By Dr. Anura Satharasinghe

THE Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, to protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs are officially known as “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. A set of 17 aspirational “Global Goals” with 169 targets and 344 indicators between them, was approved by April 2015. The SDGs were born at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

The SDGs will guide policy and funding for the next 15 years. The 2030 Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It strengthenes partnerships and requiring partnership for implementation. These elements of sustainable development are all interconnected. The SDGs focus on new areas such as economic inequality innovation, climate change, peace and justice - among others. The SDGs are universal, inclusive and a bold commitment to people and the planet. As in many other countries, Sri Lanka too, in its development agenda is now focusing on Sustainable Development Goals and how it will improve lives while protecting the planet over the long term.

The commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka (GSO) is reflected in having a separate ministry on Sustainable Development, appointing a Parliament Select Committee on SDGs and establishing cluster committees on SDGs etc.

The GOSL anticipates achieving the SDGs by 2030 by working towards the provision of basic needs of the people, progressive alleviation of poverty, elimination of all forms of discrimination and inequalities, and establishing a society based on social justice and human security. The Economic Policy of the Government outlines the vision setting the “stage for a sustainable development journey”. The Policy aims to develop an economy that will promote rapid rates of development among all. An economy that will be friendly to all, beneficial to all. An economy that will pave the way for sustainable development.

The SDGs represent a people-driven transformative agenda built on the foundations of transparency, participation and inclusion. Achieving the SDGs will depend, among others, on the degree of ownership and hence action of people in addressing them. The SDGs are for all of us so we have a shared responsibility for our future and the future of the planet. Without clear goals and measurable targets, as well as comprehensive data sets that allow analyzing the situation, including at the local level, we risk losing our ability to be informed and not properly addressing new challenges that impede development and harm our planet.

Being the key agency in the National Statistical System of Sri Lanka, the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) has been actively involved in the implementation of the SDGs through statistical activities related to the SDGs. DCS is a part of the National Statistical System (NSS) which consists of a number of agencies and sub-agencies engaged in collecting and producing statistics.

For the purpose of data collection, DCS has launched a publication titled “Sustainable Development Goals Indicators in Sri Lanka 2017” and the first copy was presented to Thilakarathna Sumithipala, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of the Parliament Select Committee recently. Launched together with the publication is a sub-website SRSGD.data.gov.lk of the DCS website. This website will serve as a SDG data repository for the country.

In conclusion, the SDGs are a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. They strengthen partnerships and require partnership for implementation. These elements of sustainable development are all interconnected. The SDGs focus on new areas such as economic inequality innovation, climate change, peace and justice - among others. The SDGs are universal, inclusive and a bold commitment to people and the planet.