

LOCAL CONFERENCE OF YOUTH

LCOY SRI LANKA

2026

NATIONAL YOUTH STATEMENT

Prepared by:



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Organized by: Save a Life

Partner Organizations

The LCOY Sri Lanka process was coordinated nationally by Save a Life, working with a partner organization in each province. Each partner organization led local coordination and facilitation for its province's consultation:

Province	Partner Organization
Northern Province	Happy Voice Hub
Eastern Province	We For Us
Western Province	Asia Lanka Social Development Co-operation (ALSDC)
Southern Province	Centre for Youth and Social Development (CEYSD)
Sabaragamuwa Province	Sai Law Advocacy Centre
Central Province	Framework of Community Uplifting & Strengthening (FOCUS)
North Western Province	REEF & Centre for Performing Arts
North Central Province	Institute of Rural Social Development (IRSD)
Uva Province	Uva Shakthi Foundation

Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) Sri Lanka process: a nationwide, youth-led consultation exercise organized by Save a Life to develop a unified National Youth Statement on climate change. Between June and July 2026, Sri Lankan youth took part in nine provincial consultations covering all nine

provinces of the country. These fed into two national consultations: a physical national consultation held in Jaffna on 23 August 2026, and a virtual national consultation held on 24 August 2026. Together, these consultations brought young people from diverse backgrounds across Sri Lanka into a shared process to discuss the climate challenges facing the country and to co-create a set of unified demands, culminating in the National Youth Statement presented in Section 10 of this report.

The provincial consultations surfaced a wide range of localized environmental concerns: from pond and wetland degradation, unregulated sand and gem mining, and mangrove loss, to human-wildlife conflict, poor waste management, and weak enforcement of existing environmental law (detailed in Section 7). From this grassroots evidence base, three central pillars of youth concern and action were carried forward into the National Youth Statement:

- **Climate Justice:** the need for a dedicated financing mechanism that covers the full cost of climate-induced loss and damage in developing countries.
- **Restoration and Conservation:** the urgent need to remove invasive water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) from Sri Lanka's ponds and wetlands, and to protect these ecosystems for the long term.
- **Circular Economy and Waste Management:** the need for every local government authority to adopt a strategic electronic waste (e-waste) management plan, paired with standardized charging ports to reduce e-waste generation.

This report documents the methodology, findings, and demands arising from this process, and sets out recommendations for national and local government, development partners, and the private sector.

About LCOY and This Report

The Conference of Youth (COY) is the official youth event preceding each United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP), organized by YOUNGO, the official youth constituency of the UNFCCC. Local Conferences of Youth (LCOYs) are nationally or regionally organized events held in the lead-up to the global COY, giving young people in a given country the opportunity to discuss climate priorities, build capacity, and develop a National Youth Statement that reflects local realities and demands. This year's process feeds into COP31, to be held in Antalya, Türkiye, from 9 to 20 November 2026.

LCOY Sri Lanka was organized to ensure that the voices of youth from every province, not only those able to attend a single national event, were reflected in Sri Lanka's youth

climate advocacy. To achieve this, the process was designed in two phases: a decentralized provincial consultation phase, followed by a consolidating national consultation phase (physical and virtual).

LCOY Sri Lanka was organized by Save a Life, with the support of a partner organization in each province.

Methodology

Phase 1: Provincial Consultations

Nine (9) provincial consultations were conducted, one in each of Sri Lanka's nine provinces (Western, Central, Southern, Northern, Eastern, North Western, North Central, Uva, and Sabaragamuwa), held over June and July 2026.

Each provincial consultation used a participatory format combining plenary discussion, small-group breakout sessions, and facilitated brainstorming, allowing participants to raise province-specific climate and environmental concerns and priorities. Outputs from each provincial consultation fed directly into the agenda of the national consultations and are set out in full in Section 7.

Phase 2: National Consultations

Two national consultations were held to consolidate provincial input into a single National Youth Statement:

- **23rd National Consultation (Physical):** held in person in Jaffna on 23 August 2026, representing all nine provinces.
- **24th National Consultation (Virtual):** held online on 24 August 2026, enabling broader participation from youth unable to attend in person in Jaffna.

Across both national consultations, delegates reviewed the consolidated findings from the provincial phase, debated priorities, and negotiated the final wording of the National Youth Statement through working groups organized around three thematic pillars: Climate Justice; Restoration and Conservation; and Circular Economy (Waste Management).

Provincial Consultations Overview

All nine provincial consultations were held in June and July 2026. Full findings for each province are set out in Section 7.

Province	Date	Key Issues Raised
Western Province	June–July 2026	Solid waste management (a major issue driven by high urban population density and the concentration of activities in the national capital); water pollution
Central Province	June–July 2026	Unpredictable rainfall; forest fires; rising temperatures; tree, mangrove and wetland loss; coastal and soil erosion; eutrophication; poor waste management; illegal gem mining
Southern Province	June–July 2026	River sand mining; illegal tree cutting; coastal plastic pollution; poor waste management; human–wildlife conflict
Northern Province	23 July 2026	Pond catchment loss due to quarrying/mining (Vavuniya, Mannar); mangrove & palmyra loss; coastal erosion; traffic-related air pollution (Jaffna)
Eastern Province	June–July 2026	Pond neglect; soil erosion; sand mining; mangrove loss; groundwater pollution; human–elephant conflict; poor solid waste management
North Western Province	June–July 2026	Waste & wastewater management; mangrove loss; seawater intrusion; flooding & drought; air pollution from cement factory; impacts of the Norochcholai power plant; mining-related damage to spring (Kurunegala)
North Central Province	June–July 2026	Human–elephant conflict (Anuradhapura & Wilpattu); ineffective and poorly maintained mitigation measures
Uva Province	June–July 2026	Landslide–drought cycle (Badulla); forest fires; plantation-driven soil erosion
Sabaragamuwa Province	June–July 2026	Soil erosion; deforestation for plantations; agrochemical runoff; poor solid waste management; poor air quality; weak environmental law enforcement (Kegalle)

Detailed Provincial Findings

This section presents the issues raised by youth delegates at each provincial consultation. These localized findings, together with the pattern of concerns that recurred across provinces, directly informed the three thematic pillars and the National Youth Statement set out in Sections 9 and 10.

Western Province

- Poor solid waste management: identified as a major issue, driven by the province's high urban population and the presence of Colombo, Sri Lanka's commercial capital.
- Water pollution: caused by untreated sewage discharge, industrial effluents, and solid waste dumped into rivers and canals, degrading water quality and posing risks to public health. Recommended: stronger wastewater treatment standards, regular water-quality monitoring, and stricter enforcement against illegal discharge into waterways.

Central Province

- Unpredictable rainfall: driven by climate variability, shifting monsoon patterns, deforestation, and degradation of wetlands; increasing flood, drought, and flash-flood risk. Recommended: climate-resilient agriculture, community rainfall monitoring, early-warning systems, rainwater harvesting.
- Forest destruction due to human-induced fires from agricultural and residential clearing, waste burning, and dry-season land preparation, leading to habitat loss, increased carbon emissions, soil erosion, and landslide risk. Recommended measures: community-based fire prevention, awareness programmes, and safer land-clearing practices.
- Rising temperatures and heat-related health impacts, particularly affecting children, elderly people, and outdoor workers. Recommended measures: heat-health awareness, shaded public spaces, tree planting, and safe drinking water access.
- Tree removal for residential development both with and without permits, reducing vegetation cover, groundwater recharge, and biodiversity. Recommended measures: stronger land-use planning, environmental assessments, compensatory planting.

- Mangrove destruction: caused by land conversion, construction, and aquaculture, leading to increased coastal erosion and loss of fisheries habitat. Recommended measures: mangrove restoration and community-based protection.
- Coastal erosion: driven by sea-level rise, storms, and the loss of mangrove/coastal vegetation buffers. Recommended: restoration of coastal buffers and restrictions on development in erosion-prone areas.
- Soil erosion: caused by deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, and construction, resulting in reduced soil fertility and sedimentation of waterways. Recommended: soil conservation, contour planting, agroforestry.
- Eutrophication and odour: caused by wastewater discharge, agricultural runoff, and excessive fertilizer use, resulting in algal blooms, loss of aquatic life, and public-health concerns. Recommended: improved wastewater treatment and better control of fertilizer and pollution sources.
- Poor waste management: open burning, inadequate waste collection, and dumping into waterways, contributing to pollution and flooding. Recommended: source segregation, composting, recycling, and reduction of single-use plastics.
- Illegal gem mining: conducted without environmental controls, causing soil erosion, land degradation, and river sedimentation. Recommended: stronger monitoring and enforcement, along with site rehabilitation.
- Wetland destruction: caused by development, land-filling, and drainage, increasing flood risk and reducing groundwater recharge. Recommended: mapping and protection of wetlands, and restoration of degraded sites.

Delegates noted that these challenges are closely interconnected and called for a shift from reactive responses towards preventive, participatory, climate-resilient approaches to environmental management.

Southern Province

- River sand mining: contributing to riverbank erosion, habitat degradation, and changes in river ecosystems.
- Illegal tree cutting in forest areas: contributing to deforestation, habitat loss, and reduced biodiversity.
- Coastal plastic pollution: accumulation of plastic waste along coastal areas, affecting marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods.

- Poor solid waste management: inadequate waste collection, disposal, and recycling, contributing to environmental pollution.
- Human–wildlife conflict: increasing pressure on communities and wildlife due to habitat loss and competition for resources.

Northern Province

- Pond catchment loss due to quarrying, gravel extraction, and sand mining (Vavuniya, Mannar): reduced or, in some cases, completely stopped natural inflow to village ponds relied on for domestic, agricultural, and livestock use; several ponds have closed entirely, and shrunken pond boundaries now cause overflow flooding into nearby residential areas during rainfall. Unprotected quarry pits left behind by mining have caused fatal incidents involving people and animals.
- Loss of natural ponds and unmanaged waste disposal (Mannar): ponds have been closed off and built over, permanently removing them as water sources and drainage points; plastic waste is burned near remaining ponds and other waste is disposed of without management.
- Mangrove and palmyra loss (Mannar): palmyra trees are being cleared for corporate land allocation, while sand mining and coastal erosion are accelerating seawater intrusion; farmland is being converted to forest reserve, displacing farming communities.
- Sand mining and land degradation (Mullaitivu): sand mining in forest areas is contributing to land and coastal degradation.
- Traffic-related air pollution (Jaffna): chronic traffic congestion is driving increased fuel consumption, higher greenhouse gas emissions, air quality degradation, and noise pollution.
- Delayed infrastructure mitigation: an approved bund-mitigation measure in Vavuniya and a higher tank bund approved under the Malwattu Oya project in Mannar have both remained unimplemented for around four years.

Eastern Province

- Pond degradation and inadequate maintenance.
- Soil erosion and land degradation: recommended response: tree planting and community awareness programmes.
- Unregulated sand mining and riverine ecosystem degradation.

- Mangrove and wetland degradation: driven by coastal development and altered waterflow.
- Groundwater contamination: from agricultural fertilizer runoff and untreated industrial discharge.
- Human–elephant conflict and wildlife-related livelihood impacts.
- Poor solid waste management.

North Western Province

- Inadequate waste and wastewater management: poor waste collection systems and inadequate wastewater management contributing to environmental pollution.
- Mangrove degradation: loss of mangrove ecosystems affecting local fishing communities and coastal livelihoods.
- Seawater intrusion and coastal erosion.
- Frequent flooding and drought: severely affecting agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods.
- Cement factory emissions: air pollution from cement production contributing to deteriorating air quality and respiratory health issues.
- Norochcholai power plant impacts: concerns related to ash waste disposal and potential increases in sea-water temperature in the vicinity of the plant.
- Soil erosion resulting from unsustainable land-use practices and loss of vegetation cover.
- Unregulated tunnel/gem mining (Kurunegala): has damaged natural water springs, caused persistent noise pollution, and created safety risks from unstable or collapsed mine tunnels affecting infrastructure and commuters.

North Central Province

Findings centred on Anuradhapura and Wilpattu:

- Human–elephant conflict driven by encroachment on reserved forest land.
- Existing mitigation measures (electric fencing, awareness campaigns) remain ineffective due to poor maintenance and corruption.
- Delegates cited substandard fence materials, voltage tampering, and bribery of officials as undermining wildlife safety measures.

Uva Province

Findings centred on Badulla District:

- A recurring cycle of landslides during monsoon seasons followed by severe droughts.
- Wild fires linked to hunting and land-clearing, destroying endemic biodiversity.
- Large-scale plantation agriculture driving soil erosion.
- Delegates emphasized community-level education and slow-growth reforestation over short-term fixes.

Sabaragamuwa Province

- Soil erosion: linked to unplanned hillside construction.
- Deforestation: land clearing for tea and rubber plantations.
- Agrochemical contamination: fertilizer and pesticide runoff reaching freshwater bodies.
- Poor solid waste management problems.
- Air pollution related issues.

Cross-Cutting Finding: Weak Enforcement of Environmental Law

A concern raised across multiple provinces was the gap between Sri Lanka's environmental laws and their practical enforcement. In Sabaragamuwa, delegates highlighted unauthorized forest clearing in Kegalle that has continued despite documented evidence and mapping by the Building Research Organization. Delegates linked this pattern to institutional complicity: including within the Police and the Forest Department: describing enforcement in practice as close to non-existent. A similar pattern of delay was raised in the Northern Province, where approved bund-mitigation and tank-rehabilitation works in Vavuniya and Mannar have remained unimplemented for around four years. Delegates called for punitive enforcement of existing environmental law and greater transparency in how violations are investigated and acted upon.

Common Threads Across Provinces

Read together, the provincial consultations point to several concerns that recurred across multiple regions of the country:

- Degradation and loss of ponds and wetlands: raised in the Eastern and Northern Provinces (Vavuniya and Mannar), and reflected nationally in the wetland-destruction findings from Central Province.
- Unregulated sand, gravel, and gem mining: raised in the Eastern, Southern, Northern, North Western (Kurunegala), and Sabaragamuwa consultations, and as illegal gem mining in Central Province.
- Mangrove and coastal ecosystem loss: raised in the Eastern, Central, North Western, and Northern (Mannar) consultations.
- Human–wildlife conflict: raised in the Eastern, Southern, and North Central consultations, most acutely around Anuradhapura and Wilpattu.
- Solid waste management gaps: raised in the Western, Eastern, Southern, North Western, Sabaragamuwa, and Central consultations, most acutely in the high-density urban areas around the capital.
- Weak enforcement of existing environmental law: highlighted through the Kegalle case study and stalled mitigation works in the Northern Province.

These recurring, cross-provincial concerns directly informed the three priority pillars carried forward into the National Youth Statement in Section 10: Climate Justice, Restoration and Conservation, and Circular Economy (Waste Management).

National Consultations

National Consultation I: Physical (23rd)

- Date: 23 August 2026
- Venue: Jaffna
- Format: In-person, full-day consultation, representing all nine provinces
- Key activities: plenary presentation of provincial findings; thematic working groups; first draft of the National Youth Statement

National Consultation II: Virtual (24th)

- Date: 24 August 2026
- Format: Online consultation, enabling broader participation from youth unable to attend in person in Jaffna
- Key activities: review and refinement of the draft statement; final endorsement and adoption of the National Youth Statement

Thematic Findings and Youth Demands

Three thematic pillars emerged consistently across all nine provincial consultations and were carried forward into both national consultations.

Pillar 1: Climate Justice – Financing Loss and Damage

Context

Sri Lanka, like many developing countries, faces disproportionate climate impacts (floods, droughts, landslides, and sea-level rise) despite having contributed minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions. Rising costs of disaster response, rehabilitation, and adaptation are placing an unsustainable burden on national budgets that could otherwise fund development priorities.

Youth Demand

Delegates called for the establishment and full operationalization of a dedicated climate finance mechanism (building on and going beyond the UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund) that comprehensively covers all expenditure arising from climate-induced damage in developing countries, including emergency response,

reconstruction, livelihood restoration, and long-term adaptation costs. Youth stressed that this funding must be:

- Predictable and adequately capitalized by historically high-emitting nations, consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- Directly accessible to affected communities and local governments, not only national treasuries.
- Additional to existing development assistance, not a re-labelling of it.

Recommended Actions

- Sri Lanka's negotiating delegation to advocate for full capitalization and simplified access modalities for the Loss and Damage Fund at upcoming COP negotiations.
- National government to establish a domestic climate damage tracking and claims mechanism to quantify and channel international finance to affected communities.
- Ring-fenced allocation in the national budget for climate loss and damage response.

Target Stakeholders: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Finance, Sri Lanka's UNFCCC negotiating team, international donor community.

Pillar 2: Restoration and Conservation – Protecting Sri Lanka's Wetlands from Invasive Species

Context

Ponds, tanks (wewa), marshes, and other freshwater wetlands are central to Sri Lanka's ecology, agriculture, and cultural heritage. Many of these water bodies are increasingly choked by invasive water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), which depletes oxygen levels, blocks sunlight, kills fish and other aquatic life, obstructs irrigation and drinking-water supply, and increases breeding grounds for disease vectors.

Youth Demand

Delegates called for a coordinated national program to remove invasive water hyacinth and other invasive aquatic plants from Sri Lanka's ponds and wetlands, paired with long-term protective and preventive measures to stop reinfestation and to conserve these ecosystems.

Recommended Actions

- A national inventory and mapping exercise to identify ponds and wetlands most affected by invasive hyacinth.
- Regular, resourced clean-up and removal programs, engaging youth and community volunteers alongside local government and the Department of Wildlife Conservation / Central Environmental Authority.
- Research into and deployment of sustainable reuse of removed biomass (e.g., composting, biogas, handicrafts) to help make removal programs self-sustaining.
- Preventive regulation on the ornamental plant trade to reduce future invasive species introductions.
- Long-term wetland conservation and restoration plans integrated into local government development planning.

Target Stakeholders: Ministry of Environment, Central Environmental Authority, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Department of Irrigation, Local Government Authorities, community-based organizations.

Pillar 3: Circular Economy and Waste Management – Electronic Waste and Standardized Charging

Context

Sri Lanka's growing electronics consumption is generating rising volumes of electronic waste (e-waste), much of which is currently unmanaged, improperly disposed of, or informally processed, creating environmental and public health hazards from materials such as lead, mercury, and cadmium. At the same time, the proliferation of device-specific, non-interchangeable charging cables and adapters is accelerating unnecessary e-waste generation.

Youth Demand

Delegates called on all local government authorities in Sri Lanka to develop and implement a strategic e-waste management plan, alongside public awareness campaigns. They further called for the adoption of a national standardized charging port requirement, in line with emerging international standards such as USB-C, to reduce redundant chargers and cables, promote device interoperability, and minimize avoidable e-waste.

Recommended Actions

- Mandate that every local government authority (Pradeshiya Sabha, Urban Council, Municipal Council) develop and publish a local e-waste management strategy, including designated e-waste collection points.
- Introduce national policy requiring standardized charging ports for new electronic devices sold in Sri Lanka.
- Establish extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes requiring electronics manufacturers and importers to fund collection and recycling.
- Run public awareness campaigns on proper e-waste disposal and the risks of informal e-waste processing.
- Support formal e-waste recycling infrastructure and the safe integration of the informal waste sector into formal systems.

Target Stakeholders: *Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Local Government, Central Environmental Authority, Local Government Authorities, Sri Lanka Standards Institution, electronics industry.*

National Youth Statement

“Our Future Is Not Negotiable”

We, the youth delegates of the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) Sri Lanka, representing young people from all nine provinces of Sri Lanka, having consulted through nine provincial consultations held in June and July 2026 and two national consultations held in Jaffna on 23 August 2026 (physical) and 24 August 2026 (virtual), declare the following:

Sri Lanka is on the front line of the climate crisis. Our communities face intensifying floods, droughts, landslides, and coastal erosion, while our natural ecosystems and the industries that depend on them are under growing strain. As the generation that will live with the consequences of decisions made today, we demand urgent, accountable, and well-resourced action across three priority areas.

1. On Climate Justice

We call on the Government of Sri Lanka and the international community to establish, adequately capitalize and operationalize a dedicated climate finance mechanism for loss and damage that fully addresses the costs of climate-induced impacts in developing countries. This mechanism should provide predictable, timely, accessible and grant-based financing for emergency response, recovery and reconstruction, livelihood restoration, and long-term adaptation and resilience-building. Funding must be directly accessible to affected communities and local organizations, particularly those most vulnerable to climate impacts, and must be additional to existing development assistance and adaptation finance.

2. On Restoration and Conservation

We call on national and local authorities to launch a coordinated, adequately resourced program to remove invasive water hyacinth from Sri Lanka's ponds and wetlands, and to implement long-term measures to protect and conserve these ecosystems for future generations.

3. On Circular Economy and Waste Management

We call on every local government authority in Sri Lanka to adopt a strategic electronic waste management plan, and on the national government to mandate standardized

charging ports for electronic devices, in order to reduce the growing volume of electronic waste in our country.

We present this statement to the Government of Sri Lanka, to Sri Lanka's delegation to COP, and to the global youth climate movement. We commit to holding our leaders accountable to these demands. Our future is not negotiable.

Adopted by consensus at the LCOY Sri Lanka National Consultations, Jaffna, 23–24 August 2026.

Recommendations and Call to Action

The following table consolidates the recommended actions arising from the three thematic pillars, with suggested responsible stakeholders and indicative timeframes.

Recommendation	Target Stakeholder(s)	Timeframe
Advocate for full capitalization and simplified access to the UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund at COP negotiations.	Ministry of Environment; Sri Lanka UNFCCC negotiating team	Short-term
Establish a domestic climate damage tracking and claims mechanism, with ring-fenced budget allocation.	Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Environment	Medium-term
Conduct a national inventory of ponds and wetlands affected by invasive water hyacinth and other invasive aquatic species.	Central Environmental Authority; Department of Wildlife Conservation	Short-term
Resource and implement regular removal and long-term protection programs for affected water bodies, including sustainable reuse of removed biomass.	Local Government Authorities; Department of Irrigation; community-based organizations	Medium-term
Require every local government authority to develop and publish a strategic e-waste management plan with designated collection points.	Ministry of Local Government; Local Government Authorities	Medium-term

Recommendation	Target Stakeholder(s)	Timeframe
Introduce national policy mandating standardized charging ports for new electronic devices sold in Sri Lanka.	Sri Lanka Standards Institution; Ministry of Industries	Medium-term
Establish extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes for e-waste collection and recycling.	Central Environmental Authority; electronics industry	Long-term
Strengthen enforcement of existing environmental protection laws, including independent oversight of Police and Forest Department action on reported violations (e.g. unauthorized clearing in Kegalle).	Ministry of Environment; Attorney General's Department; Forest Department; Sri Lanka Police	Short-term
Regulation and monitoring of sand, gravel, and gem mining in river and water-catchment areas, with mandatory rehabilitation of abandoned mining pits.	Geological Survey and Mines Bureau; Central Environmental Authority; Local Government Authorities	Medium-term
Invest in properly maintained human–elephant and human–wildlife conflict mitigation infrastructure, with transparent procurement and community oversight.	Department of Wildlife Conservation; Ministry of Environment	Medium-term

Way Forward

Submission and Advocacy Pathway

- Submit this National Youth Statement to relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Present the statement at the global Conference of Youth (COY) ahead of COP31, to be held in Antalya, Türkiye, from 9 to 20 November 2026.
- Engage Sri Lanka's official COP negotiating delegation to reflect youth priorities in national positions.
- Share the statement with media, civil society, and development partners to build broader public support.

Monitoring and Accountability

- Establish a youth monitoring group to track government responses and progress against each recommendation.
- Publish a progress review six months after submission.
- Feed outcomes and lessons learned into the next LCOY Sri Lanka cycle.