



INSTITUTE FOR
RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT
IN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

NEWSLETTER 2026

January-June

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30
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A Proud Moment for Sri Lanka: Twin Research Goes Global



Professor Athula Sumathipala has assumed office as the President of the International Society for Twin Studies (ISTS) for the 2026-2027 term, effective today, 1 January 2026. He was the Secretary General from 2024 to 2025. Following the successful conclusion of the 20th Congress of the International Society for Twin Studies and the 8th World Congress on Twin Pregnancy, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 10-12 August 2025

An Unshakable Wall in the Face of Adversity: Operation 'Ditwa' Begins for Affected School Communities

With the aim of uplifting school communities affected by recent natural disasters, a special psycho-social workshop under the theme 'Ditwa' was held recently in Pallekele. This was jointly organised by the Central Province Governor's Office, the Provincial Ministry of Education, and the Institute for Research and Development (IRD) in Health and Social Care.



TRANSLATE Team Sri Lanka Strategic Planning Meeting



On 22 January 2026 , Prof. Athula Sumathipala met with Dr. Rumi Ruben and members of the Sri Lankan arm of the TRANSLATE Team, including Dr. Risitha Wakishta Arachchi (Coordinator), Ms. Manouri Dias (CEI Lead at IRD), and Ms. Hasangi Gamage (Research Assistant), to discuss the upcoming work package.



Rising from the Collapse: Psycho-social Care After 'Ditwa' – The Exceptional Mission of the IRD Team in Kegalle



A district-level training workshop for the 'Beyond Recovery' operation—an initiative launched by the government to support the mental well-being of people affected by Cyclone 'Ditwa'—was held recently at the Kegalle SANASA Campus.

The program was organized by the Clean Sri Lanka Secretariat in collaboration with the Kegalle District Secretariat, with specialized resource contribution provided by the Institute for Research and Development (IRD) in Health and Social Care.



Psychosocial Support for Central Province Educators



IRD facilitated a dedicated programme for Central Province educational authorities, equipping school leaders with tools to serve as frontline psychosocial supports for students affected by disasters. The initiative recognised teachers as essential first responders in a child's psychological recovery.

CEI Planning Meeting for the Launch of the Centre of Excellence



On March 4, 2026, a high-level Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) planning meeting was held to finalise arrangements for the upcoming launch of the Centre of Excellence at Eastern University, scheduled for March 11.

A Milestone Visit: The World Health Organization (Colombo Office) leaders visit IRD



February 2026 brought one of the most significant external engagements in recent IRD history: a formal visit by a distinguished WHO delegation, led by Dr. Rajesh Pandav, WHO Representative to Sri Lanka, accompanied by Dr. Farrukh Qureshi, Dr. Momoe Takeuchi, and Dr. Thirupathy Suveendran. The visit offered an opportunity to present IRD's wide-ranging research programmes and to discuss how evidence generated in Sri Lanka can be translated into health policy – particularly through close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Science and Technology. IRD also shared its 25-year legacy of disaster-related research and service development, and explored how WHO can further support the transfer of local evidence into national action. The delegation expressed deep commitment to this partnership



SLCOG Leadership Visits IRD

Members of the Sri Lanka College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (SLCOG), including President Dr. Rukshan Fernandopulle and Secretary Dr. Chaminda Hunukumbura, made an important visit to the IRD. This engagement highlights the institute's increasing role as a facilitator for professional medical organizations focused on common research priorities.





Psychological First Aid Training for Teachers

A capacity development workshop on Psychological First Aid was conducted for teacher counselors on March 5, 2026. This training aims to cultivate essential mental health first-response skills within educational environments, enabling educators to effectively identify and support students in distress, especially in post-disaster contexts

Deepening Partnerships with Professional Colleges

In early March, the Institute for Research and Development (IRD) further solidified its collaborative relationships with professional medical and academic colleges. This initiative is part of the institute's ongoing strategy to enhance research quality and promote ethical practices within the Sri Lankan health and science sectors. These partnerships ensure that the work of IRD not only informs policy but also shapes professional culture.



Strengthening Plant Research Through New Collaborations

IRD's multidisciplinary character was again on display in early March with the announcement of a new collaboration to advance plant research. Extending IRD's expertise into botanical sciences reflects the institute's "No Development without Research" ethos applied across disciplines beyond health alone

Centre of Excellence Coming to Eastern University:

A New Chapter for CEI in Sri Lanka



A planning meeting convened on 5 March 2026 set the stage for one of IRD's most exciting institutional developments: the launch of a Centre of Excellence at Eastern University, Sri Lanka. This initiative, driven by the IRD Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) section, signals a major investment in capacity building and research infrastructure in the Eastern Province. The Centre is expected to become a hub for multidisciplinary health and social care research, training, and community engagement — aligned with IRD's national vision of a research culture that reaches every corner of Sri Lanka.



DIGIPATHS Community Engagement Meeting Successfully Concludes for the Future of Digital Healthcare!

The DIGIPATHS Community Engagement Meeting, organized to spearhead the digital transformation of Sri Lanka's healthcare sector and primary care processes, was held recently at the Mandarina Colombo Hotel. DigiPath is an innovative digital health program introduced to scientifically manage situations where a single patient suffers from multiple ailments simultaneously (multimorbidity). Implemented in collaboration with international institutions such as King's College London, this project provides research-level support to make more accurate medical decisions through digital technology and data analysis.



IRD Meets with the Ministry of Science and Technology

On 24th March 2026, we had the opportunity to meet with senior officials of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Sri Lanka.

We were honoured to be received by Mr. Y. L. Mohamed Navavi (Secretary), Mrs. Geethani Kuruppuarachchi (Director General), and Ms. Buddhika Silva (Director – Research).

During the meeting, IRD shared insights from our 25-year journey in health and social care research, highlighting our key collaborations and our commitment to generating evidence that informs policy and practice.



In addition to discussing IRD's research portfolio and related challenges, we engaged in broader discussions on national policy directions, drawing on our extensive experience in multidisciplinary research in Sri Lanka. We also highlighted IRD's integrated approach through its three core pillars: research, ethics, and community engagement and involvement. Furthermore, we shared our perspectives on the key challenges and barriers to the effective conduct of research—issues that are of concern to the wider research community in Sri Lanka.



IRD was pleased to participate in the Brainstorming Session on Streamlining the Regulatory and Approval Processes for Clinical Trials Conducted in Sri Lanka

IRD was pleased to participate in the Brainstorming Session on Streamlining the Regulatory and Approval Processes for Clinical Trials Conducted in Sri Lanka, held on 24 April 2026 at the SLMA Auditorium and organized by the Sri Lanka Clinical Trials Registry (SLCTR).

Representing IRD, Prof. Sumathipala and the team joined stakeholders in discussions on reducing barriers, improving efficiency, and strengthening the approval pathway for clinical research in Sri Lanka. He also, in his role as Chairman of the Committee on Ethics, Governance and Research Integrity, emphasized how the Committee can facilitate these processes.

The highly productive meeting was led by SLCTR's chairperson, Prof. Udaya Ranawaka and enabled valuable exchanges among key stakeholders. Such collaborative discussions are vital to advancing a more supportive environment for high-quality research.

The meeting was attended by Dr Suranga Dolamulla, DDG Education, Training and Research at the Ministry of Health and its Director of Research Dr Devani Ranaweera, Chairman, NSF, Dr Sudath Samaraweera, Chairman, NRC, Prof. Anuji Gamage, Dr Ananada Wijewickrama Chairman MRNA, together with many active clinical trialists.



Sri Lanka Launches Community-Based Maternal Mental Health Pilot Project in Galle

A unique community-based pilot project was officially launched recently (19th) May in Galle. The project focuses on assessing the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary outcomes of a community-based maternal mental health program for prenatal and postnatal depression in Sri Lanka. The primary objective of this inaugural meeting was to engage and consult with relevant stakeholders in this field.



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The 'Kadala' (chickpea) Dansala



The 'Kadala' (chickpea) Dansala, organized by the staff of the Institute for Research and Development in Health and Social Care (IRD) to mark Vesak Poya Day, was successfully held on June 2nd at the institute premises.

Prof. Sally Hardy, Paul Johnson, and Maddy Johnson Visited to the Institute for Research and Development in Health and Social Care (IRD) on 4 June 2026.



The visit provided an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, strengthen professional connections, and explore potential avenues for future collaboration in research and global health. We look forward to building on these discussions and fostering meaningful international partnerships that contribute to advancing research and innovation.

Dr. Ruwini Cooray Visits IRD

We were delighted to welcome Dr. Ruwini Cooray, neuroscientist, entrepreneur, and CEO of NeuroGen, during her visit to IRD on 5 June 2026. A former researcher of the IRD Genetics Laboratory, Dr. Cooray met with our research team to share updates, discuss ongoing work in genetics and molecular biology, and explore opportunities for future collaboration. We look forward to continuing our engagement and advancing impactful scientific research through continued collaboration.





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