

INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

TIPS AND STORIES FROM SRI LANKA



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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan businesses have both the ability and the responsibility to address the major social, environmental, and economic challenges the country faces today. From climate change, pollution, and inequality to economic recovery and social cohesion, the private sector can – and must – play a central role in building a better future.

At times, economic, social, and environmental progress can seem like competing goals. But they do not have to be. Leading Sri Lankan businesses are showing that it is possible to both succeed financially while also helping build a more inclusive and sustainable society.

As part of its Inclusive Business Practices project, implemented in partnership with the Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) programme, The European Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (ECCSL) has discussed inclusivity and sustainability with businesses of all sizes and from all industries across Sri Lanka. These conversations revealed that, while most Sri Lankan businesses agree on the importance of inclusivity and sustainability, many are less sure about how to put these principles into action.

This booklet is designed to help. It offers **10 practical tips** for **implementing inclusive and sustainable business practices**, each supported by real examples from Sri Lankan businesses.



Tips 1-5 offer general guidance for businesses beginning their journey:

1. **Define Your Purpose** to stay focused and committed even when challenges arise.
2. **Start Small** to test ideas, learn by doing, and build momentum with lower risk and cost.
3. **Think Long-Term** to create real, lasting impact and address complex challenges over time.
4. **Measure Your Impact** so you can improve your work and clearly communicate your successes.
5. **Be Creative** and design activities that suit your specific context.

Tips 6-9 focus on the different groups who can contribute to and benefit from your efforts:

6. **Engage Your Employees** to build ownership and utilise their knowledge and experience.
7. **Empower Your Community** to create local impact and strengthen trust.
8. **Embrace Your Network** to collaborate with other businesses and organisations for shared goals.
9. **Envision Your Sri Lanka** and consider how your business can contribute to national goals.

Lastly, Tip 10 encourages you to **Tell Your Story**. Sharing your experiences – both successes and challenges – can inspire other businesses to embrace inclusive and sustainable practices and help contribute to a shared Sri Lankan reputation for inclusive and sustainable business.

We hope these tips and stories help you to embrace inclusivity and sustainability to both achieve greater success within your business and help contribute to a fairer, greener Sri Lanka.

TIP 1

DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE

Before you begin implementing inclusivity and sustainability, start by asking a simple but essential question: Why are you doing this?

Knowing your why is crucial for creating long-term impact. Without a clear purpose, it's easy to lose momentum when challenges arise. A strong purpose will guide your decisions, motivate your team, and keep your efforts focused.

By adopting an inclusive and sustainable purpose, you acknowledge that your decisions impact not only your bottom line but also your employees, your community, the environment, and broader society. A purpose rooted in the greater good – like providing support to those who most need it, protecting the environment, or promoting social harmony – will help you stay committed even during uncertainty.

Above all, your purpose should be important to you, so focus on the things that you find most meaningful.

Selyn, Sri Lanka's only Fair Trade-certified handloom company, is driven by a clear and meaningful purpose that guides every business decision:



Our mission is to grow a sustainable social business based on the principles of fair trade in order to uplift the living standards of rural women and men. We do this by providing them with consistent income generation opportunities whilst keeping alive the local traditions of handloom and crafts in Sri Lanka.



Guided by this mission, the company has addressed challenges such as an ageing labour market, lack of skilled experience, and uncompetitive market prices by developing holistic solutions that support artisans not only financially, but in all aspects of life. This includes investing in business infrastructure, upgrading design and technical abilities, and providing life skills and leadership trainings across its network. Today, Selyn supports a network of 1,000 artisans and exports its products to fair trade and other customers around the world.



Define a clear, meaningful purpose to guide decisions, motivate your team, and keep your business focused on creating lasting impact.

TIP 2

START SMALL

Addressing complex national and global problems can feel overwhelming for any business. But every success story begins with a single step, and starting small is a smart, practical approach with many advantages.

First, it lets you learn by doing. Taking a small first step gives your business the chance to better understand the issues you want to address, experiment with solutions, and build knowledge before expanding.

Second, it reduces costs and risk. Starting on a small scale lets you test ideas, measure actual costs and benefits, and refine your approach before committing significant resources. Even if an idea doesn't work, you'll have spent only a modest amount of time and resources to gain valuable knowledge and experience that you can use to refine future efforts.

Third, it builds confidence and support. A successful pilot project demonstrates what's possible, making it easier to secure buy-in from management, employees, and other stakeholders for further investments in inclusivity and sustainability.

AMBA Estate, an organic farm, guesthouse, and social enterprise in the Uva Highlands, views starting small as central to its business strategy. Instead of building a large guesthouse all at once, AMBA added a few rooms at a time, learning from each phase to improve construction quality. This incremental approach also extended to its staff: by starting small, AMBA was able to gradually train employees from the local community over several years. In the long run, this saved money and created local jobs by avoiding the need to recruit expensive trained staff from Colombo or overseas.

This approach has enabled AMBA to succeed across diverse industries, including tourism, agriculture, and handicrafts. By starting small, AMBA was able to gradually refine its business model in each area, creating shared success by generating direct and indirect employment for over 100 local community members.



Start small to make inclusivity and sustainability more achievable and participatory. This approach helps you learn by doing, reduce risks and costs, and encourages collaboration with your local community, creating a strong foundation for lasting impact as your business grows.

TIP 3

THINK LONG-TERM

Many businesses begin their inclusivity and sustainability journey with good intentions and ideas but lose momentum when they don't see immediate results. Real impact takes time. It involves changing mindsets and behaviours along with building new systems. That's why it's important to stay focused on the bigger picture and commit to continuous improvement.

Practical ways to take a long-term approach include setting clear goals, strategies, and plans that look five to ten years ahead; investing in employee training and development; and building lasting relationships with customers, suppliers, and communities.

Short-term wins are valuable, but they should contribute to a longer-term vision. The more you commit to the long-term, the more your ability to create meaningful and sustained impact will grow.

MAS Holdings, one of Sri Lanka's largest companies and a global leader in apparel manufacturing, demonstrates the value of long-term thinking through its *Women Go Beyond* initiative.

Established in 2003, *Women Go Beyond* empowers women in MAS and its surrounding communities by addressing issues such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic empowerment. A central focus of the initiative is increasing the representation of women in management and leadership roles, while also working to dismantle the structural barriers and social norms that limit women's opportunities to compete on an equal footing.

Over the past 20 years, MAS has continually refined and expanded *Women Go Beyond* to progress towards its vision of gender parity. While keeping its long-term goals in focus, the initiative also celebrates short-term progress, for example, through its annual recognition of women role models within the company who exemplify empowerment.

MAS understands that achieving its vision requires a sustained effort, and this long-term approach ensures that *Women Go Beyond* will continue to create value and impact for years to come.



Take a long-term approach to ensure your impact grows and endures over time. Set clear future goals, design strategies and plans to achieve them, and regularly reflect on how you can improve your efforts over time.

TIP 4

MEASURE YOUR IMPACT

Measuring your impact helps you understand what is working well, what needs to improve, and how you can communicate your progress to others.

Ways to measure your impact include:

- Choose what to measure: Based on your goals, pick clear, specific indicators.
- Collect data: Regularly track your progress using those indicators.
- Analyse and reflect: Review your results. Are you meeting your goals? What challenges remain?
- Share your findings: Use reports, social media, or staff meetings to communicate progress.
- Adapt and improve: Adjust your plan based on what you learn.

Measuring your impact helps you both improve the effectiveness of your activities while also allowing you to share your story with others and build trust.

Intrepid Travel, a global travel company with a team of 300 in its Colombo office, shows how measuring impact can drive improvement and inspire others. The company tracks its many inclusivity and sustainability initiatives and uses this information to improve internal processes and communicate progress externally.

Through its annual report and website, Intrepid publishes data on efforts such as reducing plastic waste on its trips and increasing female participation in Sri Lanka's tourism sector. This transparency enhances accountability and strengthens its inclusivity and sustainability story for customers, partners, and the wider public.

By measuring and publicly sharing its impact, Intrepid builds trust, improves its practices, and inspires other companies to also adopt inclusive and sustainable business practices.



Measuring your impact is essential to understanding the real value of your initiatives. By regularly collecting and analysing data, you can see what's working, identify areas for improvement, and share your story with others.

TIP 5

BE CREATIVE

There is no single best way to practise inclusivity and sustainability. What works best depends on your business's size, industry, location, purpose, and the communities you engage with. It's important to be creative and look for approaches that suit your specific context.

Being creative doesn't have to involve cutting-edge technology or complex innovations. Sometimes, it simply means reimagining familiar practices in a way that better fits your business and engages your people more effectively.

Advantis, a leader in Sri Lanka's transport and logistics industry, recently developed a creative approach to raising awareness about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) among its employees.

Instead of using traditional classroom-style training, the company partnered with a local theatre group to perform a street drama that explored DEI themes through humour and storytelling. The performance was paired with group discussions on topics such as unconscious bias, the difference between equity and equality, and how to build an inclusive workplace. Employees found the session fun and engaging, and reported that the creative format made the concepts easier to understand and remember.

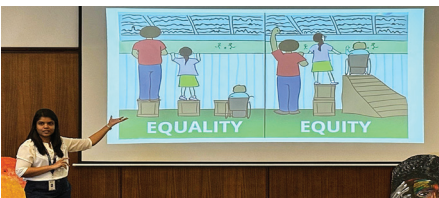
Advantis also ran an art competition where employees expressed what DEI meant to them through paintings and drawings. The artworks were then displayed for all employees, encouraging them to reflect on the principles they had learnt about. One employee shared:



When you have more colours coming into a picture, it makes the picture beautiful. So likewise, an organisation will look like a blank canvas if you don't have different people, different genders, different geographies. I think that really adds to the colour of the organisation.



Advantis' creative approach of using theatre and art for learning resonated with employees, making the learning experience both enjoyable and more effective in raising awareness of DEI principles.



Be creative when implementing inclusivity and sustainability. Every business is unique, so what works for others might not work for you. Experiment with approaches that best suit your context.

TIP 6

ENGAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Your employees are your greatest asset on your journey toward inclusivity and sustainability. They deeply understand your business, from daily challenges to innovation opportunities. Actively involving them can lead to practical, innovative ideas that enhance both business performance and social and environmental impact.

True engagement goes beyond simply telling employees what to do. Start by clearly communicating your purpose, goals, and why they matter. Invite input, listen to feedback, recognise contributions, and create opportunities for leadership so that employees feel genuine ownership of your inclusivity and sustainability efforts.

English Tea Shop, a specialty organic tea company, engages employees throughout its business. 77% of its employees are shareholders, collectively owning 30% of the company. Staff at all levels are empowered to understand the company's financial operations, enabling them to make more informed decisions in their roles. This transparency helps employees see how their contributions drive overall success, which in turn benefits them as part-owners.

This culture of employee ownership also extends to English Tea Shop's approach to inclusivity and sustainability. Employees help design and improve the company's initiatives by, for example, finding ways to reduce waste, improve packaging, and ensure fairer supply chains. The company also invests in training programs that develop environmental awareness and ethical sourcing practices. Regular updates on progress – such as reducing carbon emissions and improving farmer livelihoods – help employees stay informed, motivated, and connected to the company's mission.

By engaging their employees, English Tea Shop has built a motivated workforce that drives innovation and upholds inclusive and sustainable values throughout the business.



Engaging your employees builds ownership and motivation. Their knowledge and experience are powerful resources for designing effective inclusivity and sustainability actions.

TIP 7

EMPOWER YOUR COMMUNITY

One of the most effective ways your business can make a lasting impact is by focusing on your local community.

You understand your community's people, strengths, and challenges, making you uniquely positioned to create value. Empowering your community builds trust, strengthens local relationships, and helps your business thrive. This can take many forms, such as:

- Hiring and training local workers
- Sourcing from nearby suppliers and farmers
- Supporting schools, training centres, or youth programs

Every community is different. It is important to listen carefully. Spend time engaging with residents, community leaders, and local organisations to understand what support is most needed. This ensures your efforts are practical, welcomed, and valuable.

For **Jetwing Hotels**, one of Sri Lanka's largest tourism companies, each of its locations is designed to enhance the livelihoods and living standards of the surrounding community, which Jetwing sees as integral to its success.

Jetwing prioritises sourcing from local farmers and suppliers, hiring local staff for maintenance, housekeeping, and operations, and partnering with local tuk-tuk drivers to provide reliable guest transport. To support local agriculture, Jetwing provides seed money to nearby farming families, with the resulting harvest shared equally between the farmer and hotel.

Jetwing also runs its *Jetwing Youth Development Programme*, a free vocational training course in hotel management for local school leavers. It covers operations, English, etiquette, cultural history, and industry insights. Many graduates go on to build long-term careers with Jetwing, making it a cornerstone of the company's recruitment.

By engaging directly with communities Jetwing creates multiple benefits by enriching its guest experiences, building lasting relationships, and benefitting local communities.



One of the most effective ways to create meaningful impact is by focusing on your local community. Empowering your community addresses shared challenges, supports livelihoods, and builds relationships with local stakeholders.

TIP 8

EMBRACE YOUR NETWORK

Inclusive and sustainable change is most effective when working together. By building partnerships, you can share knowledge, pool resources, and help address challenges that are too large for any one organisation to tackle alone.

Your network includes any partners you can collaborate with to achieve shared goals – these could be other businesses (even competitors), community groups, local leaders, NGOs, government agencies, customers, suppliers, etc.

Each partner brings something unique, whether it is expertise, relationships, or resources. Working together allows you to design shared solutions and extend your reach and impact.

Good Market, is a social enterprise dedicated to building a local ecosystem of enterprises that prioritise people and planet. It brings together a network of value-aligned organisations – including social enterprises, cooperatives, responsible businesses, civic groups, and individual changemakers – who collaborate to amplify their collective impact.

Through its weekly marketplace events and organic retail shop, Good Market connects producers and consumers, provides market access to startups and small-scale producers, and raises public awareness about social and environmental issues.

Good Market also runs its organic Participatory Guarantee System, a peer-review system where farmers and producers assess each other against shared organic standards. This system offers an affordable and trusted alternative to third-party certification, while fostering knowledge exchange and community among like-minded businesses.

Another way Good Market embraces its network is its Sandbox Enterprise Program, which provides mentoring and support for early-stage entrepreneurs – especially women-led and rural initiatives – to help them prototype and launch new ventures.

Good Market shows how value-aligned networks can help amplify impact, provide mutual support, and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy.



By building a network of like-minded partners, you can enhance your business's impact. Collaborating with others who share your values creates opportunities for shared learning, mutual support, and new ideas.

TIP 9

ENVISION YOUR SRI LANKA

As the previous tips have shown, inclusive and sustainable practices can be implemented with your employees, your community, and your network. But once you've laid that foundation, it's worth looking beyond your immediate operations to consider how your business can support broader progress across the country.

Sri Lanka has many important national goals – reducing poverty, protecting the environment, creating decent jobs, and building unity across different regions and communities. Achieving these goals is not only the role of government. It also needs the commitment, ideas, and resources of communities and businesses.

Ask yourself: 'How can my business contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable Sri Lanka?'

Leading food manufacturer **MA's Kitchen**, offers a powerful example of how a single business can meaningfully contribute to national goals. Shortly after the end of the civil war, MA's saw it as their civic duty to help reconnect disrupted local economies in the Northern Province. These areas had faced years of conflict, leaving economic systems broken and communities struggling.

They began with a small dairy processing project in Kilinochchi, working directly with local farmers. Over time, this effort grew into a multi-purpose manufacturing facility in Iyakachchi, built on circular economy principles and local sourcing. The facility now produces flavoured milk, edible oils, and peanut butter using milk, sesame, and peanuts bought directly from small-scale farmers in the region.

By supporting farmer incomes, strengthening local supply chains, and creating jobs, MA's Kitchen is helping to restore economic stability and promote long-term development in the North. As well as this local impact, MA's investment also contributes to social cohesion across the country by establishing economic ties and cooperative investments between regions. It shows how inclusive and sustainable business practices can contribute to national goals.



Your business can play a role in shaping Sri Lanka's future. Consider how your decisions today can help build a more inclusive and sustainable country for generations to come.

TIP 10

TELL YOUR STORY

Once you have implemented your inclusive and sustainable business practices, it is important that you also share your story.

When you tell your story, you show that your commitment is backed by real action, helping attract and build loyalty with customers who care about inclusivity and sustainability.

Storytelling also benefits your business internally. It gives you a chance to reflect on your journey, celebrate progress, and motivate your team by highlighting the real-world impact of their work.

Finally, sharing your experience can inspire other businesses to adopt similar practices, which in turn helps strengthen Sri Lanka's international reputation for responsible business.

The final business example in this booklet features not just one business, but **17 different businesses** that each shared their inclusivity and sustainability story at ECCSL's *Inclusive and Sustainable Business Knowledge Sharing series*.

This 5-part series covered a range of industries and business sizes:

- **Tourism:** AMBA Estate, Intrepid Travel, Jetwing Hotels, Serendipity Collection
- **Food & Agriculture:** English Tea Shop, MA's Kitchen, Ceylon Biscuits Limited
- **Apparel:** Compreli Consulting, Hirdaramani, Omega Line
- **Finance:** Alliance Finance, Centre for a Smart Future, Lanka Impact Investing Network, National Development Bank
- **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises:** Mineral Earth, Viveca, Wild Collection

By openly sharing their successes, challenges, and lessons learned, these businesses provided both inspiration and practical guidance to others looking to adopt inclusive and sustainable practices. In doing so, they are helping build a national reputation for responsible business that benefits all members of the Sri Lankan business community.

CONCLUSION

By embracing inclusivity and sustainability, Sri Lankan businesses can help build a fairer and more equitable society, protect the environment for future generations, and contribute to national economic recovery.

To help businesses adopt these principles, this booklet offers 10 tips for implementing inclusive and sustainable practices based on conversations with businesses across Sri Lanka:

Tips 1-5 focus on first steps and general advice: **Define Your Purpose** to stay focused, **Start Small** to reduce costs and learn by doing, **Think Long-Term** to create lasting value, **Measure Your Impact** to guide improvements and communicate results, and **Be Creative** by designing solutions that fit your business context.

Tips 6-9 focus on working with and for different groups: **Engage Your Employees** to build ownership and draw on their knowledge and experience, **Empower Your Community** to create local value and build trust, **Embrace Your Network** to work collaboratively and share knowledge with value-aligned organisations, and **Envision Your Sri Lanka** by considering how your business can contribute to national goals.

Tip 10 encourages you to **Tell Your Story** to build trust, inspire others, and strengthen Sri Lanka's reputation for responsible business.

Each tip is supported by real examples from Sri Lankan businesses of different sizes and sectors that are already taking action. These stories show that incorporating inclusivity and sustainability into your business strategy can deliver both financial success and social and environmental impact.

We hope this booklet offers practical ideas, sparks new conversations, and encourages more Sri Lankan businesses to contribute to building a more inclusive and sustainable future.



