

# Sri Lanka

## UNICEF HIV and AIDS Programming Country Profile 2006

UNITE FOR CHILDREN  
UNITE AGAINST AIDS

### HIV and AIDS in Sri Lanka

The first case of HIV in Sri Lanka was reported in 1986. At the end of the year 2005 it was estimated that 5000 persons were living with HIV/AIDS in Sri Lanka equivalent to an adult HIV prevalence rate of <0.1%. The available data on HIV/AIDS in Sri Lanka indicates that extensive spread of HIV has not occurred. However, a number of vulnerabilities might alter this picture in the future.

Sri Lanka has one of the highest prevalence rates of sexually transmitted diseases in Asia. In 1991 it was estimated that around 200,000 sexually transmitted infections occur annually in Sri Lanka. But according to the national STD AIDS control programme statistics there is an increasing trend in reporting after the establishment of new STD clinics at district level in the year 2001

Delayed age of marriage and changes in social and cultural norms contribute to the practice of risky sexual behaviours. There is increasing evidence of adolescents engaging in commercial sex, both heterosexual and homosexual. Other factors like increasing number of tourism in the coastal areas and foreign paedophiles initiating boys into commercial sex make young men and women more vulnerable to HIV.

Adolescents comprise nearly one fifth of Sri Lanka's total population of 19.3 million. 28 % of the population is between 10-24 years old and 19.7% are in the 10-19 age group. Since Sri Lanka is still in the beginning of the HIV epidemic, successful control will to a large extent depend on the knowledge, attitude and practices of the country's adolescents and youth.

### Strategy and Objectives

In 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka finalised the second Strategic Plan to guide an expanded response to HIV and AIDS.

The objectives of the 2002-2006 strategy are to:

- ⓧ Prevent HIV transmission
- ⓧ Reduce personal and social impact of HIV on the infected persons and their families
- ⓧ Reduce the impact of HIV on the society<sup>1</sup>

Under the framework of the National Strategic Plan, UNICEF supports the government and NGOs to accelerate effective approaches to HIV prevention, care and support. The main objective of UNICEF's HIV and AIDS programming in Sri Lanka is to improve the life skills and competencies of 30% of adolescents in focus areas such as prevention of HIV/AIDS, STDs, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies and suicide through provision of youth friendly health and counselling services and available media network. Programme strategies are to:

- ⓧ Build capacity at district, provincial and national levels to develop life skills of adolescents with emphasis on prevention of tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, STD, HIV/AIDS, violence and suicides.
- ⓧ Raise awareness and change the behaviour of adolescents through advocacy and social mobilisation using available media network and available channels of interpersonal communication.



### Vulnerabilities and risks facing children and young people

- ⓧ Changes in social and cultural norms
- ⓧ Low level of knowledge on Reproductive Health, STD and HIV/AIDS
- ⓧ Delayed age of marriage
- ⓧ High-risk behaviours
  - low condom use
  - Men-who-have-sex-with-men
- ⓧ Increasing trend of early initiation of sexual activity
  - teenage pregnancies
  - illegal abortions
  - sexually transmitted diseases
- ⓧ Young commercial sex workers
- ⓧ Cultural taboos for communicating sexual related information leading to lack of correct information and skills

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<sup>1</sup> Country report – Sri Lanka, Follow up to the declaration on commitment on HIV and AIDS, UNGASS, 2005

- ⌘ Advocate on gender issues in relation to HIV and AIDS and STDs. Promote gender sensitisation and gender socialisation.
- ⌘ Develop synergetic alliances to promote adolescent wellbeing with special emphasis on HIV/AIDS prevention.
- ⌘ Establish linkages with the UNICEF funded programmes and especially with the programme for Children affected by armed conflict and Tsunami.
- ⌘ Advocate for the establishment of adolescent friendly physical and social environment at family and the community level
- ⌘ Ensure the participation of girls and boys in programme planning, development and implementation.

## UNICEF's HIV and AIDS Programme Areas

**Prevention:** Reduce adolescent risks and vulnerability to HIV by increasing access to and use of gender-sensitive prevention information, skills and services.

22 % of Sri Lanka's population are in the 10-18 age groups. According to the National Adolescence Survey conducted by UNICEF and the Government of Sri Lanka in 2004 has shown that amongst this group the knowledge on HIV and STIs is less than 45%. Coupled with a high abortion rate among teenagers, low use of condoms and contraceptives and cultural barriers and lack of access to information on sexual reproductive and health and opportunities for skills development in families or in the communities, makes this group of adolescents vulnerable to HIV infection.

UNICEF HIV/AIDS prevention programmes are mainly targeting young people in and out of schools using peer education approach. Health and Physical education curriculum and teaching and learning materials of the National school system have been revised in order to include more HIV/AIDS facts. Furthermore, advocating government authorities and supporting for establishment of youth friendly health and counselling services is one of the key activities of the current country programme.

### Current programmes

#### ⌘ *Life Skills based Education and prevention of HIV/AIDS (LCP)*

The LCP programme is implemented in 6000 secondary schools in Sri Lanka covering grades VII-IX. Taught as a stand-alone core curriculum LCP is based upon the ten core life skills from WHO's "Skills for Life".

### Future Programing Priorities

The future programme priorities have been developed to address issues identified by the National Adolescence Survey, 2005:

- ⌘ Advocacy at all levels and social mobilisation
- ⌘ Build the capacity of Government, NGOs and existing CBOs and undertake youth and parent education
- ⌘ Promote youth participation at all levels
- ⌘ Communication and behaviour change education
- ⌘ Develop school infrastructure and school health clubs to be adolescent friendly
- ⌘ Establish youth friendly community centres
- ⌘ Sensitise school principals and teachers parents and community leaders
- ⌘ Develop skills among youth leaders for peer education
- ⌘ Advocacy to promote adolescent participation and promote adolescent representation at national level

**PMTCT Plus:** Reduce HIV infection among pregnant women and prevent transmission of HIV to their infants.

**Paediatric treatment:** Universal access of HIV infected children to treatment, care and support.

The PMTCT and Paediatric AIDS programmes in Sri Lanka are still in the piloting phase

### Future Programing Priorities

- ⌘ To develop a strategic framework for PMTCT (WHO and MoH developed VCT guidelines, ART and surveillance guidelines)
- ⌘ To develop PMTCT guidelines and training manual
- ⌘ To develop Paediatric AIDS treatment guidelines



© UNICEF/SRI LANKA/Geoffrey Keele Young children who had been out of school for years lining up to register for UNICEF-Supported Catch-Up education programmes.

### Targets

- ⌘ To improve life-skills and competencies of adolescents in focus areas through provision of youth-friendly health and counselling services and available media networks. The focus areas are:
  - HIV/AIDS
  - STDs
  - substance abuse
  - reproductive health
  - suicide prevention

### Targets

- ⌘ To develop a comprehensive PMTCT programme with focus on primary prevention
- ⌘ All HIV-exposed babies receive cotrimoxazole prophylaxis
- ⌘ All identified HIV-positive children have access to drugs, medicines and treatment for opportunistic infections.
- ⌘ All identified HIV-positive children who require it, have access to appropriate ARVs.

### Protection, care and support for children affected by HIV/AIDS:

Increase the proportion of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS receiving quality family, community and government support, including education, healthcare, nutrition and psycho-social support.

War has displaced over 300,000 children in Sri Lanka, who now live in unsafe environments, stressed, homeless, orphaned, and exposed to violence.

More than 200,000 children have been affected by the Tsunami disaster and the complexity of the situation has increased the vulnerability for HIV infection.

#### Current programmes:

Life skills based HIV/AIDS prevention programmes have been initiated for the general youth population in Tsunami affected areas.

#### Future Programming Priorities

- ✘ To organise 60% of families and communities with a focus to prevent and act against child abuse and violence against women
- ✘ To enhance the capacity of 50% of service providers and other external facilitators to prevent child abuse and violence against women, and provide services to victims of abuse and violence
- ✘ Strengthen sub-national institutions to plan, implement and monitor protection of children and women
- ✘ Improve legislation, law enforcement services, and policies for protection of children and women



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**SRI LANKA:** A smiling girl sits in a large circle of children during a game at Carmel Fatima School in Kalmunai zone in the eastern district of Ampara. UNICEF is supporting play and other psychosocial therapy for children in the camp and has also provided recreational kits containing toys, games and sports equipment. Many children in the camp have been traumatized or orphaned by the tsunami disaster. About 350 families live in the camp.

#### Targets

- ✘ To contribute to the elimination of child abuse, the protection of women against violence and abuse

### Partnerships

UNICEF Sri Lanka is working closely together with...

- ✘ **Religious leaders:** to address the issue of HIV/AIDS and Young People. UNDP -Asian Pacific Leadership Forum and the local NGO Sarvodaya, are working in collaboration in this programme.
- ✘ **Other UN agencies:** UNICEF is taking leadership in UN joint programme on prevention of HIV AIDS among highly vulnerable young people in identified geographical locations

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#### Relevant Documents:

*National Survey of Emerging Issues among adolescents in Sri Lanka*, UNICEF, 2004