

Sabaragamuwa University Journal Volume 22 Number 1 August 2024**Editorial****Are we ready for the twin transition? Building Digital-Green (DIGREEN) competencies in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is gradually recovering from a severe economic crisis that plunged the country into one of the most challenging periods in its history. The need to build a resilient economy that can withstand economic, social and environmental challenges is felt more than ever. Among the challenges, climate change is one of the most pressing issue the country faces with significant potential economic losses ranging from 3.3 to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by mid-century attributed to low labour productivity from heat stress, decreased agricultural yields, and increased flooding in both urban and rural areas (World Bank, 2025). Sri Lanka has been consistently ranked among the top ten countries at risk of extreme weather events, according to the Global Climate Risk Index (UN Sri Lanka, 2023). In the face of these pressing sustainability challenges, it is important to leverage the synergy between rapidly evolving digitalization and sustainability known as “twin transition”. This concept is gaining traction in policy agenda of the EU with focus on green and digital transitions along with the political will to unite the two parallel transitions (Muench et al., 2022).

In a developing country like Sri Lanka, sustainability and digital policy initiatives are crucial to drive the twin transition to enable effective shift towards a sustainable and digitally enabled economy. Sri Lanka has recognised the importance of policy interventions to pursue sustainability goals among them, the Climate Prosperity Plan places emphasise, on the importance of creating green jobs and competencies to build an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economy. National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) 2022-2030 lays the foundation for the green shift. The Nationally Determined Contribution 3.0 (NDC 3.0) spells out an integrated, cross-sectoral effort aimed at driving sustainable, low-carbon, and resilient economic transformation. The National Digital Economy Strategy 2030, the key policy document outlining the path to a digital economy emphasises the transformative potential of digital technologies for achieving the vision of a digitally empowered Sri Lanka for innovation, inclusion and sustainable growth. Although priority is placed on green and digital transformation it is not addressed in single consolidated policy document other than a few mentions in the NDC 3.0.

A key enabler for the twin transition is to have a competent workforce equipped with integrated skills. This raises the need for addressing the skill and competency gap for realizing the benefits of the twin transition. It is necessary to develop a workforce competent in a new set of digital green skills and competencies to develop and deploy technologies to support the transition towards the desired sustainable and digitally empowered future (Trevisan et al., 2024).

Bridging the Digital-Green (DIGREEN) skill gap for the twin transition

The twin transition requires a workforce equipped with digital skills and competencies related to environmental sustainability, innovation, and green practices. Developing countries like Sri Lanka, face heightened challenges due to low institutional capacity, lack of updated educational system and resource limitations, slowing the realization of benefits of the twin transition. Developing countries are likely to fall behind in global competitiveness and reaching sustainable development targets if attention is not paid to addressing a potentially widening skill gaps. Most interventions reported in the literature on building twin transition skills are from developing nations, especially from the European Union.

EU response to skill gap

The twin transition is at the top of the European Union (EU) policy agenda. The EU adopts a strategy that combines policy, funding, and partnerships to bridge skill gaps in environmental, resource-efficiency, and circular economy competencies across the entire workforce (Cedefop 2023). A key approach of EU is to integrate skill development into major economic and climate policies.

The European Green Deal (EGD) aiming to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy plays a pivotal role in driving the skill development by simultaneously pursuing

both environmental sustainability (green) and digital transformation (European Commission, 2020). It ensures that skills needs are identified in sectoral policies and plans to develop skills are embedded into policies.

The Pacts for Skills initiative support building partnerships among public and private organizations, education providers, and social partners and commit to upskill and reskill the workforce, including dedicating specific partnerships to high-impact sectors like construction, energy-intensive industries, and renewable energy (European Commission, 2020).

GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework which is a reference framework for sustainability competences acts as the basis for the wider community enhance and develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to live, act, work and behave in a sustainable manner. It provides a common ground and understanding of what sustainability as a competence entails to learners and educators. This framework supports education and training programmes for lifelong learning. The digital counter part of GreenComp, the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) has established a detailed standard for developing digital competence among all European citizens. It provides a common understanding to identify and describe the key areas of digital competence. It identifies 21 key components of digital competences under five areas such as information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving. The EU mobilizes Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems to deliver the practical, hands-on skills required for the twin transition. European Social Fund Plus (and the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) programs heavily invest resources for vocational education and training (VET) and reskilling initiatives (European Commission, 2020).

The way forward for Sri Lanka to bridge DIGREEN skill gap

The most important lesson from the European Union (EU) is their combined top-down and bottom-up approach to bridge the skills gap for the twin transition. This integrated approach helps to avoid fragmentation and lack of focus through establishing a strategic vision, a common policy framework and making available necessary resources and funds. At the same time, the bottom-up approach ensures local relevance and effectiveness by taking into consideration local skill needs.

A national policy framework with an overarching strategic vision should be formulated by harnessing the support and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders including government agencies, private sector, education providers and social partners. DIGREEN skill requirements should be explicitly embedded in all important sectoral policies such as Carbon Net Zero 2050 Roadmap and Strategic Plan should be backed by a skill development plan to bridge skill gaps to achieve the desired goals.

DIGREEN skills which includes both digital and green competencies must be mainstreamed across all levels of education from primary to tertiary levels. The ongoing educational reforms in the country should take cognisance of the evolving skill landscape in the context of the twin transition. DIGREEN skills should be embedded to new curricula. These skills include hybrid technical skills, digital and green competencies and transversal skills. It is also important to place strategic importance to lifelong learning and continuous upskilling as key to sustain the workforce's adaptability to the dynamic and rapidly changing skill ecosystem. Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems are key to delivering practical, hands-on skills required for the twin transition and the current VET system should be strengthened to accommodate the new realities.

In conclusion, building multi-stakeholder collaborations, embedding lifelong learning, mainstreaming DIGREEN skills, and contextualizing initiatives are the key lessons for developing countries like Sri Lanka aiming to bridge skill gaps for a successful twin transition.

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