



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS START-UP (YOULEAD) SRI LANKA

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works in partnership with the people of Sri Lanka to increase prosperity, promote inclusive economic growth, and enhance the resilience of the country's resources to shocks and stresses using a variety of approaches, projects, and partners.

USAID's YouLead project supports inclusive economic growth by increasing youth employability. The project does this by strengthening vocational training for students, teachers, institutions, and entrepreneurs; improving workforce capacity to meet market demand; and linking with the private sector to encourage employment opportunities for youth. The project also works with the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training to develop partnerships with businesses and training providers to leverage resources to prepare youth with market-ready skills.

This project is one component of the longstanding partnership between the U.S. and Sri Lanka to support self-reliance, strengthen stability, and promote economic growth. USAID's program in Sri Lanka, totaling more than \$2 billion since 1961, promotes a healthy, educated, and employed population.

Implementing Partner: International Executive Service Corps (IESC); Total Estimated Cost: \$18.8 million; Performance Period: June 2017 – May 2024

OBJECTIVES

To support inclusive economic growth, USAID's YouLead project aims to:

- Increase youth employability skills in targeted sectors.

- Improve the quality, relevance, and delivery of technical and vocational education and training in targeted sectors.
- Increase prospects for successful self-employment through entrepreneurship development.

AREAS OF FOCUS

- **YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY:** YouLead works to increase youth employability and self-employment opportunities, with a focus on youth aged 16-35 who lack a university degree. To meet market demand, YouLead works to build skills in growing industrial sectors, such as construction, tourism, and IT, and to connect youth with employment opportunities.
- **VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING:** YouLead strengthens vocational skills and training for students, teachers, institutions, and entrepreneurs. It works with the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training to develop partnerships with private sector businesses and vocational training providers to leverage additional resources to further advance youth employability, entrepreneurship development, and tourism sector resilience.
- **ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT:** YouLead is working in partnership with the public and private sectors and communities to help young entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka to enhance entrepreneurship skills and establish new businesses. YouLead also facilitates linkages between youth and financial institutions to improve access to capital needed to grow existing businesses by providing entrepreneurship training and incubation, acceleration support, and business mentoring services.
- **PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS:** YouLead encourages direct engagement of Sri Lanka's private sector by supporting large-scale employers to recruit, train, and retain more youth in jobs created within high-demand sectors of the economy. The project is establishing stronger linkages with public and private organizations, industry groups, and training institutes to ensure that vocational training provided to Sri Lanka's youth is high-quality and focused on foundational skills required by employers. At the same time, YouLead enlists direct support of and engagement by the private sector to promote vocational training and employment island-wide.
- **MIGRANT WORKERS:** YouLead partners with the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) in a \$1.5 million initiative to provide career guidance and skills development to Sri Lankan migrant workers returning to Sri Lanka due to the COVID pandemic and to help reintegrate them by offering productive opportunities. Through work in Kandy, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Puttalam, and Vavuniya, YouLead and SDC will connect migrant worker returnees with employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- **TOURISM RESILIENCE SUPPORT:** YouLead partners with the European Union (EU) in a \$3.8 million initiative to provide support for the tourism industry during the COVID-related downturn and prepare it for a more sustainable and resilient future. Support includes providing grants to help struggling micro-, small-, and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs); training in health and safety for MSMEs and the tourism workforce; and developing a new, signature tourism experience focused on hiking and walking that is compliant with COVID-19 guidelines. These activities are expected to increase demand, promote the diversity of tourism experiences, and increase impacts and incomes for local communities.

RESULTS

YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY:

- Launched ‘21for21’ and ‘stayhomeandlearn’ online programs via the youlead.lk portal to encourage youth to use time at home during the pandemic productively by improving their career-related skills. The ‘stayhomeandlearn’ initiative featured 180 online learning modules, including content in local languages. Career counseling officers and online career guidance platforms reached over 60,000 youth, and 24,000 youth completed YouLead’s workforce development programs, leading to 19,000 individuals securing new or better jobs.
- Supported 5,540 youth (ages group 15-29 years) at risk of violence through training in social and leadership skills. Of those trained, 2,719 were female.
- Launched a digital campaign to encourage youth to make career choices. Built on the myth of Kalumal Pokuna, a pond that magically transforms anyone who dips in its water into the successful person they were meant to be, this video series reached over two million youth.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING:

- Supported workforce development programs that 7,429 individuals from 15 districts completed in FY 2020, which led to 4,500 individuals (55 percent women) obtaining new or better employment.
- Developed or revised 66 skills development courses targeting the construction, auto repair, hospitality, and health care sectors, 37 of which were endorsed by vocational training authorities and many of which are used by public sector training institutes.
- Trained over 1,000 career counsellors from vocational education training centers and schools. Also improved pedagogical and technical skills of over 1,200 vocational education trainers.
- Assisted Samurdhi Authority to conduct 16 entrepreneurship development training sessions in 16 Divisional Secretariats for 1,148 participants, of which 925 were women.
- Supported a ‘training of trainers’ course for 60 female mobilizers of the Women’s Development Federation, the largest women’s organization in Sri Lanka, building their capacity to deliver training on YouLead’s updated entrepreneurship development curriculum.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

- Developed curricula used by the Vocational Training Authority to implement entrepreneurship development training programs that reached 725 youth (67% women).
- Supported the establishment of 782 new businesses, of which 75% were women-led.
- Trained 874 credit officers at public and private financial institutions to improve access to credit for youth and women-owned businesses.

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS:

- Facilitated a dialogue between the Sri Lanka Association for Software Services Companies (an association of information technology firms) and the Vocational Training Authority (VTA) to engage the private sector in improving the employability of VTA’s ICT students, resulting in a program to upskill over 200 ICT instructors.
- Supported the Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by incorporating a skills center and jobs portal into its industry web platform.
- Partnered with several key private sector firms in the construction, restaurant, and caregiving sectors to design and conduct skills development programs. Through strengthening existing partnerships with two large retailers, provided work-based training opportunities to more than 3,000 youth.