

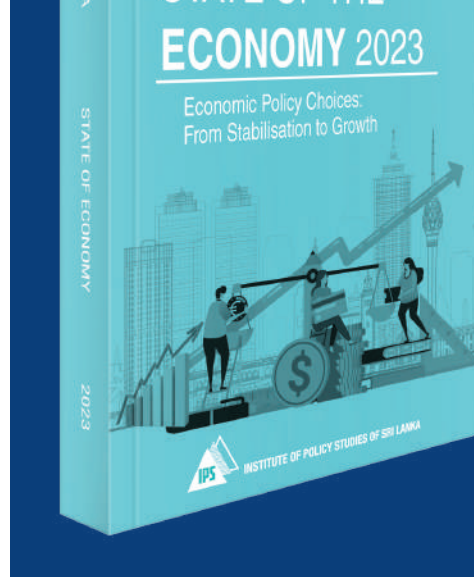
## This month's highlights:

- IPS launches its latest publication titled "Unveiling Trade Potential: An Ex-Ante Analysis of the Sri Lanka - Thailand Free Trade Agreement," authored by IPS Research Fellow Dr Asanka Wijesinghe and IPS Research Officer Nilupulee Rathnayake.
- IPS Research Officer Lakshila Wanigasinghe, writing for the IPS blogsite Talking Economics (TE), delves into the key areas of the *Aswesuma* programme that warrant clarification.
- IPS Research Assistant Piyumi Ranadewa, in a TE blog, discusses the situation of Sri Lanka's returning foreign migrant workers and sheds light on the importance of upskilling for career growth and better job opportunities.
- In a TE blog, Research Economist Priyanka Jayawardena explores the effectiveness of the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) tax in reducing SSB consumption and battling non-communicable diseases in Sri Lanka.
- In the Inside IPS segment, IPS Research Assistant Sulochana Silva speaks about the collaborative agroforestry initiatives and climate change adaptation and mitigation policies in Sri Lanka.
- Documentary video based on IPS' in-depth research to understand the nexus of migration, environmental degradation, and climate change in Sri Lanka.

We hope you find this issue insightful. Your feedback is, as always, welcome!

IPS Communications Team  
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## Forthcoming Publication



This year's IPS annual flagship report Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2023 under the theme of 'Economic Policy Choices: From Stabilisation to Growth' offers a critical assessment of the country's economic performance and near-term outlook for growth and macroeconomic stability amidst the challenges of dealing with the country's unprecedented economic crisis and a volatile global economic and political order. As the country makes slow progress in stabilisation and recovery efforts, the report will focus on the policy choices and debates in key areas of reform such as fiscal policy, trade, labour and land markets, education and health financing, migration, social protection, and sustainable development in energy.

[See more >>>](#)

## New Publication

**NEW RELEASE!**

**Unveiling Trade Potential: An Ex-Ante Analysis of the Sri Lanka - Thailand Free Trade Agreement**

This comprehensive study finds substantial gains in bilateral trade from a comprehensive FTA between Sri Lanka and Thailand. It highlights navigating the challenges posed by existing tariff structures, trade imbalances, and domestic political considerations will be crucial to ensuring the FTA's successful implementation.

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## Blogs

### Revamping Welfare: Is Aswesuma the Salvation Sri Lanka's Poor Hoped for?

By Lakshila Wanigasinghe



With the introduction of *Aswesuma* as a brand-new initiative targeting the poor and vulnerable, social protection in Sri Lanka has been a much-debated subject lately.

*Aswesuma* primarily intends to overcome some key weaknesses of existing social protection programmes – at least on paper – but several challenges prevail. However, opinions regarding its capabilities to accomplish this remain ambiguous. The public has been protesting the scheme, and opposition party critics have called it an unfair political gimmick. Initially scheduled for disbursement in July 2023, the benefits for July finally commenced disbursement last Monday (28th August) for 800,000 beneficiaries.

This blog delves into the key areas that warrant clarification, with the hope that authorities will address these concerns transparently.

[See more >>>](#)

### Skills Beyond Borders: Are Sri Lankan Returnee Migrant Workers Equipped for Migration Triumph?

By Piyumi Ranadewa

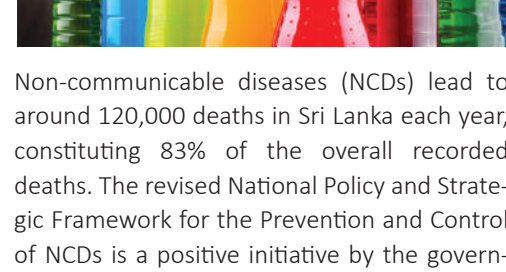


Returnee migrant workers often possess a wealth of knowledge and skills acquired during their time overseas, leading them to feel adequately equipped for the global job market. However, in today's rapidly evolving international job market, adaptability and acquiring new skill sets are essential for sustained career growth. Relying solely on existing skills can lead to complacency and hinder long-term prospects. Continuous up-skilling can open doors to more stable and higher-earning employment opportunities. As Sri Lanka unveils its Labour Migration Policy 2023-2027, it is timely to shed light on the importance of skill development for re-migration.

[See more >>>](#)

### Sri Lanka's Battle Against NCDs: Is the Sugar-Beverage Tax Doing Enough?

By Priyanka Jayawardena



Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) lead to around 120,000 deaths in Sri Lanka each year, constituting 83% of the overall recorded deaths. The revised National Policy and Strategic Framework for the Prevention and Control of NCDs is a positive initiative by the government to address this. Such policies can play a crucial role in promoting healthier lifestyles, preventing NCDs, and improving overall public health. However, the question that lingers is, how effective are the existing measures, and where can we make improvements?

In the battle against NCDs, the government implemented a crucial policy in 2017 – the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) tax. This tax aimed to curb the consumption of SSBs closely linked to health problems like obesity, diabetes, and dental issues. While this measure holds great promise, evaluating its effectiveness is difficult owing to data gaps. However, an IPS analysis of how SSB taxes are helping to reduce their consumption in Sri Lanka provides some initial insights.

[See more >>>](#)

## Inside IPS

### Special interview featuring:

**Sulochana Silva**  
Research Assistant at IPS

**Q: Tell us about yourself and your role at IPS:**

I would like to introduce myself as a researcher and a knowledge seeker. I hold a BSc (Hons) in Agricultural Technology and Management, specialising in Applied Economics and Business Management from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya. Currently, I am reading an MSc in Agricultural Economics at the Post Graduate Institute of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya.

My research interests are in Land Economics, Environmental and Agricultural policy research, and Climate Change. I work as a Research Assistant in the Environment, Natural Resources & Climate Change unit at IPS, under the supervision of Dr Erandathie Pathiraja.

**Q: What drew you into the field of economics?**

My transition from a biology-focused secondary school education to pursuing a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Technology and Management was driven by a growing interest in the pivotal role of Economics. I recognised that Economics provides essential tools for analysing resource allocation, sustainability, and policy influences within the agricultural and environmental sectors. This interdisciplinary perspective is crucial for addressing complex global challenges such as climate change, food security, and poverty reduction. This perspective allowed me to see how economic decisions impact everything from crop yields to food supply chains and environmental conservation. This multidisciplinary approach has not only enriched my academic journey but has also ignited my passion for contributing to the nexus of Biology, Economics, Agriculture, and Environment in addressing critical global issues.

**Q: What are you currently researching?**

I'm currently working on four research projects. One project is focused on the Economics of Forest Restoration, specifically, forest landscape restoration in selected districts of Sri Lanka. Another project that I'm working on is a policy review on climate smart agriculture in Sri Lanka. Both these projects are primarily focusing on addressing the issue of climate change.

Additionally, I'm engaged in a project aimed at improving pandemic responses to reduce adverse health effects on women workers in Sri Lanka's export sector. This study aims to design a pandemic response protocol and influence regulatory policies to improve workplace conditions to enhance resilience to health impacts. Lastly, there's the RESET Alcohol Initiative in Sri Lanka project, which with focuses on designing and implementing effective fiscal policies that reduce alcohol consumption in Sri Lanka.

**Q: From your perspective, how can collaborative agroforestry initiatives effectively combat deforestation and its impact on climate change in Sri Lanka?**

Addressing forest restoration is not solely the responsibility of the government; it necessitates collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders, including rural communities engaged in deforestation and land clearing for cultivation. In Sri Lanka, land scarcity issues have driven deforestation, resulting in alarming statistics. This deforestation contributes to shifting climate patterns, exemplified by a significant increase in severe droughts.

To mitigate this crisis, it is crucial to incentivise and benefit individuals participating in agroforestry initiatives. Research indicates that such incentives not only promote engagement in agroforestry programmes but also offer a potential solution to combat illegal encroachments on forest lands. This multifaceted approach acknowledges the complexity of climate change mitigation and integrates community involvement with environmental conservation efforts.

**Q: What are the key recommendations or necessary steps that should be undertaken to improve the climate change adaptation and mitigation policies in Sri Lanka?**

Several notable challenges can be identified regarding Sri Lanka's climate adaptation efforts. One of the challenges is the lack of climate information that is essential for improvements and more informed decision-making. Establishment of an effective information dissemination system is required to address this issue. Persistent technological gaps also exist, despite sector-specific assessments. Strengthening technological infrastructure is crucial in addressing this issue.

Although significant progress has been made in addressing certain policy issues at the national level, climate change is complex and multifaceted. This demands a more holistic and all-encompassing approach that goes beyond the scope of individual government ministries. We also need to improve institutional coordination and reduce fragmentation among diverse stakeholders. Lastly, financial constraints hinder extensive climate adaptation initiatives. Pioneering innovative financial mobilisation methods should be used to overcome this.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about your work?**

I derive immense satisfaction from my role as a researcher and knowledge seeker. What I find most rewarding in my work is the opportunity to explore complex diverse issues, generate new insights, and contribute to our understanding of critical challenges. This journey keeps me engaged and motivated every day.

As a policy researcher at IPS, I take great pleasure in generating fresh knowledge to address Sri Lanka's issues. It brings me immense joy to be part of the effort to find solutions for these pressing challenges through my research.

**Q: What are some challenging aspects of working as a researcher?**

In many research projects, especially in developing countries like Sri Lanka, access to high-quality data is a significant challenge. It is challenging to find relevant, up-to-date, and comprehensive data. Additionally, data quality issues, such as inaccuracies or inconsistencies, can hinder the research process and impact the validity of findings.

**Q: Apart from your current field of research, what are your other pursuits?**

Most of my recent work has been devoted to agricultural and environmental policy research. I want to grow as a policy researcher who works to address the difficulties brought on by climate change in Sri Lanka. IPS has been instrumental in providing me with several opportunities to work, study and progress in my career as a climate change researcher.

## Featured Videos

**Sri Lanka - Thailand Free Trade Agreement**

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**Migration, Environment and Climate Change | IOM Sri Lanka**

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