

Case Study: **Sri Lanka**

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## CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN WATER SOURCE PROTECTION IN THE UVA PROVINCE



### ■ Background

Water resources in Sri Lanka are spread throughout the country, in all climatic zones but in certain provinces, the proportion of water sources is much higher than in others such as the Uva province. Due to the abundance and availability of water sources within this Province, the majority of the local communities didn't recognize the importance of conserving and protecting their water sources. To address the knowledge gap and enhance the protection of water sources, UNICEF is supporting the Uva province with two key interventions as a part of the UNSDG-funded project. The first intervention is to provide technical support to the local government authorities to protect water sources. The second intervention is focused on community engagement in protecting selected water sources, especially including children and youth in seven Divisional Secretariats (DS).

### ■ Strategy and Implementation

Every village in the selected seven DS divisions has one society referred to as the 'Rural Development Society'. Society comprises members of all ages. The Passara DS division in the

Badulla district undertook a significant step forward by establishing a sub-committee on environmental protection under the 'Rural Development Society', which is entirely led by children and youth. To set up this committee, the constitution of the society was also updated. The committee and society officers capacity to work on climate change was enhanced via a two-day training workshop. The workshop highlighted the need for protecting water sources, identifying at-risk water sources, and low-cost activities and also to develop an action plan.

■ Progress and results



The sub-committee decided to implement several activities to protect the water sources, such as reforesting local flora with economic value and establishing a bio fence to demarcate the boundaries around the water sources. These activities were implemented by the provincial land commission officers, community members and sub-committee members, especially the youth and children. Kavindi Priyabashini, a 15-year-old girl from the village mentioned that "Today I planted a "Mee" tree near the water source in our village. I will protect both my tree and water source forever". Approximately thirty people participated in this event in total and that included twelve committee

members. Mr Kithsiri, a 62-year-old stakeholder from the village quoted that "Earlier when officers from the AG office came with labourers and fixed fences around this water source, we would remove the fence once they leave. Now we know why we should protect this water source. This is our responsibility."

■ Lessons learned

There were two main lessons learnt during the implementation of these activities.

Firstly, the provincial land commissioner highlighted that youth groups were very interested, motivated and concerned about environmental issues and wanted to learn more about climate change and its impact on water security.

Secondly, when promoting the establishment of an environmental sub-committee in the existing rural development societies, in several locations the adult members were not very happy to have youth and children leading the environmental sub-committee. This could be because youth have not been a part of such committees in the past and are not seen as valuable contributors to the Rural Development Society. There is also a cultural component which dictates that older members in a community have the decision-making powers and youth are very rarely acknowledged as key stakeholders in decision making processes.

### ■ Way forward and potential application

The new sub-committee on environmental protection established under the Rural Development Society has sparked an interest in the local community to conserve and protect water sources near their homes. Especially inspiring the younger generation in the village to continue to conserve these natural resources for the future. As youth and children were deeply involved with the physical activities of protecting the water sources such as planting trees around the source as a natural protective barrier, they would be more motivated to continue to protect the natural water sources.

For instance, Thejan Lahiru, a 17-year-old male youth stakeholder highlighted that “I see this water source every day but I did not understand how valuable it is and the importance of it. Now, I look at this water source in a different eye”.

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