



# OCPP GEDSI Analysis: Sri Lanka

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## Acronyms

<b>ALB</b>	Arms' Length Bodies
<b>ALDFG</b>	Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear
<b>CC&amp;CRMD</b>	Coast Conservation & Coastal Resource Management Department
<b>CEFAS</b>	Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science
<b>CEJ</b>	Centre for Equality and Justice
<b>CEPA</b>	Centre for Poverty Analysis
<b>DFAR</b>	Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
<b>DOJF</b>	Disability Organizations Joint Front
<b>DoL</b>	Department of Labor
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GEDSI</b>	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interviews
<b>LGBTQI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons
<b>MEPA</b>	Marine Environment Protection Authority
<b>MISP</b>	Minimum Initial Service Package
<b>MOLFE</b>	Ministry of Labor and Foreign Employment
<b>NARA</b>	National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency
<b>NAQDA</b>	National Aquaculture Development Authority
<b>NAFSO</b>	National Fisheries Solidarity Organization
<b>NCPA</b>	National Child Protection Authority
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>OCPP</b>	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
<b>OCUSL</b>	Ocean University of Sri Lanka
<b>SDDirect</b>	Social Development Direct
<b>SEAH</b>	Sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
<b>SLCG</b>	Sri Lanka Coast Guard
<b>VAC</b>	Violence Against Children

## Executive Summary

**This report sets out the findings from a gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) assessment focused on biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution in coastal areas of Sri Lanka.** The findings will be used to inform the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) to deepen the understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented. The findings of this report are based on the document review and a small number of key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders.

**Although the evidence base was limited, illustrating the general invisibility of marginalised groups from initiatives in the sector, findings clearly point to the fact that coastal communities face widespread economic and environmental challenges, with women, children, young people, people with disabilities and indigenous communities being among the most disadvantaged groups in Sri Lanka's coastal regions.** Evidence suggests that women experience compounded barriers that heighten their risks and limit their rights, with environmental degradation affecting coastal communities in a number of ways, such as impact on livelihood, increased vulnerabilities of women, increased risk of GBV, and increased exposure to coastal erosion and natural disasters. This GEDSI assessment found evidence of safeguarding risks in relation to OCPP that could be significant if unaddressed, including risks related to partners, the type of activities implemented under the programme, and the country context. The significant levels of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women reflect the prevalence of harmful gender norms and gender power inequalities in Sri Lankan society.

**A range of key stakeholders with relevant experience of implementing GEDSI within their work in the blue economy sector were identified as part of this report, along with data that can help enhance GEDSI inclusion in the OCPP's future activities.** Several governmental agencies were identified as key partners, involved in activities such as improving the socio-economic situation of marine communities, providing training, developing sector-specific guidance and conducting research. Secondary stakeholders include various ministries, UN agencies, civil society organisations focused on women's rights, disability and inclusion, as well as universities and similar institutions.

**The study makes high-level recommendations which can be applied in the next phase of OCPP programming, regardless of the specific focus of the work:**

- **Recommendations on GEDSI include the importance of developing explicit GEDSI commitments within the OCPP and allocating sufficient resources to support implementation.** This can be achieved by introduction of necessary resources (including financial resources), strengthening GEDSI capacities of the current OCPP team, identifying entry points and specific opportunities to advance GEDSI to ensure programme alignment with activities in key national policies, improved coordination amongst key

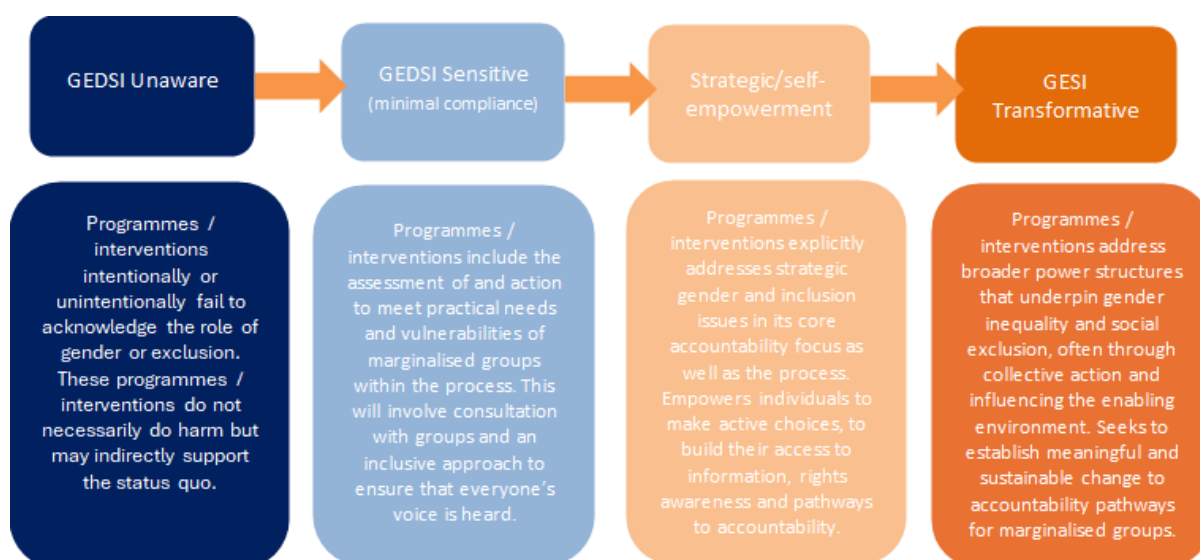
stakeholders working on GEDSI and strengthened local-levels linkages with partners, civil society organisations and coastal communities, with a special focus on nurturing women's leadership, conducting research in key areas where there is currently a gap in knowledge when it comes to GEDSI.

- **Recommendations on addressing safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme focus on addressing SEAH risks within the programme and ensuring that OCPP partners have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in order to prevent and respond to SEAH.** This includes reviewing what safeguarding procedures are in place, conducting risk assessments of high-risk activities for the programme; reviewing the impact of sexual harassment across all programme activities and taking appropriate actions to address these; endorsing the CAPSEAH commitment and working towards compliance; taking a broad approach to understanding safety for those linked to OCPP initiatives; and applying a holistic understanding of risk throughout the value chain.

# 1. Introduction and overview of the analysis

## 1.1. Purpose and objectives

Following an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in November 2023, where the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) was assessed as unaware on the Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Responsiveness Continuum<sup>1</sup>, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses on behalf of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) to support their ambition to better integrate GEDSI responsive approaches in OCPP. This continuum is a framework used to assess and guide programmes, policies, and initiatives in terms of their approach to GEDSI, helping organisations and practitioners understand how their work either reinforces or challenges existing inequalities. Along the continuum, programmes or interventions can range from being GEDSI Unaware, GEDSI Sensitive, Strategic or Self-Empowering, or GEDSI Transformative, as shown in Diagram below<sup>2</sup>.



*Adapted from [UK Aid Connect – Evidence and Collaboration for Inclusive Development, Cross-Programme– Gender Equality and Social Inclusion \(GESI\) Strategy](#)*

Addressing poverty and embedding GEDSI considerations are critical to the success of marine conservation and climate resilience initiatives like the OCPP. Coastal and marine resource-dependent communities often include groups who experience

<sup>1</sup> NB: The Independent Commission for Aid Impact review used the term Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) rather than Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), used by SDDirect, including in this assignment, as it promotes an intentional focus on disability inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> This framework has been adapted and updated by SDDirect from the Moser Framework. It aligns with the GESI Policy for DEFRA ODA Programmes, and while some of the language used varies, the concepts and approach are similar.

multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, such as women, persons with disabilities, and those living in poverty. Environmental degradation, marine pollution, and biodiversity loss disproportionately impact these groups, limiting their access to livelihoods, food security, and participation in decision-making processes. If poverty and social inequalities are not tackled, interventions risk reinforcing existing marginalisation and reducing community resilience to future environmental and economic shocks. Integrating poverty reduction and GEDSI into programme design and implementation is therefore essential to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed, resilience is strengthened, and long-term conservation and sustainability outcomes are achieved. In order to meet the objectives of the International Development Act, international commitments to ‘do no harm’ as part of the SDGs and DEFRA’s own minimum standards on gender and social inclusion, the OCPP must reduce poverty in places it is working and improve conditions for poor people and the most marginalised in this world.

**Objectives:** This assignment is intended to further OCPP’s understanding of the needs and risks of the marginalised and vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented, enabling it to adapt interventions to become more GEDSI sensitive and address those needs and risks. To achieve this objective, this GEDSI analysis provides an intersectional assessment of the social and economic context in coastal areas of Sri Lanka, and identifies key risks related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) and GEDSI that can be mitigated and addressed in an appropriate manner.

**Scope:** This analysis focuses on the key themes for the OCPP programme – sustainable seafood, marine biodiversity, and marine pollution.

### Terminology

**Gender equality** is the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender in opportunities, in the allocation of resources or benefits or in the access to services, such that all individuals can enjoy equal standards of well-being. It is the full and equal exercise by women, men, boys, girls and people of other gender identities of their human rights: in this situation, women, men, girls and boys have equal rights and equal access to socially and economically valued goods, resources, opportunities and benefits; the different gender roles are valued equally and do not constitute an obstacle to their wellbeing and finally; the fulfilment of their potential as responsible members of society is possible.

**Social inclusion** is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individual and groups to development opportunities. These barriers may be formal (written laws on spousal property for instance), or they may be informal (e.g. time village girls spend carrying water instead of attending school). In short, social inclusion is about levelling the playing field by making the ‘rules of the game’ fairer.

**Disability**, according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others” ([UN CRPD](#), 2006).

**Safeguarding** means preventing harm abuse and neglect perpetrated by staff, contractors and as a result of programmes that are being implemented. An important component of that is SEAH being perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors targeted. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people (usually men) in positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is often a form of **gender-based violence** (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children.

## 1.2. Overview of the report

The report is predominantly structured around the six research questions, with the exception of research questions two and four, which are presented together in section 3. This is due to significant overlaps between these research questions in the literature review and the KIIs.

The first section of this report provides a brief overview. Section 2 details the methodology employed, sharing information relating to the literature review, key informant interviews, and data analysis processes, as well as the methodological limitations. Section 3 presents the findings in response to the three priority areas while section 4 identifies who is most at risk of future environmental degradation along the coastline. Section 5 then sets out the key safeguarding risks for the OCPP while sections 6 and 7 map the key stakeholders and data sources available in relation to GEDSI and safeguarding in Sri Lanka. Sections 8 and 9 present conclusions and recommendations respectively.

## 2. Methodology and methodological limitations

### 2.1. Methodology

**The GEDSI analysis was conducted through a literature review and a small number of key informant interviews (KIIs).** Below, we set out the detailed approach to each of these phases.

**For the literature review we reviewed peer-reviewed literature and grey literature available on Google scholar and relevant electronic databases in English.** Search terms included the following: “Sri Lanka” and “marine pollution”, “Sri Lanka” and “fisheries and aquatic resources”, “Sri Lanka” Abandoned, Lost and Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), “ghost fishing gear”, “ඩේවර කාන්තා” (fisherwomen), “Sri Lanka” and “marginalisation” and “coastal”, “Sri Lanka” and “child labour”, “Sri Lanka” and “child sexual abuse”, “Sri Lanka” and “disability” and “coastal”, “intersectional vulnerabilities and coastal livelihoods”, “gender-responsive climate resilience strategy blue economy”, “disability inclusive marine resource management policy”, “lgbtqi+ representation and blue economy and value chain”, “socio-economic power dynamics and fishing sector and GEDSI”, “Sri Lanka” and “coral reefs”, “Sri



Lanka" and "marine protected areas", "Sri Lanka" and "seagrass beds" and "climate change impact", sexual harass\* fish\* aquacultur\* vulnerab\* group\* and "Sri Lanka", \*blue econom\* GEDSI analys\* and "Sri Lanka", "blue economy" "disability inclusion" and "Sri Lanka", "Sri Lanka" and "sexual harassment", "Sri Lanka and GBV" and "Sri Lanka" and "climate change".

Literature included journal articles, legal and policy documents, and reports published by the government and other stakeholders. Literature was identified using key search terms. A full explanation of the criteria used to identify relevant literature can be found in the inception report. We also reviewed a small selection of OCPP documents, such as the progress report, and the GESI self-assessment.

**Primary data was collected by interviewing 6 key informants, from CEFAS, academia and CSOs, conducted in English and Sinhala.** These included OCPP's key stakeholders, and others engaged in GEDSI within the OCPP focus areas of sustainable seafood, marine biodiversity, and marine pollution. Data collection tools (including consent forms and the data storage protocol) are included in the Inception Report.

**Documents and interview transcripts were coded in a coding matrix to highlight key findings and themes against the research questions.** We will host an early findings and validation workshop with OCPP staff to review preliminary analysis and high-level summary of potential GEDSI and SEAH risks identified. These initial findings will be shared for discussion before the report is finalised through a workshop.

## 2.2. Limitations

Limitations	Mitigations
There was limited literature available in key sectors such as marine biodiversity and marine pollution. It was also difficult to find information that specifically focus on coastal areas as well as people with disabilities.	The analysis presents findings from available literature and we have identified evidence gaps where relevant. OCPP may want to consider commissioning specific research on these areas.
The analyses did not review the OCPP programme activities in detail due to limited scope for document review.	The analysis did instead focus on the high-level themes that are being addressed including sustainable seafood, marine biodiversity, and marine pollution. It highlighted relevant interventions being led by other actors, including government actors, in these domains of work to identify potential areas for synergy, or overlap with OCPP.

The examination of SEAH risks were based on our understanding of the GEDSI situation in each country and the broad thematic approach that the programme is taking in the country. The analysis was not able to identify specific SEAH risks related to the individual programme activities due to the limited scope of programme review, as requested by CEFAS.	SEAH risks identified are generic potential risks, based on evidence from other countries, or international good practice and learning. It is intended that these areas will be further explored by the programme, rather than to consider these as a definitive set of risks to be addressed.
There was a short window for conducting KIIs. There was a significant number of people that we contacted was unavailable during this time period.	KIIs were identified through a mix of OCPP recommendations as well as through the literature review and the network of the in-country consultant.
There was no budget allocation to support accessibility requirements of key informants who may have required additional support to participate in the interviews.	Unfortunately, we were not able to speak with a disability rights organisation, so we do not know to what extent this lack of reasonable accommodation may have an impact on their participation.

### 3. Research findings

#### 3.1. Country context

**Sri Lanka is a lower-middle income country with a total population of 22 million people.** Poverty headcount ratio (at \$2.15 a day) (2017 PPP) is 12.6% ([World Bank](#), undated). In 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Lanka experienced one of the worst economic crises since independence ([UN](#), 2022). Owing to the lack of fuel and increased price of raw materials, businesses, agriculture, and fisheries sectors collapsed causing a ripple-effect in local communities with many related jobs being affected. Cost of food increased throughout the country ([UNFPA](#), 2022).

**The Constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees equality before the law and non-discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion or place of birth.** The Constitution notes that affirmative action for the advancement of women, children or disabled persons does not constitute discrimination. Minimum age of employment is 16 ([Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children \(Amendment\) Act](#), 2021), and there is a National Policy on Elimination of Child Labour which seeks to end child labour in the country ([Ministry of Labour, Trade Union Relations and Sabaragamuwa Development](#), 2017). However, the Penal Code in Sri Lanka criminalises sex with same-sex partners and there is no legal recognition of gender identities beyond the binary. The legal framework does

not prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Literature indicates that discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals is widespread ([Gender Equity Unit](#), 2023).

**Globally, Sri Lanka ranks relatively high in terms of education, with female literacy rate being 92% ([World Bank Group](#), 2022) and 73% of women have some level of secondary education ([Perera et al.](#), 2023).** However, there are significant gaps in labour-force participation ratio, wage equality for similar work and income levels. In 2021, at the national level, the unemployment rate for females (7.9%) was more than two times higher than that of males (3.7%) ([Perera et al.](#), 2023). In addition, only 30-35% of women are in the workforce due to social norms prescribing the importance of women taking care of the household ([Gender Equity Unit](#), 2023).

**Sri Lanka ranks among the top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries on the Climate Risk Index.** Projected changes of climate are expected to impact its poorest and marginalised communities the most ([UN](#), 2022). In Sri Lanka, women are disproportionately affected by climate impacts due to gender-based inequalities coupled with other intersecting factors (i.e., ethnic and/or racial background, religion, gender identity, disability, income level) that places women at increased vulnerability in times of crisis. For example, gender-related challenges, such as limited ownership of, or access to, land, resources, equipment, assets, markets, information, and decision-making processes can reduce coping and adaptive capacities of women. Women's labour force participation is significantly lower than that of men. Their economic situation makes women more vulnerable to shocks, including those related to climate change and its various impacts ([Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka](#), 2023). The World Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum ranked Sri Lanka amongst the top 20 countries in 2006. However, by 2022, Sri Lanka had drastically slipped in the rankings to 110 among 146 countries ([Perera et al.](#), 2023).

**Despite this Sri Lanka has made improvements in recognising GEDSI and climate change issues**, especially through the National Policy on Climate Change (NPCC). However, the institutional arrangement for climate change finance is fragmented, and there is a lack of a centralised unit for strategic planning and budgeting specifically for climate change and GEDSI issues. These gaps indicate a need for a more integrated and legally mandated approach to ensure that both climate change and GEDSI considerations are adequately embedded in Sri Lanka's policy, planning, and budgeting processes ([SLYCAN Trust](#), 2023).

### **3.2. Climate change related policies and frameworks in place in Sri Lanka**

- [National Policy on Climate Change \(NPCC\)](#) (2023): recognises as a guiding principle the shared responsibility of all citizens in addressing climate-induced

issues while incorporating youth, children, vulnerable groups including women for the decision-making process in climate action at all levels.

- [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDC\) Implementation Plan](#) (2023): sets out gender-responsive and socially inclusive recommendations for 4 sectors including fisheries.
- [Carbon Net Zero 2050 Roadmap and Strategic Plan](#) (2023): social and gender inclusion aspects related to the proposed strategies and actions were analysed, and recommendations including GEDSI are included.
- [Sri Lanka Climate Prosperity Plan \(SLCPP\)](#) (2022): no reference to GEDSI
- [National Environmentally Sensitive Areas Policy](#) (2022): promotes gender inclusion in scaling up environmentally sensitive areas management practices.
- [National Environmental Policy \(NEP\)](#) (2022) and National Environmental Action Plan 2022-2030 (2022): include multiple references to increasing the participation of both women and youth including in decision making and environmental management.

Source: [SLYCAN Trust](#), 2023, individual document review.

In addition to the policies noted above, Sri Lanka has the following laws and policies related to marine protection and coastal environment:

- [Coast Conservation Act No. 57 of 1981](#): sets out regulations related to construction, mining, and waste disposal in coastal areas and protection of ecosystems. The act makes no reference to GEDSI.
- [Marine Pollution Prevention Act No. 59 of 1981](#): establishes the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) and imposes penalties for breaches (pollution incidents, failure to maintain records, failure to report spills etc.). The Marine Pollution Prevention Act does not reference GEDSI.
- [National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems](#) (2020): sets out guidance on policy making and action on mangrove conservation and management. The policy makes no reference to GEDSI.

### **3.3. Who are the most vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged people in coastal regions in Sri Lanka?**

**While limited data on the most disadvantaged groups is available, it is rarely gender-disaggregated (KII with a CSO representative) and does not adequately illustrate the situation** (i.e. due to the exclusion of workers engaged in unpaid labour and informal work) ([Tijen et al.](#), 2021). Very limited data related to people with disabilities was identified during this research, with anecdotal evidence shared by interviewees during the KIIs.

**Women, children and young people, people living in poverty, and daily wage workers are among the most marginalised people in the coastal communities in Sri Lanka.** These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated, depending on the social norms within the community, religion, ethnicity, poverty levels and geographical location.

Due to systemic inequalities as well as the prevalence of harmful social and religious norms, women face challenges in accessing better-paid positions, stable livelihoods and participate in decision-making processes (KII with a CSO representative). People with disabilities face significant barriers to participation, with very limited information identified during the KIIs conducted as part of this research.

Depending on the sector, some communities (e.g., those practicing traditional marine resource management) may be marginalised in conservation initiatives, as modern policies tend to overlook their ecological knowledge and sustainable practices ([International Collective in Support of Fishworkers](#), 2023), while others are excluded and structurally marginalised as a result of the barriers limiting their access to services, livelihoods and other needs and rights.

### **3.3.1. Sustainable seafood**

**The fishing sector provides a livelihood for the majority of people living in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka,** providing 60% of total animal protein consumed in country ([Dissanayaka](#), 2009). Sri Lankan fisherfolk, who are often of low socioeconomic status, are experiencing shrinking incomes, high vulnerability to external shocks, and limited alternative livelihood options. Remote fishing communities face greater challenges regarding logistics and access to services, including the internet. This results in lower rates of education and higher rates of poverty. Fisherfolk are one of the most vulnerable groups in coastal Sri Lanka. Fishing communities rely mainly on limited incomes from coastal capture fisheries, as declining catch per unit of effort leads to declining incomes ([World Bank](#), 2021).

#### **Women**

**In 2019, the fisheries sector employed nearly 300,000 fishers, of whom 9.4% were women.** While these figures reflect the formal employment rates, women are at times engaged in informal roles, which are not captured in the official data ([Tijen et al.](#), 2021). Although women's participation in the fishing sector in Sri Lanka is relatively well documented, there is limited literature and systematic studies of women's full economic contribution ([Dissanayaka](#), 2009).

**Traditionally, women's role in fisheries has not been significant in active fishing, but has rather focused on post-harvest and processing activities** ([De Silva](#), 2019). Fishing is still predominantly the domain of men, with women making up 5% of the workforce in fisheries ([De Silva](#), 2019) engaging in activities such as

gleaning fish, prawns, crabs, clams, and mussels. Women are heavily involved in the fish processing (63% of the workforce), with many women working in the seafood processing plant which supply international markets ([De Silva](#), 2019). Post-harvest activities, such as sorting, gutting or fish drying, are mainly performed by women ([Tijen et al.](#), 2021; [Dissanayaka](#), 2009), especially in the areas where the social norms are particularly strict, preventing women in participating in other activities within the sector ([Weeratunge et al.](#), 2021). *‘Women contribute to every stage of the value chain, yet their work is often undervalued’*, reflects a KII respondent.

**In some communities, cultural norms dictate that fisheries related spaces are not for women** ([World Bank](#), 2021; [Weeratunge et al.](#), 2021; [Lokuge](#), 2021). The significance of gender norms and practices in constraining women from fishing was supported by data from the 2017 Household Survey which indicated that between 55-58% of men in both the west and east coast villages believed that it was culturally unacceptable for women to fish. Moreover 72% of men in the west coast villages and 49% of men in the east coast villages indicated that women did not have the skills to fish ([Weeratunge et al.](#), 2021). Despite restrictive social norms affecting women from some communities (i.e., Tamil and Muslim women), women were found to be engaged in the fishing sector, mostly fishing in shallow sea areas and gleaning clams, prawns and crab in the numerous lagoons ([Lokuge](#), 2021). In some cases, poor women from coastal Muslim communities, who lack access to tools or assets for other livelihood activities, engage in gleaning for clams and mussels. Women also collect seaweed to sell outside the district and catch prawns, and sometimes crabs, for local sale when they are in season ([Lokuge](#), 2017).

**Religious norms often play a significant role in limiting women’s participation in fishing-related activities.** In Buddhist communities, women’s participation in fishing is very rare ([De Silva](#), 2019), due in part to the Buddhist principle of non-violence: ‘Many women don’t want to raise fish or shrimp for food production because it means they would eventually have to kill them for consumption’, shared a KII respondent. In contrast, gender norms within Christian and Muslim communities are more accommodating of women’s participation in post-harvesting activities such as fish handling, grading and marketing ([De Silva](#), 2019). Although, Muslim women typically face greater restrictions on their mobility and engagement in public life compared with Sinhalese and Tamil women, research has documented their involvement in activities such as gleaning and selling their catch ([CEPA](#), 2017). In Christian communities, women often play an important role in fish grading, inshore handling and marketing fish at local markets – likely due to fewer religious and socio-cultural constraints ([De Silva](#), 2019).

**The emergence of shrimp processing has opened up new avenues for women to earn an income** ([De Silva](#), 2019). This work, however, is associated with low levels of job security, low wages, and poor working conditions (including health and safety risks and harassment) ([De Silva](#), 2019). Women dominate in the lowest paid



roles in the seafood processing plants (with supervisory and plant manager positions held overwhelmingly by men) ([De Silva, 2019](#)). Women occupy lower levels in the production value chains and are paid lower wages than men who carry out similar work ([Perera et al., 2023](#)). According to a KII respondent from a CSO, *‘Even if women and men do the same work for the same number of hours, men are paid more than women’*. Socio-cultural perceptions (including women’s own views on their roles and what is socially acceptable) act as further barriers to women’s engagement at the higher end of value/market chains and entrepreneurship, limiting their adaptation and coping capacities with regard to climate change ([Perera et al., 2023](#)).

**Fish markets are dominated by men** ([Lokuge, 2021](#)). Literature shows that women fishers feel that their contribution is not recognised, they are not treated equally, and that they are marginalised in the marketplace ([Blue Economy Tribunal, 2021](#)). While in some areas, women are active participants in fish trading, studies show that that caste is a factor determining and limiting the extent of women’s participation in trading fish ([Weeratunge et al., 2021](#)). In addition to providing support with the post-harvest activities, a smaller number of women are involved in trading fish (12% as opposed to over 40% involved in post-harvest fish preparation) ([Dissanayaka, 2009](#)).

**The literature indicates that, in some coastal communities, the majority of asset owners are men, even though some of their assets were obtained as a dowry** (with the ownership of the asset passed to the man after the marriage). In some instances, women play an important role in the daily management of the assets, although this role typically remains ‘unofficial’ or unrecognised ([Weeratunge et al., 2021](#)). In some coastal areas, women own assets, including seines and boats ([Dissanayaka, 2009](#)). Women manage the household affairs while their husbands are away on extended fishing trips or seasonally migrate to other coastal areas ([World Bank, 2021](#)). Access to finance is a significant factor for women’s involvement in the fishing sector, with 79% of women involved in fisheries taking bank loans (as opposed to 32% of women not involved in fisheries) ([Dissanayaka, 2009](#)).

**Very few women are involved in formal decision-making processes or active in trade union activities** ([De Silva, 2019](#)). While fishery organisations are dominated by men, in some regions, women make up about 20% of the membership of these groups, such as Rural Fisheries Organisations ([Dissanayaka, 2009](#)).

**Multiple studies based on qualitative data and research highlight a prevalent gender-related perception that participation of women in fishing brings “misfortune”** ([Lokuge, 2021](#)). Such harmful and negative stereotypes exclude women from decision-making processes. Additionally, lack of gender-disaggregated data prevents policymakers from understanding the scale and nature of women’s engagement in the sector (KII OCPP representative).

## **Children and young people**

For a variety of reasons, such as poverty and teacher shortages ([Jayawardena, 2024](#)), **youth in fishing communities often drop out of school without reaching the basic educational levels required to take up state or private sector employment** ([Tijen et al., 2021](#)). One of the studies carried out amongst women involved in the fishing sector in Negombo identified a significant correlation between women's involvement in fisheries and children attending school, with only 42% of children in families where women engaged in the fishing sector attending school (as opposed to the 100% of attendance amongst families where women were not engaged in fishing) ([Dissanayaka, 2009](#)). Additionally, in some industries (particularly in shrimp farming and processing), children are often required to support the family at the cost of education, with boys being particularly at risk of involvement in child labour (KII with a CSO representative).

**At the same time, studies on dried fish value chains found that workers are hesitant to involve their children in dried fish value chains** due to income instability, harsh working conditions, and varying societal attitudes about dried fish work. Instead, the processors encourage their children to find salaried jobs after graduating school ([Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs, 2017](#)).

### **Daily wage workers**

**Daily wage workers are less recognised and documented than formal sector workers, thus they remain largely invisible in the overall data related to the blue economy in Sri Lanka.** As informal labour is not captured in the official employment rates and statistics, there is lack of clarity on the scale of contribution of daily wage workers ([Tijen et al., 2021](#)). People living in poverty are most likely to be engaged in informal daily wage work or other forms of unofficial employment ([Dey et al., 2008](#)). The evidence suggests that, due to the scarcity of livelihood opportunities, the majority of older workers in Sri Lanka tend to be engaged in the informal sector, working long hours and being paid less for their labour. This exacerbates existing inequalities and limits opportunities for people already living in poverty to improve their situation ([Vodopivec and Arunatilake, 2011](#)).

**The dried fish value chain engages particularly high numbers of daily wage workers.** Dried fish is a traditional market within the fishing sector in Sri Lanka, with estimated 14% of fish harvested in country being processed for dry fish ([Galappaththi et al., 2023](#)). In addition to lack of regulated employment, people engaged in the fish drying process are often marginalised, with low levels of formal education, living in rural areas with limited livelihood options and unable to pursue more stable employment opportunities ([Galappaththi et al., 2023](#)).

**The dried fish sector is characterised by irregular work hours (dependent on the size of catch) and unregulated wages.** The literature indicates that women are paid 20-40% less than men, while often working longer hours than men ([Galappaththi et al., 2023](#)). All full-time drying sites are owned and managed by men,



while women participate as workers only, making up about 20% of the fish drying workforce ([Galappaththi et al., 2023](#)) – which demonstrates the imbalanced gender power dynamics that further marginalise women.

**Self-employed workers from small scale fisheries are negatively affected by declining stocks of marine species.** Lack of regulated management of small-scale fisheries and the introduction of industrial fishing boats (as a result of Sri Lanka opening its water to foreign countries) have negatively affected the livelihoods of fisherfolk involved in small scale fisheries, forcing them to join the foreign industrial fishing workforce in the capacity of daily wage workers ([Blue Economy Tribunal, 2021](#)).

### **Indigenous communities**

**The coastal indigenous people of Sri Lanka, also known as 'Muhudu Veddahs' (Veddahs of the sea) represent a distinct, but rapidly diminishing cultural group, engaged in fishing to secure livelihoods.** They are often not recognised as a distinct indigenous group and are marginalised in social and economic spheres. Many younger members of the community are reluctant to identify as indigenous people, further accelerating the loss of their cultural heritage. Their unique fishing methods have been replaced by modern fishing practices ([Gunasekara et al., 2022](#)).

### **People facing caste-based inequalities**

**Fishing is traditionally understood as a caste-based livelihood in Sri Lanka.** The caste of fisher-folk is reflected in both Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil caste systems; fishers belonging to Karawa (Sinhalese) and Karaiyar (Tamil) castes ([Lokuge, 2021](#)). Lokuge and Hilhorst observe that when it comes to fisherfolk, a 'class–occupation' identity exists in Sri Lanka, and that inequalities that manifest through the caste system affects women's livelihoods, for example, by limiting women's opportunity to obtain a steady supply of fish to sell at the retail market ([Lokuge, 2021](#)).

### **3.3.2. Marine biodiversity**

**It is noted in the literature that Sri Lankan biodiversity is currently facing general decline** ([Convention on biological diversity](#), undated). The loss of marine biodiversity has disproportionately affected coastal communities. Habitat destruction, climate change, and pollution have led to a decline in marine life, threatening sectors such as ecotourism and aquaculture and impacting the livelihoods of those dependent on it ([UN Climate Change High-Level Champions, 2024](#)).

### **Small-scale fishers**

**Small-scale fisheries remain a cornerstone of economic activity in the coastal regions in Sri Lanka.** Changes in the marine ecosystem, particularly those caused

by climate change, are increasing the vulnerability of small-scale fishers. Since the sustainability and productivity of fisheries is heavily dependent on environmental conditions, climate change-induced factors affect the reproduction, populations and availability of marine species. These changes lead to fishing grounds becoming unproductive and call for large vessels and bigger scale to make the activities profitable. Such transitions will be more challenging, or even impossible, for the increasingly vulnerable small-scale fishers ([Arulanathan](#), 2017). A KII respondent noted that small-scale fishers are marginalised within decision making mechanisms due to policy makers and decision makers lacking awareness about the realities of small-scale fishing and language barriers (in terms of local languages as well as the use of overly technical language) (KII with an academic). They also noted that the ineffectiveness of existing social protection schemes (the fisher pension scheme and the fisheries insurance scheme) has resulted in weak social protection for small-scale fishers.

**Like others engaged in the fishing sector, artisanal fishers are impacted by the biodiversity loss, as their income is dependent on availability of specific species**

([International Collective in Support of Fishworkers](#), 2023). Artisanal fishers often lack opportunities to pursue alternative employment, facing the increasing economic risks ([International Collective in Support of Fishworkers](#), 2023). *‘These fishers [artisanal fishers] are particularly vulnerable due to low income, lack of education, and very few alternative livelihood options. Their catch is small, making it difficult for them to sustain their families’*, noted a KII respondent (KII with an academic).

### **How the degradation of ecosystem further exacerbates existing vulnerabilities**

#### **Coral reefs**

Climate change-related weather patterns significantly affect the coral ecosystem, which in turn affects the livelihood of coastal communities, especially women. Research indicated that amongst communities dependent on coral reefs as a source of income, women and men are affected differently, as in many places women glean for invertebrates due to barriers limiting them from accessing deep-water fishing and as such are more reliant on the coral reefs and shallow water ecosystems as a source of livelihood ([Lau](#), 2021).

#### **Mangrove forests**

Many coastal communities depend on mangroves and resource extraction from mangrove ecosystems for their livelihoods and survival. The degradation of mangroves due to climate change affects coastal communities, particularly women, due to increased exposure to natural disasters and extreme weather events ([SLYCAN Trust](#), undated), reduced harvest (especially for women engaged in the fishing sector) ([Attanayake](#), 2024), and in turn increased likelihood of falling into debt or dependency ([Attanayake](#), 2024). *‘Mangroves are shallow ecosystems*

*that women could access using non-mechanised boats—like simple rafts—to fish for both income and subsistence. Now, with mangroves disappearing, those spaces are being lost, which means fewer opportunities for women in coastal communities to engage in small-scale fisheries’, shared a KII respondent from Cefas.*

## People who depend on tourism for livelihood

### **The demand for nature-based tourism has been steadily growing in Sri Lanka.**

A 2020 survey of departing foreign tourists conducted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) shows high levels of preference for nature-based activities, reflecting global trends ([Perera et al.](#), 2023). The accumulation of plastic debris in coastal areas, particularly in beach destinations like Unawatuna and Mirissa, has negatively impacted the industry ([Ministry of Defence, Sri Lanka](#), 2025).

**The tourism industry generates both direct and indirect jobs.** Directly created work opportunities include jobs at hotels, restaurants, airport, cruise lines, tour operators etc. Indirectly created jobs are jobs in the construction industry, food suppliers, handicraft suppliers etc. In addition, the local communities earn a living by selling homemade food to the restaurants and to other food and beverage outlets, providing boat services, entertainment services such as traditional dances, and tuk tuk and taxi services ([Dharmasena et al.](#), 2023). The tourism industry tends to be dominated by men ([Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance](#), 2025).

### 3.3.3. Marine Pollution

**Marine pollution negative affects livelihoods, economic opportunities and biodiversity.** These impacts disproportionately disadvantage already marginalised groups ([Bennett et al.](#), 2022). Pollution, toxic waste, marine debris and climate change lead to ecosystem and biodiversity degradation, impacting communities reliant on marine resources, including fishing communities ([Bennett et al.](#), 2022).

## Fishing communities

**Studies show declining fish stocks in the coast of Sri Lanka. Marine pollution is a factor that contributes to the decrease in fish stock.** A 2018 Nansen survey carried out in Sri Lanka calculated demersal fish biomass, based on the swept-area method, to be 53 000 tonnes ([NARA](#), 2018). The previous Nansen survey conducted in 1980 had assessed the biomass of demersal and semi-demersal fish to be 250,000–350,000 tonnes ([Institute of Marine Research Bergen Norway](#), 1993). The 2018 study also found that waters around Sri Lanka are contaminated with microplastics, and the vast majority of microplastics were from packaging material, industrial material and fishing gear ([NARA](#), 2018).

**Fishing communities are vulnerable to multiple impacts caused by the marine plastic, such as the need for repair and replacement of fishing gear damaged by marine litter, reduction in harvest and income due to the marine litter, increased welfare costs** (including health impacts of contaminated environment), and limited nutrition options and costs incurred due to loss of ecosystem, which may impact sectors such as tourism. Coastal communities face reduced income due to depletion of marine species, generating pressure on household to secure other types of income. This impacts the fishing sector, but also women's gleaning for catch in habitats such as beaches, mangroves, estuaries, and intertidal zones ([Veena and Kusakabe](#) 2023). A KII respondent shared that in the aftermath of the MV X-Press Pearl disaster, which released a large volume of harmful chemicals and plastic pellets to the ocean, there was a significant decline in fish catch, both in the sea and the lagoon in Negambo area.

## Women

**Nearshore plastic litter reduces women's income from gleaning in nearshore habitats including beaches, mangroves, estuaries, and intertidal zones** ([Veena and Kusakabe](#), 2023). In addition, there are indications of high levels of pollution within seafood. A study on the occurrence of micro-plastics in common wild-caught seafood varieties obtained at the Negambo fish market indicated that 92% of finfish samples and 88% of shellfish samples exhibited microplastic contamination ([Kandeyaya et al.](#), 2023). Studies suggest that marine pollution leads to negative health implications for women, affecting their sexual and reproductive choice. Compounds such as phthalates or Bisphenol A (BPA) which are released from plastics as they biodegrade, inhibit oestrogen function, causing disruptions in fertility. Research have also shown that BPA is linked to adverse sexual and reproductive health conditions in women and people assigned female at birth such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis ([North and Halden](#), 2013).

### 3.4. How are those most dependent on Sri Lanka's marine and coastal resources at risk from future environmental degradation?

**Future environmental degradation will affect people who depend on Sri Lanka's marine and coastal resources in a number of ways, such as the adverse impact on livelihood and exposure to natural disasters and coastal erosion.** The ways in which environmental degradation indirectly increases vulnerabilities of women and increase the risk of gender-based violence are discussed below. Underlying inequalities can lead to increased threats to livelihoods of coastal communities, especially in case of natural disasters ([SLYCAN Trust](#), 2023).

### **3.4.1. Who is most dependent on marine and coastal resources in Sri Lanka?**

**In Sri Lanka, fisherfolk (including small scale fishers, and women who engage in gleaning and fish processing) are dependent on marine and coastal resources for their livelihood.** As noted above in 3.2.1, for people who participate in dried fish value chains, most of who are daily wage workers, participation in dried fish activities is the only option available for work to meet their survival needs ([Galappaththi et al., 2023](#)).

**People who depend on tourism for livelihood discussed above in 3.2.2 also depend on marine and coastal resources.** Tourism industry related economy supports people engaged in a variety of occupations in the coastal regions.

**In addition, coastal communities depend on mangroves for protection from natural disasters.** A study conducted in Sri Lanka on 200 hectares of a mangrove in the Rekawa lagoon ecosystem identified that this complex ecosystem provided economic contributions worth \$60,000 annually by providing protection against storms and coastal erosion ([Tijen et al., 2021](#)).

### **3.4.2. In what ways are these communities/ populations at risk from future environmental degradation?**

#### **Impact on livelihoods**

**The data from a household survey in 2017 shows 65% of men in the west coast villages and 58% of the men in the east coast villages as engaged in fishing.** Around 45% of women are engaged in fisheries-related work. The survey also revealed that fishing was the most important source of income for 55% households in Kadalpalli and Cattiyur in Puttalam district, and 57% households in Selippur and Uppukadal in Trincomalee district ([Weeratunge et al., 2021](#)).

**Environmental degradation directly affects fish stock.** Nansen surveys of 1980 and 2018 show a significant decrease in the overall biomass of coastal stocks over the last four decades: In 1978–1980 the total biomass was estimated at 400,000–500,000 MT, while in 2018 this amount was estimated at only 175,000 MT ([Institute of Marine Research Bergen Norway, 1993](#) and ([NARA, 2018](#)). Stock surveys carried out in the last 4 years show a significant decrease over four decades in the overall biomass of coastal stocks ([Tijen et al., 2021](#)). Since the sustainability and productivity of fisheries is heavily dependent on conducive environmental conditions, environmental degradation will affect the production, availability and breeding patterns of marine species. The redistribution of fisheries resources will render traditional fishing grounds unproductive, and fishing gear and methods ineffective. In response, larger vessels, longer trips and new gear development will be crucial. These adaptation strategies will be more challenging for the increasingly vulnerable small-scale fishers ([Azmy et al., 2021](#)). Sea level rise and warming of the sea are

identified as the two crucial factors imparting decisive impacts on coastal fisheries, which may aggravate the problem of poverty of the coastal communities in Sri Lanka ([Arulanathan](#), 2017). In addition, as resources deplete due to environmental degradation, it can be expected that conflict between migrant fishers and host communities will intensify ([Weeratunge et al.](#), 2021).

As outlined in the section 3.2 above, **the degradation of mangroves affects coastal communities, particularly women, due to reduced harvest** (especially for women engaged in gleaning, seaweed collection, and shallow-water fishing) ([Attanayake](#), 2024). This degradation of the mangrove ecosystem increases the likelihood of coastal community members falling into debt or dependency ([Attanayake](#), 2024).

**Loss of income affects the psychological wellbeing of fishers.** *‘[T]he men participants in the FGDs reported being psychologically affected by the inability to provide. Consequently, some men increased their alcohol and drug consumption...’*, notes the UNFPA Rapid Gender Analysis Sri Lanka ([UNFPA](#), 2022:19).

### **Increased vulnerabilities of women**

**Their more precarious economic situation makes women more vulnerable to shocks, including those related to climate change and its various impacts** ([Ministry of Environment, Sri Lanka](#), 2023). Women face multilayered inequalities in accessing the land, technology and information, finance and other services dedicated to supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation ([Perera et al.](#), 2023). Lack of women’s participation in decision making and lack of presence in political spaces further exacerbate the invisibility of women’s needs in economic, political and legal spheres related to the climate change and blue sector ([Perera et al.](#), 2023).

**Increased poverty and food insecurity driven by climate-related loss of livelihoods can also impact maternal and neonatal health as a result of reduced nutrient intake.** Additionally, climate-related events hinder access to clean water and essential supplies needed for safe childbirth and personal hygiene ([SLYCAN Trust](#), 2023).

### **Increase in gender-based violence**

**The current literature notes that the loss of men’s income tends to increase violence against women within the household and in the community, which causes additional physical and emotional burden for women** ([Veena and Kusakabe](#), 2023). A study conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic found that when men lost their jobs as wage labourers on farms, or as fishermen, this unemployment led to conflicts within families due to unfulfilled gender expectations ([UNFPA](#), 2022).

### **Exposure to coastal erosion and natural disasters**



**Climate change-induced storm surges, sea-level rise and coastal flooding will impact fisheries as well as the coastal communities.** Arulananthan reports that all coasts, apart from the northernmost coast of Sri Lanka, are experiencing a moderate to high degree of erosion ([Arulananthan](#), 2017). The proximity of small-scale fisheries communities to the coast further increases their vulnerability to these events ([Azmy et al.](#), 2021).

A 2016 UNDP programme report detail the environmental impacts of changing weather patterns and rising sea levels on the coastal village of Barudelpola. During a single monsoon, the sea can claim as much as 5-7 metres of coast, destroying houses. **Increased salinity had given rise to a serious lack of drinking water, and women would spend between 2 to 5 hours a day waiting for water at the common taps** ([UNDP](#), 2016).

**Mangrove deforestation increases exposure to natural disasters and extreme weather events** ([SLYCAN Trust](#), undated). In the areas with mangrove cover the effects of 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was greatly reduced ([Mombauer](#), 2019). This natural disaster highlighted vulnerabilities of women, with reports indicating that almost 80% of the deceased were women, underscoring their heightened risk during natural disasters ([Ginige et al.](#), 2015). Though the reasons for this increased vulnerability have not been researched, the fact that women tend to stay at home focused on care work during morning hours, women are discouraged from running, climbing trees, or swimming due to gender norms, and lack of access early warnings (such as through mobile phones) could have contributed to this outcome.

**Natural disasters compound existing gender inequalities by increasing vulnerabilities to poverty, displacement, and violence, particularly for women and girls.** Limited access to sexual and reproductive health services during emergencies—such as contraception, maternal healthcare, and safe abortion—undermines their health and autonomy ([SLYCAN Trust](#), 2023). It should be noted that in Sri Lanka legal abortion is highly restricted. Abortion is permitted only when it is needed to save the life of the mother, resulting in high levels of illegal, and sometimes unsafe, abortion ([De Silva et al.](#), 2023).

### **3.5. What are the key issues in terms of SEAH for OCPP to be aware of in Sri Lanka that are flagged through GEDSI analysis?**

#### **3.5.1. Context**

SEAH happens within organisations and can be perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people (usually men) in positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH is often a form of gender-based violence (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children. Therefore, there is

limited literature on safeguarding including SEAH. This GEDSI analysis therefore looks more broadly at GBV and violence against children (VAC) as an indicator of where SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is likely to happen within OCPP in Sri Lanka.

## Legal context

**Sri Lanka's legal context provides protection from GBV, trafficking in persons and various forms of sexual violence including sexual harassment.** However, there are some key gaps such as not criminalising rape within marriage and intimate partner violence ([Penal Code](#), 1883 and [Prevention of Domestic Violence Act](#), 2005). There are also key gaps in the legislation when it comes to sexual abuse of boys. For example, the law relating to rape only applies to violence perpetrated against women and girls. The prohibition of statutory rape only applies only to girls (under the age of 16 years) and there is no parallel protection for boys. Sex between same-sex partners is criminalised.

**Implementation of the law is challenging** because of low rates of reporting due to negative stereotyping and shame, judicial and law enforcement practices such as considering violence in the family as a family matter, as well as the lack of one-stop centres or shelters for survivors ([Centre for Policy Alternatives](#), 2020).

### The impact on shame and stigma on sexual violence

There is a strong culture of shame and negative stereotyping surrounding GBV and sexual violence in particular, which leads to low levels of reporting of violence including sexual abuse and sexual harassment. However, because high value is placed on girls remaining virgins until they are married, the sexual exploitation of girls is considered serious, but because this is not as important with boys, sexual exploitation of boys is viewed as less serious.

Source: [ECPAT](#), 2021

## Manifestations of GBV and VAC

**The level of GBV is high in Sri Lanka and takes place across multiple settings, such as at home, in the workplace, in education, on public transport and in other public places.** Women, girls, boys, LGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities are at particular risk of violence ([IFC](#), 2022;). A number of qualitative studies have found that GBV affects women irrespective of income, employment and education levels, and ethnicity ([ADB](#), 2015).

Underpinning high levels of GBV are social norms that dictate women and children's inferior status in the household and society ([ADB](#), 2015). A survey conducted in 2019 found that 20.4% of ever partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime and 40% have experienced physical,



sexual, emotional, and/or economic violence and/or controlling behaviours by a partner in their lifetime ([UNFPA](#), 2022). This is in line with global averages of domestic violence. The most common form of reported violence is controlling behaviour (19%) indicating the lack of agency women have to take decisions regarding their own lives.

**A number of studies have documented high levels of GBV within education settings in Sri Lanka.** For example sexual harassment and other forms of violence is a common experience amongst women in higher education Sri Lanka ([Perera and Sewwandi](#), 2023; [UNICEF](#), 2022). Research in a state university found that 92% of surveyed women had experienced sexual harassment including 15% had experienced unwelcome pressure for sex ([Perera and Sewwandi](#), 2023)

**A survey of women's experiences of sexual harassment on public transport found that almost all women (90%) surveyed had experienced sexual harassment on public busses and trains** and that more than half experienced it at least monthly. Most respondents said that sexual harassment was of a physical nature. Of the women surveyed 51% used public transport for work and 37% said that experiencing sexual harassment on public transport negatively affect their performance at work ([UNFPA](#), 2018).

**Violence is widely prevalent in the workplace.** A study of workplace violence in 9 Sri Lankan companies (working in banking and finance, fast-moving consumer goods, manufacturing, and some other sectors that included tourism and hospitality) found high levels of violence including bullying, sexual harassment, and/or online violence, experienced by staff across all genders and age groups. Interestingly, participants were more likely to say that their colleagues had experienced sexual harassment, suggesting that personal experience of sexual harassment are highly stigmatised and under-reported. Of further concern was the finding that 19% of respondents agreed that they had not felt safe or at ease at work due to bullying and harassment. Employees with a disability were even more likely to experience all forms of workplace bullying (68% versus 59% of employees who did not have a disability). They were also more than four times as likely to say that their work was affected by domestic violence. Of particular concern was that few of the managers interviewed for the study seemed to be aware of the pervasiveness of workplace violence and what to do about it ([IFC](#), 2022).

## Violence against LGBTQI+ people

Violence and harassment against the LGBTQI+ community, including by law enforcement is high in Sri Lanka with widespread impunity for perpetrators. They also face significant discrimination and harassment when it comes to accessing services including health services. Often the first experience of violence they have is within their own home. In 2017 EQUAL GROUND's research into workplace discrimination of LGBTQI+ people found that workplaces in Sri Lanka are often unsafe for LGBTQI+ employees. Of the 193 LGBTQI+ people surveyed the research found that:

- 50% said that they would face discrimination and negative stereotyping if their colleagues knew of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- 58% have encountered verbal harassment at their workplace
- 31 have experienced sexual harassment

Source: [IFC](#), 2022; [UNFPA](#), 2022

**There is a lack of up-to-date and disaggregated data on the prevalence, trends and drivers of violence against children in Sri Lanka**, and the few studies that exist are already dated or not fully representative. There is widespread normalisation of violence as a form of punishment in schools, homes and institutions across the country, including both physical and emotional violence affecting as many as 90% of children ([UNICEF](#), 2017). Sexual violence data is significantly lacking with some smaller studies estimating that rates of sexual violence is 14-27% for both boys and girls ([UNICEF](#), 2017).

## Child labour

**According to the Child Activity Survey published in 2017 3.3% of children or 43,714<sup>3</sup> were affected by child labour, with the biggest concentration of child labour in the fishing and aquaculture sectors** ([Department of Census and Statistics](#), 2017; [Ministry of Labour, Trade Union Relations and Sabaragamuwa Development](#), 2017). The list of Hazardous Child Labour (2010) identifies a range of activities related to fishing/fisheries that put children at risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labour and prohibit these. However, according to the US Department for Labor's Finding's on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2023) 0.8% of children aged 5-14 were engaged in child labour. Agriculture (which includes fishing) accounts for 42% of child labour, with children engaged in deep-sea fishing, processing and selling fish ([US Department of Labor](#), 2023). The report identifies children living in coastal areas as some of those at highest risk. Strikingly, two out of six key informants mentioned having observed child labour in their work in coastal

<sup>3</sup> According to the US DoL the 2016 Child Activity Survey's definition of child labour does not align with international standards because children aged 5 to 11 working less than 15 hours per week and children aged 12 to 14 working less than 25 hours per week in agriculture are not counted as child labourers. These issues may have led to an underestimation of the population of children in child labour in the Child Activity Survey.

communities. This was often in the context of boys doing small jobs such as find fish on the beach, or learning how shrimp farms work. However, in general, the KIIs emphasised the importance that parents in coastal communities place on education for their children.

**The Government of Sri Lanka has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labour and laws and regulations are in line with international standards.** The key agencies involved include Department of Labor (DoL), in the Ministry of Labor and Foreign Employment (MOLFE) and Sri Lankan Police. According to the US DoL, while labour and criminal law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to address child labour, insufficient resource allocation for the labour inspectorate hindered enforcement efforts.

### **GBV and VAC in OCPP programme sectors and coastal areas**

**Violence in coastal communities is a known issue and emerged in all five of the KIIs.** This was also confirmed in the literature review. The most frequent type of violence mentioned across both the literature and the KIIs was domestic violence driven by both strict gender norms and high levels of alcoholism ([Coulthard et al, 2020](#); KIIs). Both the literature ([De Silva, 2019](#)) and one of the KIIs confirmed that there are significant levels of sexual harassment and other safety issues for women in seafood processing plants. The KIIs suggested that informants hear about these cases particularly in relation to promotions where women have to engage in sexual relations with leaders in order to gain promotions or be respected within their organisations.

**The literature review also found multiples other forms of violence including harassment and sexual abuse by boat crews** ([Weeratunge et al., 2021](#)). There is also documentation of women being stopped by military while attempting to access lagoons due to lack of identification provided by the Fisheries Department and having to attempt to negotiate access, increasing the risk of experiencing GBV or being denied entry ([Lokuge, 2021](#)).

**One KII with a CSO also confirmed the occurrence of ‘sex for fish,’ where women engage in sexual relationships with commercial fishers, particularly those who own boats or provide loans with interest.** These commercial fishers have control over resources, and, in some cases, economic hardship pushes women into dependent relationships with them. Another KII with a university set out the safety concerns for women in shrimp farms which tend to be secluded and staffed predominantly by men. The interviewee suggested that the female research students felt unsafe entering these farms and preferred to go in teams, including with male students.

**Sexual exploitation of children in the context of the tourism industry is documented in Sri Lanka and appears to disproportionately affect boys and young men.** This has been acknowledged by the government and it is now listed as one of the worst forms of child labour in its Policy on Elimination of Child Labour. The boys and young men, sometimes referred to as 'beach boys' are exploited by both male and female offenders. Drivers include poverty, alcohol abuse in families and coercion of facilitators and criminal gangs ([ECPAT](#), 2021). There are concerns that, as the tourist industry grows, more children will be affected ([UNICEF](#), 2017).

### **OCPP stakeholder actions against GBV and VAC**

**In January 2025, Sri Lanka published the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan to address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Sri Lanka 2024-2028.**

The plan sets out key actions, including in relation to fisheries. Addressing GBV within the fishery sector is a significant part of the plan, and fisheries is mentioned multiple times in the document's theory of change. There are activities relating to addressing GBV in fishing in each of the document's four goals, including indicators and budget allocations ([Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment](#), 2025). Unfortunately, none of the individuals we interviewed were aware of the Action Plan, although they expressed support for it once they heard of its existence.

#### **Key stakeholders of interest to OCPP in the multi-sector action plan on SGBV**

##### Ministry of Fisheries

- Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR)
- National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA)
- National Aquaculture Development Authority of Sri Lanka (NAQDA)

##### Development Authority

- Ceylon Fisheries Corporation (CFC)
- Ceylon Fishery Harbours Corporation (CFHC)

### **3.5.2. Safeguarding implications for OCPP**

This GEDSI review has identified the following safeguarding considerations for OCPP:

#### **Safeguarding risks with partners**

##### **1. Safeguarding arrangements across partner organisations**

The programme works with a large number of partners including both Government agencies, consultancy companies and CSOs. While partners are required to provide evidence of safeguarding mechanisms as a pre-requisite for contracting in some

instances, it is not clear if this safeguarding evidence is consistently requested from all partners. Introducing clear requirements will help address any potential safeguarding-related misconduct, including SEAH, and ensure that any cases within partner organisations and supply chain are reported to OCPP.

OCPP will need to adopt a different approach to safeguarding for different partners, working collaboratively to identify what arrangements they should have in place. This will be easier for CSOs and small private sector initiatives, as due diligence can serve as an entry point, complemented by technical assistance where necessary. For universities and Government institutions, OCPP will need to use a different approach. This may include assessing existing safeguarding procedures within universities and Government departments, and implementing additional risk mitigation activities where programme risks are high.

**OCPP should note that there is evidence of high levels of violence, including SEAH occurring within its higher education partners** ([Perera and Sewwandi, 2023](#); [UNICEF, 2022](#)).

### **Safeguarding risks within the programme**

#### **2. There is a high risk of sexual harassment occurring within OCPP funded activities, along with a low/medium risk of other forms of SEAH and safeguarding related misconduct taking place.**

Survey data has shown that almost all women (over 90%) experience sexual harassment and other forms of violence regularly while using public transport, in higher education, in workplaces and other settings ([Perera and Sewwandi, 2023](#); [UNICEF, 2022](#)). It is therefore likely that sexual harassment is also taking place across OCPP activities such as workshops and trainings, research and office work. OCPP should work with partners to address sexual harassment and ensure that OCPP-funded staff are provided appropriate support when they have experienced sexual harassment or other forms of violence.

While OCPP funded activities are fairly low-risk when it comes to safeguarding and SEAH (apart from sexual harassment), it is important for OCPP to understand that OCPP-funded personnel (through partners) are regularly coming into contact with marginalised individuals due to their work in communities, for example, through data collection and site visits. This increases the risk of safeguarding-related misconduct including SEAH, targeted at the most marginalised community members. It is thus important that safeguarding procedures (including mechanisms for community members to raise concerns) are in place to mitigate the risk of SEAH and other forms of harm).

#### **3. There are a small number of OCPP-funded activities where there is a high risk of SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct.**

There are a small number of activities where the risk of SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is considerably higher:

- Working in marginalised schools: In marginalised school settings, there is increased risk of safeguarding-related misconduct targeted at children. In order to safely be in contact with children it is important that organisations not only have safeguarding policies and procedures in place, but that there are additional safeguards for children, such as clear codes of conduct, procedures to prevent staff from having contact with children outside of work, etc. It is unclear if this is currently the case.
- Scholarship programme: The selection of 12 students for scholarships to study a Masters degree offer significant risks of SEAH and other forms of harm. Research in Sri Lanka has shown that sexual harassment and other forms of violence is a common experience amongst women in higher education Sri Lanka ([Perera and Sewwandi, 2023](#); [UNICEF, 2022](#)). When selecting applicants for scholarships it is crucial that clear procedures are in place including transparency in the application process and an opportunity to raise concerns.

#### **4. OCPP is working in sectors where the risk of GBV and child labour is high**

OCPP is working in a few sectors where there is evidence of high levels of GBV and child labour. This is most notable in the fishing sector and higher education.

- Fishing sector: There is evidence of both high levels of GBV and to a limited extent child labour within the fishing sector that OCPP should be aware of. This increases the risk of safeguarding related misconduct amongst partners that the OCPP is working with including both in relation to women and children.
- Higher education sector: There is strong evidence of high levels of violence, including GBV within the higher education sector. This will increase the risk that programme associated individuals may perpetrate or experience sexual harassment.

### **The Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH)**

In 2024, The UK Government launched the Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment ([CAPSEAH, 2024](#)) which aims to bring consistency of approach and promote shared values across the international aid sector to end SEAH. Other sectors are highly encouraged to adopt the principles this document endorses. CAPSEAH stresses the importance of zero tolerance to inaction toward SEAH, survivor support and strong preventative efforts reduce the prevalence of SEAH. This document is a useful reference point to consider best practice standards toward SEAH that should inform current and future programming.



### 3.6. Who are the key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why? What work is already going on to address poverty and vulnerability and empower groups across OCPP areas (those interacting or dealing with pollution, seafood and biodiversity loss)? What lessons can be learned from this?

#### 3.6.1. Stakeholder mapping

The table below outlines who are the key stakeholders in the area of marine biodiversity, sustainable seafood and marine pollution as identified during the literature review and KIs. The table provides further details on rationale for engagement and ongoing work on GEDSI currently undertaken by each of the organisations.

Several governmental agencies were identified as stakeholders for engagement, with activities spanning across improvement of socio-economic situation of marine communities, provision of training, development of sector-specific guidance and research. Secondary stakeholders include several Ministries, UN agencies, civil society organisations with specific focus on women's rights and disability and inclusion as well as universities and other similar institutions.

Stakeholder	Description	Rationale for Engagement	Ongoing work on GEDSI
<b>Government agencies</b>			
<b>Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources</b>	The Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development is the central government ministry in Sri Lanka responsible for formulating and implementing national policies on fisheries and aquatic resources development. It oversees various departments and agencies related to fisheries including Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR), National	Engaging with the Ministry is crucial for aligning national fisheries policies with international standards, promoting sustainable fishing practices, and enhancing marine conservation efforts. Collaboration can lead to improved fisheries management, data sharing, and capacity building,	Improving socio-economic conditions of the fisher community is one of the key objectives of the Ministry ( <a href="#">Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources</a> , 2024). However, specific programmes targeting gender equality, disability, and social inclusion



	Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA), and National Aquaculture Development Authority (NAQDA) ( <a href="#">Ministry of Fisheries, Aquatic and Ocean Resources</a> , 2025).	benefiting both local communities and marine ecosystems.	within the fisheries sector are not documented.
<b>Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR)</b>	Introduction of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act No 2, 1996 and updating the fisheries management activities and legal provisions in compliance to the regional and international conventions and regulations.	Collaboration with DFAR can enhance the enforcement of sustainable fishing regulations, improve data collection, and strengthen community-based awareness rising activities.	<p>Investigation and training division of DFAR provides awareness programmes for fisher women on alternative income generation (<a href="#">Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources</a>, n.d). There is no data on the results of this activity.</p> <p>DFAR is an implementing agency of the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan to Address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in Sri Lanka – II 2024-2028. Key activities led by DFAR include capacity strengthening of individuals from fishing communities who are at risk of SGBV (<a href="#">Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</a>, 2024).</p>

<p><b>National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA)</b></p>	<p>NARA is the institution charged with the responsibility of carrying out and coordinating research, development and management activities on aquatic resources in Sri Lanka.</p>	<p>One of the fields of NARA's research is the social and economic aspects of the fishing industry, including the welfare of fishermen and their dependents (<a href="#">NARA</a>, n.d). Partnering with NARA can facilitate joint research initiatives on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion of fisher communities and coastal communities with a view to advancing social inclusion and economic empowerment.</p>	<p>In 2022, NARA published a study on gender roles in small-scale coastal fisheries in Negombo and Chilaw fisheries districts of Sri Lanka, examining issues such as the lack of recognition of women's work and gender-based discrimination which manifests as wage disparity (<a href="#">NARA</a>, 2022).</p>
<p><b>National Aquaculture Development Authority (NAQDA)</b></p>	<p>NAQDA's mission is to contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of rural societies through alleviation of poverty (<a href="#">NAQDA</a>, n.d).</p> <p>NAQDA is already a partner of OCPP, working on sustainable aquaculture.</p>	<p>Engagement with NAQDA can promote sustainable aquaculture practices, enhance technical expertise, and support the development of policies that ensure environmental sustainability and social inclusion in the aquaculture sector.</p>	<p>NAQDA's Aquaculture and Culture Based Fisheries Sector Development Plan for 2021-2025 seeks to uplift the living standards of coastal fisher communities by engaging them in the farming of high valued fish/crustacean species, mainly targeted at the export market. Alleviating poverty and generating livelihoods are aspects of the overall objective of the 2021-2025 Plan. NAQDA assists the</p>

			local community, including women, owning and operating aquaculture activities, especially the seaweed culture projects ( <a href="#">NAQDA</a> , 2023)
<b>Secondary stakeholders</b>			
<b>Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA)</b>	<p>MEPA is the apex body established by the Government of Sri Lanka under the Marine Pollution Prevention Act No. 35 of 2008. It operates under the Ministry of Environment and Wildlife Resources and is responsible for preventing, controlling, and managing pollution in Sri Lanka's marine environment.</p> <p>MEPA is currently the main partner of OCPP for emergency response, which focuses on developing policy for future pollution emergencies.</p>	Collaborating with MEPA is essential for addressing marine pollution and protecting marine biodiversity through GEDSI-response strategies, and aligning national practices with international marine conservation standards.	Currently MEPA is working on mangrove restoration in Kalutara. There are several ongoing programmes to raise awareness on the protection of marine ecosystems that engage school children, teachers, and fishing communities. ( <a href="#">MEPA</a> , n.d.). However, there is no data on specific initiatives targeting gender equality, disability, and social inclusion conducted by MEPA.
<b>Coast Conservation &amp; Coastal Resource Management Department (CC&amp;CRMD)</b>	This department is responsible for the conservation and management of Sri Lanka's coastal zones and resources. One of its key objectives is to	Ongoing work of CC&CRMD includes prevention of coastal erosion to address adverse results of environmental	There is no data on specific initiatives targeting gender equality, disability, and social inclusion conducted by CC&CRMD.

	improve the living standards of coastal communities. ( <a href="#">CC&amp;CRMD</a> , 2025).	degradation on coastal communities. Collaborating with CC&CRMD is useful to achieve objectives related to disaster risk reduction.	
<b>Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC)</b>	The Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) is the principal government agency responsible for the conservation and management of Sri Lanka's wildlife and natural habitats. Operating under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No. 2 of 1937, the DWC oversees a network of protected areas, including national parks, marine national parks, nature reserves, and sanctuaries.	Designating and managing marine protected areas has significant implications for coastal communities, particularly those reliant on fishing. The establishment of protected areas can lead to restrictions on traditional fishing practices and, in some cases, the relocation of communities.	There is no data related to current GEDSI related work conducted by DWC.
<b>Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG)</b>	The Sri Lanka Coast Guard is the premier maritime law enforcement agency functioning under the Ministry of Defence. Its responsibilities include ensuring maritime safety and security, enforcing maritime law, preventing illegal fishing, and protecting the marine environment ( <a href="#">SLCG</a> , n.d.).	SLCG plays a crucial role in monitoring fishing vessels that leave Sri Lankan ports. Collaboration with SLCG is particularly important with regard to the prevention of the use of child labour in fishing, including deep sea fishing- a form of hazardous labour, and addressing risks related to human trafficking.	There is no data related to current GEDSI related work conducted by SLCG.

<b>Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</b>	<p>The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is the primary government body responsible for formulating and implementing policies related to women's rights and child welfare. It oversees multiple departments and agencies, including the National Child Protection Authority (<a href="#">Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</a>, 2025a)</p>	<p>Collaboration with Ministry of Women and Child Affairs is particularly useful for responding to and preventing GBV in the coastal and fishing communities.</p>	<p>Ministry of Women and Child Affairs leads the implementation and monitoring of the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan to Address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in Sri Lanka – II 2024-2028. The Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan specifically seeks to ensure social cohesion and capacity to stop SGBV among fisheries communities through facilitation of transformative change in attitudes and behaviour, and build alliances of fishing communities to prevent SGBV (<a href="#">Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</a>, 2024). The 2025 Action Plan of the Ministry includes specific strategies aimed at economic empowerment of women from fishing communities, and addressing needs of marginalised children from fishing communities (<a href="#">Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</a>, 2025b).</p>
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<b>National Child Protection Authority (NCPA)</b>	NCPA advises the government on policies and laws on the prevention of child abuse, supports the protection of children, and leads co-ordination and monitoring of action against all forms of child abuses. NCPA also operates the 1929 child helpline ( <a href="#">Ministry of Women and Child Affairs</a> , 2025c)	Engaging with the NCPA is useful for integrating child protection considerations into the OCPP.	Currently NCPA engages in awareness creation among public sector officials on child protection and supports criminal proceedings related to child abuse including cyber sexual violence.
<b>UNFPA</b>	UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. In Sri Lanka, UNFPA works towards eliminating unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, and gender-based violence and harmful practices ( <a href="#">UNFPA</a> , 2025a).	Collaboration with UNFPA is useful for assessing disaster preparedness, and addressing essential health service needs in situations of natural disasters in the coastal regions.	UNFPA leads the national coordination of the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for SRHR in crisis situations, ensuring that essential reproductive health services are available during emergencies including natural disasters. This includes preventing sexual violence, reducing HIV transmission, and addressing maternal and new-born health needs ( <a href="#">UNFPA</a> , 2025b).
<b>Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA)</b>	CEPA is an independent, Sri Lankan think-tank promoting a better understanding of poverty-related development issues. CEPA carries out a range of	Engaging with CEPA can provide valuable socio-economic insights into Sri	CEPA has ongoing research projects that examine the impact of environmental and economic ruptures on small-scale fisheries through an

	<p>client services that includes; research, consultancy, evaluation and training (<a href="#">CEPA</a>, n.d.a).</p> <p>CEPA is currently a partner of OCPP, working on abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and has been conducting fisher community engagement workshops for OCPP.</p>	Lanka's fishing communities.	<p>intersectional lens (<a href="#">CEPA</a>, n.d.b). CEPA team has recently researched the socio-economic impact of the MV X-Press Pearl disaster on fisher groups (<a href="#">CEPA</a>, 2022), and intersectionality and inequality in the fisheries of Trincomalee (<a href="#">CEPA</a>, 2017).</p>
<b>Ocean University of Sri Lanka (OCUSL)</b>	<p>Ocean University of Sri Lanka is a special purpose government University established by a parliament act with an aim of developing the human resources requirement to achieve the economic benefits of Marine, Maritime, Fisheries and allied technology sectors (<a href="#">OCUSL</a>, 2021).</p> <p>Ocean University is an existing OCPP partner. Two students from the University were funded to present their work at an international conference in the UK.</p>	OCUSL's specialised programmes in fisheries and marine sciences are closely linked to areas of work under OCPP, creating opportunities for joint research initiatives and knowledge exchange.	There is no data on specific initiatives targeting gender equality, disability, and social inclusion conducted by OCUSL.

<p><b>Oceanswell</b></p>	<p>Oceanswell, established in 2017 by marine biologist Asha de Vos, is a marine conservation research and education organisation. The organisation's mission is to transform the trajectory of ocean conservation by educating the next generation of diverse ocean heroes (<a href="#">Oceanswell</a>, 2025a).</p> <p>Oceanswell is an existing OCPP partner, and have been contracted through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to conduct workshops and produce scientific reports.</p>	<p>Partnering with Oceanswell can bring scientific expertise and community engagement to marine conservation and fisheries management efforts.</p>	<p>Oceanswell does not currently have programmes with a specific GEDSI focus. However, the organisation supports local researchers, students, and coastal communities in developing skills in marine science and conservation. In 2020, Oceanswell examined the impact of COVID-19 on small scale fishers (<a href="#">Oceanswell</a>, 2025b).</p>
<p><b>National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO)</b></p>	<p>NAFSO is a fisherfolk movement of Sri Lanka that works with marginalised groups such as internally-displaced persons, women, and youth to promote human rights and sustainable development, particularly in the agriculture and fisheries sectors (<a href="#">International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</a>, 2025)</p>	<p>NAFSO's extensive grassroot-level network can facilitate community engagement in marine conservation initiatives.</p>	<p>NAFSO works on promoting gender equality, enhancing livelihoods, and building leadership skills among women in the fishing sector through community mobilising efforts and training programmes (<a href="#">NAFSO</a>, 2024).</p>



<b>Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organization</b>	Founded in 2000, the Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organization emerged in response to challenges faced by fisherwomen, particularly when their family members were detained for fishing in neighbouring waters. Since then, it has grown into a significant movement advocating for the rights and empowerment of fisherwomen in Sri Lanka ( <a href="#">Contested Ports</a> , n.d.).	Sri Vimukthi's presence in coastal communities can aid in disseminating sustainable fishing practices and awareness on marine conservation among women in fishing communities.	The Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organization has been actively involved in various community initiatives aimed at empowering fisherwomen and promoting environmental sustainability. For instance, in 2019 they conducted an awareness programme on waste management in Kadolkele, Negombo ( <a href="#">Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organization</a> , n.d.).
<b>Centre for Equality and Justice (CEJ)</b>	CEJ is a women's organisation based in Colombo. CEJ engages with policy makers, government officers and strengthens grassroots level women's capacities to claim their rights.	CEJ has expertise with regard to safeguarding challenges- sexual bribery in particular, in government institutions.	Sexual bribery is a form of sexual exploitation when a public official demands sexual acts in exchange for services or benefits. CEJ has been working on sexual bribery for several years and has published research on sexual bribery, though not particularly focusing on fisheries sector ( <a href="#">CEJ</a> , 2020).
<b>Disability Organizations Joint Front (DOJF)</b>	DOJF, established in 2001, is an umbrella organisation comprising 36 member organisations led by people with disabilities in Sri Lanka, with	DOJF can provide technical expertise and networking support to OCPD with regard to disability inclusion.	There is no information on DOJF's direct involvement in activities related to marine biodiversity, marine,

	advocating for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities as their primary objective ( <a href="#">DOLF</a> , 2022).		pollution, and sustainable seafood.
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### 3.6.2. Lessons

**The literature indicates that the current management of ecosystems and habitats linked to the fisheries sector suffers from overlapping responsibilities and lack of cooperation and coordination among various government organisations** ([Höjman](#), 2022).

**A key lesson from the stakeholder mapping is that most government institutions involved in fisheries, marine conservation, and aquaculture in Sri Lanka lack a dedicated GEDSI focus.** Institutions such as the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR) play a critical role in regulating and managing Sri Lanka's marine and fisheries resources. However, their policies and programmes primarily emphasise economic development, sustainable fishing practices, and environmental conservation, with limited focus on addressing gender disparities, disability inclusion, or social vulnerabilities within fishing communities. While some agencies are part of the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan to Address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sri Lanka (2024-2028), there is little information on how effectively these commitments translate into action within fisheries and coastal communities. Similarly, academic and research institutions such as the Ocean University of Sri Lanka (OCUSL) and Oceanswell provide expertise in marine science and conservation but do not have structured GEDSI-focused programmes.

**Another gap is the absence of a national mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of activities on sustainable seafood, marine pollution, and marine biodiversity.** While various agencies implement policies and projects aimed at economic upliftment and environmental sustainability, there is no systematic framework to track the extent to which these initiatives benefit marginalised groups, particularly women, persons with disabilities, and coastal communities. For instance, while NAQDA's Aquaculture and Culture-Based Fisheries Sector Development Plan (2021-2025) seeks to improve the socio-economic conditions of fisher communities, it lacks a clear mechanism to measure how these programmes address gender equality and, disability and social inclusion.

**At the grassroots level, civil society organisations such as Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organisation and NAFSO play a crucial role in empowering marginalised fisher communities, particularly women.** These organisations are well embedded in local communities, conducting advocacy, training, and awareness programmes on issues such as GBV and marine conservation. However, these organisations lack strong connections to larger policy networks and decision-making structures. This limits their influence in shaping national programmes and policies. Strengthening linkages between grassroots CSOs and national institutions such as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and other ministries such as Ministry of Environment and Wildlife Resources and Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic

Resources Development can enhance the integration of local-level knowledge and experiences into broader policy frameworks.

**Our stakeholder mapping shows that there is a need for stronger coordination between government agencies, research institutions, and civil society to effectively mainstream GEDSI into Sri Lanka's efforts related to sustainable seafood, marine pollution, and marine biodiversity.** While some actors work on socio-economic empowerment and environmental conservation, their efforts remain fragmented and lack an overarching strategy to ensure inclusive development. Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together government bodies, grassroots organisations, research institutions, and international agencies could facilitate knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and policy integration to ensure that marine conservation and fisheries governance are equitable and inclusive.

### 3.7. What data is available in-country that can be used for GEDSI analysis and what are the data gaps?

The table below sets out what data can be used for conducting GEDSI analysis in Sri Lanka. It provides short summary of each resource, noting any gaps of relevance. The resources listed below focus on areas such as human rights, statistics related to demographic, health, crime (including gender-based violence) and other relevant aspects. Additionally, key resources related to social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including women, people with disabilities and LGBTQI+ communities are included. In line with the findings of the report, datasets on climate are also provided.

Source	Available data	Data gaps
<b>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</b> ( <a href="#">U.S. Department of State</a> , 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law relating to sexual and gender-based violence</li> <li>• Nature of discrimination faced by women in marriage and family life, labour force participation, and reproductive rights</li> <li>• Systemic discrimination based on race and ethnicity</li> <li>• Law relating to child abuse and reports of child abuse</li> <li>• Law relating to sexual exploitation of children</li> <li>• Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression</li> <li>• Experience of discrimination and barriers to access experienced by persons with disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of discrimination faced by women and marginalised groups in coastal regions</li> <li>• Data on workplace sexual harassment</li> </ul>
<b>Demographic and Health Survey- 2016</b> ( <a href="#">Department of Census and Statistics</a> , 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevalence of domestic violence by an intimate partner</li> <li>• Type and frequency of domestic violence</li> <li>• Women's participation in household decision-making</li> <li>• Maternal and child health, fertility levels, and unmet need for family planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No analysis based on sector (e.g., fisheries) or coastal regions</li> </ul>

<b>Data Center   Human Development Reports</b> ( <a href="#">UNDP, 2024</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sri Lanka's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2022 (0.780)</li> <li>• Gender Development Index (GDI) value for 2022 (0.947)</li> <li>• Gender Inequality Index (GII) value for 2022 (0.376)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No data relevant to Gender Social Norms Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, and Planetary pressures-adjusted HDI</li> </ul>
<b>Gender (Policies)</b> ( <a href="#">WORLD Policy Analysis Center, 2025</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No explicit prohibition of gender-based discrimination at work</li> <li>• Legislation does not explicitly guarantee equal pay on the basis of gender</li> <li>• No explicit prohibition of workplace discrimination based on pregnancy or parenthood</li> <li>• No explicit prohibition of discrimination at work based on both sexual orientation and gender identity</li> <li>• Sexual harassment in workplace is expressly prohibited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on minimum age of work is outdated</li> </ul>
<b>Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities   OHCHR</b> ( <a href="#">OHCHR, 2025</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission by Disability Organisations Joint Front (DOJF) for the 19th pre-sessional working group of the committee on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2024 (<a href="#">DOJF, 2024</a>)</li> <li>• Discrimination and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities with regard to employment, safety net, education, health services etc.</li> <li>• Sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities</li> <li>• Pervasive lack of accessibility</li> <li>• Sri Lanka Initial Report (<a href="#">CRPD, 2019</a>)</li> <li>• Number of persons with disabilities (2012) disaggregated by nature of disability sex, province, education, and marital status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on involvement on persons with disabilities in policy making</li> <li>• Number of allegations of discrimination based on disability</li> <li>• Information on impact of awareness rising activities by government institutions</li> <li>• Data specific to coastal regions and fisheries sector</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitutional safeguards, laws, and policies related to rights of persons with disabilities</li> <li>• Future plans for improving accessibility for people with disabilities</li> </ul>	
<b>Country Profiles</b> ( <a href="#">Gender and climate tracker</a> , 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender considerations in adaptation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory process for NDCs</li> </ul>
<b>Country Rankings</b> ( <a href="#">ND-GAIN Country Index rankings   ND-GAIN Index</a> , n.d.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ND-GAIN Country Index rank 110: score- 45.6</li> <li>• Vulnerability: 0.466/ Readiness: 0.379</li> <li>• Projected change of marine biodiversity: 0.367</li> <li>• Social inequality: 0.575</li> </ul>	
<b>Criminalisation of LGBT people</b> ( <a href="#">Human Dignity Trust</a> , 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminalisation of same sex sexual activity (for males and females)</li> </ul>	
<b>Equaldex progress of LGBTQ+ rights across the world</b> ( <a href="#">Equaldex</a> , 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality Index: 31</li> <li>• Legal Index: 26</li> <li>• Public Opinion Index: 37</li> </ul>	
<b>Climate Risk Country Profiles</b> ( <a href="#">Climate Change Knowledge Portal</a> , 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key factors that account for the differences between women's and men's vulnerability to climate change risks</li> <li>• National adaptation policies, strategies, and plans</li> <li>• Vulnerability to impacts of sea-level rise</li> <li>• Average number of people experiencing flooding per year in the coastal zone under different emission pathways and adaptation scenarios</li> <li>• Potential decline in fish catch due to climate change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on climate change impact on coastal communities</li> <li>• Vulnerability to climate change risks among people with disabilities and other marginalised groups</li> </ul>



<b>Global database on Violence against Women</b> ( <a href="#">UN Women</a> , n.d.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence</li> <li>• Lifetime non-partner sexual violence</li> <li>• Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence in the last 12 months</li> <li>• Gender Inequality Index Rank: 92/162</li> <li>• Global Gender Gap Index Rank: 110/156</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• </li> </ul>
<b>Statistics</b> ( <a href="#">Sri Lanka Police</a> , 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cases recorded in relation to rape, grave sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation of children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on sexual harassment is not available</li> <li>• Consensual sex between same-sex partners is not distinguished from sexual violence</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Statistics</b> ( <a href="#">Department of Census and Statistics</a> , 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women survivors (and victims) of grave crimes against persons</li> <li>• Economically active population by sector and sex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No data specific to fisheries sector</li> </ul>

## 4. Conclusion

This section presents the conclusions in relation to six research questions.

**The majority of the literature was found in relation to the fishing industry rather than the other two priority sectors**, though the KIIs provided some information especially about marine pollution and its impact on women and other marginalised groups.

**There has been significant work in Sri Lanka to document GEDSI in coastal areas and in the fishing industry in particular.** The literature review and the KIIs revealed a complex pattern of women's role in the fishing industry, based on the coastal typography, religion and caste. Overall, women's roles tend to be concentrated in post-harvest activities including in informal and low paid jobs in seafood processing plants, with multiple barriers preventing their participation in managerial or decision-making positions. Women's marginalisation is driven by restrictive gender norms, disproportionate burden of care work, gender power dynamics (in fish processing plants, fisheries co-operatives, and markets), increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence among other factors. The KIIs identified additional safety concerns faced by women, including workplace-related issues, such as risk of harassment and bullying and risk of exploitation in order to access resources (i.e., 'sex for fish').

**Fishers (who are predominantly men) also face significant challenges in the coastal areas, including the highly physically demanding and dangerous nature of work.** Small-scale fishers (including artisanal fishers) were identified as a marginalised group. KII participants noted that small-scale fishers face heightened vulnerability due to lack of social protection and remain marginalised in decision-making processes. A KII respondent from a CSO noted that even where fishers are participating in Government initiatives, their participation tend to be nominal rather than meaningful due to the highly technical nature of these meetings: *'True co-management requires active, informed participation—not just having fishers physically present at meetings'*, they explained.

**Our findings highlighted that children and young people, people with disabilities, and indigenous communities are among the most disadvantaged groups in Sri Lanka's coastal regions.** A KII respondent from a CSO noted that harbours are not disability friendly and people with disabilities are excluded in the fishing industry. There is limited evidence in the literature that explores marginalisation of people with disabilities in the coastal regions, and this reflects the invisibility experienced by people with disabilities in Sri Lankan society. This lack of research and data is reflected at a global level, where the evidence base on people with disabilities generally is still underdeveloped, including within the blue economy. Findings note that fishing is one of the few areas where child labour is identified,

though the numbers are small. LGBTQI+ people face marginalisation in Sri Lanka due to restrictive laws. The nature of discrimination and workplace harassment experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Sri Lanka is well-documented.

**The findings show that environmental degradation affects coastal communities in a number of ways, such as impact on livelihood, increased vulnerabilities of women, increased risk of GBV, and increased exposure to coastal erosion and natural disasters.** Marine pollution and destruction of mangrove ecosystems have been particularly linked to decline in income.

**This GEDSI assessment found evidence of safeguarding risks in relation to OCCP which could be significant if unaddressed, including risks related to partners, the type of activities implemented under the programme, and the country context.** The highest risk activities include work in primary schools and the scholarship programme. However, the risk of SEAH is considerably high across the board considering the extremely high levels of sexual harassment across the country in the workplace and in higher education institutions. The vast majority of women report experiencing sexual harassment when accessing public transportation. Significant levels of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women reflect the prevalence of harmful gender norms and gender power inequalities in Sri Lankan society, which directly influences the risk of SEAH. In consequence, it is important that OCCP takes this into account, and works with partners across the programme to ensure preventive action, and establish effective reporting and response mechanisms to address safeguarding concerns.

## 5. Recommendations

This section sets out recommendations for OCCP to consider with regards to improving GEDSI and addressing safeguarding risks within OCCP in Sri Lanka.

### **Recommendation 1: Develop and articulate a commitment to GEDSI within the OCCP**

At the moment the OCCP has not considered GEDSI in its theory of change or activities to any meaningful extent. OCCP should consider adding specific activities to advance GEDSI within the programme. This may include the following:

- **Develop explicit GEDSI commitments within the OCCP** through guidelines, strategies, implementation plans etc., and necessary budget allocations. Review OCCP workplans through a GEDSI lens to ensure programme alignment with GEDSI commitments. It should be noted that while there is an immediate need to achieve GEDSI sensitive status, the commitments should reflect the long-term goal of GEDSI transformation should the programme continue past one year.

- **Recruit local GEDSI experts** to spearhead the integration of GEDSI in the OCPP country programme.
- **Ensure that there is a gender balance and diversity within the OCPP team** (internally) at all levels.
- **Use a multi-pronged approach to strengthen GEDSI capacities of the current OCPP team/s**, for example through staff orientation, targeted capacity strengthening efforts, and annual refresher trainings. These efforts can be supported by adopting/ developing tools and resources such as GEDSI integration checklists, how-to-guides, training manuals etc.

## **Recommendation 2: Identify entry points and specific opportunities to advance GEDSI**

This assessment has identified a number of entry points for OCPP to consider in order to promote GEDSI in coastal areas and within the three priority sectors.

- **Ensure programme alignment with activities in key national policies related to GEDSI**, in particular, the National Environmental Policy (NEP) and National Policy on Climate Change (NPCC) and the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan on SGBV.
- **Improve coordination amongst stakeholder working in the blue economy on GEDSI**. This may include consultations across all relevant stakeholder to understand the best method for this-, such as a dedicated unit, a secretariat or identifying dedicated focal points.
- **Strengthen local-level linkages with partners, civil society organisations, and coastal communities, with a special focus on nurturing women's leadership**. As a first step, this should include consultation with stakeholders such as the Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women's Organization, to understand how OCPP can amplify their work on women's leadership and help to tackle the key barriers they have identified. OCPP may also want to consider how it can contribute to the convening and facilitation of more inclusive dialogue and consultations in which marginalised groups can meaningfully engage and contribute.
- **Develop specific activities to address GEDSI concerns within the fishing industry and allocate funds**. This may include stakeholder sensitisation, support to local partners on GEDSI-sensitive workplaces and addressing violence in the workplace (for instance by drawing on work already done in the tourist industry in Sri Lanka), exploring opportunities for enhanced role for women in mangrove restoration, conducting regular GEDSI assessments, etc.

**Recommendation 3: Consider conducting research in key areas where there is currently a gap in knowledge when it comes to GEDSI**

Whilst in general there is already a significant body of research that has on GEDSI in Sri Lanka's coastal areas, there are still evidence gaps which OCPP may want to address. These include:

- **Conduct research with persons with disabilities**, including how they are currently working in the three sectors within the programme, how they are affected by pollution and environmental degradation and how the programme could better work with OPDs and persons with disabilities to ensure the programme upholds their rights.
- **Conduct primary research with women on leadership in climate change and the three priority sectors**: OCPP may want to develop a consultation process with women activists, women working on climate change, and women in the fishery sector to understand how their work can be amplified and supported – and how to best develop a women's leadership support programme.
- **Conduct research in indigenous coastal communities ('Muhudu Veddahs')** to understand how their cultural practices can best be supported, especially in the districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa the Muhudu Veddahs where are experiencing increasing pressure to assimilate into the predominant culture and abandon their fishing techniques. The literature review found very little research about this group and OCPP may want to consider how they could support this group to maintain their cultural heritage.

**Work with relevant stakeholders, such as Ministry of Labour, Trade Union Relations and Sabaragamuwa Development, to better understand the manifestation of child labour within the fishery sector**: Whilst the statistics on child labour in the sector are small at 3%, the impact on the children affected is likely to be vast. OCPP should work with stakeholders to understand better the dimensions and impact of child labour in the sector and to develop activities to address this issue.

**Recommendation 4: Ensure meaningful participation of individuals and groups who experience marginalisation within the OCPP.**

- **Identify strategies to improve the participation of women and marginalised groups**, at minimum by responding to gender-related barriers to participation such as lack of child-care services.

- **Ensure that communities who are most affected by degradation of coastal environment (women, fishers including small scale fishers) meaningfully participate** in decision-making processes, and all stages of the programme cycle— programme design, implementation, and learning, and to this end use community-centred and locally informed strategies of engagement.
- **Allocate resources and identify strategies** to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in the programme.

### **Recommendation 5: Address safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme**

OCPP is currently working with multiple partners, including Government, universities, private sector and civil society. It is imperative that all partners have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in order to prevent and respond to SEAH and other safeguarding related misconduct and to ensure that programme activities have been suitably risk assessed and mitigated. To do this OCPP should:

- **Review what safeguarding procedures are in place across all partners** to safeguard both OCPP funded staff and individuals coming into contact with programme staff for each partner, recognising that the approach will need to be different depending on the type of partner that is assessed. This should include a specific focus on sexual harassment considering the high levels in Sri Lanka. Both prevention and response of safeguarding related misconduct should be looked at as part of this review. Where safeguarding procedures are inadequate, support partners to develop policies and procedures to address SEAH and subsequently support them to implement these.
- **Review or conduct risk assessments especially of high-risk activities for the programme.** OCPP should identify and conduct a proper risk assessment for all activities prioritising those that are more likely to lead to SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct. These should include all activities that involved children, such as those in schools, as well as scholarship selection. Following the risk assessment, appropriate mitigation actions should be put in place including regular monitoring and oversight.
- **Review the impact of sexual harassment across all programme activities and staff and take appropriate action to address these.** OCPP should consider working with a safeguarding specialist to consult with women staff about their experiences of sexual harassment related to the programme and identify strategies to mitigate and address these.

- **Adopt a protocol on responding to disclosure of SGBV by colleagues or members of the community**, to enable confidential and non-judgemental information and support. Develop referral pathways in partnership with local organisations, law enforcement, health providers, and psycho-social support providers.
- **Familiarise themselves with the CAPSEAH commitment<sup>4</sup> and work towards meaningful implementation.** Whilst this would go beyond the OCPP, CAPSEAH could provide a useful entry point for engagement with Government stakeholders in Sri Lanka as it applies equally to Governments.

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<sup>4</sup> More information can be found here: [Home | CAPSEAH](#)



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*The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).*



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