

# ChildFund Sri Lanka share experience of youth engagement in Youth-Led Eco System Management for Disaster Risk Reduction

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ChildFund Sri Lanka organised a symposium recently titled 'Young Leaders for Environment 2021' to share its experience and showcase youth engagement initiatives on Eco Systems based Disaster Risk Reduction (ECO DRR). These initiatives were based on a three-year project implemented by ChildFund Sri Lanka, with financial assistance from ChildFund Korea. The project was implemented with the technical support from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Held at the BMICH, the symposium welcomed participants including representatives of the government, ChildFund's alliance members, private sector organisations, local and global institutions and implementing partner agencies.

Objectives of the symposium were; to showcase the work conducted by ChildFund Sri Lanka to promote ECO DRR practices within the country; create a vibrant platform for youth who led the initiatives to share their key accomplishments to a wider local and international audience, and importantly; to lobby stakeholders to mainstream ECO DRR aspects into national level planning.

Sri Lanka is prone to floods, droughts, and landslides and even vulnerable to rising sea levels. These disasters are continuously challenging the wellbeing and survival of most vulnerable communities in the country. In an attempt to strengthen youth participation and also to increase livelihood resilience ChildFund Sri Lanka invested in youth-led Disaster Risk Management (DRM) initiatives since 2015. The project tested the potential of youth-led Eco System based approaches in mitigating adverse effects of both manmade and natural disasters.

At the outset, the project invested in building knowledge and capacities of youth to identify issues related to disasters in their respective communities and also to develop their ability to design and implement community projects. During the later stage of the project, youth groups were supported to design and implement youth led nature-based interventions to address the identified issues.

This project was implemented in identified vulnerable eco systems in four districts namely Batticaloa, Nuwara Eliya, Mullaitivu and Puttalam.

To showcase the work completed and outcomes achieved the symposium included a diverse range of speakers including Neelam Makhijani, Country Director, ChildFund India & Sri Lanka, Unjgae Wong, Humanitarian Project Manager, ChildFund Korea. Rtd Maj. Gen. S. Ranasinghe, Director General, Disaster Management Centre delivered the keynote speech.

The first session of the symposium was to highlight the 'Global and National Landscape on Youth Led ECO DRR'. Dr. Karen Sudmeier-Rieux, Senior Advisor, Disaster Risk Reduction with the United Nations Environmental Programme's (UNEP) Disasters and Conflicts programme in Geneva addressed the participants on the global landscape while Ranga Pallawala, National Climate Finance Advisor at the Commonwealth Secretariat elaborated on the local setting.

The second session showcased the work accomplished by the youth groups. The Field Youth Ambassadors representing Batticaloa, Puttalam, Mullaitivu and Nuwara Eliya engaged participants on the interventions and work completed in their respective areas.

The symposium concluded with a vibrant panel discussion with expert panellists; Dr. Ananda Mallawatantri, Country

Representative, IUCN, Nalaka Siriwardena, Country Manager, ChildFund Sri Lanka, while Thavaputhalvan Thavapiraja, Secretary, Thurukka Youth Club, Batticaloa and S. Rockshanthan, President, Drops Youth Club, Radella, Nuwara Eliya also voiced their views. The panel discussion was moderated by Kaushal Attanayake, Technical Specialist, ChildFund Sri Lanka. Event ended with the launch of a project publication followed by the final remarks from Samantha De Mel, Project Manager, Youth-Led Eco Based DRR Project, ChildFund Sri Lanka.

### **About ChildFund Sri Lanka**

ChildFund Sri Lanka is an international child development organization working with children for the past 40 years in the country. ChildFund is committed to uplifting lives of over 200,000 children and their families from marginalized communities in 10 districts by implementing programs on education, nutrition, youth empowerment, inclusion of children with disabilities, child protection, environment & disaster risk reduction. ChildFund ensures that children and youth are growing in a healthy, protective and supportive environment, enabling them to reach their full potential.

