



Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-supported Childcare in Sri Lanka

Case Study

Unilever Sri Lanka Limited

Fast-moving consumer goods



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ABOUT IFC'S WOMEN IN WORK PROGRAM IN SRI LANKA

The IFC-led Women in Work (WiW) Program, a four-year program valued at US\$11.5mn and funded by the Australian Government, launched in April 2017.¹ It is IFC's largest, standalone country-based gender program, working with private sector companies to close gender gaps while improving business performance. The program, which benefits from multisector program design and works closely with the World Bank on research, tackles women's access to jobs and assets at the same time. It aims to increase women's workforce participation in Sri Lanka's private sector, create more and better jobs for women, and has the potential to increase company profits and drive overall economic growth. WiW also contributes to the vision of the Government of Sri Lanka where all citizens can achieve higher incomes and better standards of living by 2025.²

Access to quality childcare services is a key constraint on women's labor force participation. Following IFC's global Tackling Childcare initiative, this report highlights Sri Lanka-specific data, experiences and resources on employer-supported childcare and may not only be relevant to individual businesses but can also serve as a resource for special economic zones, Information Technology (IT) parks and other consortium models. This case study is one of 10 featured in the report: *"Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-supported Childcare in Sri Lanka"*, available at www.ifc.org/tacklingchildcare.

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Unilever Sri Lanka Limited

Diversity: a Commitment at the Heart of Unilever's Business



Unilever Sri Lanka (USL) is one of the biggest Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies in Sri Lanka, with 29 market leading brands in categories such as Home Care, Personal Care and Foods. Established in 1938 with brands such as Sunlight, Lux and Pears, today Unilever Sri Lanka manufactures 95 percent of its products locally. Building a gender-balanced organization with an inclusive work culture is a strategic priority for Unilever as it believes that a more diverse and inclusive workforce can boost financial performance, reputation, innovation, and staff motivation. Globally over 70 percent of the people who buy Unilever products are women. For Unilever (including in Sri Lanka), mirroring the consumer base in the workforce supports the company in anticipating consumers' needs.

Unilever Sri Lanka is committed to help employees find their own purpose in life and embraces the diversity in every individual which in turn drives superior engagement and performance of employees. The performance driven culture is reflected in a 100 percent maternity return rate. Women who return from 6 months of maternity leave are provided with equal opportunities for job expansions, promotions, or job rotations.

To reach its global ambitious target of a 50 percent gender balanced senior management workforce by 2020, Unilever has put in place a pro-active gender diversity program that includes accountability, clear targets and global scorecards for all regions; mentoring programs; women's networks; recruitment strategies with special focus on management trainees and mid-career recruits. Globally, Unilever offers a range of policies to support employees' work-life needs, including 6 months maternity leave, 21-days paternity leave, flexible working, and agile working programs among others. Unilever has introduced a Maternity and Paternity Support (MAPS) online system to facilitate caring transitions for employees and their managers.



Employee Profile:

- Unilever Sri Lanka employs over 400 employees out of whom 100 (or 25 percent) are women
- 38 percent of women are Senior Managers and above
- 60 percent of 2018 new hires are women - there is a policy in place to have a balanced slate in recruitment by having an equal number of male and female candidates for new positions
- Unilever Sri Lanka's first ever woman factory manager was appointed to Unilever Agarapathana Tea Factory in 2018

Unilever Sri Lanka supports working parents through:

- 6 months paid maternity leave
- 3 weeks paid paternity leave
- Adoption leave: same maternity and paternity leave benefits are applicable
- Fully fledged crèche with CCTV facility enabling parents to monitor their children from their work stations
- Agile working: working from home, flexible work timings, working agile from another location/country etc.
- Maternity and paternity support (MAPS) an online tool that facilitates caring transitions for employees and their managers
- Lounge facility for women staff in the factory
- Specially designed comfortable uniforms and shoes for women and men factory staff
- Pregnant women who are performing a sales job in the field are given office-based jobs for their comfort
- The management is committed to a gender balanced senior management by 2020

Key business impacts of offering childcare support:

- Childcare is an important building block for improving gender diversity and the advancement of women into leadership positions
- Savings of hiring and onboarding costs as a result of higher maternity return rates (close to 100 percent) especially for employees who are responsible for large portfolios and client relations
- #1 Employer of Choice (Nielsen) for six consecutive years and winner of "Best Private Sector Organization for Gender Equality" by Sri Lanka's Women in Management in 2015

The employer-supported onsite crèche at Unilever's head office in Colombo was named "USL Pears Happy Baby Tiny Tots Centre". In establishing the crèche, Unilever partnered with their very own brand Pears, which is the oldest baby care brand in Sri Lanka. The crèche was established in 2014 and extends its childcare services to both children of mothers and fathers. It is custom built with the best in class facility and aesthetics which can accommodate up to 25 children from the age group of 6 months to 7 years. The facility provides an in-house doctor and nurse, a play area and lactation room. Safety is a part of the DNA of Unilever; mock evacuation drills are conducted with children. A closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera monitors the crèche, and live stream is accessible to all parents via their workstations. There is a pre-school program and many engaging activities are conducted on a regular basis. Extracurricular activities include elocution, painting, junior chef every Thursdays, arts and crafts, celebrations of all festivals etc.

"Apart from providing the best in class facility, the success factor of the Crèche is to have a passionate vendor/supervisor who not only needs to take care of the children with love and care, but who also builds a good relationship with the parents."

Nadee Hemachandra, Head of Workplace Services, Unilever Sri Lanka Limited

The crèche is outsourced to a third party, which gives the parents the option to use the crèche outside of Unilever premises over weekends at a special rate. It is open from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm for the convenience of all parents to attend to their work commitments. Parents also have the option of sharing the night meal with their children which can be fed before the pick-up of the child. There are two shifts provided by the third-party service provider and the team consists of a head mistress, teachers and care givers. The crèche is supported by a Parents Committee which provides inputs for improvements of the crèche and governance.

'Pears Safe Hands' commitment to maternal and child health facilities in the country

In addition to its employer-supported childcare, Unilever Sri Lanka also promotes children's well-being as part of its brands with purpose program. For example, Unilever's 'Pears Safe Hands Fund' has renovated maternity, childcare wards and lactation management centers in 19 hospitals across the country and is committed to continue this until this facility is available with adequate standards in every government hospital in the country.

Unilever Sri Lanka embraces celebrations of diversity through various campaigns including celebrating motherhood, celebrating fatherhood, International Women's Day, Children's Day etc. Unilever has been the #1 Employer of Choice (Nielsen) for six consecutive years. Unilever won the "Best Private Sector Organization for Gender Equality" by Sri Lanka's Women in Management in 2015.

Empowering Rural Women under Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan Pillar

Currently in its 15th year, Project Saubhagya is Unilever Sri Lanka's key initiative under its Unilever Sustainable Living Plan pillar which provides 'opportunities for women' and has emerged as a symbol of women's empowerment in the country's rural areas. This initiative partners with rural women and gives them the opportunity to become direct-to-home ambassadors of Unilever brands thereby empowering them to become entrepreneurs and being guaranteed a regular and sustainable income. Initiated in 2003 with 5 brave women entrepreneurs who took the first step towards economic inclusion, the program now engages over 5,000 Saubhagya (prosperity) entrepreneurs. There is an ambition to grow the network of women entrepreneurs to 14,000, representing the 14,000 Grama Niladari (village offices) divisions of Sri Lanka. Going beyond, Unilever Sri Lanka also assists these women entrepreneurs with the education of their children through the Saubhagya Scholarships Program. Unilever Sri Lanka recognizes the top 100 performers of Project Saubhagya at its annual Diriya Pranama Awards.

Source: Daily FT. Unilever Sri Lanka's 'Gamata Api' initiative empowers rural communities (October 29, 2016) and 'Saubhagya marks 15 years of empowering rural women' (June 12, 2018)



1 IFC. 2017. Government of Australia Partner to Support More and Better Jobs for Women in Sri Lanka.
 2 Office of the Prime Minister. 2017. Vision 2025. A Country Enriched. See page 26.

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