

Review of a national water safety and drowning prevention model three years on: A Sri Lankan case study



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Introduction

Drowning is the second highest cause of accidental death in Sri Lanka, with a rate of 4.4 deaths per 100,000 population. Whilst drowning prevention has been on the injury prevention agenda in high income countries (HICs) over a number of years, many low and middle income countries (LMICs) like Sri Lanka are working towards drowning prevention and seeking support from those in government, the private sector and community settings. Best practise models from HICs can be adapted and applied by those in LMICs. Conversely, there are models from LMICs, particularly based on innovation, which can be adapted for HICs.

National model

Sri Lanka Life Saving has long been working towards a water safe Sri Lanka. In partnership with Life Saving Victoria, a national model for water safety and drowning prevention was developed and formally implemented in 2015. This model was based on internationally accepted injury prevention models and drowning prevention strategies. We outline the key steps and specific examples in the model along with key outputs.

Key outputs, aligned with the World Health Organization's "Ten Actions to Prevent Drowning", are outlined below.

Output		Corresponding WHO action
Swim for Safety program educating over 2,000 children in survival swimming and water safety to date.		<i>WHO Action 3</i> Teach school-age children basic swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills.
Expansion of lifesaving services utilising armed forces personnel previously involved in the civil conflict.		<i>WHO Action 4</i> Train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation.
Community lifesaving and first aid training.		<i>WHO Action 4</i> Train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation.
Internationally recognised lifesaving training delivered to personnel across various industries including tourism, swimming, lifesaving and the armed forces.		<i>WHO Action 4</i> Train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation.
Publication of the first Drowning Prevention Report for Sri Lanka.		<i>WHO Action 5</i> Strengthen public awareness and highlight the vulnerability of children.

Output		Corresponding WHO action
Female leadership in media and lifesaving development through the Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Fellowship.		<i>WHO Action 5</i> Strengthen public awareness and highlight the vulnerability of children.
Partnerships developed with government, industries and non-profit organisations.		<i>WHO Action 8</i> Coordinate drowning prevention efforts with those of other sectors and agendas.
Sri Lankan Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Plan, developed with a multi-stakeholder governance and implementation structure.		<i>WHO Action 9</i> Develop a national water safety plan.
National guidelines for safe pool operation		<i>WHO Action 9</i> Develop a national water safety plan.
Research partnerships between SLLS and universities in Sri Lanka and in the broader Asia Pacific region		<i>WHO Action 10</i> Address priority research questions with well-designed studies.

Future outputs will align with the remaining WHO actions:

<i>WHO Action 1:</i>	Install barriers controlling access to water.
<i>WHO Action 2:</i>	Provide safe places away from water for pre-school children, with capable child care.
<i>WHO Action 6:</i>	Set and enforce safe boating, shipping and ferry regulations (in progress).
<i>WHO Action 7:</i>	Build resilience and manage flood risks and other hazards locally and nationally.

Going forward

The outputs from the water safety and drowning prevention model have helped increase the profile and elevate the importance of developing lifesaving and drowning prevention activities within Sri Lanka. This model provides a guide for other practitioners to develop and structure comprehensive drowning prevention initiatives.