



# BUSINESS TIMES

## Good jobs for more workers to improve livelihoods

By Sunimalee Dias

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Policy makers insist on creating good jobs that will carry most of the working population into the formal sector that is required in Sri Lanka's growing economy.



Dr. Nisha Arunatillake

At least 67 per cent of the country's population is engaged in work in the informal sector with only 8 per cent found to be doing formal sector jobs.

Access to Decent Work for everybody is essential, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Director Research Dr. Nisha Arunatillake told the Business Times ahead of the release of the Sri Lanka: State of Economy 2023 report by IPS.

The 67 per cent of the working population found in the informal sector have no social protection and, as a result Sri Lanka should look at creating more good jobs that will guarantee social protection like EPF/ETF, she noted. In addition good jobs will provide adequate remuneration,

rights at work and social dialogue thereby minimising the losses and improve the resilience of households to economic fluctuations.

Most workers are found in the rural parts of the country but in order to improve the livelihoods of this sector authorities need to help connect them with the value chains in a bid to ensure they have access to the markets to sell their produce.

In this respect, linking farmers with the markets is important and the government should facilitate job creation, Dr. Arunatillake explained.

Some of the issues faced with the changes proposed are in the implementation process as subjects of ministries are changed from time to time resulting in changes to the projects that are already underway, she noted.

With over 30 per cent workers engaged in the agriculture sector they need to be made aware of the prospects available for them to market their produce and in doing so connect them with local and global markets by adding value to their crops.

Sri Lanka's labour market is comprised of 60 per cent with only an O/L qualification and the majority of them are found in the agriculture sector.

With no accountability for any new policy decisions taken for complete implementation the country has today run out of the required cash for development.

In fact, it was pointed out that most of the university graduates in Sri Lanka are not IT skilled and prefer public sector jobs in terms of job security and with no room for change in the way work is carried out and there is no possibility for improvement either, Dr. Arunatillake said.

Structural changes are required like improving the skills of the workers with access to better jobs.

Dr. Arunatillake points out that despite a number of efforts by the authorities to promote decent work in the country as far back as 2006, the quality of jobs created has not developed much and the formal job creation in the private sector is relatively weak.

Knowledge-based private sector-led development is vital in this context but this also requires a large share of skilled workers and sufficient employment opportunities to keep them gainfully employed.

In attempting to provide access to quality jobs tertiary level education alone is not sufficient, whereas other skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision making and creativity too are essential, she noted.

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