder for families to cope with economic or climate-related shocks.

Despite these challenges, migration remains a critical coping mechanism for many families in Batticaloa. Remittances help cover essential expenses such as food, education, and healthcare, and they often act as a buffer against economic and climate-related stresses. However, the benefits of migration are unevenly distributed, with wealthier households better positioned to afford the initial costs of migration and reap its rewards. Poorer families, by contrast, are more likely to rely on informal channels, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

ADDICTION AND SOCIAL DECAY

The rising trend of addiction to alcohol and drugs in Batticaloa is intricately linked to the economic and social stresses created by climate change. The district's reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods, such as agriculture and fishing, means that families are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of erratic rainfall, floods, and other extreme weather events. These climate shocks disrupt income streams, deepen poverty, and create a sense of hopelessness—conditions that often drive individuals to seek escape through substance abuse.

For men, who are often viewed as the primary breadwinners, the failure of crops or the destruction of fishing equipment due to floods or human-elephant conflict can lead to feelings of inadequacy and despair. The loss of anticipated crop yields, which farmers would have been relied upon as collateral to secure agricultural loans, also fuels debt traps. This emotional strain, sense of shame linked to traditional masculine identities being compromised, combined with economic hardship, pushes many men toward alcohol, drugs, depression and even suicide as a coping mechanism. A farmer from Batticaloa explained during a focus group discussion, **"When the harvest fails, we have nothing to do. Some of us turn to drinking because it feels like there's no way out."**

The economic fallout of climate-related livelihood stress disproportionately impacts women, who often must take on additional responsibilities to manage household finances and food security. In many cases, women are forced to seek alternative income sources, such as small-scale handcrafting or selling milk products, to compensate for the loss of agricultural income. However, these efforts are frequently undervalued, and women face significant barriers in accessing markets or resources to expand their income-generating activities.

The intersection of livelihood stress and addiction creates a vicious cycle of vulnerability for women. As men turn to alcohol or drugs, household finances are further depleted, and women bear the brunt of managing the fallout. This often manifests as increased domestic violence, as addiction fuels aggressive behaviour and exacerbates existing gender inequalities.

A woman from a rural village near Batticaloa shared, **"When the crops fail, my husband drinks more. He gets angry easily, and we are the ones who suffer. There's no one to help us."** These dynamics are particularly acute in post-conflict areas, where the breakdown of community safety nets and limited access to justice systems leave women with few avenues for protection or recourse.

Climate change also intensifies the conditions that lead to GBV in other ways. For example, women in Batticaloa often have to travel longer distances to fetch water or collect firewood due to environmental degradation and resource scarcity. These tasks expose them to risks of harassment or violence, particularly in areas where traditional community safety networks have broken down. Additionally, the economic strain caused by climate impacts often forces children, particularly girls, to drop out of school to support their families, increasing their vulnerability to early marriage or exploitation.

The mental health toll on women is significant but often overlooked. The combination of economic stress, domestic violence, and the lack of safe spaces or mental health support leaves many women feeling isolated and trapped. One participant noted, **"We carry everything on our shoulders—feeding the family, earning money, and dealing with violence at home. But there's no one to listen to us."** In a region where the psychological scars of war remain unhealed, the added burden of climate-induced stress further exacerbates mental health challenges, particularly for women and children.

Efforts to address these challenges must recognise the interconnected nature of climate change, addiction, and GBV. Expanding livelihood support for women, such as training in climate-resilient agriculture or access to microfinance for starting small businesses, can help reduce economic dependence on climate-sensitive activities and provide women with greater financial independence. At the same time, community-based initiatives to combat addiction and GBV must be scaled up, with a focus on involving men and boys, as well as male community and religious leaders, in awareness campaigns to address harmful gender norms.

Moreover, integrating mental health services into disaster response mechanisms and creating safe spaces for women in climate-affected communities are critical steps. As one women's group leader from Batticaloa put it, **"Climate change is not just about the weather. It is breaking our homes and our communities. If we want to survive, we need to support each other and find new ways to live."**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BATTICALOA

1. **Community-Led Drought Adaptation:**
   - Develop and support implementation of existing community-level water management plans, including irrigation tank rehabilitation and drought-resistant crop programmes tailored to local needs.
   - Train local farmers on adaptive planting calendars to align with changing rainfall patterns.

2. **Address Waste Management:**
   - Establish community-operated waste collection and recycling centres to manage solid waste effectively, particularly in lagoon areas.
   - Educate communities on waste segregation and provide infrastructure for composting organic waste to reduce environmental degradation.

3. **Youth and Livelihoods:**
   - Introduce youth-focused agricultural innovation hubs to encourage engagement in climate-resilient farming and aquaculture.
   - Provide micro-grants for youth entrepreneurship in eco-tourism and sustainable crafts.

4. **Governance and Equity:**
   - Enhance participatory governance mechanisms to ensure that marginalised groups, including Tamil and Muslim communities, have a voice in climate adaptation planning.

5. **Empower Women through Livelihoods and Improve Transport Access:**
   - Provide subsidies and technical training for women to establish profitable businesses, such as coconut-based product manufacturing.
   - Establish localised processing centres for value addition in crops and dairy to reduce dependence on external markets and increase household incomes.
   - Invest in safer and more reliable transport options to enable women to fully participate in economic activities. Examples include subsidised transport services to garment factories or markets, especially in areas where women face security risks traveling long distances.

6. **Strengthen Governance and Tailor Agricultural Policies:**
   - Establish a Paddy Association office in Batticaloa to give Tamil and Muslim farmers a voice in decisions on crop calendars and fertilizer distribution, ensuring alignment with local climatic conditions.
   - Invest in the rehabilitation of rain-fed tanks and irrigation infrastructure to improve water resource management for farmers in the East, building on existing plans in flood mitigation and abandoned tank restoration that have lagged in implementation.
   - Launch capacity-building programmes for male and female farmers, focusing on climate-resilient agriculture and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), tailored to the province's specific climate and agricultural techniques.
   - Bridge regional disparities in agricultural development by aligning policies with local needs and priorities.
   - Strengthen interagency coordination and ensure relevant actors — Municipal Councils, Pradeshiya Sabhas, Public Health Inspectors, and Agriculture and Irrigation Departments — are actively engaged in consultations for effective local governance.

7. **Address Social Issues and Expand Education Access:**
   - Combat addiction and gender-based violence through community-driven approaches supported by institutions.
   - Establish safe spaces for women and girls and conduct awareness campaigns on substance abuse to reduce vulnerabilities and foster social cohesion.
   - Expand vocational training programmes tailored to local industries, such as garment production or eco-tourism, to create sustainable income opportunities for women and youth.
   - Provide targeted scholarships and transport support for rural youth, including girls, boys, and gender-diverse children, to improve educational outcomes and reduce dropout rates.
   - Build long-term resilience against poverty and climate challenges through education and skills development initiatives.

VEDDAS INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Veddas, one of Sri Lanka's Indigenous communities, have a unique cultural and historical connection to the land, practising traditional livelihoods such as hunting, gathering, and small-scale farming. In Batticaloa, the Veddas face mounting challenges as climate change, environmental degradation, and governance issues disrupt their way of life. Erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and deforestation have reduced access to natural resources such as water, wild plants, and game, which are essential for their subsistence. These changes threaten their food security and cultural heritage, as their traditional knowledge systems are deeply tied to the environment.

The isolated location of Vedda settlements in the jungle further exacerbates their vulnerability, especially in accessing essential services like healthcare and education. Seasonal rainfall often renders roads impassable, cutting off communities from schools and clinics. This was historically managed by using boats during the rainy season, but climate change means that flooding is now unpredictable, and boats cannot be made available. During field research for this study, the road to one settlement was impassable by a regular vehicle, making it impossible for children to reach school by bus.

Land encroachment, stringently policed forestry rules and government resettlement programmes have further marginalised the Veddas, limiting their access to ancestral lands and use of forest products. Addressing these issues requires inclusive policies that respect Indigenous rights, protect natural resources, and integrate the Veddas into climate adaptation and peacebuilding

6.3 Hambantota

Hambantota, located in Sri Lanka's Southern Province, has a unique combination of climate vulnerabilities, socioeconomic challenges, while having historically enjoyed a central role in the country's political and development landscape. The district faces various climate hazards as it spans three climatic zones: the Dry Zone, the Intermediate Zone and Wet Zone.

Risks include prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and sea level rise—which threaten both inland and coastal livelihoods. Coastal communities are particularly vulnerable to coral bleaching, ecosystem degradation, and saltwater intrusion, which disrupt traditional fishing practices and southern coastal tourism. Hambantota also experiences moderate rates of displacement, driven by both environmental pressures and socioeconomic development.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

As the hometown of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Hambantota's story is shaped by its political ties. During his tenure, the district saw massive infrastructure projects like the Hambantota Port and Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, part of a bold vision to turn the area into a regional economic hub.

These investments brought resources and opportunities that many other regions lacked, shaping its economic landscape and influencing the resilience of its communities today. However, these projects have faced criticism for prioritising political ambitions over sustainable benefits for communities. Today, many communities are left grappling with unfulfilled promises of prosperity, navigating a fragile balance between environmental challenges and socioeconomic struggles.

Hambantota's population is predominantly Sinhalese, with smaller Sri Lanka Tamil and Muslim communities practicing Buddhism and Islam.

Climate and Environmental Challenges

UNPREDICTABLE RAINS

Communities in Hambantota are feeling the harsh realities of erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and rising temperatures, which are wreaking havoc on both agriculture and fishing. Over the past decade, rainfall has become unpredictable, with dry spells stretching longer than before and sudden downpours drowning fields. In Lunugamwehera, both male and female farmers showed researchers the devastating impact of heavy rains on their crops—papaya, green chili, cucumber, and tomato—ruined by unexpected flooding. These shifting weather patterns are not just damaging harvests, but threatening the livelihoods of families who depend on the land.

Changing rainfall patterns, including pre-harvest rains have created additional costs for farmers, as they must take extra steps to protect their crops. Farmers have noted that the Yala agricultural season (March–September) is increasingly marked by insufficient rainfall, while the Maha agricultural season (October–February) provides some relief but remains inconsistent.

The increasing unpredictability of hydrological patterns is undermining farmers' ability to implement effective planting schedules and risk management strategies, threatening both food security and agricultural livelihoods in the region.

EXTREME HEAT

Rising temperatures are making life even harder for farmers and fishers, who report struggling with heat stress that harms both their health and their work. Coastal communities, especially those who rely on outdoor labour, face growing risks of dehydration and heat-related illnesses. The heat is already becoming unbearable, with more frequent tropical nights where temperatures do not drop below 26°C (Geldin 2025). Looking ahead, projections show that by mid-century, the Dry Zone, including Hambantota, could see average temperatures rise by over 1°C, further straining these communities.

In Hambantota and Galle, civil society groups have noted that rising temperatures are affecting women's health, including disruptions to menstru-

al cycles in adolescent girls. Poor households are hit the hardest, feeling the effects of heat more severely. Muslim women face added challenges, as wearing the abaya in extreme heat makes coping with rising temperatures even more difficult.

Coastal communities are under growing pressure as coral bleaching and rising sea temperatures disrupt fish breeding and traditional fishing methods like "ma dal," making them unprofitable. Many fishermen have been forced to give up their livelihoods and turn to other work or inland farming, increasing competition for resources and available climate-proof livelihoods. Rising sea levels, expected to increase by 23 cm by mid-century, add to the risks of flooding, erosion, and saltwater intrusion, threatening homes and farmland. These challenges are making it even harder for communities already struggling to adapt to the changing climate.

THREATS FROM WILDLIFE

Wildlife conflicts, particularly with elephants, monkeys, and peacocks, are a recurring issue in Hambantota, driven by habitat changes resulting from climate impacts and development.

Communities relocated for the construction of Hambantota Port detailed that elephants frequently devastate farmland and damage infrastructure.

> **“When our community was relocated, the school was built on a long-established elephant pathway. The walls have been destroyed by elephants’ multiple times”**
>
> - Ishara, female, 50, Port Village, KII 2025

These relocations, often carried out with limited community consultation, have disrupted traditional social networks and exacerbated feelings of marginalisation, particularly among poorer households.

Farmers are forced to adopt labour-intensive practices, such as individually wrapping cobs of corn in polythene, to protect their crops. These conflicts pose risks to both livelihoods and personal safety, reflecting the broader challenges of balancing environmental and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. In a context where climate change is already straining livelihoods, the added burden of human-wildlife conflicts deepens economic insecurity and fosters resentment toward both wildlife conservation efforts and local authorities.

In response to the rise in wild elephant attacks, communities and Ministries have coordinated efforts to install electric fences around villages, chena cultivations and Managed Elephant Reserves (MER) to deter elephants from entering from nearby national parks and reserves. While these measures have shown some effectiveness, they remain insufficient.

During community consultations, a man was hospitalised after being attacked by a wild elephant while attempting to drive the animals away from a village in Weerawila. His family now faces financial hardship as he recovers, highlighting the ongoing need for more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. The lack of adequate support for affected families not only undermines trust in governance, but also weakens social cohesion, as communities struggle to cope with the compounded pressures of climate insecurity and wildlife conflicts. These challenges underscore the critical role of governance and women’s engagement, in addressing not only human-wildlife conflicts, but also the broader vulnerabilities faced by communities in Hambantota.

Gaps in Governance and Resource Management

Government services are often seen as inadequate or hard to access. Farmers are frustrated by the lack of compensation for crop damage caused by wildlife and climate impacts, as well as limited support for adopting climate-resilient practices. While some training and financial aid, for example for polytunnel farming, exist, gaps in policies, such as the absence of region-specific crop recommendations, create inefficiencies and market instability. Many villagers, male and female, are also unaware of their rights to services like crop insurance or financial aid for agricultural technology, leaving them unsupported.

The district's traditional water cascade and reservoir systems, which have historically supported agricultural livelihoods, are increasingly under strain. Many reservoirs have become silted, reducing their capacity to store water for the dry season and exacerbating the impacts of erratic rainfall. Farmers have expressed frustration over the lack of government support to maintain and rehabilitate these systems, which are critical for managing water resources in this drought-prone region.

> **"They never inform us when they release water from the reservoirs, which causes the river near our house and fields to overflow. We're forced to rush and remove our water pump to prevent damage, as we already lost one the last time they opened the reservoir during a storm."**
>
> - Vishmi, male, farmer, 62, Hambantota

In Ellagala, an irrigation project that diverted water into a natural canal has worsened riverbank erosion, threatening homes and agricultural land. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to promote resilient crops like pepper and turmeric, which thrive in Hambantota's conditions but remain underutilised due to limited government promotion.

Microcredit has become a double-edged sword for many communities, offering faster and more accessible financial support compared to government or bank loans, but often at a high cost. Many borrowers lack a full understanding of the terms they are agreeing to, leading to financial strain as interest rates accumulate. The issue has escalated as collectors have adopted increasingly aggressive tactics to recover loans, creating additional stress and insecurity for vulnerable households.

Socioeconomic Challenges and Migration

In Hambantota, environmental challenges and rapid changes have made life harder for many. Falling crop yields, the collapse of traditional fishing, and rising farming costs have forced families to look for other ways to earn a living, like inland farming or small businesses. People shared how income from farming, which once helped them build homes and improve their lives, now barely covers basic needs.

> **"We teach English Montessori, have a small shop, grow crops, and still, it is hard to earn enough."**
>
> - Asha, female, entrepreneur, 54, Hambantota

Economic vulnerabilities exacerbate household challenges, particularly in disaster-prone and economically marginalised areas. In Hambantota, women face significant financial and emotional burdens, particularly when male family members are unable or unwilling to contribute to household income.

A small-scale businesswoman in Ranminithanna manages her family's finances and runs a sweet-selling business while also engaging in paddy cultivation, despite her husband's alcoholism and lack of support. In resettled communities, financial struggles persist despite initial compensation, as many families have exhausted these funds and face difficulties accessing stable employment.

"People think we have money because we got some compensation for being relocated. We spent the money on building a house, and now we don't have much."

- Saheli, male, entrepreneur, 60, Hambantota

The erosion of financial stability in these communities not only deepens individual hardships, but also hinders efforts to rebuild trust and collective resilience, straining social bonds under the weight of overlapping economic and environmental pressures.

UNSUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Infrastructure development, particularly the Hambantota Port and Mattala Airport, play a central role in shaping the district's socioeconomic profile. While these projects were intended to create economic opportunities, their long-term viability has been questioned.

The Hambantota Port in particular has become a symbol of rising geopolitical influence after Sri Lanka handed over a controlling equity stake and a 99-year lease to China in 2017 due to its inability to repay the debt incurred for its construction (Hillman 2018). Communities in resettled areas expressed frustration over unmet job promises and the lack of economic stability despite large-scale development projects.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

This economic fragility has forced many households to rely on migration as a coping strategy. Migration is particularly prominent among youth, who increasingly view agriculture and fishing as unprofitable and unsustainable. Many young people aspire to migrate abroad, especially to countries like Korea, which holds an employment quota for Sri Lankan migrant workers, in search of better financial stability. This trend has led to a decline in rural labour and weakened social cohesion, as traditional practices of mutual aid and shared labour are replaced by paid work. For women, male migration often results in dual burdens, as they take on both caregiving and income-generating roles, further intensifying their workload and psychosocial stress.

Community Dynamics and Resilience

Traditional community collaboration, such as "Aththam" has declined over the years, replaced by mechanisation and hired labour. This shift has weakened social cohesion and mutual support systems, which were once vital for managing agricultural and environmental challenges collectively. Some collective practices, such as "Shramadana" (volunteer work), persist, particularly in paddy cultivation and water distribution.

"When we plant together, synchronised, we are less vulnerable to wildlife destruction"

- Thilini, male, farmer, 36, Kudagammana

Hambantota's communities demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Farmers are adopting innovative practices and building from available resources, such as polytunnel farming and using sarees to protect crops from heavy rains and pests. Women are increasingly involved in agriculture and small-scale businesses, balancing these roles with caregiving responsibilities. In communities resettled because of development or climate impacts, strong inter-ethnic relationships and cultural integration have fostered social cohesion, even amidst economic struggles.

The persistence of domestic violence and gender-based inequalities continues to challenge household and community dynamics, however. Women in families affected by domestic violence often face restricted authority over financial and household decisions, which can deepen their vulnerabilities. Evidence from Hambantota highlight cases where women, despite being primary breadwinners, struggle with the lack of support from their spouses and, in some instances, endure abusive relationships.

Broader societal factors, such as stigma and systemic barriers, further limit women's ability to seek justice or protection.

SHIFTING SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Marriage and family structures are undergoing significant shifts, reflecting broader societal changes. Divorce is increasingly accepted, particularly among

women who have financial independence or family support, signalling a departure from traditional norms.

> **"Divorce is more common now when marriages face problems, unlike in the past when it was a heavy burden on the woman's family due to social norms."**
>
> - Prashani, female, CSO, 38, Hambantota

However, early marriages remain prevalent in some areas, often driven by limited awareness of marital responsibilities and economic pressures. This trend has been linked to rising rates of separations and divorces, as young couples may prioritise immediate relationships over long-term stability. These evolving dynamics underscore the complex interplay between cultural norms, economic conditions, and individual choices.

Despite barriers, women are increasingly taking on diverse roles, including active participation in agriculture and small-scale enterprises, often stepping into traditionally male-dominated activities. In Tangalle, women are involved in net fishing to reduce labour costs, while cross-community collaboration and inter-ethnic marriages between Muslim and Sinhala communities have fostered strong social cohesion. These examples illustrate how communities are leveraging social cohesion and adaptability in navigating the compounded challenges of economic instability, environmental pressures, and shifting cultural norms.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAMBANTOTA

1. **Protect Coastal Livelihoods:**
   - Support sustainable fishing practices by providing access to affordable, eco-friendly fishing gear and training in seasonal practices to reduce overfishing and coral damage.
   - Promote alternative livelihoods such as drought-resistant crops like pepper and turmeric, aquaculture, seaweed farming, or coastal tourism equitably across all ethno-religious, gender and age groups to diversify income sources for fishing communities.
   - Incentives and better irrigation support for inland farming can further reduce dependency on declining fish stocks,
   - Support coral reef restoration projects to revive fish breeding grounds and improve long-term availability.

2. **Mitigate Drought Impacts:**
   - Expand community-based water conservation programmes, including desalination plants and rainwater harvesting, to address water scarcity in drought-prone areas.
   - Establish drought early warning systems and provide training for communities to prepare for and mitigate drought impacts.

3. **Waste Management and Coastal Protection:**
   - Develop coastal waste management systems to address plastic and marine debris, protecting fisheries and tourism.
   - Introduce mangrove restoration projects to enhance natural coastal defences against sea-level rise and storm surges.

4. **Gender-Inclusive Resilience Building:**
   - Provide targeted support for women in post-harvest activities, such as access to equipment for fish drying and processing, to enhance their economic resilience.
   - Establish women's cooperatives to manage microfinance programmes and reduce dependency on predatory lending practices.

5. **Empower Women and Strengthen Livelihoods:**
   - Expand financial literacy programmes, affordable microcredit, and entrepreneurship training to support women in small-scale, climate resilient enterprises, such as sweet-making or solar-dried fruit and vegetable production.

6. **Address Human-Wildlife Conflict:**
   - Loosen electric fences permitting, improve land-use planning to reduce conflicts with elephants and other wildlife, and strengthen accessibility and transparency in compensation schemes for crop damage to alleviate financial stress for affected households.
   - Ensure community consultations and conflict-sensitive planning in development projects near wildlife habitats to minimise disruptions to both human and animal populations.
   - Implement collaborative land-use strategies that balance conservation goals with community needs, actively engaging women, who often bear the brunt of crop losses, in wildlife management initiatives.

7. **Strengthen Governance and Access to Services:**
   - Revitalise traditional water cascade systems and rehabilitate silted reservoirs to improve water management in both wet and dry seasons.
   - Ensure transparent communication about water releases – including across district and provincial boundaries – and provide region-specific crop recommendations to help farmers plan more effectively.
   - Integrate community consultations into water management projects to reflect local knowledge and priorities in decision-making.
   - Conduct environmental assessments that address the long-term sustainability of water resources for both agriculture and household needs.

8. **Engage Youth and Revitalise Social Cohesion:**
   - Address youth migration by engaging young people in agriculture through modern techniques, vocational training, and eco-tourism initiatives.
   - Revive traditional practices like “Aththam” (mutual labour exchange) and foster collective action through “Shramadana” (volunteer work) to rebuild social bonds.

9. **Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing:**
   - Establish community-based mental health support systems and train local leaders in gender-sensitive counselling to address psychosocial stress.
   - Destigmatise mental health issues through awareness campaigns and integrate mental health support into existing healthcare services to enhance resilience.

10. **Build Inclusive and Conflict-Sensitive Communities:**
    - Facilitate inter-community collaborative projects, such as water-sharing initiatives, to build trust and reduce tensions.
    - Ensure environmental and social impact assessments for development projects include conflict-sensitive approaches to avoid exacerbating inequalities or tensions.
    - Promote collaborative planning with diverse community groups to foster inclusivity and trust.

6.4 Mullaitivu

Located in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, Mullaitivu's vulnerabilities are deeply rooted in the intersection of climate risks, post-conflict challenges, and systemic inequalities, all of which are experienced differently by men and women. With a population heavily reliant on agriculture and fishing, Mullaitivu faces significant vulnerabilities exacerbated by erratic weather patterns and environmental degradation. Gender dynamics play a critical role in shaping these challenges. Women—particularly war widows and female-headed households—bear the brunt of socioeconomic and environmental stressors. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates gender-sensitive policies, inclusive governance, and targeted support for vulnerable communities. By investing in women's empowerment, youth engagement, and improved service delivery, Mullaitivu can build a more resilient and equitable future.

Legacy of Civil Conflict

WAR WIDOWS AND FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

The civil conflict (1983–2009) left a lasting imprint on Mullaitivu, a district that bore the brunt of the war's violence. Today, the district is home to approximately 7,000 female-headed households, many of which are led by war widows (Arudpragasam 2025). Across the Northern Province, there are an estimated 46,000 war widows, reflecting the scale of the conflict's impact on women. With many disappeared individuals still unaccounted for, female household heads face legal and financial challenges, such as being unable to sell their homes or use them as collateral for loans if they remain in the husband's name. This lack of resolution for wartime grievances not only perpetuates economic hardship, but also undermines efforts to rebuild trust and social cohesion, as many women feel abandoned by the state and excluded from reconciliation processes.

The lack of investigation into mass graves in the region deepens feelings of marginalisation and further erodes trust in the government and the social contract. These unresolved grievances are further compounded by climate impacts such as erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and flooding which are disrupt agricultural livelihoods, leaving female-headed households even more vulnerable.

> **"It's been 16 years and I've still not heard anything. Even if I find a way to move forward psychologically, I cannot get a loan in my name without a death certificate, so I cannot move forward financially."**
>
> - Presumed war widow, 57, Kokuthoduvai, Mullaithivu

Female headed households face additional barriers to economic stability, including limited access to resources, less favourable market prices, social stigma, and the absence of male family members to share the physical and economic burden of farming, herding and selling goods to markets.

Women in Mullaitivu also struggle to secure land ownership or access government support, as bureaucratic processes are frequently inaccessible to Tamil-speaking women with limited literacy. One widow from Kokkuthoduvai village shared, **"I have no one to fight for my rights. The land we farmed together is now being claimed by others, and no one listens to me."** The increasing competition for land, exacerbated by climate-induced pressures such as soil degradation and reduced arable land, heightens tensions within communities and reinforces grievances against perceived inequities in governance.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The war also left many residents with permanent disabilities due to injuries from landmines, shelling, and other conflict-related violence. People with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, education, and employment, further marginalising them within the community. Inadequate infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools that lack accessible facilities, compounds these challenges. Climate change also exacerbates these vulnerabilities, as extreme weather events disrupt access to essential services and increase the physical and logistical challenges faced by people with disabilities. For example, flooding often damages roads and healthcare facilities, leaving those with mobility impairments unable to access critical support.

Climate and Environmental Challenges

CLIMATE IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the primary livelihood for many families in Mullaitivu, but it is increasingly threatened by climate change. Farmers face erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and frequent flooding, which disrupt planting and harvesting cycles and reduce crop yields. Wild animals, including elephants and monkeys, further exacerbate these challenges by destroying crops and home gardens. A farmer from Kokkuthoduvai explained, **"We work hard to grow our food, but the elephants come at night and destroy everything. We have no one to help us. I now feel it isn't worth bothering to plant anymore."**

Women, who are often responsible for managing household food supplies, bear a disproportionate burden when agricultural productivity declines. They must find alternative ways to feed their families, often taking on additional unpaid labour or small-scale income-generating activities, such as selling homemade goods.

DEFORESTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Deforestation is an increasing issue in Mullaitivu, driven by illegal logging and land clearing for development projects. Residents perceive that government actors, the military and powerful private entities are complicit in the large-scale extraction of high-value timber, such as teak and mahogany, often operating with impunity. Meanwhile, local Tamil communities reported that they face strict penalties for minor infractions, such as collecting firewood for household use. This double standard has deepened mistrust in governance and fuelled resentment among residents. A farmer from Kokkuthoduvai explained, **"The military cut down huge and valuable trees and sell the timber, but if we collect a few dry sticks to cook food, we are treated like criminals. It feels like the rules are only for us."**

The fear of punishment for collecting firewood or other forest materials disproportionately impacts the Vedda community, whose livelihoods are deeply tied to forest resources. This fear is exacerbated by their limited access to education and longstanding mistrust of authorities, leaving them ill-equipped to navigate formal judicial processes. Women are particularly affected, as they are often responsible for firewood collection and face additional structural barriers in accessing justice. Compounding these challenges, women also fear physical harm from security actors, further deterring them from engaging in such livelihood activities which has a detrimental impact on their adaptive capacity and the wellbeing of their families.

This environmental degradation has reduced the availability of natural resources, such as firewood and water, which women rely on for daily household tasks. The depletion of forest cover also exacerbates soil erosion and reduces water retention, further undermining agricultural productivity and increasing the vulnerability of rural communities to climate shocks. Residents expressed frustration over the lack of accountability for illegal logging, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement of environmental regulations and equitable resource management.

Livelihood Challenges

GENDERED LIVELIHOOD BARRIERS

Women in Mullaitivu face significant challenges in accessing stable and sustainable livelihoods. While agriculture and fishing are the primary economic activities in the district, these sectors are increasingly unreliable due to climate impacts and systemic barriers. Women farmers often lack access to credit, agricultural inputs, and market opportunities, leaving them dependent on subsistence farming.

In addition to farming, some women engage in small-scale enterprises, such as running local shops or producing handmade goods. However, these activities are often undervalued and underfunded, limiting their potential to provide economic security. A woman entrepreneur from Mullaitivu shared, **"I make brooms and handwoven mats to sell in the market, but the prices are so low that it's hard to make a profit. We need better support to grow our businesses."**

Mullaitivu scores lowest in UNDP developmental rankings, highlighting significant challenges in gender responsiveness. The district struggles with female staff participation and mechanisms for identifying gender needs. Consultations with women's groups are underdeveloped. These findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to improve gender responsiveness in Mullaitivu and the broader Northern Province (UNDP 2021).

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL GAPS

Youth in Mullaitivu face high levels of unemployment and underemployment, with limited access to vocational training or job opportunities. Many young people, both men and women, are involved in farming and animal husbandry activities carried out by their families, but these roles often do not provide a stable income. The lack of recreational facilities and educational opportunities further isolates youth, leading to feelings of frustration and hopelessness.

Illegal alcohol and drugs are easily available in the region, and substance abuse among young people is a growing concern. A community leader explained, **"with this unpredictable weather, our youth have no jobs and no hope for the future. Many of them turn to drugs because they don't see any other way out."**

Social Cohesion and Governance Gaps

LAND OWNERSHIP DISPUTES

Unresolved land ownership issues continue to strain social cohesion in Mullaitivu, particularly in areas such as Janakapura, where government resettlement programmes have relocated Sinhalese families onto land historically claimed by Tamil communities. Tamil residents often view these resettlement efforts as state-sponsored colonisation, aimed at altering the demographic composition of the region. Many Tamil families feel dispossessed, citing a lack of transparency and consultation in the allocation of land. A Tamil farmer shared, **"Our families have farmed this land for generations, but now it is given away to others. We feel like strangers in our own home."** These unresolved grievances not only perpetuate inter-ethnic mistrust, but also hinder efforts to rebuild social cohesion, as communities feel excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect their livelihoods and cultural identity.

However, the resettled Sinhalese farming families also face significant challenges. Many of them were promised fertile land and government support but have found themselves struggling with poor infrastructure, limited resources, and hostility from local Tamil communities. A resettled farmer explained, **"We came here because we had nothing in our old villages. We were told this land would give us a new start, but now we are facing tensions we didn't want."**

Land disputes between Hindus and Buddhists over religious shrines have become a flashpoint for tensions in some areas of Sri Lanka. In Kokuthoduvai, Mullaitivu, an almost exclusively Hindu village, a Buddhist shrine was erected on the site of a former Hindu temple, sparking violent clashes that resulted in deaths. The site is now guarded by a special army camp, which respondents felt was a misallocation of resources, when in their view, the basic security needs of the villager were not being met. These disputes over sacred spaces highlight the intersection of cultural preservation and land ownership, with climate impacts adding another layer of complexity. For example, rising sea levels and flooding in coastal areas have pushed communities further inland, intensifying competition for land and increasing the likelihood of such disputes.

Tamil respondents express deep mistrust of the Department of Archaeology, viewing it as an instrument of forced Sinhalese 'colonisation' under the pretext of preserving Buddhist archaeological sites. As one Hindu respondent put it, **"If they see a hill or a Bodhi tree, they'll come and put a shrine on it and claim it as theirs."** These disputes not only strain inter-ethnic relations, but also raise broader concerns about land ownership, cultural preservation, and the equitable governance.

Military-occupied land and uncleared, mine-contaminated areas in Mullaitivu exacerbate land scarcity, hindering agricultural activities, grazing and climate adaptation efforts, while limiting opportunities for displaced communities to rebuild livelihoods and enhance resilience. The erosion

of financial stability in these communities not only deepens individual hardships, but also weakens trust and cooperation, making it harder to build resilience and foster lasting stability amid economic and environmental pressures.

These disputes deepen mistrust between communities and hinder efforts to build long-term co-existence. Marginalised groups often feel overlooked by the government, which fails to address their grievances or provide adequate support. Resolving these tensions requires transparent land policies that consider the needs and histories of all communities, as well as initiatives to foster dialogue and cooperation between Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese residents.

TAMIL-MUSLIM RELATIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Relations between Tamil and Muslim communities in Mullaitivu are shaped by both historical tensions and shared struggles, with climate change acting as both a divider and a unifier. Land disputes, often rooted in resettlement policies and encroachment allegations, have created friction between the two groups. Similarly, some Muslim families express concerns about exclusion from government support schemes, fuelling mistrust- However, climate change has also created opportunities for collaboration. Both communities face shared challenges, such as crop failures due to erratic rainfall and water scarcity. In some areas, Tamil and Muslim farmers have come together to repair irrigation tanks or advocate for government support. A Muslim farmer noted, **"When the rains don't come, we all suffer. Working together is the only way to survive."**

Building on these shared vulnerabilities through joint climate adaptation projects could help foster trust and strengthen social cohesion between the two communities. A Tamil farmer from Mullaitivu noted, **"We [Tamils and Muslims] speak the same language, and we all face the same struggles with the land and the weather. If we worked together, we could achieve so much more."**

Trade was identified as a connector. A Tamil trader from Mullaitivu explained, **"if we had better roads and storage, we could sell our vegetables to more places. But we also need to work with others—Muslim traders can help us reach bigger markets."**

WEAK GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Governance challenges in Mullaitivu further exacerbate vulnerabilities. It is one of the most underserved districts in Sri Lanka despite being among the most vulnerable to climate impacts and poverty. Residents frequently express frustration over the lack of government investment in critical infrastructure such as tank rehabilitation for irrigation and road schemes to improve accessibility. These gaps are particularly stark in rural areas, where poorly maintained roads make it difficult for farmers to transport goods to markets or for families to access healthcare and education facilities. A farmer from Mullaitivu explained, **"Our tanks are dry, and our roads are broken. We know the government spends money elsewhere. It feels like we are forgotten."**

Rural hospitals in the district lack adequate human resources, such as doctors and nurses who are limited by poor roads and transport access to reach the facilities. Language barriers further compound the issue, as Tamil-speaking residents struggle to communicate with Sinhala-speaking medical staff. Women, particularly those in female-headed households, face additional barriers to accessing healthcare, as they often cannot afford the high costs of private medicine or travel to distant facilities. A participant noted, **"Even when we go to the hospital, they tell us to buy medicines from private pharmacies. How can we afford this when we barely have enough to eat?"**

The perception that Mullaitivu is systematically neglected by the government deepens feelings of marginalisation among its residents, who believe that other regions receive disproportionate attention and funding. Addressing these governance gaps requires targeted investments in infrastructure, healthcare, and service delivery, alongside efforts to rebuild trust between the government and local communities.

Improving governance in Mullaitivu must focus on addressing grievances and rebuilding trust between communities and the state. Transparent and participatory processes are essential for resolving land disputes, particularly in areas like Janakapura, where tensions between Tamil and Sinhala residents run high. Establishing local dispute resolution committees with representation from all ethnic groups can help ensure fair outcomes and foster dialogue.

To bolster the social contract, government programmes must be inclusive and visibly benefit all communities. For example, investing in shared infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation tanks, and healthcare facilities, can demonstrate the state's commitment to equitable development. Mobile healthcare units staffed by Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim professionals could improve access to services while symbolising inclusivity. Additionally, creating mechanisms for community feedback—such as citizen monitoring committees for government projects—can enhance accountability and ensure that resources are distributed fairly.

Gender Dynamics and Intersectional Vulnerabilities

WAR WIDOWS AND FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Female-headed households in Mullaitivu face intersecting vulnerabilities related to gender, poverty, and climate change. War widows, in particular, experience social stigma and economic marginalisation, as they are often excluded from decision-making processes and struggle to secure land rights or government support. Many war widows also face additional caregiving responsibilities, such as supporting elderly parents or children with disabilities, which limits their ability to engage in income-generating activities. A widow from Kokkuthoduvai shared, **"I have no one to help with my children or the farm. I have land for paddy but I cannot afford daily labourers, and it is too much for me to walk in the extreme heat. Every day feels like a challenge to survive."**

SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women and girls in Mullaitivu face significant safety concerns, particularly in workplaces and public spaces. Weak security measures and low levels of accountability leave them vulnerable to harassment and exploitation, further limiting their ability to participate in economic and social activities. This is especially pronounced for girls walking to school in remote areas or women travelling long distances to markets or workplaces.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDERED IMPACTS

Climate change exacerbates existing gender inequalities, as women are disproportionately affected by the loss of livelihoods and the increased burden of unpaid care work. For example, when agricultural productivity declines due to drought or flooding, women must find alternative ways to provide for their families, often taking on additional labour-intensive tasks such as fetching water or collecting firewood. Men, on the other hand, frequently migrate in search of work, leaving women to manage households and farmlands alone. This dynamic places additional stress on women while also increasing the vulnerability of boys and girls left behind, who may drop out of school to support household needs.

Individuals with disabilities face unique challenges in this context, as climate-induced disruptions often limit their access to essential services and resources. For example, during floods, disabled residents may struggle to evacuate or access relief services due to inadequate infrastructure. A woman caring for her disabled son explained, **"When the floods come, I don't know what to do. I can't carry him and save our things at the same time."**

Addressing these intersectional vulnerabilities requires targeted interventions that recognise the differing needs of men, women, boys, girls, and disabled individuals. This includes improving access to childcare, creating safe spaces for women and girls, and ensuring that disaster response plans are inclusive and accessible for all members of the community.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MULLAITIVU

1. **Strengthen Drought Resilience:**
   - Develop community-managed water storage systems, such as small-scale reservoirs, to improve water availability during dry spells.
   - Promote climate-resilient farming techniques, including intercropping and agroforestry, to sustain agricultural livelihoods.

2. **Address Waste Management:**
   - Implement village-level waste management systems, including waste-to-compost programmes, to reduce reliance on open dumping and burning.
   - Partner with local NGOs to introduce plastic recycling initiatives in rural areas.

3. **Support for Women-Headed Households:**
   - Provide targeted assistance to female-headed households, such as access to land, microfinance, and training in sustainable livelihoods.
   - Establish community childcare centres to reduce the unpaid care burden on women and enable economic participation.

4. **Conflict-Sensitive Adaptation:**
   - Address perceptions of inequity by ensuring transparent allocation of resources, such as permits for constructing elephant fences and access to agricultural support.
   - Build trust in governance through participatory planning processes that include marginalised Tamil and Muslim communities.

5. **Empower Women's Livelihoods to Build Bridges Across Communities:**
   - Support women's livelihoods in Mullaitivu as a tool for fostering social cohesion between Tamil and Muslim communities.
   - Establish cooperative enterprises, such as women-led agricultural collectives or small-scale food processing units, to create shared economic opportunities and build trust across ethnic lines.
   - Organise cross-community training sessions on climate-resilient agriculture or entrepreneurship to create spaces for dialogue and mutual understanding.
   - Empower women economically while fostering interdependence and collaboration across diverse groups.

6. **Engage Youth in Shared Vocational and Civic Programmes:**
   - Launch joint vocational training programmes for Tamil and Muslim youth to promote skills development while breaking down stereotypes and fostering friendships.
   - Focus on training in areas like renewable energy installation, eco-tourism, or flood-resilient infrastructure, paired with team-based projects requiring inter-ethnic cooperation.
   - Establish youth-led civic initiatives, such as community clean-up drives, tree-planting campaigns, or disaster prevention projects, to encourage collaboration on shared goals.
   - Create recreational facilities that host inter-community sports events or cultural exchanges, offering neutral spaces for youth interaction and cohesion.

7. **Strengthen Governance to Bolster the Social Contract:**
   - Resolve ethno-religious land disputes in high-tension areas like Janakapura by establishing local dispute resolution committees with representation from all ethnic groups.
   - Invest in shared infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation tanks, and healthcare facilities, to visibly benefit all communities and demonstrate the state's commitment to equity.

- Deploy mobile healthcare units staffed by Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim professionals to improve access to services while symbolising inclusivity.
- Create citizen monitoring committees for government projects to enhance accountability and ensure fair resource distribution.

8. **Promote Inter-Community Collaboration to Strengthen Social Cohesion:**
   - Initiate community-led disaster preparedness programmes that train diverse groups (Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala) to collaboratively respond to floods or droughts, fostering mutual trust.
   - Organise joint cultural events or festivals, such as 'Pongal' (harvest celebrations), to promote understanding and reduce prejudice.
   - Integrate economic, social, and governance-focused interventions to rebuild trust between communities and the state, strengthening the social contract and fostering resilience.

9. **Enhance Trade Networks to Strengthen Local Economies and Social Cohesion:**
   - Develop regional trade hubs that connect Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim producers, processors, and traders to create economic interdependence and reduce ethnic tensions.
   - Invest in rural market infrastructure, such as storage facilities, cold chains, and transport links, to help farmers and small-scale producers sell goods competitively and reduce post-harvest losses.
   - Introduce fair trade certification schemes for local products, such as spices or organic vegetables, to enable access to higher-value domestic and international markets.
   - Promote inter-group collaboration in agricultural trade networks, linking paddy and vegetable Tamil farmers with Muslim traders managing distribution to urban markets.



Public awareness poster for Tamils on the risks of informal migration © adelphi research



Kitchen garden, Mullaitivu District © adelphi research

7 EXISTING RESPONSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

7.1 Existing Policy Framework

Nationally Determined Contribution: Sri Lanka's NDC 2.0 appropriately calls for localised risk assessments and sectoral plans that address the specific needs of vulnerable populations. Building on this foundation, a granular, gender and conflict-sensitive approach can simultaneously create conditions for adaptation while promoting social cohesion and reducing grievances around unequal access to government services.

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: Sri Lanka has launched its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) for 2023–2027, with support from the Government of Japan and UN Women. This plan strengthens the country's legal and policy frameworks to protect and empower women, aligning with international commitments under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). It also seeks to enhance coordination among stakeholders involved in the WPS agenda, a critical step toward achieving sustainable peace and development.

National Policy on Climate Change: The policy calls for climate neutrality by 2050, the integration of climate action in the development agenda, and shared responsibility of citizens and inclusion of youth and women in decision making (Sri Lanka Ministry of Environment 2023). The Ministry of Environment has a broad overseeing role, though responsibility to implementing different elements of the policy reach across many government departments (Sri Lanka Ministry of Environment 2023).

National Environment Policy: The NEP sets policy goals around land use planning, increasing forest cover to one-third of total land area, pollution prevention and control, waste management, and climate-resilient sustainable economy (Sri Lanka Ministry of Environment 2022). It is based around the principles of sustainable development, polluter pays, the life cycle principle, safe minimum standards, the precautionary principle, stewardship, equity, efficiency in resource use, planetary boundaries, common but differentiated responsibilities, and the public trust doctrine (Sri Lanka Ministry of Environment 2022).

National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change Impacts in Sri Lanka: The NAP covers adaptation needs of nine vulnerable sectors: food security, water, coastal sector, health, human settlements, biodiversity, tourism and recreation, export development and industry-energy-transportation (Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment 2016). It further includes national level adaptation needs and implementation factors such as institutional development and coordination, international cooperation, technology transfer, and education and training (Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment 2016).

Regional cooperation frameworks: South Asia is among the least integrated regions in the world. It is a heterogeneous region in terms of culture, language, religion and ethnicity, and there is a history of conflict over political demarcations that divide shared natural resources (Vishwanath et al. 2024). Existing regional cooperation mechanisms of which Sri Lanka is a part include: the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme, South Asian Seas Programme, South Asia Coral Reef Task Force, The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (Vishwanath et al. 2024). Challenges to regional collaboration include lack of data and trust (Vishwanath et al. 2024).

7.2 Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Strengthening Climate Security

A critical analysis of Sri Lanka's current policy landscape reveals gaps in integrating climate security considerations into national and local frameworks. These gaps include insufficient conflict sensitivity, limited gender inclusion, and weak coordination between government agencies, and with civil society. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that climate adaptation efforts do not inadvertently exacerbate social tensions or deepen inequalities.

TABLE 3. POLICY GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Key Policy Gaps	Opportunities for Improvement
Conflict Sensitivity: Current climate policies lack mechanisms to address the root causes of vulnerability and conflict, particularly in post-conflict regions like the Northern and Eastern provinces.	Understand political dimensions of climate action and design climate policies to pro-actively reduce social tensions by ensuring equitable resource allocation and inclusive decision-making processes.
Gender Inclusion: Policies often fail to account for the unique vulnerabilities and capacities of women and girls, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.	Strengthen the gender responsiveness of policies by addressing the intersectional vulnerabilities of women, men, boys and girls through targeted interventions and capacity-building initiatives.
Local-Level Adaptation: Limited resources and capacity at the local government level hinder the effective implementation of community-based adaptation initiatives. Initiatives are often technical and lack ethno-political sensitivities.	Ensure community-based adaptation initiatives take account of conflict dynamics and are peace positive. Provide local governments with the technical support, funding, and training needed for effective, conflict sensitive implementation and scaling up.
Policy Coordination: Fragmented efforts between government agencies, UN programmes, and civil society organisations lead to duplication and inefficiencies.	Integrate climate security into national peacebuilding strategies by coordinating efforts between government agencies, UN programmes, and civil society to address vulnerabilities and conflicts holistically.

7.3 Lessons Learned: Harnessing Opportunities for Social Cohesion and Strengthening Local Governance

The case studies in Chapter 6 and the five pathways in Chapter 3 highlight the critical role of fostering cross-ethnic and religious engagement and improving relations between politically marginalised communities and local government as core dimensions of resilience to climate security risks. The following lessons highlight actionable strategies to enhance resilience to climate-related challenges:

1. **Diversifying livelihoods to reduce migration pressures and foster collaboration**: Climate-resilient livelihoods, such as polytunnel farming, mushroom cultivation, and spice production, have not only reduced reliance on climate-sensitive crops, but also created opportunities for cross-ethnic and religious collaboration. In regions like Badulla and Hambantota, joint training programmes and shared market access have brought together diverse communities, strengthening social cohesion while mitigating forced migration.

2. **Climate adaptation policies:** While Sri Lanka has advanced climate adaptation frameworks, they often lack a conflict-sensitive lens. Integrating peacebuilding objectives, such as inclusive decision-making and equitable resource allocation, can address grievances and foster trust. Prioritising marginalised groups—like women-headed households and communities in drought-prone regions—ensures policies are both gender-responsive and socially inclusive. By aligning climate action with social cohesion goals, Sri Lanka can build resilience while promoting unity.

3. **Prioritising equitable service delivery to build trust and inclusion:** Transparent governance and equitable investments in rural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and healthcare facilities, have reduced perceptions of exclusion. By ensuring fair access to services, local governments have an opportunity to rebuild trust with politically marginalised communities, fostering stronger relationships and improving social cohesion in areas with historical grievances, particularly in the North and East.

4. **Engaging communities in human-wildlife conflict management to strengthen inter-community ties:** Community-led initiatives, such as watchtower networks and coordinated elephant deterrent systems, have demonstrated the value of collective action in addressing shared challenges. In regions like Hambantota and Mullaitivu, these initiatives have brought together farmers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, creating a platform for collaboration and mutual support. Partnerships between local governments and communities that promote leadership roles for women in managing these conflicts could further bolster trust and cooperation.

5. **Adapting education systems to climate pressures while fostering inter-group engagement:** Flexible learning programmes and vocational training have not only equipped youth with climate-resilient skills, but also created opportunities for cross-community interaction. In Batticaloa and Badulla, scholarships and transport support for children from diverse backgrounds, including female-headed households and Indigenous Veddas communities, have increased attendance rates while fostering a sense of inclusion.

6. **Strengthening healthcare systems to improve trust and resilience:** Investments in flood-proof healthcare infrastructure and mobile clinics have enhanced access to essential services during extreme weather events, particularly for vulnerable groups such as plantation workers and female-headed households. These initiatives, when implemented equitably across communities, can improve trust in local governance and demonstrate the value of inclusive service delivery in building resilience and addressing climate-exacerbated health challenges.



Terraces of market gardens in rural Sri Lanka © BrianScantlebury

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sri Lanka's economic recovery has surpassed expectations, and its climate mitigation efforts are commendable. However, nearly a third of the population remains in poverty or at risk of falling back into it. Decades of civil war, ethno-nationalism, and social divisions continue to shape perceptions of inequality and exclusion, undermining trust in governance and deepening social grievances. These dynamics have left lasting impacts on governance, social cohesion, and equitable development, with marginalised groups—especially women, ethnic minorities, and youth—facing systemic barriers to resources and opportunities.

Climate stressors, such as erratic rains, extreme heat, and violent storms, now exacerbate these historical challenges. Unequal access to climate adaptation resources is reinforcing perceptions of favoritism and neglect, particularly in conflict-affected regions, further straining inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships. Vulnerable families are pushed deeper into poverty, while those with greater resources are better equipped to adapt. This disparity risks fuelling grievances among marginalised communities, who may perceive climate adaptation efforts as inequitable or exclusionary. Addressing these interconnected issues requires urgent, integrated solutions that tackle both structural inequalities and emerging climate risks.

Sri Lanka's recent financial stabilisation, following years of economic and political turmoil, presents a unique opportunity to address these vulnerabilities. With improved fiscal capacity, the country can invest in equitable climate adaptation measures that enhance social cohesion, strengthen governance, and build resilience in at-risk communities. Failure to address these issues in a conflict-sensitive manner could inadvertently deepen divisions, particularly in regions where historical grievances remain unresolved. If strategically managed, however, this recovery could drive transformative change.

Adding to this momentum is the emergence of a progressive government committed to inclusive governance. Early signs indicate a focus on prioritising marginalised communities, promoting gender equity, and adopting innovative climate resilience strategies. By explicitly linking climate adaptation efforts to peacebuilding goals, the government can foster trust and reconciliation among communities that have historically been excluded from national development priorities. This political and financial alignment offers a critical opportunity to implement bold, locally tailored, and gender-responsive interventions.

By addressing root causes of vulnerability and building resilience to climate risks, Sri Lanka can chart a path toward a more equitable, cohesive, and sustainable future.

8.1 General Recommendations

1. Leverage Climate Action for Peacebuilding and Governance

- **Develop Province-Level Climate Action Plans**: Building on ongoing work of Provincial Councils and the Global Green Growth Institute in developing Provincial Adaptation Plans, break down national NDC targets into provincial action plans that reflect local priorities and vulnerabilities. Use a gender responsive climate security risk assessment and Multidimensional Vulnerability Indices (MVIs) to guide investments, ensuring that regions like the Northern and Eastern provinces, recovering from conflict, receive equitable resources—based on social vulnerability as well as physical climate exposure—to prevent further marginalisation.

- **Enhance Inter-Agency Coordination:** Establish a centralised task force or platform to streamline the implementation of existing plans across multiple departments, ensuring accountability and reducing duplication of efforts. Facilitate regular inter-sectoral meetings and joint planning sessions to align strategies and share resources, enabling a unified approach to address climate security challenges effectively. Incorporate Municipal Councils, Pradeshiya Sabhas, Public Health Inspectors, and Agriculture and Irrigation Departments into consultation processes through structured engagement frameworks to ensure their expertise and on-the-ground knowledge inform decision-making and policy implementation.

- **Promote Inclusive Governance:** Strengthen cross-sector institutional coordination by establishing formal mechanisms between climate and environment ministries, security and justice institutions, and the Ministry of Women. Promote representation of minorities and indigenous communities in governance roles, for example through the appointment of a Minority's Commissioner at district level. Ensure local governments and community leaders are empowered to implement and monitor climate actions, particularly in vulnerable and fragile districts.

- **Track Equity Metrics and Ensure Accountability:** Use indicators such as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), poverty rates, and climate vulnerability indices to monitor equitable resource distribution and impact of climate action on social cohesion and governance trust. Publish annual progress reports disaggregated by province, gender, ethnicity, and income level to ensure transparency and accountability.

- **Foster Community-Led Resource Management:** Establish multi-ethnic and multi-religious community committees for both men and women to manage water, wildlife, and other shared resources. These committees can address grievances stemming from historical inequalities and build trust among diverse groups.

2. Tailor Adaptation Strategies by Region

- **Dry Zone (North Western, North Central, Eastern, Northern)**:
  - Prioritise irrigation efficiency, rainwater harvesting, and solid waste management.
  - Update national crop calendar to address regional seasonal shifts and climate volatility.
  - Restore ancient tank cascade systems equitably across provinces to enhance water retention and reduce drought vulnerability.
  - Provide training for women farmers on value addition and water-saving techniques.

- **Wet Zone (Western, Sabaragamuwa, Southern)**:
  - Invest in improved drainage systems and flood-resilient housing.
  - Include women and youth in community-based flood preparedness programmes.
  - Address urban heat islands through green spaces and tree planting in cities like Colombo.

- **Intermediate Zone (Central, Uva)**:
  - Develop integrated watershed management to balance water overabundance and availability for agriculture, drinking water, and hydropower.
  - Address the unique challenges of plantation communities, such as poor housing and limited education, by prioritising climate-resilient housing and clean water access.

3. Address Sector-Specific Climate Security Risks to Foster Stability

LIVELIHOOD RELATED RISKS

- **Support Livelihood Diversification**: Promote eco-tourism in Uva, Northern and Eastern provinces and sustainable fisheries in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Provide training and financial support for marginalised groups, including women and youth, to transition to green jobs like solar panel installation, value addition jobs such as producing yogurt, dried fish and vegetables, and chilli powder, or more climate-resilient work like tailoring and sewing, driving and small business ownership. Invest in transport to support access to markets and alternative jobs for rural communities.

- **Encourage Cooperative Models**: Establish women-led, multi-ethnic agricultural cooperatives to enhance food security and foster collaboration across ethnic and religious lines. Provide gender-sensitive training in leadership and conflict resolution to support these efforts.

- **Expand Social Safety Nets**: Improve accessible, transparent and means-tested micro-insurance schemes to protect farmers and fishers from climate shocks, particularly in drought- and flood-prone areas. Tailor these schemes to women-headed households and smallholder farmers. Enhance financial literacy and regulate microfinance to protect vulnerable populations.

- **Leverage Remittances for Resilience**: Support sensitisation programmes, for example through TV or radio shows, to encourage remittances are channelled into long-term investments in renewable energy, disaster preparedness, and sustainable livelihoods. Address inequities in migration policies to ensure marginalised groups benefit from safe and dignified migration opportunities.

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS AND HUMAN SECURITY

- **Community-led Solutions**: Support localised solutions to address increasing wildlife interference caused by peacocks, monkeys, wild boars and elephants. For example, palmyrah or citrus tree planting can deter elephants while providing alternative income sources through fruit sales.

- **Strengthen Governance for Biodiversity Protection**: Ensure clear responsibilities among government bodies at provincial and district levels, with adequate funding and effective management. Address perceived inequalities, such as penalties for collecting dead wood versus impunity for commercial logging, by engaging communities and local authorities in transparent governance and incentivising sustainable practices. Ensure trade-offs between biodiversity, forests and people are understood in decision making, and balance biodiversity goals with urgent human needs.

- **Invest in Mitigation Infrastructure**: Ensure electric elephant fence permit decisions consider safeguarding livelihoods of most marginalised alongside sustaining wildlife corridors to reduce conflicts. Ensure compensation schemes for wildlife damage are accessible to marginalised groups, such as female farmers, in all languages.

- **Biodiversity-Friendly Land Use**: Promote agroforestry and mixed-cropping with native species, and incentivise buffer zones around protected areas to balance conservation with livelihoods.

INCLUSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

- **Equitable Infrastructure and Industrial Development**: Ensure planned infrastructure projects are climate security risk-informed and equitably distributed across regions. For example, prioritise projects like the Pasikuda bridge to enhance trade, tourism, and livelihoods in the North and East while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Green Industrial Practices**: Encourage industrial parks to adopt eco-friendly concepts and incorporate social safeguards to benefit local communities. Strengthen accountability mechanisms to address environmental concerns, such as water pollution from garment and dye factories, and build trust with affected communities.

- **Promote Inclusive Tourism**: Develop community-based tourism initiatives that highlight the cultural heritage of all ethnic and religious groups. This can foster reconciliation while providing economic opportunities for marginalised communities, particularly women.

EQUITY IN CLIMATE AND HEALTH SERVICES

- **Gender-sensitive Health Initiatives**: Resource healthcare workers to provide culturally sensitive, language appropriate and gender-responsive care, particularly for women and young girls affected by GBV, youth facing addiction and men facing psychological illness such a depression.

- **Inclusive Disaster Preparedness**: Design evacuation shelters with mobility aids and medical support for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Address the specific needs of women and girls during disasters, such as menstrual hygiene and private sanitation facilities in shelters. Address trust deficits among historically persecuted groups in North and East in relation to the military's role in disaster relief efforts.

- **Health and Nutrition**: Establish mobile health clinics in rural areas to address climate-related health issues like heat stress, waterborne diseases, and kidney disease. Prioritise nutritional support for children and pregnant women in regions affected by drought or food insecurity, including in tea plantation communities.

- **Address Emerging Climate-Related Health Issues:** Tackle the growing health risks linked to changes in soil pH and heavy metal uptake by crops, which are contributing to kidney-related health issues in regions like Badulla. Promote the use of biochar as a sustainable solution to neutralise acidic soils, enhance soil organic carbon, and improve agricultural productivity, leveraging biochar initiatives to access carbon markets and secure Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) funding, creating both environmental and economic benefits for affected communities.

CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION

- **Improve School Infrastructure Resilience**: Upgrade schools in flood- and drought-prone areas with climate-resilient infrastructure, such as elevated classrooms, rainwater harvesting systems, and solar-powered electricity. Ensure these upgrades prioritise rural schools in districts like Batticaloa and Mullaitivu, where investments are low, to minimise learning disruptions and build the social contract.

- **Expand Financial Support for Education**: Provide targeted scholarships, transport subsidies, and free school meals for children from poorer, and female-headed households to reduce financial barriers to education. This support should prioritise girls, who are more likely to drop out due to economic pressures or caregiving responsibilities.

- **Introduce Flexible Learning Options**: Develop flexible school schedules and mobile learning programmes to accommodate children engaged in seasonal agricultural work. These initiatives should include tailored support for boys, who are often pulled out of school for labour, and girls, who face additional household responsibilities during climate crises.

- **Strengthen Vocational and Skills Training**: Establish vocational training programmes in climate-resilient livelihoods, such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and disaster management. These initiatives should target youth in regions like Badulla and Hambantota and include specific outreach to girls and boys to address the perception that education offers limited economic opportunities.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND GREEN INITIATIVES

- **Community-Driven Green Initiatives**: Promote renewable energy and waste management projects that involve multi-ethnic and multi-religious community participation. For example, establish waste-to-energy plants managed by local cooperatives, and available to women, to provide employment opportunities while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Target Marginalised Groups**: Provide subsidies or low-interest loans for renewable energy projects that benefit low-income households, particularly women-headed households and those with disabled members.
- **Address fear and mistrust of renewables:** Build public understanding and support for renewable energy through social awareness campaigns, genuine community consultations, and ensuring communities directly gain from large-scale projects like the Andani Wind Farms.
- **Strengthen Local Institutions**: Build the capacity of provincial and local government officials to design and implement context-specific, equitable, and peace-positive climate actions. Train community leaders and community accepted CSOs or NGOs in vulnerable provinces to act as intermediaries between the government and local populations.

8.2 Recommendations by District:[2]

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE:
DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BADULLA

1. **Strengthen Agricultural Resilience:**
   - Promote drought-resistant crops and sustainable farming practices such as mulching and agroforestry to mitigate the impacts of erratic rainfall and soil degradation.
   - Establish community-led irrigation systems and rainwater harvesting to reduce reliance on rain-fed agriculture, especially for smallholder farmers.
   - Expand access to climate-smart agricultural training for women, youth, and marginalised groups to ensure inclusive participation.
2. **Improve Waste Management:**
   - Develop community-based solid waste management systems, including composting and recycling programmes, to address waste accumulation in plantation communities.
   - Provide subsidies or incentives for waste-to-energy initiatives that reduce environmental pollution while generating clean energy.
3. **Address Wildlife Conflicts:**
   - Implement community-managed wildlife deterrent systems, such as elephant fences, with transparent governance to ensure equitable access to permits and resources.
   - Provide compensation schemes and alternative livelihood opportunities for farmers affected by crop damage from wildlife.

2 These district level recommendations are a reiteration of the localised recommendations set out in Chapter 6.

4. **Youth Engagement and Livelihoods:**
   - Promote gender-sensitive youth entrepreneurship programmes in non-agricultural sectors (e.g., eco-tourism, renewable energy) to reduce migration and create local economic opportunities.
   - Introduce culturally-sensitive vocational training for young men and women in sustainable industries such as solar panel installation or organic farming.

5. **Empower Women and Marginalised Groups:**
   - Provide financial literacy programmes, fair microcredit schemes, and entrepreneurship training to economically empower women.
   - Support diversification into high-value crops, such as flowers or mushrooms, to enhance financial stability and reduce climate risks.
   - Promote women's participation in decision-making spaces to ensure their needs are addressed.

6. **Blend Traditional and Modern Farming Practices:**
   - Improve access to affordable greenhouses, irrigation systems, and cold storage to scale up modern farming practices like mulching, polytunnel farming, and drought-resistant crops.
   - Integrate traditional knowledge with modern techniques to enhance agricultural resilience.
   - Ensure equitable access to farming resources, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status.

7. **Strengthen Social Cohesion:**
   - Facilitate inter-community dialogues and collaborative projects, such as water-sharing initiatives, to build trust among diverse ethnic and religious groups.
   - Revive traditional mutual labour exchange practices, such as "Aththam," to strengthen social bonds and reduce reliance on paid labour.
   - Address stigma and improve access to documentation, such as birth certificates, for plantation workers to integrate them into broader society and improve access to essential services.

8. **Improve Access to Services:**
   - Address perceived inequities in government resource allocation by tailoring agricultural support to local conditions and ensuring transparent resource distribution.
   - Provide gender-sensitive public services that address women's specific needs, such as childcare and healthcare.
   - Improve healthcare access in tea plantations through mobile clinics and address language barriers for Tamil speakers, particularly for women and children who face disproportionate health risks.

9. **Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing:**
   - Establish community-based mental health support systems and provide gender-sensitive counselling to address psychosocial stress among women and youth.
   - Create safe spaces for dialogue to alleviate mental health burdens and promote social cohesion.
   - Destigmatise mental health issues and integrate mental health support into healthcare services to enhance community resilience.
   - Address the isolation of tea estate workers in line housing and improve social support systems to reduce mental health burdens exacerbated by physical and social marginalisation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BATTICALOA

1. **Community-Led Drought Adaptation:**
   - Develop and support implementation of existing community-level water management plans, including irrigation tank rehabilitation and drought-resistant crop programmes tailored to local needs.
   - Train local farmers on adaptive planting calendars to align with changing rainfall patterns.

2. **Address Waste Management:**
   - Establish community-operated waste collection and recycling centres to manage solid waste effectively, particularly in lagoon areas.
   - Educate communities on waste segregation and provide infrastructure for composting organic waste to reduce environmental degradation.

3. **Youth and Livelihoods:**
   - Introduce youth-focused agricultural innovation hubs to encourage engagement in climate-resilient farming and aquaculture.
   - Provide micro-grants for youth entrepreneurship in eco-tourism and sustainable crafts.

4. **Governance and Equity:**
   - Enhance participatory governance mechanisms to ensure that marginalised groups, including Tamil and Muslim communities, have a voice in climate adaptation planning.

5. **Empower Women through Livelihoods and Improve Transport Access:**
   - Provide subsidies and technical training for women to establish profitable businesses, such as coconut-based product manufacturing.
   - Establish localised processing centres for value addition in crops and dairy to reduce dependence on external markets and increase household incomes.
   - Invest in safer and more reliable transport options to enable women to fully participate in economic activities. Examples include subsidised transport services to garment factories or markets, especially in areas where women face security risks traveling long distances.

6. **Strengthen Governance and Tailor Agricultural Policies:**
   - Establish a Paddy Association office in Batticaloa to give Tamil and Muslim farmers a voice in decisions on crop calendars and fertilizer distribution, ensuring alignment with local climatic conditions.
   - Invest in the rehabilitation of rain-fed tanks and irrigation infrastructure to improve water resource management for farmers in the East, building on existing plans in flood mitigation and abandoned tank restoration that have lagged in implementation.
   - Launch capacity-building programmes for male and female farmers, focusing on climate-resilient agriculture and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), tailored to the province's specific climate and agricultural techniques.
   - Bridge regional disparities in agricultural development by aligning policies with local needs and priorities.
   - Strengthen interagency coordination and ensure relevant actors — Municipal Councils, Pradeshiya Sabhas, Public Health Inspectors, and Agriculture and Irrigation Departments — are actively engaged in consultations for effective local governance.

7. **Address Social Issues and Expand Education Access:**
   - Combat addiction and gender-based violence through community-driven approaches supported by institutions.

- Establish safe spaces for women and girls and conduct awareness campaigns on substance abuse to reduce vulnerabilities and foster social cohesion.
- Expand vocational training programmes tailored to local industries, such as garment production or eco-tourism, to create sustainable income opportunities for women and youth.
- Provide targeted scholarships and transport support for rural youth, including girls, boys, and gender-diverse children, to improve educational outcomes and reduce dropout rates.
- Build long-term resilience against poverty and climate challenges through education and skills development initiatives.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAMBANTOTA

1. **Protect Coastal Livelihoods:**
   - Support sustainable fishing practices by providing access to affordable, eco-friendly fishing gear and training in seasonal practices to reduce overfishing and coral damage.
   - Promote alternative livelihoods such as drought-resistant crops like pepper and turmeric, aquaculture, seaweed farming, or coastal tourism equitably across all ethno-religious, gender and age groups to diversify income sources for fishing communities.
   - Provide incentives and better irrigation support for inland farming to reduce dependency on declining fish stocks.
   - Support coral reef restoration projects to revive fish breeding grounds and improve long-term availability.

2. **Mitigate Drought Impacts:**
   - Expand community-based water conservation programmes, including desalination plants and rainwater harvesting, to address water scarcity in drought-prone areas.
   - Establish drought early warning systems and provide training for communities to prepare for and mitigate drought impacts.

3. **Waste Management and Coastal Protection:**
   - Develop coastal waste management systems to address plastic and marine debris, protecting fisheries and tourism.
   - Introduce mangrove restoration projects to enhance natural coastal defences against sea-level rise and storm surges.

4. **Gender-Inclusive Resilience Building:**
   - Provide targeted support for women in post-harvest activities, such as access to equipment for fish drying and processing, to enhance their economic resilience.
   - Establish women's cooperatives to manage microfinance programmes and reduce dependency on predatory lending practices.

5. **Empower Women and Strengthen Livelihoods:**
   - Expand financial literacy programmes, affordable microcredit, and entrepreneurship training to support women in small-scale, climate resilient enterprises, such as sweet-making or solar-dried fruit and vegetable production.

6. **Address Human-Wildlife Conflict:**
   - Loosen electric fences permitting, improve land-use planning to reduce conflicts with elephants and other wildlife, and strengthen accessibility and transparency in compensation schemes for crop damage to alleviate financial stress for affected households.
   - Ensure community consultations and conflict-sensitive planning in development projects near wildlife habitats to minimise disruptions to both human and animal populations.
   - Implement collaborative land-use strategies that balance conservation goals with community needs, actively engaging women, who often bear the brunt of crop losses, in wildlife management initiatives.

7. **Strengthen Governance and Access to Services:**
   - Revitalise traditional water cascade systems and rehabilitate silted reservoirs to improve water management in both wet and dry seasons.
   - Ensure transparent communication about water releases – including across district and provincial boundaries – and provide region-specific crop recommendations to help farmers plan more effectively.
   - Integrate community consultations into water management projects to reflect local knowledge and priorities in decision-making.
   - Conduct environmental assessments that address the long-term sustainability of water resources for both agriculture and household needs.

8. **Engage Youth and Revitalise Social Cohesion:**
   - Address youth migration by engaging young people in agriculture through modern techniques, vocational training, and eco-tourism initiatives.
   - Revive traditional practices like “Aththam” (mutual labour exchange) and foster collective action through “Shramadana” (volunteer work) to rebuild social bonds.

9. **Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing:**
   - Establish community-based mental health support systems and train local leaders in gender-sensitive counselling to address psychosocial stress.
   - Destigmatise mental health issues through awareness campaigns and integrate mental health support into existing healthcare services to enhance resilience.

10. **Build Inclusive and Conflict-Sensitive Communities:**
    - Facilitate inter-community collaborative projects, such as water-sharing initiatives, to build trust and reduce tensions.
    - Ensure environmental and social impact assessments for development projects include conflict-sensitive approaches to avoid exacerbating inequalities or tensions.
    - Promote collaborative planning with diverse community groups to foster inclusivity and trust.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESILIENCE: DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MULLAITIVU

1. **Strengthen Drought Resilience:**
   - Develop community-managed water storage systems, such as small-scale reservoirs, to improve water availability during dry spells.
   - Promote climate-resilient farming techniques, including intercropping and agroforestry, to sustain agricultural livelihoods.

2. **Address Waste Management:**
   - Implement village-level waste management systems, including waste-to-compost programmes, to reduce reliance on open dumping and burning.
   - Partner with local NGOs to introduce plastic recycling initiatives in rural areas.

3. **Support for Women-Headed Households:**
   - Provide targeted assistance to female-headed households, such as access to land, microfinance, and training in sustainable livelihoods.
   - Establish community childcare centres to reduce the unpaid care burden on women and enable economic participation.

4. **Conflict-Sensitive Adaptation:**
   - Address perceptions of inequity by ensuring transparent allocation of resources, such as permits for constructing elephant fences and access to agricultural support.
   - Build trust in governance through participatory planning processes that include marginalised Tamil and Muslim communities.

5. **Empower Women's Livelihoods to Build Bridges Across Communities:**
   - Support women's livelihoods in Mullaitivu as a tool for fostering social cohesion between Tamil and Muslim communities.
   - Establish cooperative enterprises, such as women-led agricultural collectives or small-scale food processing units, to create shared economic opportunities and build trust across ethnic lines.
   - Organise cross-community training sessions on climate-resilient agriculture or entrepreneurship to create spaces for dialogue and mutual understanding.
   - Empower women economically while fostering interdependence and collaboration across diverse groups.

6. **Engage Youth in Shared Vocational and Civic Programmes:**
   - Launch joint vocational training programmes for Tamil and Muslim youth to promote skills development while breaking down stereotypes and fostering friendships.
   - Focus on training in areas like renewable energy installation, eco-tourism, or flood-resilient infrastructure, paired with team-based projects requiring inter-ethnic cooperation.
   - Establish youth-led civic initiatives, such as community clean-up drives, tree-planting campaigns, or disaster prevention projects, to encourage collaboration on shared goals.
   - Create recreational facilities that host inter-community sports events or cultural exchanges, offering neutral spaces for youth interaction and cohesion.

7. **Strengthen Governance to Bolster the Social Contract:**
   - Resolve ethno-religious land disputes in high-tension areas like Janakapura by establishing local dispute resolution committees with representation from all ethnic groups.
   - Invest in shared infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation tanks, and healthcare facilities, to visibly benefit all communities and demonstrate the state's commitment to equity.
   - Deploy mobile healthcare units staffed by Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim professionals to improve access to services while symbolising inclusivity.
   - Create citizen monitoring committees for government projects to enhance accountability and ensure fair resource distribution.

8. **Promote Inter-Community Collaboration to Strengthen Social Cohesion:**
   - Initiate community-led disaster preparedness programmes that train diverse groups (Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala) to collaboratively respond to floods or droughts, fostering mutual trust.
   - Organise joint cultural events or festivals, such as 'Pongal' (harvest celebrations), to promote understanding and reduce prejudice.
   - Integrate economic, social, and governance-focused interventions to rebuild trust between communities and the state, strengthening the social contract and fostering resilience.

9. **Enhance Trade Networks to Strengthen Local Economies and Social Cohesion:**
   - Develop regional trade hubs that connect Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim producers, processors, and traders to create economic interdependence and reduce ethnic tensions.
   - Invest in rural market infrastructure, such as storage facilities, cold chains, and transport links, to help farmers and small-scale producers sell goods competitively and reduce post-harvest losses.
   - Introduce fair trade certification schemes for local products, such as spices or organic vegetables, to enable access to higher-value domestic and international markets.
   - Promote inter-group collaboration in agricultural trade networks, linking paddy and vegetable Tamil farmers with Muslim traders managing distribution to urban markets.

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ANNEX I:
Field research locations

District	Location
Badulla	Uva Paranagama Himbiliyagaha Madiththa Uduhawara Badulla Sapugolla Welimada Idalgashinna Estate Gonagan Ara
Hambantota	Tangalle Ellagala Lunugamwehera Hambantota Koholankala (Port Village) Ranminithenna Weerawila
Mullaitivu	Kokkuthoduvai Janakapura Chemmalai Mullaitivu town Maritimepathu Puthukkudiyiruppu Welioya
Batticaloa	Mylaththamadu Mylambaweli Kathiraveli Batticaloa town

In addition to these four districts, additional conservations were held in Galle (Galle District), Katharagama (Monaragala District), Kumbukkan Lake (Monaragala District), Buttala (Monaragala District), and Mancholai (Trincomalee District).

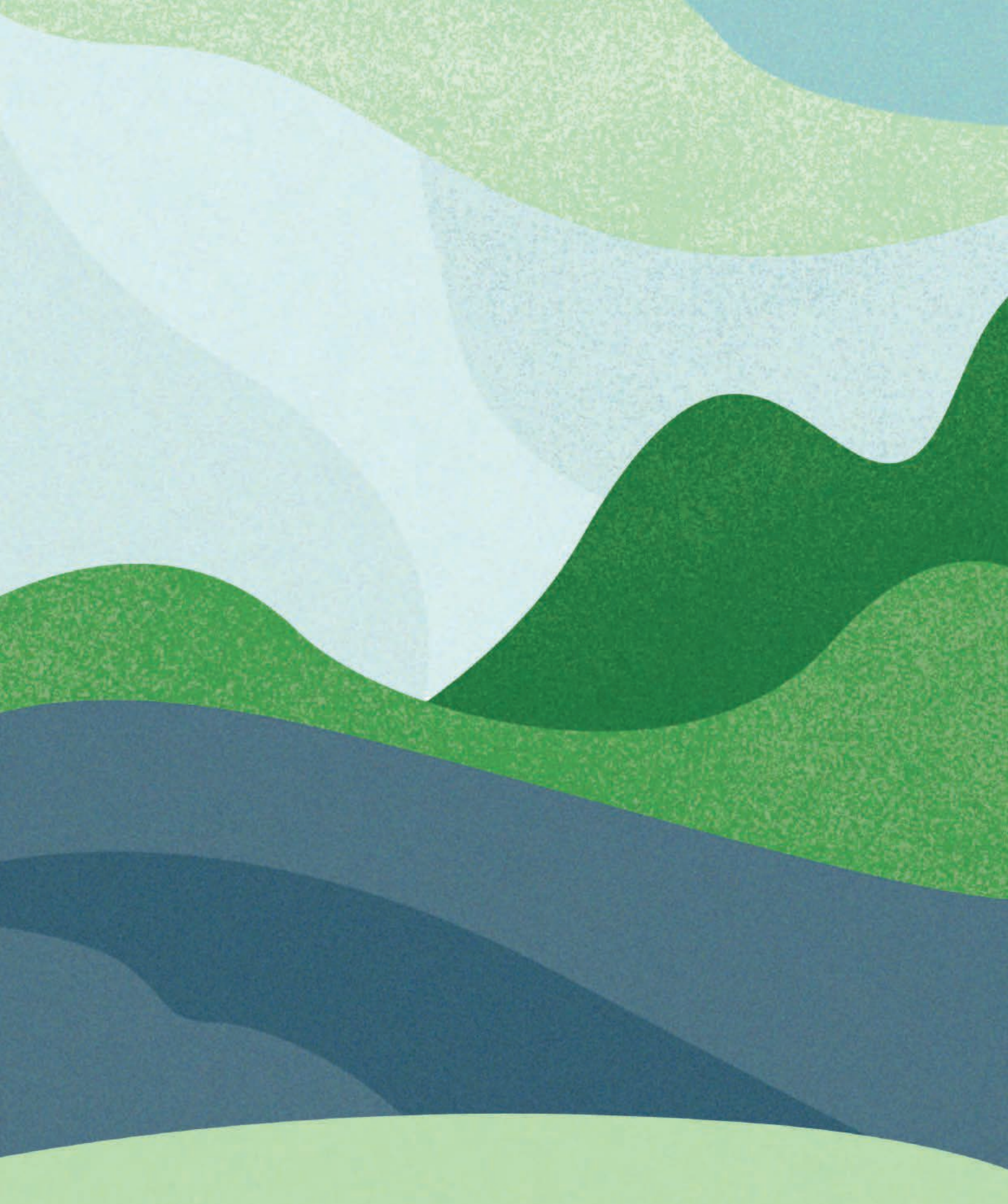
ANNEX II:
Population by Ethnic Group According to Districts, 2012

District	Total number of persons									
		Sinhalese	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Sri Lankan Muslim	Burgher	Malay	Sri Lankan Chetty	Bhartha	Other
Sri Lanka (total number and percentage)	20,263,723 100	15,173,820 74.9	2,270,924 11.2	842,323 4.2	1,869,820 9.2	37,061 0.2	40,189 0.2	6,075 0.0	1,688 0-0	21,823 0.1
Colombo	2,309,809 100.0	1,771,319 76.7	231,318 10.0	27,336 1.2	242,728 10.5	13,304 0.6	12,463 0.5	1,314 0.1	721 0.0	9,306 0.4
Gampaha	2,294,641 100.0	2,079,115 90.6	80,071 3.5	10,879 0.5	95,501 4.2	9,898 0.4	11,658 0.5	4,093 0.2	552 0.0	2,874 0.1
Kalutara	1,217,260 100.0	1,054,991 86.7	24,362 2.0	23,611 1.9	112,276 9.2	968 0.1	597 0.0	20 0.0	44 0.0	391 0.0
Kandy	1,369,899 100.0	1,018,323 74.3	71,640 5.2	83,234 6.1	191,159 14.0	2,201 0.2	2,062 0.2	115 0.0	23 0.0	1,142 0.1
Matale	482,229 100.0	389,092 80.7	24,756 5.1	23,400 4.9	44,113 9.1	376 0.1	335 0.1	29 0.0	7 0.0	121 0.0
Nuwara Eliya	706,588 100.0	279,784 39.6	31,867 4.5	375,795 53.2	17,422 2.5	770 0.1	492 0.1	49 0.0	10 0.0	399 0.1
Galle	1,058,771 100.0	998,540 94.3	15,228 1.4	5,641 0.5	38,591 3.6	242 0.0	79 0.0	8 0.0	10 0.0	432 0.0
Matara	809,344 100.0	763,121 94.3	8,562 1.1	11,984 1.5	25,300 3.1	177 0.0	54 0.0	3 0.0	3 0.0	140 0.0

Hambantota	596,617	579,032	2,111	136	6,556	138	8,210	7	2	425
	100.0	97.1	0.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.1
Jaffna	583,378	3,366	577,246	499	2,139	93	5	1	0	29
	100.0	0.6	98.9	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mannar	99,051	1,961	80,568	394	16,087	19	10	0	0	12
	100.0	2.0	81.3	0.4	16.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Vavuniya	171,511	17,191	141,269	1,292	11,700	15	5	0	0	39
	100.0	10.0	82.4	0.8	6.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mullaitivu	91,947	8,851	79,081	2,182	1,760	21	12	0	0	40
	100.0	9.6	86.0	2.4	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kilinochchi	112,875	962	109,528	1,682	678	1	0	0	0	24
	100.0	0.9	97.0	1.5	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Batticaloa	525,142	6,127	381,285	1,015	133,844	2,794	16	3	0	58
	100.0	1.2	72.6	0.2	25.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ampara	648,057	251,018	112,750	165	282,484	849	176	4	1	610
	100.0	38.7	17.4	0.0	43.6	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Trincomalee	378,182	101,991	115,549	6,531	152,854	815	364	14	0	64
	100.0	27.0	30.6	1.7	40.4	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kurunegala	1,610,299	1,471,339	18,763	3,582	113,560	711	1,083	92	28	1,141
	100.0	91.4	1.2	0.2	7.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Puttalam	759,776	559,031	47,523	2,503	146,820	1,481	592	187	206	1,433
	100.0	73.6	6.3	0.3	19.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2
Anuradhapura	856,232	778,131	5,065	957	70,248	187	158	17	44	1,425
	100.0	90.9	0.6	0.1	8.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2

Polonnaruwa	403,335 100.0	365,476 90.6	7,356 1.8	1,190 0.3	29,060 7.2	86 0.0	46 0.0	1 0.0	1 0.0	119 0.0
Badulla	811,758 100.0	593,120 73.1	20,335 2.5	149,662 18.4	45,886 5.7	904 0.1	1,288 0.2	43 0.0	9 0.0	511 0.1
Moneragala	448,142 100.0	423,972 94.6	9,783 2.2	4,590 1.0	9,552 2.1	109 0.0	46 0.0	10 0.0	1 0.0	79 0.0
Ratnapura	1,082,277 100.0	942,244 87.1	54,658 5.1	62,595 5.8	21,550 2.0	325 0.0	270 0.0	28 0.0	22 0.0	585 0.1
Kegalle	836,603 100.0	715,723 85.6	20,250 2.4	41,468 5.0	57,952 6.9	577 0.1	168 0.0	37 0.0	4 0.0	424 0.1

Source: (Department of Census and Statistics 2012)



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