Monthly Bulletin | August 2021

This month's issue features articles on health, labour, agriculture, and food systems. In an insightful blog titled 'Building Pandemic-Resilient Food Systems in Sri Lanka and Nepal' published on Southern Voice, Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa and Dr Paras Kharel from the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) dissect the impacts of COVID-19 on the food supply chains of the two countries and propose possible solutions to mitigate such vulnerabilities in the future.

Continuing with the theme of food security, IPS Executive Director Dr Dushni Weerakoon speaking at the IFPRI Global Food Policy Report 2021 launch explained that due to the disruption of food distribution networks as a result of the pandemic, one of the biggest concerns in Sri Lanka is food price inflation. She pointed out that digital platforms should be embraced by the stakeholders to maintain a reliable and resilient food system for the long run.

IPS is also excited to announce its inaugural Policy Pitch Contest for University Undergraduates. In line with the main theme of our forthcoming Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2021 publication 'Pandemics and Policy: Protecting Health and Promoting Economic Recovery', we aim to encourage the youth to present practical solutions to contemporary problems in Sri Lanka through this competition.

This issue's 'Inside IPS' segment features Research Officer Ruwan Samaraweera who is engaged in the environment, natural resources and climate change policy research at IPS. We hope you find this issue interesting and welcome your feedback to make our content even more engaging.

IPS Communications Team
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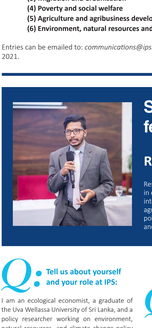
IPS Policy Pitch Contest



The Policy Pitch competition is open to all Sri Lankan undergraduates who are enrolled at a local or foreign university. Entries can be submitted in Sinhala, Tamil or English under any one of the following six themes which are the main focal areas of IPS' annual flagship publication 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy':

(1) Macro-economics, trade and competitiveness
(2) Health, education and labour
(3) Migration and urbanisation
(4) Poverty and social welfare
(5) Agriculture and agribusiness development
(6) Environment, natural resources and climate change.

Entries can be emailed to: *communications@ips.lk* from 2 August 2021 until 30 August 2021.

See more ›

Inside IPS

Special interview featuring:

Ruwan Samaraweera

Research Officer at IPS, with a background in entrepreneurial agriculture. His research interests are in environmental economics, agricultural economics, macro-economic policy and planning, labour and migration, and poverty and development policy.

Q Tell us about yourself and your role at IPS:

I am an ecological economist, a graduate of the Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka, and a policy researcher working on environment, natural resources, and climate change policy at IPS. At the moment, I am contributing as a researcher for both national and international efforts aimed at sustainable management and rehabilitation of the environment, addressing global environmental challenges, and formulating plans and policies for the environmental sustainability of the country.

Q What are you currently researching?

I am currently working on national-level policy engagements such as updating the National Environmental Policy of Sri Lanka, developing the National Cooling Policy of Sri Lanka, and Evaluation of Overall Policy Coherence and Recommendations for Designing and Implementing an Optimal Policy Package *Measuring, Reporting and Verification (MRV), Sri Lanka Carbon Registry (SLCR) and Sri Lanka Carbon Crediting Scheme (SLCCS).* Apart from that, I am part of the research team that explores the possibility of introducing a market-based solution for the human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka and climate-induced migration in the island.

Q What are the top environmental concerns in Sri Lanka?

Several environmental concerns are present in the country, and they comprise both sudden and slow-onset impacts. For instance, climate change, a severe global environmental challenge, is a major environmental concern in Sri Lanka that has consequences on various areas such as human habitats and agricultural value chains. Coastal and marine environmental pollution, encroachment of forest reserves followed by deforestation, challenges related to waste management, and human-wildlife conflict including human-elephant conflict are among the most prominent.

Q How do you assess the damage from the X-Press Pearl disaster?

The X-press Pearl disaster has been widely recognized as one of the most acute environmental disasters that took place in Sri Lanka. Reports stated that the ship was carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid, 278 tonnes of low-sulfur fuel oil, 50 tonnes of gas oil, 20 containers full of lubricating oil, other chemicals, and plastics, etc. Millions of plastic pellets along with the chemicals were released to the environment forming detrimental impacts, especially on marine life forms. The damage to the marine ecosystem is beyond assessment. Numerous reports stated that carcasses of blue whales, fish species, sea turtles, etc. were found immediately after the initial reports of chemical leakages from the vessel. In addition, the livelihoods of around 4,300 fisherman families were put to hold due to the pollution and the exact impacts on the environment including marine and coastal, economic sectors and coastal communities are yet to be assessed through formal scientific inquiries.

Q What should Sri Lanka do to ensure that such disasters do not recur?

A comprehensive assessment is to be conducted based on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The Sendai Framework provides guidelines for substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health. This also includes guidelines on the economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities, and countries. It notes that the government has the main responsibility to reduce disaster risks but this responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including the local government, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Hence, an assessment based on the Sendai framework and a future action plan would help to successfully manage any of such disasters in the future.

Q What are some of the challenging aspects of research?

The central parts of ecological economics are the valuation of ecosystems, the increasing scarcity of natural resources, the impacts of environmental externalities, the importance of uncertainties, the existence of irreversible processes, and the long-term orientation of planning. Hence, on many occasions, it requires stated preference approaches to obtain the relevant data. Despite the available empirical approaches, the stated preferences would carry biases such as the 'glowing effect/halo effect' where surveyed individuals overestimate the value thinking, thus making them appear better over others. I find such biases to be challenging for accurate estimations. On the other hand, most of the variables are latent variables that are difficult to measure directly.

Q What do you enjoy most about your work?

As a policy researcher, I actively take part in matters relating to environmental protection, conservation, and sustainability practices. I always enjoy creating awareness among others, especially to the youth. Knowing that I have contributed in some way to protect our environment for future generations is intrinsically satisfying!

Q What books would you recommend to an aspiring economist?

An environmental economist should read the 'Ecological Economics' by Herman E. Daly and Joshua Farley. I also suggest reading 'Das Kapital' by Karl Marx on how a materialistic economist thinks.

Blogs

COVID-19 and the Burden of Child Undernutrition in Sri Lanka

By Wimal Nanayakkara

The nutritional status of children under five in Sri Lanka has not shown a significant improvement for the last 20 years. It has also been lagging behind most of the other health and social indicators on children. IPS research shows that household income, inadequate nutrient intake, breastfeeding practices, mothers' education, etc., play a major role in child undernutrition in Sri Lanka. Moreover, given significant losses in household income experienced at the hands of the COVID-19 pandemic, nutrient intake may have declined further over the past year. As such, it would be a challenging task for health planners to develop effective strategies to minimise undernutrition among children under five years. This article highlights some of the facts contributing to child undernutrition in Sri Lanka and suggests ways to address this critical issue.

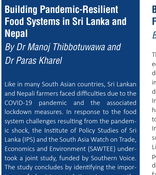
See more ›

Employer-supported Childcare: A Solution to Labour Shortages?

By Amanda Balasooriya

Most Sri Lankan families are struggling to meet the costs of childcare. A vast majority of women who wish to be employed do not enter the labour market due to the lack of quality and affordable childcare. Even low-income families have to bear the high cost of childcare due to the absence of affordable childcare arrangements. Despite a growing need for childcare, for many women, finding quality and affordable childcare is difficult and childcare costs are very high. At the same time, faced with labour shortages employers are struggling to attract women to the workforce. Some companies have tried to overcome this problem by offering childcare at the workplace. This blog, based on an IPS study, tries to assess the feasibility of employer-assisted child care by estimating the willingness of women to pay for such childcare.

See more ›



Building Pandemic-Resilient Food Systems in Sri Lanka and Nepal

By Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa and Dr Paras Kharel

Like in many South Asian countries, Sri Lankan and Nepali farmers faced difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown measures. In response to the food system challenges resulting from the pandemic shock, the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) and the South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) undertook a joint study, funded by Southern Voice. The study concludes by identifying the importance of short-term solutions to ensure the smooth supply of inputs, and medium to long-term solutions that deal with structural issues in the food system as a whole.

See more ›

Building Pandemic-Resilient Food Systems in Sri Lanka

By Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa

The threat of rising food insecurity due to economic lockdowns and supply chain disruptions is among the many adverse impacts unfolding amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Sri Lanka. In the past, the food system in the country has proven to be vulnerable and inefficient to cope with even much smaller shocks. Inefficiencies at various points along food supply chains are a perennial challenge. Likewise, malnutrition continues to be a persistent problem, with severe regional disparities in its prevalence. Policy makers face the dual challenge of mitigating the short- and medium-term impacts of COVID-19 as well as future-proofing the country's food systems.

See more ›

Featured Videos

COVID-19 and Internal Migration in Sri Lanka – Dr Bilesha Weeraratne

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IFPRI Global Food Policy Report (GFPR) 2021 Launch - Dr Dushni Weerakoon

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