

## PRE-PROJECT CONCEPT PAPER

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### I. Project Overview

Sri Lanka is a democratic nation where sovereignty is vested in the people, as stated in the Constitution: *“In the Republic of Sri Lanka, sovereignty is in the people and is inalienable.”* The country’s local governance system is supported by key legal frameworks including the Municipal Councils Ordinance No. 29 of 1947, the Urban Councils Ordinance No. 61 of 1939, and the Pradeshiya Sabhas Act No. 15 of 1987. These legislative instruments also provide avenues for citizens to participate in local-level administrative and development decision-making processes.

However, in practice, many citizens lack the knowledge, capacity, and access to engage meaningfully in these processes. As a result, local governance faces several challenges such as the failure to accurately identify community needs, the implementation of inefficient or overlapping development programs, and an increase in corruption due to a lack of accountability and transparency. Existing methods used by local governments, such as formal meetings, surveys, and citizen councils, have proven to be limited in scope and effectiveness, often excluding a significant portion of the population from participatory governance.

Recognizing these gaps, and in alignment with the present government national policy direction to promote digital governance for improved public service delivery, there is a pressing need to establish a national framework that strengthens participatory governance through e-governance mechanisms at the local level. This project aims to institutionalize digital platforms in local authorities to enhance citizen engagement, increase transparency and accountability, and empower people to voice concerns, report malpractice, and participate actively in local planning and budgeting processes.

The initiative promotes an integrated and inclusive planning process that engages a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society, local communities, the private sector, academia, and the media. It seeks to build trust between citizens and local authorities while fostering democratic values, the rule of law, and public sector accountability. By embedding digital tools into local governance systems, this project will help create a more responsive, efficient, and participatory governance structure that genuinely reflects the priorities and aspirations of the people.

### II. Background & Rationale

In recent years, several local non-governmental organizations have taken significant steps to promote e-governance platforms within local authorities across Sri Lanka. Notable initiatives, such as the “E-Sabha” and “ManKiwwa” mobile applications, have been implemented in approximately 30–40 local authorities across the Southern, Central, and North Western Provinces. These platforms are designed to strengthen the link between citizens and local governance

institutions by providing a user-friendly interface to lodge service-related complaints and track responses.

Through these platforms, residents can report issues related to essential services, such as waste collection, street lighting, drainage blockages, fallen trees obstructing roads, and water leakages, without physically visiting the local authority office. Citizens can submit complaints using their mobile phones by geotagging the location, attaching images, and providing a brief description of the issue. The complaints are automatically routed to a centralized local government dashboard, which then facilitates timely responses and updates to the complainant via SMS. This has significantly improved public trust, increased transparency, and enhanced the efficiency of public service delivery.

Moreover, these e-governance platforms reduce time and paper waste, enable better monitoring and accountability, and promote quicker service responses. A key advantage is their ability to integrate with other line agencies, such as the Water Board, Electricity Board, and Road Development Authority. This inter-agency coordination allows local authorities to forward complaints to the relevant institutions seamlessly, fostering a more collaborative and responsive governance ecosystem.

The benefits of the system extend to local councillors as well, enabling them to guide their constituents in using the platform rather than addressing each issue individually. This has led to a more efficient use of their time and resources, while simultaneously empowering citizens to take an active role in governance. Local administrators also benefit from the centralized dashboard, which allows for easy tracking and analysis of complaints, responses, and service outcomes.

Despite the success of these platforms in selected regions, there is currently no standardized or institutionalized framework to replicate and scale these efforts across the country. There is a pressing need to develop a national-level master plan that formalizes the adoption of such e-governance systems across all local authorities. This master plan should also include advanced features, such as online booking of local authority services and a dedicated portal for submitting local development proposals. By incorporating such features, local authorities can enhance participatory planning by integrating citizen feedback directly into their annual development plans. It is proposed to apply the advanced model to the remaining 18 local authorities that were not covered by previous implementations by other organizations, in order to establish a comprehensive e-governance platform across the entire province, incorporating all local authorities.

Additionally, to ensure more inclusive and transparent governance, the project proposes the establishment of Social Investigator Teams/Watchdog Team and Community-Based Organization (CBO) Forums to complement the digital platforms. Social investigators, equipped with knowledge in areas such as the right to information, human rights, participatory planning, and budgeting, play a critical role in engaging directly with local governments. They can help present area-specific proposals to development committees and address sensitive community issues, including gender-based violence, market conditions, and more.

By combining digital innovation with grassroots-level participation, this project aims to institutionalize a participatory, transparent, and responsive governance model. It will not only

improve service delivery and inter-agency coordination but also ensure that public resources are used effectively, contributing to inclusive and sustainable local development across Sri Lanka.

### III. Objectives

To develop a national-level e-governance master plan, implement advanced e-governance platforms at the local authority level, and strengthen capacity at both national and sub-national levels.

### IV. Expected Outputs

#### Activity 1-

Sri Lanka e-governance master plan for local authorities has been created

- i. Hire a national and foreign consultants to initiate the e-governance master plan
- ii. Carry out a situational analysis survey among local authorities that are using the e-governance platform
- iii. Conduct a national-level consultative workshop to gather inputs for drafting the e-governance master plan
- iv. Conduct sub national level workshops to get inputs to draft e-governance master plan
- v. Submit the draft plan to the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Local Governments
- vi. Conduct a validation session of the master plan with key stakeholders
- vii. Launch the E-Governance Master Plan for Local Government in Sri Lanka
- viii. Disseminate the E-governance Master Plan for Local Government in Sri Lanka (341 LAs-(24 Municipal Councils + 41 Urban Councils + 274 Pradeshiya Sabha (Rural Councils))

#### Activity 2-

Capacity development for social investigator team/watchdog team have been built and strengthened

- i. Establish Community Based Organizations (CBOs) forums within two districts in Southern Province
- ii. Identify the social investigator team/watchdog team within LAs in Southern Province
- iii. Train Social Investigator team identified on participatory governance
- iv. Issue guidebooks on community participation for local area planning and produce leaflets about the E-governance platform
- v. Exposure visits to study the e-governance platform in a foreign sister city

#### Activity 3-

E-governance platform has been established & upgrade

- i. Hire a technical agency to setup E-governance platform
- ii. Introduce the more advanced version of the E-governance platform
- iii. Conduct introductory sessions on E-governance platform at LA level

- iv. Conduct technical training sessions for operational teams within two districts in Southern Province
- v. Aware the local government councillors and public officers about the e-governance platform

## V. Expected Outcome

- Sri Lanka e-governance master plan for local authorities has been implemented and support to specific local authorities to practice the application (in Southern Province of Sri Lanka).
- National and sub-national public officers and ordinary citizen aware on e-governance platform
- E-governance platform has been used by public officers and ordinary citizen

## VI. Cost Estimation

| <b>Component 1: Sri Lanka e-governance master plan for local authorities has been created</b>             |  |                                 |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Activities</b>   | <b>Contents</b>  | <b>Proposed budget (in USD)</b> |
| Hire a national and foreign consultants to initiate the e-governance master plan                          | <i>Hire national &amp; foreign consultants (one foreigner and one local) for one year</i>                            | 40,000                          |
| Carry out a situational analysis survey among local authorities that are using the e-governance platform  | <i>Survey on 35 local authorities</i>  | 17,500                          |
| Conduct a national-level consultative workshop to gather inputs for drafting the e-governance master plan | <i>National level consultive workshop with 100 participants from stakeholders</i>                                    | 2,500                           |
| Conduct sub national level workshops to get inputs to draft e-governance master plan                      | <i>9 sub national level workshops with 50 participants from each LA</i>  | 11,250                          |
| Submit the draft plan to the Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Local Governments | <i>50 people attend the public meeting at the ministry</i>   | 250                             |
| Conduct a validation session of the master plan with key stakeholders                                     | <i>100 people attend the validation session</i>  | 2,500                           |
| Launch the E-Governance Master Plan for Local Government in Sri Lanka                                     | <i>150 people attend the launching session</i>   | 3,750                           |
| Disseminate the E-governance Master Plan for Local Government in Sri Lanka                                | <i>Disseminate among 341 LAs-(24 Municipal Councils + 41 Urban Councils + 274 Pradeshiya Sabha (Rural Councils))</i> | 2,500                           |

|  |   |                |
|--|---|----------------|
|  | <b>Sub-total component 1</b>  | <b>80,250</b>  |
| <b>Component 2:</b> Capacity development for social investigator team/watchdog team have been built and strengthened               |   |                |
| Establish Community Based Organizations (CBOs) forum within two districts in Southern Province                                     | <i>Two district level CBO forums with the representation of 500 CBOs within LAs</i>   | 10,000         |
| Identify the social investigator team/watchdog team within LAs in Southern Province  | <i>Identify 90 social investigators representing 5 from each LA</i>   | 2,000          |
| Train Social Investigator team identified on participatory governance  | <i>Two local training programs for 90 Social Investigators</i>  | 5,000          |
| Issue 500 guidebooks on community participation for local area planning and produce 5,000 leaflets about the E-governance platform | <i>Printing of 500 guidebooks and 5,000 leaflets</i>  | 3,500          |
| Exposure visits to study the e-governance platform in a foreign sister city  | <i>10 core team including social investigators, CBO forum members, local authority commissioner and local councillors attend oversea training courses</i> | 35,000         |
|  | <b>Sub-total component 2</b>  | <b>55,500</b>  |
| <b>Component 3:</b> E-governance platform has been established & upgrade   |   |                |
| Hire a technical agency to setup E-governance platform   | <i>Select a technical agency to setup platform and develop TOR</i>  | 6,500          |
| Introduce the more advanced version of the E-governance platform   | <i>Modified the existing versions to incorporate more services to the system</i>  | 1,500          |
| Conduct introductory sessions on E-governance platform at LA level   | <i>18 Introductory sessions for the 18 local authorities about the e-governance platform</i>  | 3,000          |
| Conduct technical training sessions for operational teams within two districts in Southern Province                                | <i>Technical training programs for IT sections of each Local Authorities</i>  | 600            |
| Aware the local government councillors and public officers about the e-governance platform   | <i>Awareness sessions for the local councillors and public officers</i>   | 2,000          |
|  | <b>Sub-total component 3</b>  | <b>13,600</b>  |
|  | <b>Miscellaneous</b>  | <b>650</b>     |
|  | <b>Total</b>  | <b>150,000</b> |