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## EMPOWERING SRI LANKAN YOUTH: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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### ABSTRACT

With United Nations unveiling the Sustainable Development Agenda, today the entire world has come together on a common platform with the objective of realizing the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals put forth by the United Nations. When realizing these Sustainable Development Goals the youth undoubtedly has a significant role to play. With regards to Sri Lanka also it remains the same. Despite the presence of extensive research and literature on Sustainable Development and youth, not adequate studies have been made on incorporating the youth with the Sustainable Development Agenda. This study attempts to contribute in filling the gap of incorporating the youth with the Sustainable Development Goals from Sri Lankan perspective. Has Sri Lanka able to comprehend the importance of youth in attaining sustainable development? Has it understood the main issues and challenges faced by the Sri Lankan in the context of realizing sustainable development? And how can the youth be incorporated and empowered to attain sustainable development? These are the main research questions which would be attempted to answer by this study. Out of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals put forth by the United Nations, the study has picked four goals which have a direct bearing on youth to better understand main issues and challenges faced by the Sri Lankan youth in realizing sustainable development. They are; 1) Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, 2) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, 3) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and 4) promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Basically, this study is a qualitative research based on secondary data. The study shall take into account a wide array of statistics on Sri Lanka youth, especially on education, labour force, unemployment, job opportunities and health to have a clear understanding on where Sri Lanka's youth stands today. The study has unveiled a number of key issues and challenges faced by the youth in Sri Lanka in the context of attaining sustainable development. The study has also found that, despite the importance of youth in shaping the future of the country, from the legislature to the grass root level decision making authorities the role of the youth has been greatly undermined.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Sri Lanka, Youth, Inclusive