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# COVID 19: Impact, Mitigation, Opportunities and Building Resilience

From Adversity to Serendipity

*Perspectives of global relevance based on  
research, experience and successes in  
combating COVID-19 in Sri Lanka*

Volume 01

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(edited by)

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# COVID-19 nexus with food security and sustainable growth: Impacts, implications and road to resilience in Sri Lanka

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## ABSTRACT

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Covid-19 pandemic, one of the most significant humanitarian and development setbacks faced by humankind in the known history, imposes immeasurable risks to the progress of sustainable development and human wellbeing. It is a health crisis that went beyond anyone's control, leading to a global pandemic, but on the other end, it is an economic catastrophe that might takes years, if not decades, for a full recovery. Impacts vary from region to region, country to country and district to district, depending on how resilient, lean, agile the systems are. However, impacts are undoubtedly immense. Developed, developing, and least developed countries are battling to regain social, cultural and economic progress. Due to the pandemic, Sustainable Development Goals, commonly known as SDGs, the global blueprint with clearly set development targets to be achieved by 2030, has faced enormous strain as never before. Among 17 goals of the SDGs, Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 03: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth have been pushed back by the pandemic. While the pandemic has significant impacts on all the goals and targets, this chapter specifically discusses the impacts of Covid-19 on goals 1 and 2 and their overall impacts on food security and sustainable growth, with particular emphasis on Sri Lanka. The chapter also discusses potential recovery options to regain the path to SDG, prosperity and splendour in the island nation.

*Key words: Sustainable development goals, Covid-19, Recovery, Resilient, Food security*

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## 1. COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN SRI LANKA

Covid-19, a zoonotic disease that handcuffed the whole world, is caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2, commonly known as SARS-CoV-2. The disease was first detected and identified in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in Hubei province of the People's Republic of China (Santos-Sanchez & Salas-Coronado, 2020). As of 12 May 2021, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), confirmed cases of COVID-29 are 159,319,384, while 3,311,780 deaths have been reported globally (WHO, 2021a). The

pandemic is not yet over. As of 12 May 2021, Sri Lanka has reported 131,098 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 850 deaths (WHO, 2021a). With robust contact tracing and surveillance in place, Sri Lanka detected its first local case of COVID-19 on 11 March 2020 (Ediriweera et al., 2020). The first wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka resulted in swift and urgent actions by the government, public health authorities, and the general public with lockdown and restricted movements to control the spread of the disease. While effective disease control measures were in place, their impacts on the economy, trade, tourism, education, livelihoods and food security, among others,

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were significant. According to the world bank, Sri Lanka economy contracted by 3.6 per cent in 2020, which is the lowest growth on record (World Bank, 2021a). Global demand for the textile industry impacted drastically, reducing the trade and jobs market. Uncertainty on the investment was very high as the pandemic continued to diminish the investors' confidence and interests. Due to the pandemic, jobs lost and earnings reduced, impacting livelihoods and food security.

Sri Lanka was praised for its successful control of the first wave of the pandemic, with about 3,000 confirmed cases and 11 deaths by the end of September 2020. However, the second wave was much wider, with sharp spikes emerging across the country with 43,000 infections and 204 deaths towards the end of 2020 (Weerakoon, 2021) and almost double this number by the end of February 2021. The approach to managing the second and third waves is different to that of the first wave, and the country did not go through country-wide lockdown as it may affect the production, supply and value chain, livelihoods, food security, unemployment and the overall economic performance, which was already in the declining path. The growth rate could be less than what is reported as 2.3% in 2019. As Covid-19 has evidently impacted the progress of achieving sustainable growth, the

next two sections of the chapter discuss about the Sustainable Development Goals and the economic footprint in general and in particular to the context of Sri Lanka.

## 2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Sustainable Development Goals, commonly known as SDGs, defines the 2030 development agenda and its targets. It calls upon all member countries to enhance prosperity while protecting the planet (UN, 2021). This global blueprint is being implemented to transform the development discourse while keeping sustainability at the core. It supports an integrated approach for ending poverty, economic growth and addressing other social needs such as education, health, job opportunities, climate change, and environmental protection. Seventeen goals of the SDG are presented in Figure 1.

The SDG goal 1, “No Poverty”, aims in ending extreme poverty for all people in all its forms everywhere by 2030. It also aims to ensure nationally appropriate social protection systems, the poor and vulnerable have equal rights to economic resources and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and disasters. It also focuses on resource mobilization and



Figure 1. UN Sustainable Development Goals: Source (UN, 2021)

creating sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels. Goal 2, “Zero Hunger”, aims to end hunger and ensure access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food by all people, in particular poor and vulnerable people, throughout the year. It also focuses on ending malnutrition, increasing agricultural productivity and income of small-scale food producers, ensuring sustainable food production systems through resilient agricultural practices. Goal 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages. Goal 4 aims at inclusive, equitable and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 8 focuses on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 12 aims at ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, while goal 13 focuses on urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, including climate-related hazards and disasters. All other goals are also vital instruments to pave the path for sustainable development, achieving lasting peace, economic growth and ecosystem resilience.

### **2.1. Sustainable Development Goals and Sri Lanka**

After ending the three-decade-long internal conflict, Sri Lanka was on its path to a sustainable and more resilient society before Covid-19 struck. Having set high standards in the human development index, Sri Lanka was able to keep the unemployment rate below 5 per cent, a high literacy rate of 98.7 per cent and life expectancy over 75 years (UNESCAP, 2019). According to UNESCAP, some of the critical challenges of achieving SDGs in Sri Lanka were improving the quality and relevance of education, providing affordable treatments and care facilities for the ageing population and fighting climate change and disasters which requires further policy support and financial resources while strengthening existing partnerships and forming new ones. One of the key milestones in achieving SDGs in Sri Lanka is the enactment of the “SRI LANKA SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT, No. 19 OF 2017,” which was certified on

03 October 2017. The Act provides the legal framework to implement the SDGs and the establishment of the Sustainable Development Council to formulate national policies, guidelines and promote institutional and policy coherence (UNESCAP, 2019). Financing SDG implementation and improving investment efficiency in key sectors such as Education, Healthcare, Agriculture, Climate Resilience and Gender Equality remained priorities before the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, engaging through multi-sectoral partnerships, including the private sector, and enhancing regional cooperation within the South Asian economy can bring Sri Lanka to new heights in its SDGs endeavour. As the country is just nine years away from the 2030 milestone of achieving Sustainable Development Goals, sound macroeconomic and fiscal policies supported by measured approaches must be followed if the goals to be a reality. Among 17 goals of the SDGs, Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 03: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth have been challenged as never before due to the recession caused by the pandemic. Therefore, the next section of the chapter discusses specific Covid-19 impacts on the progress of achieving SDGs.

### **2.2. COVID-19 Impacts on Sustainable Development Goals**

Although countries had spent one-third of the 2030 agenda timeframe before Covid-19 struck the world, they were not on track to achieve set targets by 2030. It was recognized that the speed and progress were not up to the mark; therefore, world leaders renewed their commitments during the SDG summit held in September 2019, pledged to achieve transformational progress by 2030. This decade from 2020-2030 was recognized as the decade of actions to achieve SDGs; however, Covid-19 has devastating impacts on all 17 goals of SDGs and threatening to derail the progress made in multiple areas (UN, 2020). Impacts are not uniform across countries, sectors and communities. The poorest and most vulnerable countries have impacted disproportionately

by the pandemic. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), SDGs progress will be adversely impacted, leaving more than 1 billion people living in extreme poverty by 2030 (UNDP, 2020). It is evident that continued Covid-19 spread will delay the recovery process.

While Covid-19 has impacted all the goals, Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, and Goal 4: Quality Education were the most affected goals. Global poverty has escalated as Covid-19 has hit the poorest most and widen inequalities. Half of the global workforce, 1.6 billion workers, are in the informal sector, and they were pushed towards unemployment or underemployment resulting in 60-80 per cent income lost due to Covid-19 (UN, 2020). Loss of livelihoods will immensely contribute to poverty, keeping countries away from their reach in the SDG 1.

On the other hand, food production, supply chain, and prices have been affected due to Covid-19. Impacts on food availability, access, utilization, and stability will keep countries away from SDG 2. Health care systems are already over-stretched globally, impacting the SDG 3. Remote learning remains out of reach for more than 500 million students globally, resulting in a substantial setback to the progress of SDG 4. All in all, SDGs have gone beyond our reach as economic recovery is yet to be seen. As Covid-19 has caused substantial impacts on SDG goals related to food security, the next section of the chapter discusses about the covid impacts on the food security sector with special emphasis on Sri Lanka.

### **3. COVID-19 IMPACTS ON THE FOOD SECURITY SECTOR**

Covid-19 is not only having health impacts but also severe economic impacts across the world. Impacts on the food and agriculture sector, among others, are significant. Affected countries had to rethink their existing and future food and agriculture policies to ensure food availability and affordability to all (Ma et al., 2021). Economic impacts, including food

insecurity, will be much more challenging than the disease itself for the poor and developing countries (WFP, 2020a). Food insecurity was already on the rise before Covid-19 struck the world (UN, 2020). Six hundred ninety million people were unable to meet their nutritional requirements in 2019, 60 million higher than in 2014. Furthermore, more than 2 billion people suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity in 2019. It had gone up from 22.4% in 2014 to 25.9% of the global population in 2019. According to the world bank, chronic and acute hunger was on the rise due to conflicts, natural hazards, climate change, pests etc., even before covid-19 struck the world. Covid-19 has led to severe food insecurity globally across all countries, and it will continue in 2021 and 2022 (World Bank, 2021b). Due to Covid-19, global food prices have risen by 38%, causing severe strain on food access, especially by poor and vulnerable communities in developing countries. Increased retail prices and loss of income have led to a compromise in quality and quantity of food consumption by covid-19 hit communities in lower- and middle-income countries.

Covid-19 restrictions and unavailability or lack of workforce during the pandemic affected domestic and international food trade and the supply chain. In 2020, more than 821 million people did not have access to safe and nutritious food, and they regularly suffer from hunger, out of which 100 plus million people endured acute hunger (WFP, 2020a). Global hunger is mainly due to conflicts, climate change and economic recessions. Covid-19 has imposed unimaginable economic and supply chain challenges increasing the severity and magnitude of hunger globally (WFP, 2020a). United Nations has identified undernutrition as a high-risk factor for the Covid-19 (UNOHCA, 2020). According to the United Nations World Food Program, the Covid-19 pandemic can contribute to more than a quarter of a billion people suffering from acute hunger by the end of 2020. The figure may go as high as 265 million people from low and middle-income countries by the end of 2020 (Anthem, 2020). This doubles the global acute hunger estimate due to the pandemic, a significant setback

to decades of investments made to enhance food security globally. It is evident that the pandemic and its control measures, including the social distancing, have disturbed the food production, distribution and economies, leaving food security at risk (Mardones et al., 2020). Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on poverty and food security are visible and directly related due to shocks on household income and thereby limited access (Laborde et al., 2021). The authors further predicted that global GDP might be declined by 5% due to Covid-19 with a similar range in South Asia and a higher decline (-9%) in Africa.

As the food security of Sri Lanka has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic as the rest of the world, the next section of the chapter discusses the food security context of Sri Lanka.

### 3.1. Food Security Context in Sri Lanka

Food security can be defined as a “condition when all people, at all times, have physical, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996). From the outset, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all the key dimensions of the definition resulting in significant challenges to food and nutrition security as the pandemic impacted the physical and economic access to food. Based on the Economist Group, Sri Lanka ranked 75 in the Global Food Security Index. One of the

main challenges is the volatility of agriculture production (Economist, 2020).

As stated in Figure 2 and Figure 3, Sri Lanka food security performances in the year 2020 is relatively weak compared to other countries in the Asia Pacific region. Sri Lanka food security index of 2020 deteriorated two places from 73 to 75 in the global food security index compared to 2019. Developing countries in South Asia, including Sri Lanka, will face hunger, poverty and food insecurity due to climate change impacts. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals, especially the goal 1 and 2 (no poverty and zero hunger) by 2030 in a changing climate, will be a major challenge for the country (Herath & Poon, 2021).

The president of Sri Lanka declared 2017 as a key milestone for alleviating poverty to realize the SDG 1. In 2016, the “National Strategic Review on Food and Nutrition: Towards Zero Hunger” was launched by the government to accelerate the progress of achieving SDG 2, Zero Hunger (WFP, 2017). Despite substantial progress over the last 20 years, food insecurity and poverty remain high in low income and certain social strata of the country. According to the WFP, 80 per cent of Sri Lanka’s annual food demand is produced domestically, while 20 per cent is imported from international markets. Rice, Sri Lanka’s staple food, was nearly self-sufficient before the covid-19 struck. However, the availability of adequate food at the domestic markets does

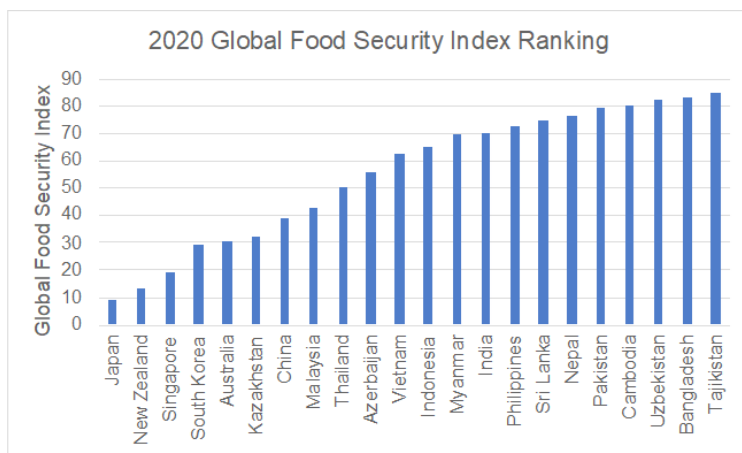


Figure 2. Global Food Security Index -2020 [Data Source (Economist, 2020)]



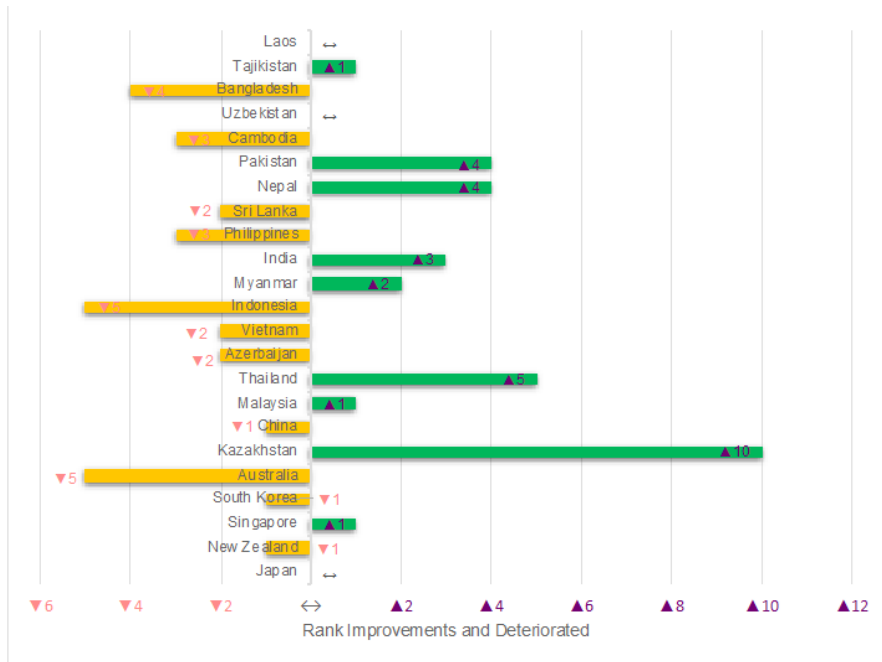


Figure 3. Global Food Security Index Changes in 2020 compared to 2019 [Data Source: (Economist, 2020)]

not guarantee economic and physical access to food at the household level in Sri Lanka (WFP, 2017). The nutrition status of children and mothers have shown some progress over the years. However, food and nutrition insecurity are still a major concern. Some of the main reasons are due to yield stagnation, food prices, income inequalities, high informal labour force, land degradation, and climate change. As it is evident that the food security of the country has impacted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as the rest of the world, the next section of the chapter discusses Covid-19 impacts on the food security sector in Sri Lanka.

### 3.2. Covid-19 Impacts on Food Security Sector in Sri Lanka

The first Covid-19 case of Sri Lanka was a Chinese tourist reported on 27 January 2020. The second confirmed case was reported on 11 March 2020, and it climbed 122 cases with two deaths by 31 March 2020 (Amaratunga et al., 2020). By 31 July 2020, total confirmed cases escalated to 2,814 and by 12 May 2021, confirmed cases had rocketed high as 131,098 with 850 deaths (WHO, 2021b). The Impact of Covid-19 in Sri Lanka is multi-faceted. While it directly impacts the SDG Goal 03: Good

Health and Well-being due to morbidities and mortalities caused by SARS-CoV-2, other direct and indirect long-lasting socio-economic impacts cannot be underestimated. State and development partners' priorities on poverty alleviation had to be reprogrammed, allowing sufficient resources available for the pandemic response. On the other hand, zero hunger may no longer be a reality during the pandemic and post-pandemic era unless sound planning, strategies and program are designed across the systems and sectors. According to the World Food Program, restricted movements and lockdown have impacted income-generating opportunities, especially for low- and middle-income families, impacting their food and nutrition security (WFP, 2021). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the country had reported a negative real GDP growth rate of - 4.6% for 2020 (IMF, 2021).

Further, average consumer price inflation has been reported as 4.7 %. Food and nutrition security has been impacted due to the loss of income and livelihoods, negative GDP growth rate, price fluctuation and inflation of agricultural and food products.

In Sri Lanka, the food supply chain was interrupted due to more stringent lock-down measures coupled with the closure of ports and airports. Economic hardships were enormous in the first phase of lock-down from March-May 2020 (Hettiarachchi et al., 2020). Loss of economic opportunities and interruptions to livelihoods have caused significant impacts, especially among the daily wage labours. Emergency food supply and financial assistance worth Sri Lankan rupees 5,000 were given to the needy people. However, there were initial setbacks in reaching the at-risk communities in time. Local charities and well-wishers collaborated with local authorities in providing dry rations to the food-unsecured and at-risk communities who have lost their livelihoods (Hettiarachchi et al., 2020). While Covid-19 has caused food insecurity globally, a balanced and safer diet is one of the main concerns. Protein intakes such as fish and meat and fruits and vegetable intakes have gone down across the world while instant foods and sugary drinks consumptions have increased, affecting immunity against communicable diseases (Jayawardena & Misra, 2020). Peliyagoda fish market Covid-19 cluster had led to several sub-clusters and district level spreads of the pandemic across the country by the end of December 2020 (WHO, 2020). The closure of the Paliyagoda wholesale fish market, the only wholesale fish market on this scale, had created public panic and refusal to buy and consume seafood due to misconception (Piyasiri, 2020). While it has caused economic hardships and livelihood impacts to the fishery industry, food insecurity implications to the general public were immense, especially from the nutrition lens as fish and seafood are primary protein sources of Sri Lankan meals. Import restrictions and supply chain disruptions had halted the production of “Thripasha”, a supplementary food given to children and lactating mothers, due to the unavailability of imported maize. Furthermore, the national school feeding program has been halted since 12 March, resulting in the loss of daily in-school meals, a key component of food security in Sri Lanka (WFP, 2020b). Heavy dependency on retail-based food security, especially from urban and

peri-urban poor communities, have paid the price during the lock-down period.

On the other hand, impacts on livestock, especially the poultry sector, was significant. Lack of animal feeds, labour shortage, the closure of processing and storage facilities, and diminished demand due to reduced disposable income are the main setbacks (Netherlands and You, 2020). Furthermore, post-harvest food loss due to the closure of wholesale and retail markets was a heavy blow to farmers. The foreign exchange stabilization policy of the Government also took a toll on the food sector. Import restrictions imposed on 156 products, including food items such as rice, grains, pasta, and bakery products, impacted the food security of people, especially in the urban and peri-urban settings.

Similar to the global trend, the impacts of covid-19 on the food security of Sri Lanka are multi-faceted. It has affected all SDG goals to varying degrees contributing to increased poverty, loss of livelihoods, increased unemployment and declined disposable income and purchasing power, especially among the poorest districts and communities. Urban poor is one of the hardest-hit segments of the society as most of them are part of the informal workforce.

Covid-19 has shown how a pandemic in this scale can derail decades of investments and progress achieved in the food security sector. Covid-19 impacts on the food security sector is a complex spiral without a visible end. It is connected with poverty, health and wellbeing, education, and nutrition security, just to name a few; hence an integrated approach is needed if the country is to reinvigorate for a speedy and sustainable recovery to make the 2030 agenda straight. Therefore, the next section of the chapter discusses some possible interventions to pave the path forward for prosperity and splendour, a vision that the Government embarked before covid-19 struck the country. These recommendations were derived from extensive literature reviews and speaking to food security and disaster risk management experts in Sri Lanka and in the region to design

strategies and options for regaining resilience and prosperity in the post-covid development phase.

#### **4. PATH TO SPLENDOUR: REGAINING RESILIENCE AND PROSPERITY**

Although Covid-19 has caused substantial setbacks to Sri Lanka and its socio-economic development, it can also provide an opportunity to reassess vulnerabilities, regain resilience and prosperity through process re-engineering to meet current and future challenges. Some of the possible interventions to achieve food and nutrition security are stated below, which eventually contribute to sustainable development.

##### **4.1. Coherence Approach to Food Security**

Coherence is the key to achieve faster, equitable and sustainable recovery from Covid-19. It has proven beyond doubt that covid-19 is a multi-sectoral issue than just a public health emergency; therefore, solutions also depend on multi-sector, multi-disciplinary approaches. Policies, programs and interventions can be designed in an integrated manner keeping the sustainable development goals at the centre of the policymaking and implementation, while disaster risk reduction, food security, climate change adaption and all other sectoral policies and strategies supporting the SDGs targets. The sustainable development act of 2017 and the sustainable development council of Sri Lanka can play a leading role to establish nexus and synergy across the sectors and actors. Empowerment of the sustainable development council with necessary technical, operational, leadership and tactical skills will decide how quick Sri Lanka can recover from the pandemic.

##### **4.2. Data-driven Food and Nutrition Security**

During Covid-19, it was proven that data and evidence are critical to formulating informed policies and programs. However, reliable and timely data is one of the most

significant development challenges in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, data access is a perennial issue. Data analytics and utilization to make informed and inclusive policies and programs are limited. Nevertheless, Covid-19 has presented all sectors and actors an opportunity to bring this long-lasting issue to order. Integrated data management protocols, decisions support system (DSS), data visualization and food and nutrition intelligence supported by crowdsourcing, big data and artificial intelligence (AI), digitization of markets, demands and supply chains could be potential tools to regain the food and nutrition security in Sri Lanka.

##### **4.3. Re-engineering Market Access**

Access to food is one of the main dimensions of food security. However, Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns showed us that access to food could be disrupted during a disaster. As most of the markets, wholesaler and retailer outlets closed down their operations, people did not have sufficient consumer tools to access vendors. Although some limited online vendors and mobile retail stalls were in operation, especially in the urban and peri-urban areas, it was not sufficient to meet the demand and reach specifically in the rural areas. Capitalizing on the high literacy rate, mobile phone penetration and internet access in Sri Lanka, market access re-engineering is a priority. Learning how consumer markets and the e-commerce industry work in other countries during the pandemic, such as in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka needs to expand and invest in the e-commerce industry allowing farmers, consumers and vendors to interact through e-commerce platform to select their preferred food and nutrition options. Such a system will not only improve food access but also will provide analytics, food intelligence and tools for policymakers and the private sector.

##### **4.4. Self-reliance through Regenerative Agriculture**

Traditionally, Sri Lanka's food security relied on the home gardening system, where nutrition and food diversity were inherent.

However, modern monoculture has dominated most parts of the country in the recent past diminishing food and nutrition diversity. Furthermore, urbanization has reduced the arable land availability for home gardening. Food insecurity was apparent during the Covid-19 lock-down, and communities could not meet their minimum nutritional and food preferences. The Government initiated distributing seeds for home gardening, which created a positive trend for resuming the home gardening system across the country. Capitalizing on the new trend and willingness by the public, Regenerative Agriculture can be a viable option, which promotes organic and ecosystem-based home gardening. It will not only avoid the highly toxic Agro-chemicals usage but also increase the quality of food and nutrition diversity that Sri Lankans cherished and known for centuries.

#### 4.5. Climate-Smart Agriculture

Agriculture is one of the most sensitive sectors to climate change and variability. Hydro-met disasters such as droughts and floods can affect food availability, access, stability and utilization. Food security will adversely be impacted if climate-induced disasters strike during the post-recovery phase. Therefore climate-informed agriculture planning and climate-smart agriculture practices should be scaled up across the country. Developing appropriate strategies supported by actionable programs by the government, private sector, and farming communities, including farmer associations, can be a critical component of reviving food security in Sri Lanka. Forecasts based agriculture through the annual and seasonal climate outlooks, Agri-early warning systems coupled with Agri-extension network and supporting progressive farmers to invest in Climate Smart Agriculture is a timely need in the post-covid-19 recovery phase.

#### 4.6. Alternative Farming Techniques to boost Food Security

Covid-19 revealed the food vulnerability of the urban and peri-urban settings, especially during the lock-down restrictions. Alternative farming techniques such as vertical farming,

hydroponics, and aquaponics, can be vital practices to face food insecurity and demands, especially in a resource-constrained setting like urban settlements (FAO, 2021b). Such practices will be essential to meet the food and nutrition needs and achieve SDG targets in the post-covid-19 recovery phase.

#### 4.7. Social Safety Nets for Food Security

“Social Safety Net” (SSN) can be defined as the private and public mechanisms designed to support individuals and families to maintain minimum consumption standards (Paitoonpong et al., 2008). SSN is critical during economic and disaster shocks for people to meet their daily food and nutritional needs. Some of the SSN programs in Sri Lanka include the Samurdhi program, school feeding program, cash for work program and work for food programs, among others. However, the development and social welfare objectives of such programs should be reviewed to assess the level of impacts on the ground. If planned and programmed well, these SSN programs can be the lifeline for the country’s most impoverished communities to bounce back from Covid-19 and other future shocks. According to the World Bank Group, the SSN programs have supported addressing chronic poverty, shocks and food insecurity, especially in low and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2011). Revitalization of SSN programs in Sri Lanka is a must, going beyond the current system, which has not yielded developmental and social welfare benefits as anticipated.

#### 4.8. Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Food Governance

The government and other relevant stakeholders need to reassess the efficiency and effectiveness of the food governance system. Functional food governance should be able to stimulate the formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of food security and nutrition-related legislation, policies, strategies and programs. The food governance system needs to consider the “right to food” as a fundamental human right. Food governance needs to be people-centric, context-specific and provide workable solutions to

all the parties involved. The efficiency and effectiveness of the food governance will not only support the Covid-19 recovery programs but also accelerate poverty eradication, ending hunger, malnutrition and support achieving SDG 2 (FAO, 2021a).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Covid-19 has caused immeasurable economic and development impacts on the SDGs and the food security sector. Path to achieve SDGs in the 2020-2030 decade will be a daunting task. However, substantial progress is still feasible, provided that the Government designs and implements a measured approach, enabling policies, stimulating strategies and innovative programs to regain resilience and prosperity. Failing to do so will not only delay the recovery phase but also will diminish decades of progress achieved in SDGs and food security. Furthermore, delaying the post-covid-19 recovery will make Sri Lanka further vulnerable to climate change, and climate-induced disasters in the future, and therefore prosperity and splendour may be beyond its reach unless they act wisely and promptly.

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