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Clean Energy Learning to Earning Pathways for Youth in Sri Lanka

Snapshot of Education Opportunities in Solar and Wind

Summary

The Opportunity:

Sri Lanka is a country rich in renewable energy resources. The Government of Sri Lanka has committed to filling 70% of its energy demands with renewable energy by 2030, (Reuters, 2024) and a 2017 study from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) suggests that by 2050 the country could meet its entire energy demand with renewables (ADB, 2017). This political commitment provides an opportunity for the country to substantially build up its clean energy sector with targeted investments in areas that are key to sector development, such as education and training.

The Challenge:

To meet Sri Lanka's renewable energy goals in the next few decades, significant developments will be needed in the clean energy sector, especially in the nascent wind and solar sectors. This includes building up the nation's wind and solar energy workforces, which will require an education and training ecosystem that can prepare qualified candidates for jobs in these fields. Investigating the availability of post-secondary education opportunities in Sri Lanka that can provide pathways to jobs in wind and solar, Unbounded Associates and Chemonics International found that less than half of the courses of study that contribute to robust wind and solar sectors are offered in the country, with the large majority concentrated in the Western Province. Filling this education and training gap will be critical for Sri Lanka to reach its clean energy goals.

A Targeted Solution:

Invigorating Sri Lanka's education and training landscape with a wider range of learning-to-earning pathways in wind and solar will require increasing the diversity of fields of study offered by post-secondary institutions and ensuring the accessibility of these learning opportunities across the country. The European Union (EU)-led Training Hub for Renewable Energy Technologies in Sri Lanka – THREE LANKA project provides an example of a program that is helping address Sri Lanka's education and training gaps, supporting the development of a qualified renewable energy workforce through accredited training courses and institutional partnerships. While this study focuses on the availability of post-secondary education and training opportunities in wind and solar, attention should also be given to understanding the current state of secondary education in Sri Lanka, and the enabling factors, as well as structural and normative barriers, that might encourage or prevent, respectively, youth from entering clean energy education pathways.

Recommendations from the Research:

1. **Increase and diversify** the fields of study offered by post-secondary education and training institutions that lead to diverse jobs in the wind and solar sectors.
2. **Ensure that the availability and accessibility of renewable energy education and training opportunities** are socially and geographically equitable.
3. **Support young people's educational transitions** from lower secondary to additional schooling to promote more uptake of post-secondary education and training pathways in wind, solar, and other renewables.
4. **Conduct additional research to inform policy and practice** regarding the availability and accessibility of renewable energy learning-to-earning pathways.

Cover Photo: USAID/Sri Lanka Supporting Opportunities for Livelihoods Development and USAID/Sri Lanka Energy Program

Background to Sri Lanka's Renewable Energy Sector

The island of Sri Lanka, located off the southeastern coast of India, has a population of over 22 million people, virtually all of whom have access to electricity (World Bank 2022, 2021).

The Government of Sri Lanka has committed to filling 70% of its energy demands with renewable energy by 2030 (Reuters, 2024), which will require substantial advancements in the sector to increase clean energy utilization. A 2017 study from the UNDP and ADB suggests that the country could meet its entire energy demand with renewables by 2050 if the necessary transitions are made from fossil fuels to clean energy (ADB, 2017), which currently accounts for a little over one-third of the country's total energy supply (IRENA, 2023).

Photo Credit: USAID Sri Lanka Energy Program

BOX 1

Sri Lanka's Renewable Energy Sector at a Glance

Installed Re-Capacity

Consists primarily of hydropower (65% of total capacity), solar (25% of total capacity), and wind (9% of total capacity)

Re-Utilization

Despite significant clean energy generation potential in the country, as of 2021, Sri Lanka was utilizing only 45% of their potential hydropower capacity, 34% of their potential wind capacity, and 12% of their potential solar capacity.

Re-Production Shares

In 2020, the renewable energy supply (which accounted for 39% of total energy supply) consisted of only 1% wind and 1% solar, compared to 81% bioenergy and 16% hydropower

Source: IRENA, 2023

The wind and solar renewable energy sectors need to be developed rapidly for Sri Lanka to achieve its ambitious clean energy goals by 2050. The country has already demonstrated its ability to increase wind and solar energy production, as wind energy generation increased by 11.9% between 2021 and 2023 and solar energy generation increased by 36% between 2021 and 2022 (Windforce, 2023). As of June 2022, the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) had also reported 319 renewable energy projects commissioned in the country (up from 273 projects in 2021), including 17 wind and 75 solar projects.

Increasing wind and solar energy generation in Sri Lanka requires commensurate increases in the workforce for both sectors, which in turn necessitates a robust education and training

ecosystem to prepare qualified candidates for jobs in these fields. To meet Sri Lanka's ambitious energy goals in the coming decades, targeted interventions will be needed to ensure that Sri Lankans have access to quality education and training opportunities in fields of study associated with wind and solar. The following section introduces a preliminary scan undertaken by Unbounded Associates and Chemonics International to better understand the availability of education and training opportunities in Sri Lanka that support careers in these two fields, which can inform policy, practice, and future research on education coverage and access in a clean energy transition.

Exploring the Renewable Energy Education and Training Landscape in Sri Lanka

Introduction to the Research

Unbounded Associates and Chemonics International undertook a scan of wind and solar learning-to-earning pathways to better understand Sri Lanka's renewable energy education and training landscape.

Building from the methodology developed in the New Green Learning Agenda research project, this research maps courses of study offered by a small sample of post-secondary education and training institutions that are associated with jobs in the wind and solar industry value chains.
The scan from this research indicate that the sampled Sri Lankan post-secondary institutions currently offer fewer learning pathways to wind and solar jobs than the database of pathways used as a comparison (see Box 2: Note on Research Methodology), and that these institutions would benefit from expanding their fields of study offered to provide more diverse pathways to jobs across both sectors' value chains. Moreover, geospatial mapping of the wind and solar learning opportunities offered by the institutions sampled shows a dense concentration of pathways in

Sri Lanka's most populous Western Province, which, while expected due to the concentration of population and institutions, indicates that additional research and attention should be given to studying the availability of renewable energy education and training opportunities across the country, especially in peri-urban, rural, and remote areas. Research should also be conducted to better understand additional push and pull factors that contribute to the training, employment, and retention of skilled workers in the clean energy sector — for example, understanding social norms and young people's motivations for, and perceptions of pursuing clean energy fields of study in higher education (push factors), and institutional and market realities, such as the cost/benefit ratios of education and training for individuals and labor market demands (pull factors).

BOX 2

Note on Research Methodology

To calculate and map the green learning opportunities available in Sri Lanka for jobs in the wind and solar sectors, this paper maps the fields of study offered by a sample of 21 (out of 79 institutions and programs initially identified) post-secondary education and training institutions in the country against those associated with jobs across the value chain in the wind and solar sectors.

To calculate the potential universe of green learning-to-earning pathways in the wind and solar sectors, on the opportunities are compared with occupational and educational data available from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The BLS database consists of 420 degree- and/or certificate-awarding fields of study associated with 947 green learning-to-earning pathways that lead to 129 jobs across the wind and solar industry value chains. While the BLS data is derived from the US labor market and the resulting green learning-to-earning pathways mapping may not be indicative of the wind and solar sectors in Sri Lanka, the mapping nonetheless provides a useful and comprehensive benchmark for analyzing gaps in Sri Lanka's renewable energy education and training landscape, especially in the absence of an equivalent Sri Lanka-specific wind and solar occupational database.

The selected Sri Lankan institutions (listed below) were chosen purposefully, giving preference to those institutions and programs that are members of the Women in Power Sector Professional Network (WePOWER) Sri Lanka Network (See Box 3 for more information).

Annex A includes a green learning opportunity snapshot database for Sri Lanka's wind and solar sectors mapped from each institution's departmental and/or program websites to identify whether they offered any of the potential degree- and/or certificate-awarding fields of study associated with the green learning-to-earning pathways that lead to jobs across the wind and solar industry value chains, according to the BLS database. These include 89 wind-related jobs across the value chains of project development; component manufacturing; construction; operations; and education, training and research, as defined by the US Department of Energy (DOE)[1] and 40 solar-related jobs across the value chains of manufacturing, systems design, project management, and installation and operations; as defined by the Interstate Renewable Energy Council.[2]

FIGURE 1.

Linking fields of study with learning to earning pathways and jobs in wind and solar

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1 — https://www.energy.gov/eere/wind/wind-career-map
2 — https://www.irecsolarcareermap.org/

BOX 2 NOTE ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sri Lankan Institutions Included in the Analysis

Ceylon Electricity Board	Construction Industry Development Authority	International College of Business and Technology Campus
Colombo International Nautical and Engineering College (private) Limited	Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka (IESL) College of Engineering	Lanka Electricity Company Training Centre
Institute of Engineering Technology	National Institute of Business Management	National School of Business Management Limited
National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority	Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka	South Eastern University of Sri Lanka
Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology	University of Jaffna
Sri Lanka Energy Manager Association	University of Peradeniya	University of Ruhuna
University of Moratuwa	Wayamba University of Sri Lanka	University of Sri Jayawardhanapura

Member of Sri Lanka WePOWER network
Member of South Asia WePOWER network
Degree/certificate awarding institution
Private institution

NOTE ON STUDY SAMPLE LIMITATIONS:

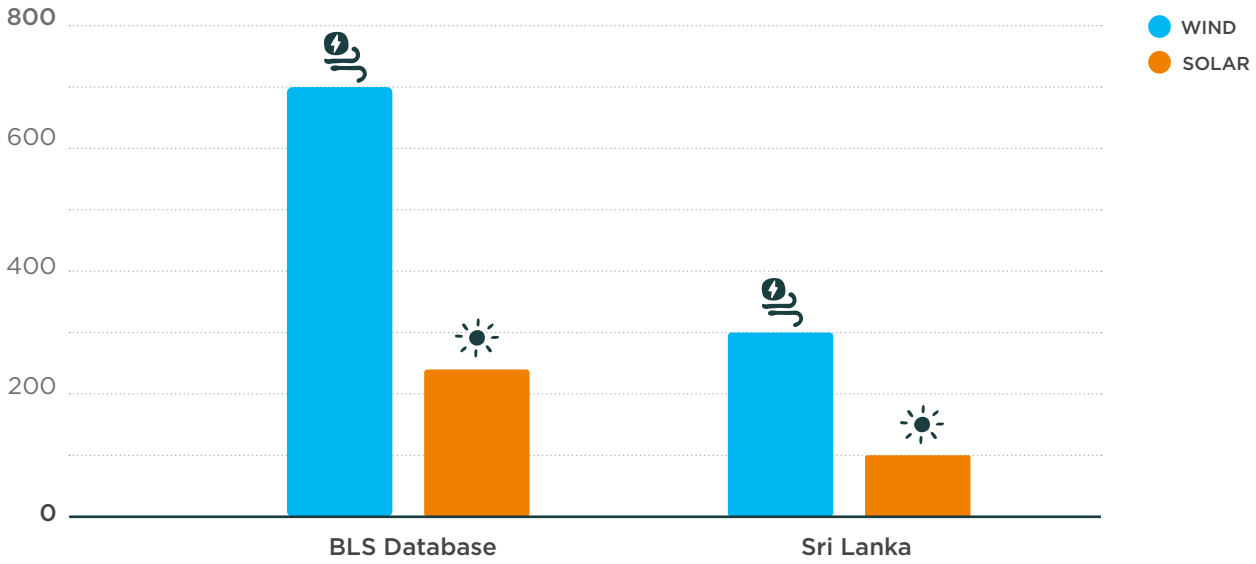
While the analysis of the 21 institutions sampled for this research provides an indication of what Sri Lanka's education and training landscape is like in terms of providing pathways to wind and solar jobs, it should be noted that there are hundreds of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in the country that this research does not cover, and therefore additional studies should be conducted that include these institutions to better understand what their offerings are in regards to renewable energy workforce development (See the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka's VTA Map, and UNESCO and UNEVOC's Sri Lanka TVET Profile).

What We Found: Need for More Diverse Learning-to-Earning Pathways across Fields of Study, Value Chains, and Geographic Locations

The 21 Sri Lankan education and training institutions included in the sample were found to offer less than half of the courses of study that contribute to a robust wind and solar sector, according to the BLS database (see Figure 1).

While the BLS database includes 947 learning-to-earning pathways in the wind and solar sectors, the institutions sampled offer 402 pathways, including 305 pathways for jobs in the wind sector (43% of total pathways for the wind sector, according to BLS), and 97 pathways for jobs in the solar sector (40% of total pathways for the solar sector according to BLS). This implies that Sri Lanka should increase the diversity of fields of study offered by its post-secondary institutions to increase the number of learning-to-earning pathways that support greater workforce development for the wind and solar sectors to accelerate a clean energy transition.

FIGURE 1.
Green learning-earning pathways for jobs in the wind and solar sector



BOX 3

Equity in education and training: Evidence from the WePOWER network for Sri Lanka's renewable energy sector

The South Asia WePOWER network, a professional network for women in the energy and power sector launched by the World Bank and partners, conducted a gender analysis of the country's power sector in 2020 that revealed gender gaps in the education and training landscape.

They found that, among technical and vocational training institutions in the country, women represented only 2.4% of enrollees in National Certificate electrician courses, and only 9.5% of enrollees in construction trades, compared to comprising 85% of enrollees in tailoring. Additionally, the analysis showed that women represented only 22% of engineering faculty

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BOX 3 Equity in education and training: Evidence from the WePOWER network for Sri Lanka's renewable energy sector

across six national universities surveyed, and that, at the time, no initiatives were in place to improve women's representation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs in higher education. Women also represented only a quarter or less of undergraduate engineering students at the same six universities in 2015. These findings point to the need for additional research on women's — as well as other historically marginalized groups — access to and participation in education and training opportunities in Sri Lanka that can lead to jobs in the clean energy sector. In 2023, the World Bank and the ADB launched the Sri Lanka national chapter of WePOWER with support from the USAID Sri Lanka Energy Program, implemented by Chemonics International. The network aims to improve gender equity in the country in terms of STEM education, recruitment, development, retention, and policy and institutional change. This includes holding gender equality and social inclusion trainings and developing an action plan to monitor gender activities.

The need to broaden the fields of study offered by post-secondary education and training institutions to create diverse pathways to wind and solar jobs in Sri Lanka is further illustrated when disaggregating wind and solar career pathways by location in each sector's energy value chain. Figures 2 and 3 below show the distribution of learning pathways offered by the sample institutions across wind and solar value chains, represented as a percentage of the total number of pathways included in the BLS database. Through this analysis, shortages in green learning opportunities are visible across all value chains, with current learning pathways in Sri Lanka representing around 50% or less than the number of opportunities included in the BLS database, except for learning pathways in the systems design value chain for solar jobs (67% of the total pathways listed by BLS). Compared to the BLS database, the institutions we sampled offer the fewest learning pathways in the Education, Training, and Research and Component Manufacturing value chains in the wind sector, and in the Installation and Operations and Manufacturing value chains in the solar sector.

FIGURE 2.

Sri Lanka learning pathways to jobs in wind as a percent of total pathways included in BLS database

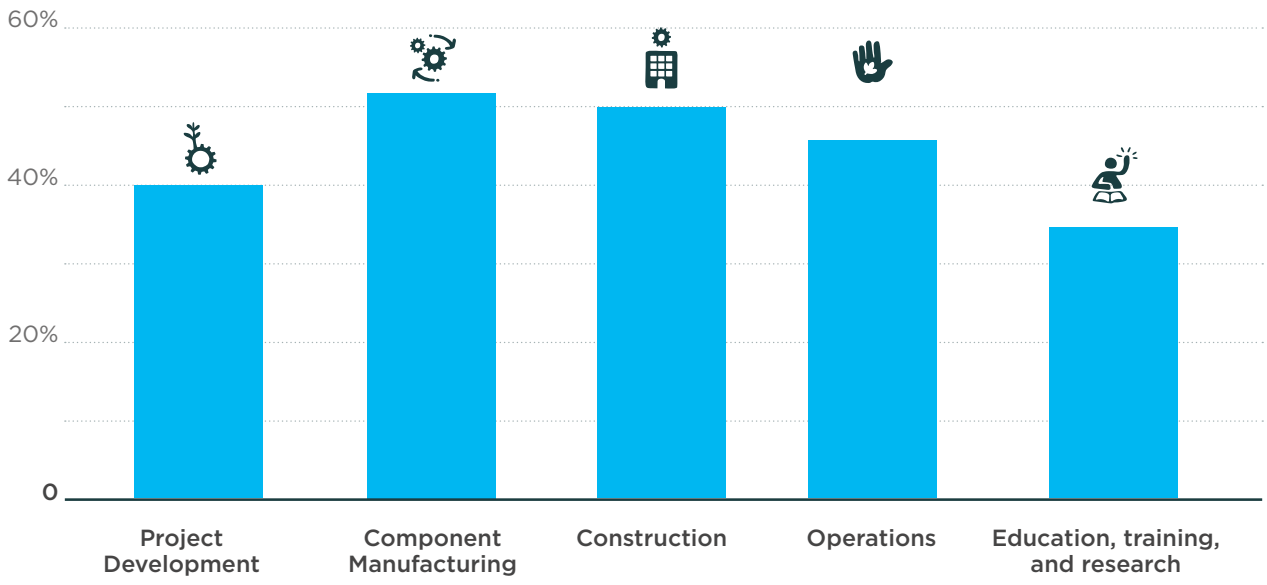
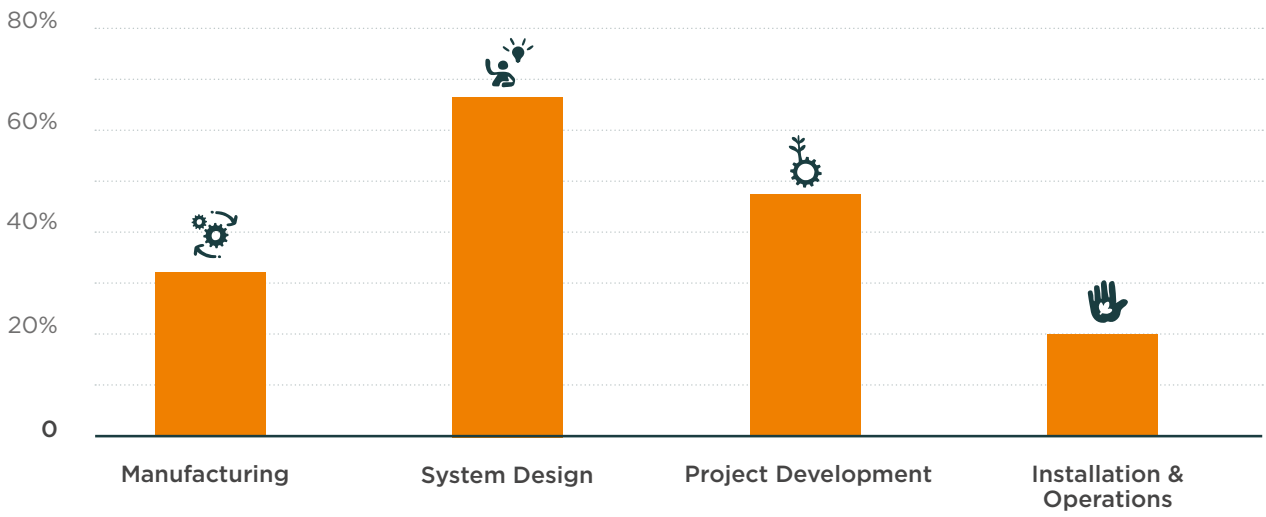


FIGURE 3.

Sri Lanka learning pathways to jobs in solar as a percent of total pathways included in BLS database



BOX 4

Job Opportunities in the Wind and Solar Value Chains

One reason the BLS database was used as a benchmark for determining the robustness of Sri Lanka's wind and solar education and training landscape is because the database includes a highly diverse set of jobs within each sector and value chain. Below are a few examples of jobs included in the BLS database for wind and solar, for each value chain.

WIND SECTOR

Value Chain	Example Jobs
Project Development	Environmental Scientist, Power Marketer, Wind Resource Analyst, Civil Engineer
Component Manufacturing	Transportation Worker, Engineering Manager, Trade Worker, Attorney
Construction	Master Welder, Construction Manager, Civil Engineer, Assembler and Fabricator
Operations	Site/Plant Manager, Meteorological Technician, Power Plant Manager, Asset Manager
Education, Training, and Research	Senior Research Scientist, Professor, Technical Trainer/ Instructor, Analyst/Researcher

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BOX 4 Job Opportunities in the Wind and Solar Value Chains

SOLAR SECTOR

Value Chain	Example Jobs
Manufacturing	Quality Assurance Specialist, Electrical Engineer, Process Control Technician, Process Control Technician
System Design	Software Engineer, Information Technology Specialist, Utility Interconnection Engineer, Structural Engineer
Project Development	Solar Marketing Specialist, Lawyer with Solar Expertise, Electrical Inspector with Solar Expertise, Solar Site Assessor
Installation and Operations	Solar Crew Chief, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Technician with Solar Expertise, Solar Assembler/Basic Installer, Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Installer

FIGURE 4. Geographic distribution of green learning opportunities in Sri Lanka for wind and solar jobs

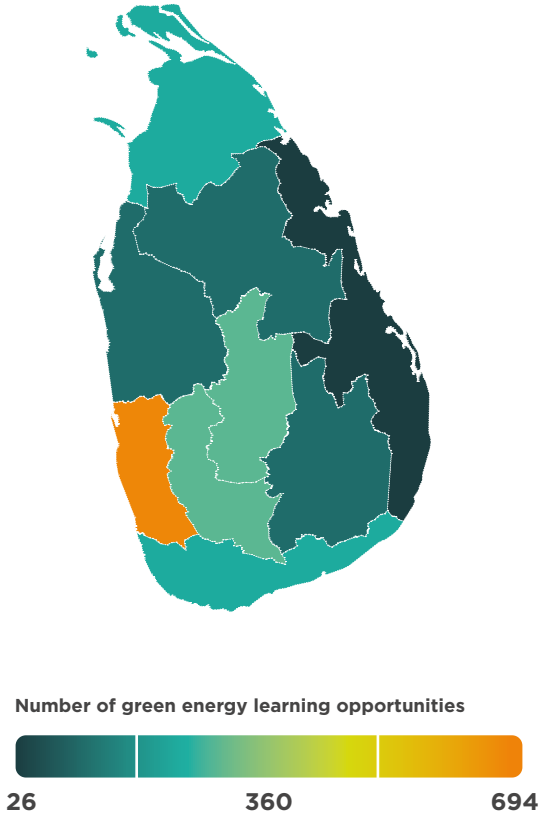
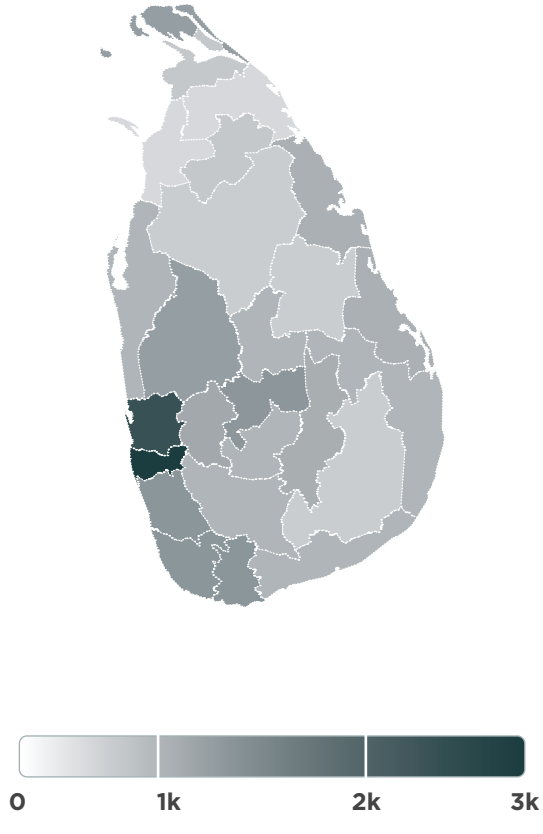


FIGURE 5. Population density in Sri Lanka (Lanka Statistics, accessed April 8, 2024).



Mapping where the wind and solar learning opportunities available from the institutions we sampled are located across Sri Lanka (see figure 4 above), we see that they are concentrated in the southern part of the country, with the Western Province (Colombo) hosting 65% of the total number of green learning pathways for wind and solar across our sample of institutions in Sri Lanka (694 pathways of 1,073 total pathways disaggregated across each institution). Comparing this map with a map of the population density in Sri Lanka (Figure 5 above), it is perhaps unsurprising that the learning-to-earning pathways we analyzed (and in turn the institutions we sampled) exhibit a distribution pattern similar to the population distribution in the country. Future research efforts should further map the geospatial distribution of clean energy learning opportunities across a wider range of institutions in Sri Lanka to better understand what geographic gaps may exist in providing learning opportunities to individuals living outside densely populated areas of the country and for what types of wind and solar occupations across their value chains.

Opportunities for Future Research

As previous research suggests that gender gaps do exist in the renewable energy education and training landscape in Sri Lanka (see Box 3), future research on this topic can be enriched with a stronger focus on equity.

For example, collecting and publishing data on the demographics — including age, gender, and socioeconomic status — of enrollees and graduates from the different fields of study offered in Sri Lanka that feed into wind and solar jobs would reveal the extent of disaggregated equity and access gaps to the existing learning-to-earning pathways in these sectors. This level of analysis can then be used to inform evidence-based policies and processes to promote more equitable and inclusive green learning opportunities across the country and proactively address equity concerns that will otherwise impact the composition of the renewable energy workforce. Linking enrollment and graduation rates with job availability and energy generation potential within both the wind and solar sectors would also be useful to see where there might be mismatches between education and training uptake and the needs of the labor market.

In addition, it would be beneficial to understand what factors affect young people's choices to pursue higher education or vocational training higher education and select fields of study related to renewable energy. Box 6 below provides a snapshot of current lower-, upper-, and post-secondary completion rates in Sri Lanka, as well as tertiary enrollment rates. This data shows there is a clear drop-off in educational enrollment and completion after lower-secondary school. While this could imply that people are choosing TVET pathways instead of continuing to upper secondary and post-secondary education, this drop-off has negative implications for the utilization of any post-secondary learning pathway that might support young people entering jobs in wind and solar. Additional attention should therefore be paid both to collecting up-to-date information on who is transitioning from lower secondary into TVET pathways and to supporting youth in the transition from lower secondary school to higher educational attainment Thus, policymakers and educators can ensure that renewable energy learning-to-earning pathways that are available, accessible, and implemented to prepare Sri Lanka's young labor force with employment opportunities emerging from its clean energy transition initiatives.

BOX 6

Targeted Solution for Developing a Robust Education and Training Ecosystem for Renewable Energy in Sri Lanka: The THREE Lanka project

Statistic	Male (%)	Female (%)	Year
Lower-secondary-completion	95.9%	97.6%	2021
Upper secondary completion	63.4%	64%	2021
Post-secondary completion	29%	30.2%	2009
Tertiary enrollment	17%	29%	2022

Data from World Bank Open Data

BOX 7

Targeted Solution for Developing a Robust Education and Training Ecosystem for Renewable Energy in Sri Lanka: The THREE Lanka project

Sri Lanka's ambitious renewable energy goals for the coming decades will require addressing gaps in the clean energy learning opportunities offered by the country's education and training institutions.

These gaps must be filled today to make robust wind and solar sectors possible tomorrow. The EU-led Training Hub for Renewable Energy Technologies in Sri Lanka (THREE Lanka) is an example of a program designed to directly contribute to solving Sri Lanka's education and training challenges.

The primary focus of the project is to increase the number of certified renewable energy technicians in Sri Lanka, through the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for wind, solar, and other renewable energy fields. Launched in 2021 and now in its final year, the project conducted a gap analysis of renewable energy sector skill shortages in Sri Lanka and developed training programs in wind, solar, and other renewables that meet industry requirements, provide certifications, and act as pathways towards degrees in these fields.

According to Dr. Iromi Ranaweera (Faculty of Engineering at University of Ruhuna) and Ms. Thedani Lionel (Planning Engineer at Lanka Electricity Company) who have been engaged in the project, THREE Lanka has successfully developed NVQs for both wind and solar technicians which were previously not available in Sri Lanka. Three technician-level courses are also currently being piloted through five universities that are providing practical training, with the hope of piloting engineering and managerial-level courses soon. In total, the project developed course modules for 10 technical-level courses, seven engineer-level courses, and five managerial-level courses, all providing certification upon completion. The courses themselves are designed to be delivered in a hybrid format, with lectures and course materials accessible online, and practical lab components being offered through university partners.

THREE Lanka represents a partnership between five Sri Lankan universities, four European universities, and the Sri Lanka Sustainable Energy Authority and the Sri Lanka Energy Managers Association. This illustrates how international development programs can facilitate partnerships between education institutions, government, and professional bodies in-country to build local capacity for education and training and help hasten the work to fill gaps in clean energy workforce development.

Recommendations

Sri Lanka has the potential to build on past and current progress in developing its renewable energy sector and achieve its goal of deriving 70% of their energy from renewable sources by 2030 and becoming completely renewable by 2050. To do this, the wind and solar energy sectors will need to be rapidly scaled up, which will require a trained workforce in these fields. The research conducted for this case study suggests that Sri Lanka's education and training landscape is currently providing some of the necessary learning-to-earning pathways to support robust wind and solar workforces but could do more to expand its offerings (see Recommendations #1 and #2 from the Clean Energy Annex).

While the scope of the research conducted for this case is narrow, the findings from this study point to important areas where Sri Lanka can turn its attention in future research and policy efforts related to developing their education and training ecosystem to support youth workforce development in wind and solar, and clean energy in general. These findings are summarized in the following recommendations to support efforts to build a qualified, diverse, and thriving renewable energy workforce in Sri Lanka.

1

Increase and diversify the fields of study offered by post-secondary education and training institutions that lead to the full range of jobs in the wind and solar sectors.

As evidenced by the research conducted for this case, additional learning pathways in wind and solar are needed in Sri Lanka to train a well-rounded workforce for these two sectors. Education and training opportunities should be matched to labor market and workforce development needs and include pathways to certification and degrees. Programs such as THREE Lanka introduced in Box 7 are prime examples of the potential for national and international institutions to work together to develop and deliver high-quality, accredited training opportunities in renewable energy.

2

Ensure that the availability and accessibility of renewable energy education and training opportunities is socially and geographically equitable.

While the scope of research presented here did not investigate where people who are accessing wind and solar learning pathways are located, a preliminary mapping of the pathways we identified shows they are concentrated in just one part of the country (see Figure 4). Renewable energy workforce development in Sri Lanka can and must prioritize access to education and training opportunities for youth, women, and other marginalized and underrepresented groups. This includes making opportunities available to individuals living outside densely populated areas, including peri-urban, rural, and remote locations in the country. Only if equity is centered in renewable energy workforce development will the sector succeed in a just, green transition.

3

Support young people's educational transitions from lower-secondary to additional schooling to promote more uptake of post-secondary education and training pathways in wind, solar, and other renewables.

There is a clear drop-off in educational achievement after lower-secondary in Sri Lanka (see Box 6). Promoting educational transitions for young people, including transitions to TVET pathways, in Sri Lanka will be crucial in ensuring that the solar and wind learning-to-earning pathways that are already available, as well as those that are being added by projects like THREE Lanka, are benefiting all of Sri Lanka's youth. Supporting these educational transitions for youth is also an opportunity to promote learning pathways to jobs in clean energy, establishing clear workforce pipelines for wind, solar, and other renewables.

4

Conduct additional research to inform policy and practice regarding the availability and accessibility of renewable energy learning-to-earning pathways.

This could include building on the research methodologies presented in this case to sample a wider range of post-secondary institutions, and taking a deliberate equity lens to understand what gaps may exist in providing equitable access to renewable energy education and training pathways. Experience from this case shows that there is exciting potential for Sri Lanka to harness their renewable energy resources for a green transition, and that additional research, and subsequent policy-setting, and targeted implementation are needed to ensure a just transition as well.

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We thank Lo Bueno Colectivo for their contribution to the graphic identity of this case study.

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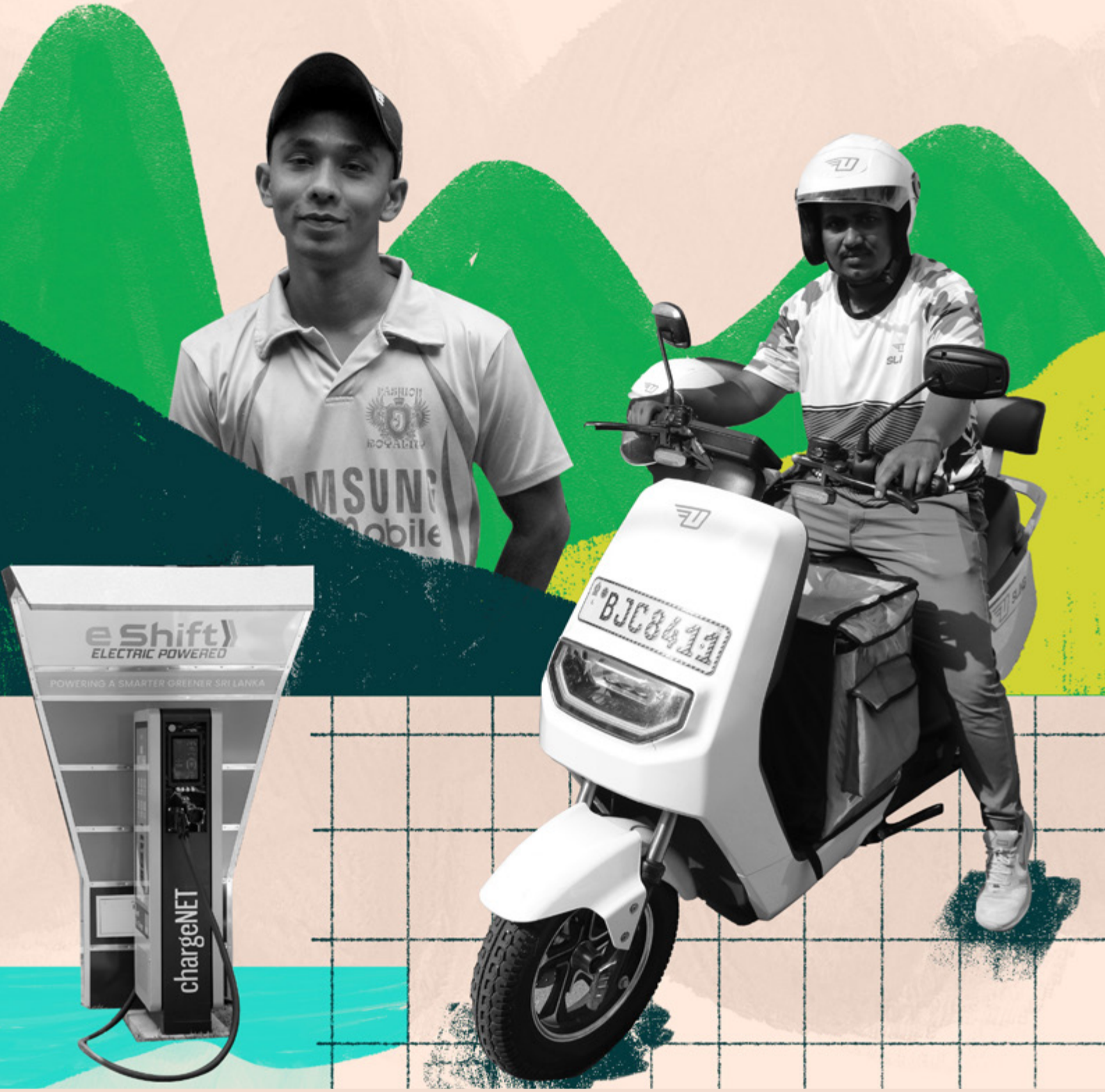

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