PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

COLLECTIVES FOR COEXSITENCE

formerly
Building Local capacities to Engage in the reconciliation Process in Sri Lanka

International Coalition of SITES of CONSCIENCE

GIJTR
Global Initiative for Justice, Truth & Reconciliation

Prepared By:

Nucleus RESEARCH

The Institute of Social Development (ISD) is a non-governmental organization based in Kandy, Sri Lanka established with the aim of empowering marginalized communities. Founded in 1991 by a group of intellectuals, ISD implements projects on promotion of transitional justice, truth and reconciliation, democratic governance, human rights, advocacy and gender empowerment.

Founded in 1999, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience ("the Coalition") is the only worldwide network of Sites of Conscience. With over 300 members in 65 countries, they build the capacity of these vital institutions through grants, networking, training, transitional justice mechanisms and advocacy.

The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation is a consortium of nine global organizations that works alongside communities to amplify the voices of survivors and inspire collective action in countries struggling to confront human rights violations.

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PROJECTS

TRAINING

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List of Abbreviations

CCE	Collectives for Coexistence
CCPR	Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DO	Development Officer
DS	Divisional Secretariat
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GN	Grama Niladhari
ISD	Institute for Social Development
KII	Key Informant Interviews
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OMP	Office on Missing Persons
ONUR	Office for National Unity and Reconciliation
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RTI	Right To Information
SSRM	Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRF	Truth and Reconciliation Forum
UN	United Nations
VSF	Village Solidarity Forum

Executive Summary

Background & Introduction

Since 2016, the Institute for Social Development (ISD) has spearheaded the Truth and Reconciliation process in Sri Lanka, initially through the project "Building Local Capacities to Engage in the Reconciliation Process," later renamed "Collectives for Coexistence." ISD focused on fostering social cohesion, preventing violence, and aiding healing, with emphasis on women and youth. They mediated conflicts, trained communities in democracy and peacebuilding, and facilitated the establishment of the Truth & Reconciliation Forum (TRF) through local NGOs in 24 districts. TRF leaders advocated nationally for reconciliation. Additionally, ISD introduced the Village Solidarity Forum (VSF) across 240 communities to empower grassroots efforts. VSF members, trained as Coexistence Ambassadors, addressed community issues. Nucleus Foundation evaluated the project's process and outcomes. The objectives of the evaluation were to: 1) assess the extent to which project goals and objectives were achieved, 2) identify strengths and weaknesses in project design and implementation, 3) evaluate the impact of the project and 4) provide recommendations for improving future projects.

A mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative survey methods was used in the study. Tools used included kick off meeting with ISD, 9 Focus Group Discussions (GFDs) with Truth and Reconciliation Forum (TRF) members by province, survey of 187 Village Solidarity Forum (VSF) members across 24 districts, 35 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 8 Most Significant Change stories. A desk review was also carried out.

Relevance, Effectiveness & Efficiency

Respondents from key informant interviews (KIIs) strongly agree (63 percentage) and agree (26 percentage) that the project's goals align well with local community needs, emphasizing its relevance and potential effectiveness. Similarly, KIIs reveal a consensus (77 percentage strongly agree, 20 percentage agree) on the active involvement of local communities in project planning, fostering ownership and sustainability. VSF survey results support this, with a majority (66 percentage strongly agree, 27 percentage agree) acknowledging community involvement. While KIIs show agreement (40 percentage strongly agree, 49 percentage agree) on the design of project activities to address community issues, some neutrality (9 percentage) suggests a need for clearer communication. VSF survey responses echo this sentiment, with a significant number (56 percentage strongly agree, 30 percentage agree) indicating tailored project activities.

Regarding adaptation to changing situations, KIIs reveal varying perceptions, with agreement (43 percentage strongly agree, 31 percentage agree) and neutrality (20 percentage). However, the VSF survey highlights positive perceptions, with most respondents (58 percentage strongly agree, 28 percentage agree) acknowledging the project's adaptability. Moreover, both KIIs (54 percentage strongly agree, 37 percentage agree) and VSF survey respondents (56 percentage strongly agree, 34 percentage agree) express confidence in the effective utilization of project resources for community benefit, reflecting efficient resource management practices and contributing to positive project outcomes.

The survey of VSF members assessed the project's impact on truth and reconciliation efforts. Most respondents rated its contribution to reconciliation and appreciation of diversity as very high or high, indicating positive community impact. Efforts to include marginalized voices were seen positively, as were dialogues and conflict mediation. Collaboration with local authorities and NGOs was generally viewed positively, as were the adaptation and flexibility of activities. Monitoring and reporting were perceived well, and there was a positive perception of community ownership and alignment with local needs.

Achievement of Goals & Objectives

Capacitating youth to counter hate speech and reject violence: Efforts in Western, Southern, and Uva Provinces focus on awareness programs and community engagement to equip youth with skills to counter hate speech and violence. Similar initiatives in Anuradhapura and Colombo engage diverse groups through education on human rights and democracy.

Enhancing TRF members to promote non-violence during elections: In Colombo and Eastern Provinces, TRFs collaborate with local stakeholders to prevent potential violence during elections. Similar efforts in Ampara and Badulla support community empowerment and non-violence advocacy.

Supporting educators in history curriculum reform for inclusiveness: Initiatives in North Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces aim to reform history curricula for inclusiveness. Kurunegala and Monaragala programs address discrimination and promote children's rights.

Capacitating schoolteachers and educators in fostering civic education: In North Western and Southern Provinces, programs empower educators to teach civic education and promote responsible media usage. Galle and Kandy initiatives focus on addressing societal issues through counselling and education.

Promoting responsible use of social and digital media among youth: Efforts in Western and Southern Provinces raise awareness about responsible social media usage. In Trincomalee programs address child abuse prevention and transparency promotion.

Capacitating women to increase public participation in political and social life: Initiatives in Central and Northern Provinces aim to change perceptions and empower women through training and community engagement. In Vavuniya interventions focus on legal advocacy, while in Nuwara Eliya and Kurunegala programs empower women and promote their participation in public life.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths: Several key themes that emerged from the survey of VSF members: knowledge acquisition and capacity building emerged as the most significant theme, with 60 percent of respondents emphasizing its importance. Community unity and harmony were identified as crucial aspects by 40 percent of respondents, and government and institutional support garnered attention from approximately 33 percent of respondents. Awareness and education were highlighted by 25 percent of respondents, and teamwork were emphasized by 24 percent of respondents.

The following strengths were identified by respondents in the FGDs and KIIs:

1. Community Empowerment and RTI Training: Notable progress in community empowerment was observed through the training of VSF members in Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee.
2. Empowering VSF Members: The involvement of women and youth in project activities contributed to establishing unity among different ethnic and religious groups. Through training sessions on democracy, good governance, and RTI, the project facilitated a deeper understanding of community issues and empowered participants to effect positive change.
3. Strengthening Community-Government Partnerships: Initiatives to enhanced engagement with government stakeholders, resulted in greater recognition and support for reconciliation initiatives.
4. Proactive Conflict Resolution Strategies: Collaboration between VSF and TRF proved instrumental in addressing various community challenges, including family disputes and gender-based issues.
5. Engagement of Women and Youths in Project Activities: Efforts facilitated access to essential services by raising awareness and fostering understanding among community

members. The project's model effectively influenced service providers to uphold their obligations, contributing to improved service delivery and community well-being.

6. Enthusiastic Involvement in Identifying Community Issues: the commitment of TRF and VSF teams drove the project forward, strengthening community delivery of services and promoting well-being. The project's inclusive approach fostered a sense of ownership among community members, ensuring relevance and sustainability of initiatives like peace gardens.
7. Collaborative Approach to Community Development: Unity among community members and stakeholders fostered collaboration and synergy, while agricultural support empowered communities to improve their economic situation.
8. Unity Establishment among Different Ethnic and Religious Groups: Initiatives promoted unity among diverse communities, fostering supportive environments and inclusive collaboration.

Weaknesses: According to the VSF member survey, key weaknesses in the project include communication and collaboration issues, organizational challenges, community awareness gaps, and difficulties in engaging youth. These areas require attention to enhance project effectiveness and impact.

The following weaknesses were identified by respondents in the FGDs and KIIs:

1. Weaknesses in Geographic Coverage and Resource Allocation: Limited presence in some areas restricts community engagement and effectiveness, necessitating expansion efforts. Insufficient resources hinder comprehensive engagement, particularly among youth, highlighting the need for enhanced allocation and representation.
2. Challenges in Community Engagement and Functionality: Limited establishment of project activities restricts community involvement, while ineffective committees impede reconciliation efforts, requiring broader coverage and improved functionality.
3. Dependence on Individual and Political Factors: Reliance on individual political preferences introduces bias and uncertainty, hindering project implementation. Lack of cooperation from government officials inhibits progress, while targeted efforts are needed to address gaps in community representation.
4. Influence of Extremist Groups and Nationalist Agendas: Presence and influence of extremist groups exacerbate tensions, undermining project objectives and inclusivity. Mitigating extremist ideologies is essential for fostering a conducive environment for community engagement.
5. Sustainability Concerns and Dependency on External Support: Dependency on external support raises concerns about long-term project viability, necessitating capacity development and efforts to address opposition from nationalist elements. Sustainability planning and ongoing support mechanisms are crucial for project effectiveness.
6. Resource Constraints and Geographic Limitations: Limited resources and geographic constraints hinder project implementation and community engagement, necessitating strategic resource allocation and efforts to address accessibility challenges.
7. Legal Standing and Intimidation by Authorities: Lack of legal standing and accusations of political bias threaten project safety and effectiveness, requiring efforts to ensure community initiatives are protected and inclusive.
8. Ethnic and Religious Dynamics: Challenges related to ethnic and religious dynamics impact project implementation and community engagement, highlighting the need for addressing diversity issues within communities.
9. Youth Engagement and Addiction: Decreased youth involvement due to addiction and employment trends affect community engagement and sustainability, necessitating targeted strategies for youth empowerment and engagement.
10. Infrastructure and Transportation: Inadequate infrastructure and transportation facilities hinder program delivery and accessibility, underscoring the importance of addressing infrastructure challenges for effective project implementation.

11. Dependency on Urban Migration: Urban migration trends lead to a loss of talent and manpower from communities, emphasizing the need to address factors contributing to migration for community sustainability.
12. Instances of Domestic Violence: Instances of domestic violence highlight broader social issues impacting community well-being, necessitating comprehensive strategies for promoting gender equality and creating safe environments within communities.

Sustainability

The VSF survey indicates a high level of dedication among participants, with 70 percentage strongly agreeing and 25 percentage agreeing (95 percent in total) to continue project activities post-completion, suggesting potential long-term sustainability. Leveraging networks and collaborations with government sectors and other organizations is crucial for ongoing support and resource access. The innovative VSF concept fosters unity and will serve as a platform for community engagement. Engaging youth and diverse groups ensures ongoing participation and representation. Organizational development initiatives and capacity building efforts strengthen networks and empower individuals for sustainability. Collective action among CSOs, along with education on important topics, equips communities with valuable knowledge and tools for advocacy and awareness. Community initiatives like peace gardens, children's education activities, and women's empowerment contribute to sustainable development and resilience-building. Key informants express willingness to continue project activities post-completion, indicating perceived value and impact within the community and ensuring long-term viability and effectiveness.

Impacts and Lessons Learnt

The survey of VSF members reveals a strong consensus on the project's contribution to reconciliation, with 68 percentage strongly agreeing and 22 percentage agreeing, totalling 90 percentage, highlighting widespread perception of its positive impact on fostering harmony. This indicates deep appreciation for its role in promoting lasting peace and reconciliation within the community. Themes identified include Democracy and Governance (14 percentage), Unity and Cooperation (12 percentage), Knowledge Acquisition, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding (12 percentage each), alongside others like Awareness of Rights and Laws, Gender Equality, Mental Health, and Ethnic and Religious Harmony, reflecting diverse community concerns. These findings offer valuable insights into collective values and aspirations, informing future initiatives aimed at addressing community needs and fostering cohesion.

The TRF initiatives in various provinces have addressed key aspects of community development and conflict resolution. In the Central Province, efforts in Kandy, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya have focused on transforming inter-ethnic relationships, promoting social cohesion through initiatives like peace gardens, and fostering relationships between different communities. In Ampara, emphasis has been placed on developing problem-solving skills, utilizing the Right to Information (RTI) effectively, and forging stronger networks among forums and governmental bodies to address economic rights and inter-ethnic relations. Conflict resolution and empowerment initiatives in the Eastern Province, particularly in Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee, have successfully resolved post-war conflicts and land issues through collaboration and governance training. Similarly, initiatives in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Galle have promoted unity, awareness building on democracy and human rights, and addressing social issues like drug abuse, contributing to community cohesion and empowerment. TRF efforts in the North-western and Northern Provinces, including Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya, have focused on addressing various social issues, promoting peace, and fostering community resilience through collective action and sustainable solutions. Lessons learned across different regions highlight the importance of youth engagement, legal support, advocacy for sustainable development, environmental advocacy, community leadership, transparency, and accountability in driving positive change and fostering holistic community well-being. These initiatives emphasize the significance of embracing cultural

diversity, reconciliation, and empowering communities through legal literacy to address challenges collaboratively and promote long-term peace and stability.

Recommendations

1. Expand Geographical Coverage & Outreach: Broaden project impact by extending activities to new areas and establishing connections with additional organizations, focusing on resource-lacking regions and marginalized communities.

2. Engage & Empower more Youth: Actively engage youth through sports, cultural events, and vocational training to empower them, while establishing youth networks and councils within TRFs to promote leadership and active participation.

3. Strengthen Sustainability & Inclusivity: Develop TRF as a sustainable network prioritizing community welfare, while promoting inclusivity through further training for marginalized communities and strengthening Village Solidarity Forums (VSFs).

4. Increase Government Engagement and Accountability: Enhance government engagement by building capacities of officers and collaborating with VSFs, advocating for rights-based policies, and conducting political literacy programs for citizens.

5. Promote Independent Media and Information Dissemination: Establish free and independent media movements to counteract biased narratives, utilize multimedia platforms for effective dissemination, and document successful interventions for future reference.

6. Foster Inter-ethnic and Inter-religious Cohesion: Promote ethnic and religious cohesion through collaborative initiatives, awareness programs to mitigate conflicts, and multicultural events to foster understanding and unity.

7. Further Enhance Economic Rights and Social Cohesion: Sustain initiatives like the Peace Garden Initiative, facilitate cross-community dialogues, empower women's networks, and ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in project activities.

8. Build Capacity and Institutionalize Community Engagement: Provide training for TRF and VSF members to enhance community engagement, institutionalize networks and mechanisms for sustained engagement, and develop strategic plans for effective implementation.

9. Advocate for Legislative Changes: Advocate for legislative changes to eliminate constraints on civil society organizations, particularly removing barriers like the Online Safety Act to enable them to operate more freely.

10. Expand Project Scope: Extend the project's scope to more remote villages, establish community-based forums in each village, and ensure diverse voices are heard and represented.

11. Foster Cultural and Religious Engagement: Build networks among religious leaders, facilitate cultural exchange through events, promote dialogue and understanding among different groups, and organize cultural events to celebrate diversity.

1. Background and Introduction

1.1. Background

Since 2016, the Institute for Social Development (ISD) has been actively championing the Truth and Reconciliation process in Sri Lanka through the project *Building Local Capacities to Engage in the Reconciliation Process in Sri Lanka*, funded by the International Coalition for Sites of Conscience. Employing a "top-down" approach, the project aimed to instigate policy-level changes crucial for advancing the Truth and Reconciliation process in the country. Due to the changes that took place in the country with a change in government in 2019 and emergence of a new leadership, the project was renamed *Collectives for Coexistence.*

The primary objectives of this initiative were to bolster social cohesion, prevent violence, and foster healing within communities, with a particular focus on women and youth. ISD played a crucial role in mediating conflicts among communities and families, offering training to community members in vital areas such as democracy, good governance, gender equality, pluralism, psychosocial support, and peacebuilding.

At the district level, 24 local NGOs and civil societies collaborated to establish the Truth & Reconciliation Forum (TRF), actively striving to promote reconciliation and coexistence within their respective districts. Leaders identified by the TRF were equipped with expertise in various subjects to effectively advocate for reconciliation and coexistence at the national level. A notable addition to the project was the introduction of the "Village Solidarity Forum" (VSF), a grassroots forum involving youth, women, and local social activists aimed at nurturing coexistence. VSF members assumed the role of Coexistence Ambassadors within their communities, addressing social and economic issues that threatened harmony. The selected VSF members (Focal Points) underwent training in subjects such as Governance and Democracy, Gender and Women Representation, Constitution & Voters' rights, and Psychosocial Care.

ISD commissioned Nucleus Foundation to implement an evaluation of the project, this report documents the process and outcomes of the evaluation.

1.2. Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation as per the Terms of Reference (TOR) are to:

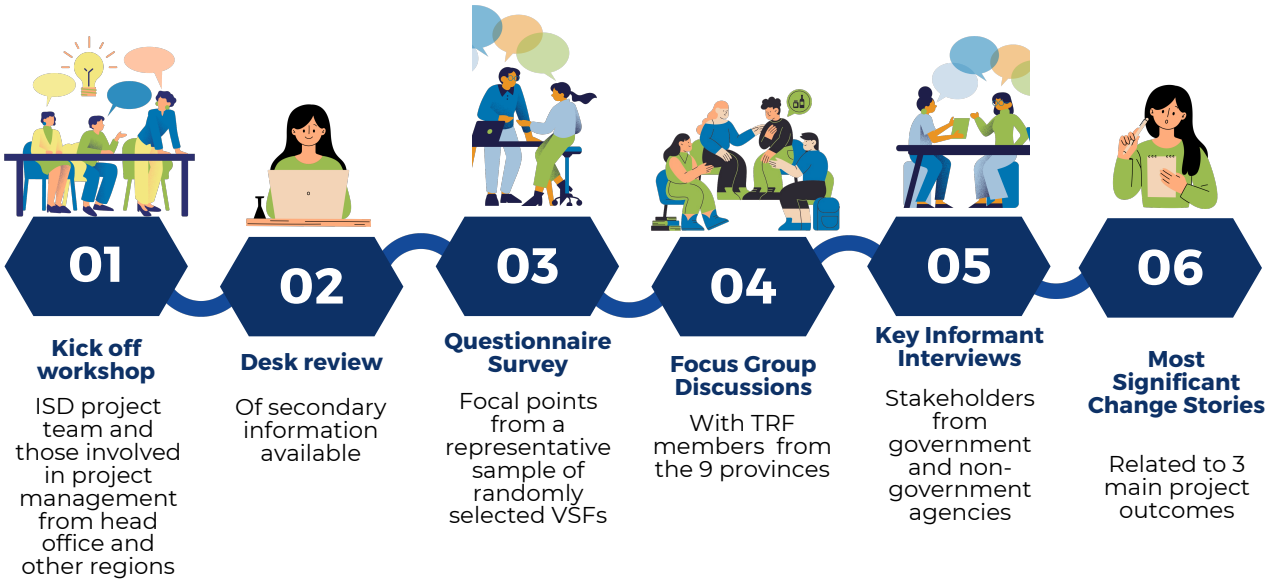
- ⇒ Assess the extent to which project goals and objectives were achieved.
- ⇒ Identify strengths and weaknesses in project design and implementation.
- ⇒ Evaluate the impact of the project
- ⇒ Provide recommendations for improving future projects.

1.3. Methodology

A mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative survey methods was used in the study. Both informal and less-structured data collection methods and formal, more-structured data collection methods were employed in this assignment. The informal or less-structured methods included discussions with the project team, partners, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A questionnaire survey was carried out among a representative sample of VSFs.

Stakeholders engaged through the evaluation included VSF Members, TRF Members, Community, Divisional, District, Provincial level stakeholders and ISD management and staff. A kick off meeting with the ISD team and TRF members held on 24 January 2024. Questions or concerns regarding the evaluation process were addressed to ensure all stakeholders had a clear understanding of the evaluation scope, methodology, timelines, and expected deliverables.

Figure 1: Methodology



1.4. Sample

The proposed sample and status of achievement are provided in the able below:

Table 1: Sample

Tools	Description	Planned	Achievement
Kick off workshop (virtual)	ISD Project Team	ISD project team and those involved in project management from head office and other regions	Completed on 24.01.2024 and included focal points from TRFs for field coordination
Desk review	Of secondary information available	Not applicable	Completed and covered project proposals, narrative progress reports, case studies, M & E data and other reports
Questionnaire Survey	Of VSF members. Self-rating/ self-assessment questionnaire	Focal points from a representative sample of 148 randomly selected VSFs[1] **Total = 148**	187 randomly selected VSF members including 50 men (27 percentage) and 137 (73 percentage) women participated survey and completed the questionnaire
Focus Group Discussions	9 FGDs with stakeholders from the 9 provinces	1 per province for 9 provinces **Total = 9**	Completed 9 FGDs for the 9 provinces comprised of TRF members
Key Informant Interviews with district and province level stakeholders	Stakeholders from government and non-government agencies,	5 per province for 9 provinces **Total = up to 45**	35 KIIs completed in 15 districts covering all 9 provinces
Most Significant Change Stories (max. 1 A4 size page/ up to 500 words per case study)	Related to 3 main project outcomes	1 per outcome for 3 outcomes + 2 other significant case stories **Total = up to 5**	8 most significant change storied covered and documented
Workshop to share findings of the survey (Virtual)	ISD project team	ISD team and other stakeholders of the project	Planned, will be done after ISD has reviewed this report

[1] Calculated using Krejcie and Morgan Formula (1970) providing 95 percentage confidence level and 5 percentage margin of error (s = X2 NP(1-P)/(d2 (N-1) + X2 P(1-P)).

1.5. Limitations

One of the primary challenges encountered during the evaluation process was the constraint of a relatively short time frame to cover a vast geographical area comprising nine provinces and 24 districts. To address these challenges, innovative solutions were implemented, including leveraging online platforms for remote engagements.

Moreover, the lack of organization and consistency in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data, including contact lists, presented challenges to the application of random sampling methodologies. Overall, while these limitations posed notable challenges throughout the evaluation process, proactive measures were taken to adapt and innovate, ultimately ensuring the integrity and comprehensiveness of the evaluation findings.

Arranging meetings and securing time with VSF members across 24 districts grew increasingly challenging. Multiple attempts were required to reach respondents, resulting in delays to the timeline.

2. Truth and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

2.1. Initiatives for Truth and Reconciliation

The Good Governance Government, which took office in 2015, established several bodies to address truth and reconciliation, such as SCRM (Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms) and ONUR (Office for National Unity and Reconciliation). OMP (Office on Missing Persons) was formed in 2016, albeit with delays. CSOs raised concerns about the credibility of these mechanisms and victim fatigue. The CTF report stressed inclusive truth-seeking processes.

2.2. Political Dynamics and Historical Context

The government's shift in 2019 away from reconciliation raised concerns about ethnic tensions, exacerbated by events like the Easter Sunday Attack. Sri Lanka has seen significant events since 2009, including the end of the Civil War, presidential elections in 2015, and the Easter Sunday Attacks in 2019. A change in presidency in 2022 resulted in protests and resignations, leading to Wickremesinghe becoming president. International pressure for accountability and reconciliation faces challenges from internal political dynamics, including Buddhist clergy influence and ethnic polarization.

2.3. Current Human Rights Landscape

Sri Lanka faces a critical juncture in its human rights landscape due to its foreign debt crisis and global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This has triggered a severe economic downturn and political instability. The public, especially the youth, is increasingly advocating for human rights, notably social, cultural, economic, and political rights, exemplified by the "Aragalaya" protest movement since March 2022. However, many Sri Lankans, particularly in conflict-affected regions, await reparations for past human rights violations. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for a national dialogue to promote human rights and reconciliation, stressing the need for institutional and security sector reforms to prevent future abuses. Despite some cooperation with UN bodies, the government faces growing criticism for restricting protests and cracking down on activists, with reports citing instances of excessive force and arbitrary arrests. Recent violations include the use of excessive force against peaceful assemblies and the application of counter-terrorism laws on protesters, as highlighted by the CCPR (Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

2.4. Government Initiatives

The Sri Lankan government has initiated various efforts to address past human rights abuses and promote reconciliation, including establishing the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), and the Reparations Office. However,

critics question the independence and effectiveness of these initiatives. Concerns have also been raised about proposed amendments to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), with calls for its replacement with a National Security Act. The international community, including the United Nations and human rights organizations, has urged Sri Lanka to pursue accountability for alleged war crimes and to ensure justice for victims. Calls for international investigations into the conflict have been met with resistance from the Sri Lankan government, which views such inquiries as undue interference in its internal affairs.

Sri Lanka is facing a complex crisis affecting its economy, society, and politics, exacerbated by issues like corruption, centralized power, and the legacy of conflict. The international community is urged to support the country's recovery while pushing for governance improvements. Accountability for past human rights violations is crucial, with calls for democratic renewal and institutional reforms. However, concerns have been raised about proposed legislation, such as the Online Safety Bill, which activists fear could restrict freedom of speech. Additionally, doubts have been cast on the effectiveness of a proposed Commission for Truth, Unity, and Reconciliation. Despite these challenges, the draft bill for the commission was gazetted in January 2024, highlighting ongoing issues of impunity and intimidation in certain regions.

2.5. Challenges to Achieving Truth and Reconciliation

In Sri Lanka, achieving truth and reconciliation faces numerous challenges, including political polarization, ethnic tensions, and a lack of public trust in state institutions. Ongoing human rights violations, including harassment of activists and journalists, hinder the reconciliation process. Specific challenges include:

1. Public Distrust: Lack of trust in government efforts undermines truth and justice initiatives.
2. Ongoing Human Rights Violations: Concerns persist about harassment, particularly in conflict-affected areas.
3. Lack of Coordination: Limited coordination among stakeholders and civil society organizations.
4. Documentation Challenges: Issues with systematic archiving and security hinder documentation efforts.
5. Disappearances and Uncertainty: Families of the disappeared face harassment when seeking information.
6. Lack of Female Representation: Women face barriers in accessing initiatives and leadership roles.
7. Government Coordination: Challenges in coordinating government initiatives and ensuring inclusivity.
8. Need for Capacity Building: Civil society organizations need capacity building to engage effectively.
9. Lack of Political Will: Reluctance to prioritize reconciliation undermines progress.
10. Controversial Constitutional Reforms: Concerns about minority rights and representation.
11. International Pressure: Mounting international pressure can lead to nationalist backlash.
12. Polarized Political Environment: Political polarization hinders reconciliation efforts.
13. Lack of Public Participation: Limited public consultation undermines transparency.
14. Fragmented Civil Society Engagement: Lack of coordination among civil society organizations.

2.6. Role of Civil Society

Civil society organizations and grassroots movements play a crucial role in promoting truth, justice, and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. These groups work to document human rights abuses, provide support to victims, and advocate for institutional reforms. However, they also face significant challenges, including intimidation, harassment, and restrictions on their activities.

Relevance | Effectiveness | Efficiency

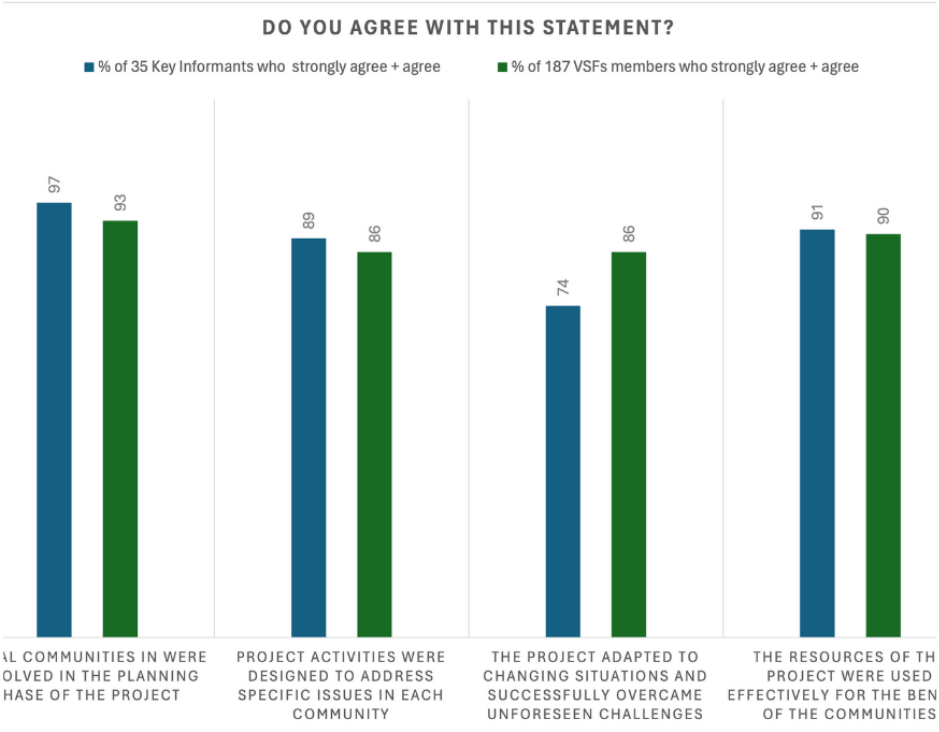
Self Rating: Percentage of VSF members that rated each of the following component as either very high or high

- **86%** Contribution to truth and reconciliation in the community
- **83%** Appreciation of religious and cultural diversity within the community
- **83%** Community ownership of reconciliation initiatives
- **81%** Partnerships with NGOs or other community-based groups
- **79%** Alignment of project goals and objectives with needs and priorities of local communities
- **78%** Collaboration with local authorities including governmental bodies
- **78%** Reductions in misunderstanding and conflicts as a result of project actions
- **78%** Work to improve marginalised voices in our truth and reconciliation efforts
- **76%** Monitoring, reporting and documenting of activities
- **75%** Adaption and flexibility of activities to suit changing contexts
- **70%** Facilitation of dialogues and mediation of conflicts within the community

The CCE Project's goals closely align with the needs of the communities in the project area.

The CCE Project implemented activities that contributed to truth reconciliation, inclusion, diversity and empowerment in the supported communities.

CCE Project resources were used efficiently for the benefit of the communities.



3. Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency

During the key informant interviews, and survey of VSF members participants were asked questions to determine the project's relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Their insights were sought to gauge the project's significance, its impact on intended outcomes, and the optimization of resources and processes. The outcomes are provided in the tables below. Responses are provided as percentages.

A total of 35 key informants from 15 districts were interviewed.

Table 2: KIIs responses regarding relevance, effectiveness & efficiency

Question	5 strongly agree	4 agree	3 neutral	2 disagree	Not responded
Project goals and objectives were aligned with needs and priorities of local communities	63	26	11	0	0
Local communities in were involved in the planning phase of the project	77	20	3	0	0
Project activities were designed to address specific issues in each community	40	49	9	3	0
The project adapted to changing situations and successfully overcame unforeseen challenges	43	31	20	3	3
The resources of the project were used effectively for the benefit of the communities	54	37	9	0	0

Source: Key Informant Interviews

Members of the VSFs responding to question related to the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the project gave the following responses: A total of 187 VSF members participated in the survey.

Table 3: VSF members responses regarding relevance, effectiveness & efficiency

Question	5 strongly agree	4 agree	3 neutral	2 disagree	1 strongly disagree	Not Responded
Local communities in were involved in the planning phase of the project	66	27	4	2	0	2
Project activities were designed to address specific issues in each community	56	30	9	1	3	2
The project adapted to changing situations and successfully overcame unforeseen challenges	58	28	9	1	3	1
The resources of the project were used effectively for the benefit of the communities	56	34	5	2	3	1

Source: Survey of VSF members

3.1. Alignment of Project Goals and Objectives with Community Needs

The majority of respondents, comprising 63 percent who strongly agree and 26 percent who agree, indicate a high level of alignment between the project goals and objectives and the needs and priorities of local communities. This strong consensus underscores the project's relevance and potential effectiveness in addressing community needs. (KIIs with stakeholders).

3.2. Involvement of Local Communities in Project Planning

A significant portion of respondents, with 77 percent strongly agreeing and 20 percent agreeing, affirm the active involvement of local communities in the planning phase of the project. This robust level of agreement suggests a collaborative and participatory approach to project development, fostering community ownership and buy-in. Such involvement not only enhances the project's relevance but also promotes sustainability by ensuring that solutions are rooted in local contexts and priorities. (KIIs with stakeholders).

When asked if local communities were involved in the planning of the project a majority of VSF members from the survey either strongly agreed (66 percent) or agreed (27 percent) that local communities were involved in the planning phase of the project. This indicates a high level of community engagement in the project's initial planning, which is generally considered a positive aspect of community-based initiatives. (Survey of VSF members).

3.3. Design of Project Activities to Address Specific Community Issues

While a majority of respondents agree (40 percent strongly agree, 49 percent agree) that project activities were designed to address specific issues in each community, there is some proportion of neutral responses (9 percent). This indicates a need for further clarification or improvement in communicating how project activities directly target community-specific issues. Enhancing clarity in project design and communication can better ensure that initiatives effectively address the diverse needs and challenges within each community. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Responses to this question by VSF memebrs that attneded the survey show that a significant number of respondents either strongly agreed (56 percent) or agreed (30 percent) that project activities were tailored to address specific issues in each community. This suggests that there was a deliberate effort to customize project activities according to the needs and challenges unique to each community. (Survey of VSF members).

3.4. Adaptation of Project to Changing Situations and Overcoming Challenges

The data reveals varying perceptions regarding the project's adaptation to changing situations and overcoming challenges. While a considerable portion agrees (43 percent strongly agree, 31 percent agree) with the project's success in this aspect, a notable percentage remains neutral (20 percent). This suggests a need for further exploration into specific instances of adaptation and challenge resolution to better understand and address any discrepancies in perception. Strengthening adaptive strategies can enhance the project's resilience and effectiveness in navigating uncertainties. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Responses from the survey of VSF members indicate a positive perception of the project's adaptability and problem-solving abilities. A majority of respondents either strongly agreed (58 percent) or agreed (28 percent) that the project successfully adapted to changing situations and overcame unforeseen challenges. This flexibility is crucial for the successful implementation of any project, particularly in dynamic environments. (Survey of VSF members).

3.5. Effective Utilization of Project Resources for Community Benefit

A substantial majority of respondents (54 percent strongly agree, 37 percent agree) express confidence in the project's effective utilization of resources for the benefit of the communities. This consensus underscores efficient resource management practices, which are essential for maximizing the impact and sustainability of project outcomes. By ensuring that resources are allocated judiciously and aligned with community needs, the project can optimize its potential to create meaningful and lasting positive change. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Most of the respondents of the VSF survey either strongly agreed (56 percent) or agreed (34 percent) that project resources were utilized effectively for the benefit of the communities. This suggests that there was a perception of efficient resource allocation and utilization, ultimately contributing to the positive outcomes of the project. (Survey of VSF members).

3.6. Overall Contribution to Truth & Reconciliation

Respondents of the survey of VSF memebrs were asked to rate themselves based on ciretria to determine the contribution of the project to truth and reconcilaiton in the supported communities. Their responses as percentages are provided in the table below:

Table 4: Self rating by VSF members

Self Rating	5 Very High	4 High	3 Moderate	2 Low	1 Very low	Not Responded
Contribution to truth and reconciliation in the community	62	21	13	0	2	2
Appreciation of religious and cultural diversity within the community	60	26	9	3	1	1
Work to improve marginalized voices in our truth and reconciliation efforts	50	31	14	2	2	0
Facilitate of dialogues and mediation of conflicts within the community	57	21	14	3	4	1
Reductions in misunderstanding and conflicts as a result of project actions	45	30	14	4	5	1
Collaboration with local authorities including governmental bodies	49	21	18	7	4	1
Partnerships with NGOs or other community-based groups	55	28	12	1	3	1
Adaption and flexibility of activities to suit changing contexts	42	37	14	4	2	2
Monitoring, reporting and documenting of activities	53	23	17	3	2	2
Community ownership of reconciliation initiatives	50	28	14	4	2	2
Project goals and objectives were aligned with needs and priorities of local communities	50	28	14	4	2	2

Source: Survey of VSF members

The above table provides self-assessment ratings on various aspects related to a project's contribution to truth and reconciliation efforts within a community. Each aspect is rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating "Very High" and 1 indicating "Very Low."

1. **Contribution to truth and reconciliation in the community:** The majority of respondents rated the project's contribution to truth and reconciliation in the community as either very high (62 percent) or high (21 percent). This indicates a positive perception of the project's impact on fostering reconciliation processes within the community.

2. **Appreciation of religious and cultural diversity within the community:** Responses show that most respondents rated the project's impact on fostering appreciation of religious

and cultural diversity within the community as very high (60 percent) or high (26 percent). This suggests that the project effectively promoted tolerance and understanding of diversity among community members.

3. **Work to improve marginalized voices in our truth and reconciliation efforts:** Ratings indicate that a significant number of respondents viewed the project's efforts to improve marginalized voices in truth and reconciliation efforts as high (31 percent), or very high (50 percent). This suggests that the project made substantial efforts to include and empower marginalized groups within the community.

4. **Facilitation of dialogues and mediation of conflicts within the community:** Responses show a positive perception regarding the project's effectiveness in facilitating dialogues and mediating conflicts within the community. A considerable number of respondents rated it as moderate high (21 percent), or very high (57 percent).

5. **Reductions in misunderstanding and conflicts as a result of project actions:** Ratings indicate that while some respondents perceived reductions in misunderstanding and conflicts as a result of project actions to be moderate (14), high (30), or very high (45), there were also a significant number who rated it as low (4) or very low (5).

6. **Collaboration with local authorities including governmental bodies:** Many respondents perceived the collaboration with local authorities positively, with a significant number rating it as high (21 percent) or very high (49 percent).

7. **Partnerships with NGOs or other community-based groups:** The majority of respondents rated partnerships with NGOs or other community-based groups positively, with a considerable number rating it as very high (55 percent) or high (28 percent).

8. **Adaptation and flexibility of activities to suit changing contexts:** A notable portion of respondents viewed the adaptation and flexibility of activities positively, with many rating it as high (37 percent) or very high (42 percent).

9. **Monitoring, reporting, and documenting of activities:** A majority of respondents perceived the monitoring, reporting, and documenting of activities positively, with a significant number rating it as high (23 percent) or very high (53 percent).

10. **Community ownership of reconciliation initiatives:** The perception of community ownership of reconciliation initiatives was generally positive, with many respondents rating it as high (28 percent) or very high (50 percent).

11. **Alignment of project goals and objectives with the needs and priorities of local communities:** The majority of respondents perceived the alignment of project goals and objectives with community needs and priorities positively, with a considerable number rating it as high (28 percent) or very high (50 percent).

Based on the provided self-rating table, the aspects with the highest negative responses include the effectiveness in reducing misunderstandings and conflicts resulting from project actions, indicated by a notable number of low (4 percent) and very low (5 percent) ratings. Additionally, the collaboration with local authorities, including governmental bodies, received a considerable number of low (7 percent) and very low (4 percent) ratings, suggesting dissatisfaction or perceived shortcomings in this area. These findings highlight potential challenges and areas for improvement in the project's impact on conflict reduction and collaboration with key stakeholders, indicating a need for further attention and intervention to enhance effectiveness and address concerns. Overall the sel rating was mostly positive and indicates tha positive responses towards the project by VSF members. (Survey of VSF members).

Achievement of Goals & Objectives

Findings related to Project Objectives stated in the Project Proposal:

ENHANCE TRF MEMBERS TO ENGAGE TO PROMOTE NON VIOLENCE AMONG THE COMMUNITY DURING ELECTIONS

- Non-violence promotion during elections in Colombo and Eastern Provinces.
- Community empowerment in Ampara and Badulla.

CAPACITATE SCHOOLTEACHERS AND EDUCATORS TO EFFECTIVELY TEACH AND FOSTER CIVIC EDUCATION AT SCHOOLS

- Civic education and responsible media usage in North Western and Southern Provinces.
- Addressing societal issues through counselling and education in Galle and Kandy.

CAPACITATE WOMEN TO INCREASE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

- Training and community engagement in Central and Northern Provinces.
- Legal advocacy in Vavuniya, participation promotion in Nuwara Eliya and Kurunegala.

CAPACITATE YOUTH TO COUNTER HATE SPEECH AND REJECT VIOLENCE.

- Awareness and community engagement in Western, Southern, and Uva Provinces.
- Education on human rights and democracy in Anuradhapura and Colombo.

SUPPORT EDUCATORS TO IDENTIFY KEY AVENUES FOR HISTORY CURRICULUM REFORM TO PROMOTE A SHARED HISTORY WHICH ENSURES INCLUSIVENESS.

- Inclusiveness initiatives in North Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces.
- Addressing discrimination and promoting children's rights in Kurunegala and Monaragala.

PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA AMONG YOUTH

- Social media awareness in Western and Southern Provinces.
- Child abuse prevention in Trincomalee.

EVALUATE AND DOCUMENT PROJECT IMPACTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF TRF AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

- Project Evaluation done with 187 VSF members, 9 FGDS with TRF members, 35 KIIs, 8 Case Studies & 1 Desk Review

The project extended its impact beyond the outlined goals, through TRF and VSF activities, it fostered meaningful truth and reconciliation initiatives in the communities, transcending the above objectives states in the project proposal.

4. Achievement of Goals & Objectives

The objectives of the project as stated in the project proposals and findings of the evaluation as per achievement of these goals are objectives are detailed in this chapter:

1. Capacitate youth to counter hate speech and reject violence.
2. Enhance TRF members to engage to promote non-violence among the community during elections.
3. Support educators to identify key avenues for history curriculum reform to promote a shared history which ensures inclusiveness.
4. Capacitate schoolteachers and educators to effectively teach and foster civic education at schools.
5. Promote responsible use of social and digital media among youth.
6. Capacitate women to increase public participation in political and social life.
7. Evaluate and document project impacts with the support of TRF at the district level.

4.1. Capacitating of youth to counter hate speech and reject violence

In the Western Province, particularly in Gampaha, efforts are focused on working with female-headed households and women workers in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) to promote reconciliation among mixed ethnic groups, including Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim communities. The initiative aims to equip youth with the necessary skills and knowledge to counter hate speech and violence through awareness programs and community engagement activities. Similarly, in the Southern Province, such as Matara, programs have been conducted targeting university students to provide solutions and link them with resources like the Matara Hospital. These initiatives have successfully increased awareness among youth about the consequences of hate speech and violence, fostering a more responsible approach to social interactions. Moreover, in the Uva Province, efforts are underway to empower youth to address issues at the village level, particularly focusing on linking communities to government services and addressing concerns specific to the plantation sector. These initiatives aim to harness the potential of young people as agents of positive change in promoting harmony and rejecting violence within their communities. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Anuradhapura, awareness programs were conducted on topics such as human rights, democracy, and conflict management, targeting diverse groups. Similarly, in Colombo, initiatives encompassing democracy, harmony, and violence prevention fostered friendships between different ethnic communities. Such programs effectively engage youth in promoting tolerance and countering hate speech through dialogue and education. (KIIs with stakeholders).

4.2. Enhancing TRF members to promote non-violence during elections

In Colombo, the TRF operates independently to address and resolve issues within the district, including mitigating potential conflicts during elections. Through collaboration with local government and community stakeholders, the TRF identifies root causes of potential violence and takes proactive measures to prevent drug abuse among vulnerable populations, such as children and women. Similarly, in the Eastern Province, district-level TRFs have been established, bringing together NGOs and government officers to collaborate with village-level VSFs in identifying and resolving community issues. These collaborative efforts aim to promote non-violence and ensure peaceful electoral processes through grassroots engagement and conflict resolution. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Ampara, the TRF played a pivotal role in resolving longstanding community issues, such as improper infrastructure and waste management, through advocacy and collaboration with local authorities. Additionally, in Badulla, TRF support facilitated the empowerment of village groups, enabling them to address community concerns effectively and promote non-violence during electoral periods. (KIIs with stakeholders).

4.3. Supporting educators in history curriculum reform for inclusiveness

In the North Central Province, efforts are focused on conducting awareness programs on truth and reconciliation, collaborating with educators and district officials to reform history curricula to promote inclusiveness and mitigate misconceptions. These initiatives aim to foster a shared history that reflects the diversity of the community and promotes reconciliation among different ethnic groups. Similarly, in the Sabaragamuwa Province, programs on reconciliation through TRFs have been implemented, empowering rural communities to resolve issues and increase awareness on topics such as gender equality and human rights. These efforts contribute to creating an inclusive educational environment that promotes understanding and tolerance among students. (FGDs with TRF members).

Efforts to promote inclusivity in education were observed in Kurunegala, where awareness programs addressed caste-based discrimination and early marriage. Similarly, in Monaragala, programs focused on children's and women's rights contributed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. (KIIs with stakeholders).

4.4. Capacitating schoolteachers and educators in fostering civic education

In the Northwestern Province, particularly in Kurunegala, efforts are focused on addressing community concerns raised at VSF meetings and conducting regular TRF meetings to discuss civic education topics. These initiatives aim to empower schoolteachers and educators to effectively teach civic education and promote responsible media usage among youth, contributing to the development of informed and responsible citizens. Similarly, in the Southern Province, such as Galle, VSFs have been developed for community development, with training sessions conducted on various civic education topics, including rights and gender equality. These initiatives aim to equip schoolteachers and educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to foster civic education in schools and promote active citizenship among students. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Galle and Kandy, initiatives included addressing domestic violence, drug addiction, and conflict management through counselling and educational programs. These efforts aimed to equip educators with the necessary skills and resources to promote civic education and social cohesion within schools and communities. (KIIs with stakeholders).

4.5. Promoting responsible use of social and digital media among youth

In the Western Province, efforts are underway to prevent drug abuse and promote responsible social media usage among educated workers in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ). These initiatives aim to raise awareness among youth about the potential risks of irresponsible social media usage and encourage responsible digital citizenship. Similarly, in Hambantota, programs on democracy, governance, and responsible media usage are being conducted among communities. These efforts aim to educate youth about the importance of responsible media consumption and equip them with the skills to critically evaluate information online. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Trincomalee, initiatives targeted the prevention of child abuse and the promotion of transparency through legal consultations and support services. By addressing digital media-related issues and promoting responsible usage among youth, these efforts contribute to creating safer online environments and fostering community trust. (KIIs with stakeholders).

4.6. Capacitating women to increase public participation in political and social life

In the Central Province, particularly in Kandy, initiatives have been undertaken to change perceptions about NGOs and encourage participation in training programs among women,

including Muslim women. These efforts aim to promote unity and harmony among different ethnic groups and empower women to take an active role in public life. Similarly, in the Northern Province, efforts are focused on capacitating women and empowering local communities through VSF initiatives. These initiatives aim to foster stakeholder involvement in issue resolution and promote women's participation in decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to greater inclusivity and diversity in political and social spheres. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Vavuniya, interventions focused on legal advocacy and support for women, facilitating their participation in public life by addressing documentation issues and advocating against gender-based violence. Similar initiatives in Nuwaraeliya and Kurunegala contributed to empowering women and promoting their active engagement in political and social spheres. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Strengths & Weaknesses

STRENGTHS

- Community Empowerment and RTI Training
- Empowering VSF Members
- Strengthening Community Government Partnerships
- Proactive Conflict Resolution Strategies
- Engagement of Women and Youths in Project Activities
- Enthusiastic Involvement in Identifying Community Issues
- Collaborative Approach to Community Development
- Unity Establishment among Different Ethnic and Religious Groups
- Impact of Training Sessions on Democracy, Governance, and RTI
- Youth Leadership and Stakeholder Support in Kalutara
- Fostering Interethnic Understanding in Kandy, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya
- Collective Strength and Cohesion in Project Implementation
- Empowering Communities and Promoting Collaboration
- Promoting Rights Awareness and Community Engagement
- Cultivating Strong Partnerships and Community Engagement
- Empowering Communities through Awareness and Advocacy
- Fostering Unity and Promoting Social Justice
- Promoting Unity and Leadership Development
- Empowering Rights Advocacy
- Grassroots Mobilization and Advocacy

WEAKNESSES

- Weaknesses in Geographic Coverage and Resource Allocation
- Challenges in Community Engagement and Functionality
- Dependence on Individual and Political Factors
- Influence of Extremist Groups and Nationalist Agendas
- Sustainability Concerns and Dependency on External Support
- Resource Constraints and Geographic Limitations
- Legal Standing and Intimidation by Authorities
- Ethnic and Religious Dynamics
- Youth Engagement and Addiction
- Infrastructure and Transportation
- Dependency on Urban Migration
- Instances of Domestic Violence

- **Communication & Collaboration Issues**
- **Community Awareness & Myths**
- **Organisational Challenges**
- **Youth Participation Challenges**
- **Political Interference & Support**
- **Leadership & Decision-Making Challenges**

Main themes related to WEAKNESSES identified by VSF members

- **Knowledge Acquisition & Capacity Building**
- **Community Unity & Harmony**
- **Government & Institutional Support**
- **Awareness & Education**
- **Collaborative Efforts & Teamwork**

Main themes related to STRENGTHS identified by VSF members

Strengths of the project identified by the respondents outweigh the weaknesses ...

5. Strengths & Weaknesses

5.1. Strengths

VSF members were askd about the strengths of the projects, their responses are categorised under the following themes:

Table 5: Strengths, as per VSF members

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Knowledge Acquisition and Capacity Building	113	60
Community Unity and Harmony	74	40
Government and Institutional Support	61	33
Awareness and Education	46	25
Collaborative Efforts and Teamwork	44	24
Social Advocacy and Empowerment	34	18
Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution	33	18
Resource Management and Utilization	21	11
Cultural Understanding and Tolerance	17	9
Community Engagement and Participation	14	7

Source: Survey of VSF members

Knowledge acquisition and capacity building emerged as the most significant theme, with 60 percent of respondents emphasizing its importance. This underscores the recognition of the project's role in enhancing skills and knowledge among participants, potentially contributing to long-term sustainability and effectiveness. Community unity and harmony were identified as crucial aspects by 40 percent of respondents, indicating a strong emphasis on fostering cohesion and positive relationships within the community. This suggests a recognition of the project's potential to promote social cohesion and address underlying tensions or divisions. Government and institutional support garnered attention from approximately 33 percent of respondents, signaling the perceived importance of external support and collaboration with governmental bodies for the project's success. This underscores the need for broader institutional backing and engagement to ensure the project's impact at a systemic level. Additionally, awareness and education were highlighted by 25 percent of respondents, indicating a recognition of the significance of raising awareness and providing educational resources to empower participants and stakeholders. This underscores the importance of disseminating information and fostering understanding to drive meaningful change. Collaborative efforts and teamwork were emphasized by 24 percent of respondents, suggesting a recognition of the value of cooperation and partnership in achieving project goals. This highlights the importance of fostering a collaborative environment and leveraging collective strengths to maximize impact. (Survey of VSF members).

5.1.1. Community Empowerment and RTI Training

Ampara has seen remarkable progress in community empowerment through the training of VSF members, enabling them to address local grievances and utilize RTI effectively. Similarly, in Batticaloa, collaborative efforts with government agencies have facilitated the identification and resolution of common issues, strengthening community-government partnerships. Additionally, in Trincomalee, proactive conflict resolution strategies have helped defuse tensions and promote harmonious coexistence among diverse communities. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.1.2. Empowering VSF Members

The women and youths were involved in the project they involved themselves enthusiastically in the process of identifying the issues in the community. Unity was established among the people such as Tamils and Muslims. The series of training such as democracy, good governance and RTI were much helpful to work in the field. A unity has been created among different ethnic and religious people through this project. A monitoring system was established and I monitored the activities of the project. Proper planning in the project and it considered the issues from the grass root level. The project established a unity among the different ethnic and religious people together and found a relevant target group to implement the project to achieve the objective. The activists, community stakeholders, religious leaders and other officials were attached in the project activities. The establishment of VSF is one of the strengths in the project. A better coordination and a unity were there in the project activities. Provision of seed and other things was very useful assistance for the members to overcome and stabilize their economic situation. The VSF had included the youth club, fishermen cooperative society, trustees of Hindu temple and few government officers, which is a strength for the project. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.3. Strengthening Community-Government Partnerships

Anuradhapura has witnessed organizational development and enhanced engagement with government stakeholders, leading to greater recognition and support for reconciliation initiatives. Similarly, in Polonnaruwa, capacity-building programs have equipped TRF members with valuable skills and knowledge, enabling them to address community concerns effectively and promote awareness on democracy and human rights. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.1.4. Proactive Conflict Resolution Strategies

The collaboration between the VSF and TRF has been instrumental in addressing various community challenges, including family disputes and gender-based issues such as the mistreatment of women. The dedication of ISD officers has been noteworthy, with their commitment demonstrated through the utilization of new technologies and innovative approaches to problem-solving. The TRF, comprising mostly service providers, has facilitated extensive community engagement and involvement in addressing local issues. Additionally, initiatives such as providing agricultural equipment, planting materials, and knowledge have empowered communities to enhance their agricultural practices and economic sustainability. The presence of capable resource persons has further bolstered the effectiveness of project interventions, while the support of government officers, including those from various departments such as the GN and Agriculture, has been pivotal in ensuring the success of community initiatives. The unity among community members and stakeholders has been a key strength, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to achieving tangible results. Furthermore, effective networking with individuals and institutions has played a crucial role in leveraging support and resources, with government sector backing significantly contributing to the project's impact. The remarkable organization of programs and the practical implementation of strategies reflect the commitment and dedication of all involved parties towards realizing the project's objectives. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.5. Engagement of Women and Youths in Project Activities

In Badulla the project has facilitated access to essential services by raising awareness and fostering a deeper understanding among community members. This has helped to alleviate apprehensions surrounding government services, empowering individuals to overcome their fears and seek assistance when needed. By equipping citizens with knowledge of their rights, the project has effectively influenced service providers to uphold their obligations and deliver services in a transparent and equitable manner. The program's model has been particularly effective in addressing community needs and promoting sustainable development. The project has benefited from robust support from public services, further enhancing its reach and impact. The collaborative strength of the VSF and the TRF has been a driving force behind the project's success, facilitating coordinated efforts and resource allocation. Guidance from

the ISD has provided valuable direction and expertise, ensuring the project's alignment with best practices and standards. Moreover, the active participation of the community, particularly in later stages of the project, underscores its ownership and commitment to driving positive change within their locality. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.6. Enthusiastic Involvement in Identifying Community Issues

In Colombo, the project has benefited greatly from the unwavering commitment of both the TRF and the VSF teams. Their dedication has been instrumental in driving the project forward and ensuring its success. One notable outcome of this commitment has been the strengthening of community delivery of services. Through collaborative efforts, the TRF and VSF teams have worked tirelessly to improve access to essential services within the community, enhancing overall well-being. The program's success can also be attributed to the meticulous manner in which it was implemented. By garnering support from all relevant parties and engaging with stakeholders at every level, the project has been able to address a wide range of community needs effectively. This inclusive approach has fostered a sense of ownership among community members and stakeholders, ensuring that the project's initiatives are both relevant and sustainable. Furthermore, the project has actively promoted practices such as gardening as a means of enhancing community well-being. By providing assistance and encouraging community members to engage in gardening activities, the project has not only contributed to food security but also promoted environmental sustainability and community cohesion. Overall, the commitment of the TRF and VSF teams, coupled with a comprehensive implementation strategy and a focus on practical initiatives like gardening, has led to tangible improvements in community delivery of services and overall quality of life. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.7. Collaborative Approach to Community Development

In Galle, the project has benefitted significantly from the support provided by the TRF, which has played a crucial role in organizing activities and resolving various community issues. The TRF's extensive networking capacity has ensured that community members are connected to the correct service providers, facilitating efficient problem-solving and service delivery. Additionally, the project has received invaluable support from family members, whose involvement has strengthened community cohesion and collective action. One notable strength of the project has been the unity demonstrated by the group involved, which has fostered collaboration and synergy in achieving project goals. Furthermore, the provision of agriculture equipment and planting material to beneficiaries has empowered them to improve their agricultural practices and enhance their livelihoods. The TRF team's diverse capabilities, representing various organizations, have enriched the project with a wide range of expertise and resources. Moreover, the organizational capacity of the ISD has been instrumental in coordinating project activities effectively. The program's attractive model, combined with the expertise of selected resource persons, has contributed to its success in engaging and mobilizing the community. The project's implementation, guided by the needs of the community, has facilitated community coexistence and raised awareness of citizens' rights. The intervention of the Saviya Institute has further enhanced the program's impact, demonstrating a collaborative approach to community development. The project has received maximum support from government officials, underscoring its importance and relevance in addressing community needs. Overall, the manner in which the project has been implemented reflects a holistic approach that prioritizes community empowerment and sustainable development. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.8. Unity Establishment among Different Ethnic and Religious Groups

In Gampaha, the project has fostered unity among diverse communities, as evidenced by the personal testimony of individuals like the mention of having a Sinhalese sister as a best friend. This sense of unity has contributed to a supportive and inclusive environment, facilitating collaboration and mutual understanding. Both the ISD officials and members of the TRF have provided unwavering support to the project. Initially, practical assistance such as the provision of dry ration packages was offered, followed by consistent follow-up to ensure sustained

progress and impact. The project has also received valuable support from community police, particularly in efforts to combat drug abuse. Their active involvement has strengthened prevention initiatives, promoting community safety and well-being. The implementation of the "Sama Udyanaya" program, aimed at encouraging home gardening, has been instrumental in promoting self-sufficiency and sustainable living practices within the community. This program has received widespread support and participation, further enhancing its effectiveness. Furthermore, the dedication of ISD officials and the active participation of government officers, including those from various departments such as the GN and DO, have been crucial in driving the project forward. Their support has facilitated smooth implementation and resource allocation, ensuring the project's success. Continued follow-up of the home gardening program and other activities underscores the project's commitment to long-term sustainability and impact. Through regular monitoring and evaluation, the project aims to maintain momentum and address evolving community needs effectively. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.9. Impact of Training Sessions on Democracy, Governance, and RTI

In Jaffna, the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act empowered residents through training, enabling them to access crucial information and address community issues effectively. Similarly, in Mullaitivu, proactive intervention on emerging social issues, such as microcredit agency practices, mitigated risks and protected community well-being. In Vavuniya, Mannar, and Kilinochchi, community empowerment and advocacy efforts have addressed local challenges and promoted sustainable development. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Jaffna, the project has made strides in addressing discrimination based on caste and religion, although further efforts are needed to effect meaningful change in this regard. The establishment of the VSF, inclusive of youths, signifies a strength of the project, indicating a commitment to engaging diverse perspectives and fostering unity within the community. One notable outcome of the project has been the promotion of unity and peaceful relationships among family members through activities such as home gardening. The inclusion of youths and women has further strengthened the project's impact, highlighting their essential roles in community development and reconciliation. The project has effectively demonstrated the meaning of reconciliation through tangible initiatives, such as cultural exchanges between different communities. For instance, the exchange of merchandise and traditional food items among communities in Jaffna has facilitated mutual understanding and cooperation. This exchange not only promotes cultural appreciation but also fosters economic opportunities, as seen in the continued business activities between communities. Similarly, the reciprocal exchange of goods between Jaffna and other districts underscores the project's success in promoting intercommunity relations and fostering economic empowerment. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.10. Youth Leadership and Stakeholder Support in Kalutara

In Kalutara, the commitment demonstrated by youth leaders within the VSF has been commendable, reflecting their dedication to the project's objectives and their active involvement in community initiatives. This commitment has been pivotal in driving positive change and fostering community development. The support provided by ISD officials and other stakeholders has further strengthened the project's implementation. Their guidance and assistance have ensured smooth coordination and effective execution of project activities, enhancing its overall impact. The resource persons involved in awareness programs have played a crucial role in disseminating valuable information and facilitating community engagement. Their expertise and contributions have enriched the quality of program delivery, effectively raising awareness and promoting positive behavioural change within the community. The project has also benefited from the support of external organizations such as Sarvodaya, particularly through initiatives like the "Mihikatha Mithuro" program. This collaborative effort has augmented the project's reach and effectiveness, allowing for the implementation of parallel programs that complement its objectives. Additionally, the backing of government officers, coupled with the collective efforts of the project team, has provided

vital support and resources for project implementation. Their involvement has lent credibility to the project and facilitated access to essential services and resources, further enhancing its success. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.11. Fostering Interethnic Understanding in Kandy, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya

In Kandy, concerted efforts have been made to foster understanding and cooperation among diverse ethnic groups, laying the foundation for peaceful coexistence and collaboration. Similarly, in Matale, significant strides have been made in building bridges between Tamil and Sinhala communities, promoting mutual respect and dialogue. Furthermore, in Nuwara Eliya, the adoption of Right to Information (RTI) practices has empowered residents to access vital information, promoting transparency and accountability in governance. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.1.12. Collective Strength and Cohesion in Project Implementation

The VSF has established a robust and cohesive team, characterized by their collective strength and dedication to the project's objectives. This strong team dynamic has been instrumental in driving forward initiatives and achieving tangible results within the community. The TRF has played a crucial role in ensuring comprehensive representation by nominating all relevant organizations to participate in the project. This inclusive approach has facilitated collaboration and synergy among diverse stakeholders, maximizing the project's impact. The involvement of skilled and knowledgeable resource persons has greatly enriched the project's activities, providing valuable expertise and guidance in various areas of focus. Their contributions have enhanced the quality and effectiveness of program implementation, ensuring the delivery of impactful interventions. The success of the project can be attributed to the collective hard work and determination of all involved parties. Their relentless efforts to overcome challenges and achieve set goals have been key to driving progress and realizing positive outcomes within the community. The dedication demonstrated by ISD team members has been exemplary, underscoring their commitment to the project's success. Their unwavering support and tireless efforts have been essential in ensuring smooth project implementation and facilitating meaningful change within the community. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.13. Empowering Communities and Promoting Collaboration

In Kegalle and Rathnapura, effective collaboration with CSO leaders and support for women's groups have contributed to greater awareness on governance issues and improved community resilience against communal violence. Galle, Matara, and Hambanthota have successfully bridged the gap between communities and government service providers, enhancing access to essential services and promoting collaboration for community development. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Kegalle, the involvement of the TRF has been instrumental in guiding and supporting project activities, ensuring comprehensive engagement with relevant stakeholders and organizations. Their active participation has facilitated effective collaboration and coordination, enhancing the project's overall impact. The project's success has also been attributed to the careful selection of resource persons, who bring valuable expertise and knowledge to various program activities. Their contributions have enriched program delivery and facilitated the achievement of project objectives. The dedication demonstrated by members of the VSF has been a driving force behind the project's progress. Their commitment to community development and empowerment has fuelled meaningful change and positive outcomes within the target communities. The implementation of the "Sama Udyanaya" program has provided community members with valuable opportunities for self-sufficiency and economic empowerment through home gardening initiatives. This program has been well-received and has contributed to improving livelihoods and fostering sustainable practices within the community.

The ISD approach to project implementation has been characterized by strategic planning and community-centric methodologies. Their systematic methods for identifying and addressing community needs have ensured that project interventions are relevant and impactful. Effective organizing and teamwork have been key factors in driving project success, enabling smooth coordination of activities and the efficient utilization of resources. The unity demonstrated by the VSF group has further strengthened project implementation and fostered a sense of collective purpose within the community. The project has received valuable support from government officials, highlighting the importance and relevance of its objectives in addressing community needs and priorities. This support has facilitated access to resources and services, enhancing the project's capacity to effect meaningful change. The organizational strength of human organizations involved in the project has been a critical asset, enabling efficient coordination and implementation of activities. The growing unity within the community has empowered them to exert influence and advocate for their needs effectively. The active functioning of Village Co-operative Forums and Reorganization Societies has provided platforms for community engagement and participation, further strengthening the project's grassroots impact. The program model implemented by the ISD Institute has been effective in achieving project objectives and promoting sustainable development within the target communities. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.14. Promoting Rights Awareness and Community Engagement

Kurunegala has seen significant strides in raising awareness on rights-based issues among estate workers, fostering collaboration between NGOs and local communities. Initiatives such as peace gardens have not only provided economic benefits but also served as platforms for dialogue and mutual understanding. (FGDs with TRF members).

The project has benefited significantly from the support of TRF members, who have actively contributed to project initiatives and provided invaluable guidance. There has been a noticeable change in community attitudes, facilitated by the efforts of resource persons who have effectively disseminated information and fostered awareness. The organizational prowess of the ISD has been evident in their strategic planning and efficient coordination of project activities. Youth involvement has been a key driving force, supported by both TRF and ISD, amplifying the project's reach and impact. Support from the Devasarana organization and government officers has further bolstered project efforts, facilitating multi-dimensional community participation and the implementation of effective strategies. The dedication and capabilities of various groups within the community, coupled with ISD's commitment, have contributed to the project's success in addressing community needs and fostering unity. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.15. Cultivating Strong Partnerships and Community Engagement

In Matale, the project has thrived due to its ability to cultivate strong relationships with external government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly the TRF. The ISD officials have played a pivotal role in organizing and facilitating project events, demonstrating effective teamwork and leadership. The presence of knowledgeable resource persons and the provision of agricultural equipment and seeds have empowered community members to establish home gardens, promoting self-sufficiency and economic empowerment. The active involvement of youth has further enriched project initiatives, reflecting the project's commitment to holistic community engagement and development. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.16. Empowering Communities through Awareness and Advocacy

In Monaragala, efforts to meet community needs have been facilitated through awareness programs aimed at eliminating the fear of accessing government services and empowering citizens to advocate for their rights. The support and guidance provided by the Uva Wellassa Women's Organization, alongside the strength of both the VSF and TRF, have been instrumental in driving positive change within the community. The active participation of community members has further underscored the project's grassroots impact and collective determination to effect meaningful change. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.17. Fostering Unity and Promoting Social Justice

In Nuwara Eliya, the project has fostered unity among team members and the wider community through awareness initiatives and collaborative efforts. Support from government officers has strengthened project implementation, while concerted efforts to combat violence against women reflect the project's commitment to promoting social justice and inclusivity. The ISD teamwork has further facilitated project success, demonstrating the power of collective action in addressing community challenges and fostering positive change. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.18. Promoting Unity and Leadership Development

In Trincomalee, the project did not affect any religious norms when implementing the project and they made a unity among the people. The project activities were carried out independently by the members of VSF. The training sessions developed skills of leadership. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.19. Empowering Rights Advocacy

In Vavuniya, as the project much related to rights and advocating for the rights for the people, many participated and supported the project. By the VSF rights-based issues were identified in the community and the training sessions were relevant to the nature of the work. As ORHAN which has been working in the district, involved in the project, and the VSF worked for the rights of the community, many of the people supported the activities of VSF. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.1.20. Grassroots Mobilization and Advocacy

Within the Western Province, in Gampaha, Kalutara, and Colombo, proactive interventions by TRFs have helped mitigate conflicts, address environmental concerns, and advocate for community rights, demonstrating effective grassroots mobilization and advocacy efforts. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.2. Weaknesses

VSF members were asked if there were challenges or weaknesses encountered during the project's executione. The responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 6: Weaknesses as per VSF members

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Communication and Collaboration Issues	38	20
Community Awareness and Myths	21	11
Organizational Challenges	20	11
Youth Participation Challenges	19	10
Political Interference and Support	11	6
Leadership and Decision-Making Challenges	11	6
Technology Utilization Challenges	7	4
Community Engagement Issues	6	3
Adaptability and Sacrifices	6	3
Resource Constraints	1	1

Source: Survey of VSF members

Communication and collaboration issues emerged as a predominant concern, with 20 percent of respondents highlighting challenges in these areas. This suggests potential shortcomings in effective communication channels and collaborative efforts among project stakeholders, potentially hindering the smooth execution and coordination of project activities.

Organizational challenges were identified by 11 percent of respondents, indicating potential difficulties in project management, structure, or internal processes. Such challenges may impede the project's efficiency and effectiveness, highlighting the need for organizational reforms or improvements to address underlying issues. Similarly, community awareness and myths were noted as an issue by 11 percent of respondents, pointing to potential gaps in community understanding or misconceptions surrounding project objectives or activities. Youth participation challenges were also highlighted as an area of weakness, with 10 percent of respondents indicating difficulties in engaging and involving young people in project activities.

Political interference and support, leadership and decision-making challenges, technology utilization challenges, community engagement issues, and adaptability and sacrifices were also identified as areas of weakness, each representing varying degrees of concern as highlighted by the respective percentages of respondents. Addressing these weaknesses will be essential for overcoming obstacles and maximizing the project's impact and effectiveness. (Survey of VSF members).

5.2.1. Weaknesses in Geographic Coverage and Resource Allocation

In Kandy, the organization's limited presence in only 5 Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions restricts its reach and impact. Expansion to cover all 20 DS divisions is necessary for broader community involvement and effectiveness. Similarly, in Matale, insufficient resources allocated to only 10 VSFs hinder comprehensive community engagement, necessitating efforts to engage more youth for enhanced participation and representation. Additionally, low male participation in Nuwara Eliya reflects a gender gap in awareness and engagement, requiring further efforts to raise awareness among men and emphasize the relevance of these issues to all citizens. (FGDs with TRF members).

In several regions like Jaffna and Ampara, challenges arise due to limited geographic coverage. The project's focus on specific areas neglects marginalized locations, leading to disparities in resource allocation and intervention coverage. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.2.2. Challenges in Community Engagement and Functionality

In Ampara, limited establishment of VSFs and activities in certain areas restricts community engagement, requiring efforts to expand coverage and address resource limitations. Furthermore, ineffective functioning of District Reconciliation Committees and limited coverage of VSFs in Batticaloa impede reconciliation efforts, necessitating expansion and improved functionality for broader impact. Additionally, limited district coverage and safety concerns for women in Trincomalee hinder participation and engagement, requiring measures to enhance safety and inclusivity for broader community involvement. (FGDs with TRF members).

Issues related to community engagement and functionality are prevalent across various regions. In Anuradhapura and Badulla, decreased youth involvement, reluctance to adopt new approaches, and a lack of openness among community members hinder effective functioning. Additionally, language barriers and low initial participation rates further complicate community engagement efforts. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.2.3. Dependence on Individual and Political Factors

The organization's ability to garner government support heavily relies on individual political preferences, introducing uncertainty and potential bias into the process. Moreover, political factors present challenges in project implementation, with politicians exerting influence that can disrupt or delay progress. Furthermore, limited participation of Muslim women in community activities presents a barrier to inclusive representation and engagement, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to address this gap. (FGDs with TRF members).

Dependence on individual and political factors poses challenges in regions like Ampara. Lack of cooperation from government officials and political leaders, as well as reluctance from political parties to support community initiatives, inhibits progress. Moreover, poor participation of government officials in project activities undermines effective implementation. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.2.4. Influence of Extremist Groups and Nationalist Agendas

The presence and influence of racist and religious extremist groups pose significant challenges to the project's objectives, hindering collaboration and progress. Similarly, promotion of nationalist and religious agendas by political parties exacerbates tensions and divisions within communities, undermining the project's neutrality and inclusivity. Addressing misinformation and mitigating the influence of extremist ideologies are essential for fostering a conducive environment for community engagement. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.2.5. Sustainability Concerns and Dependency on External Support

Sustainability planning in Jaffna and dependency on external support for VSFs in Kilinochchi highlight concerns regarding long-term project viability. Capacity development for reconciliation committees in Mannar and Mullaitivu is necessary to navigate challenges effectively and foster reconciliation efforts. Moreover, opposition from nationalist elements and extremist religious leaders in Kegalle and Rathnapura underscores the need to address misinformation and mitigate influence for effective community engagement. (FGDs with TRF members).

Sustainability concerns and dependency on external support are evident in regions like Kalutara. Issues such as a lack of infrastructure, prevalence of drug addiction, and instances of violence against women and children require ongoing support mechanisms beyond the project's duration. Dependency on external support may hinder long-term sustainability. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.2.6. Resource Constraints and Geographic Limitations

Limited resources in Galle and Matara constrain the project's ability to reach a wider population and address diverse needs effectively. Additionally, geographic limitations in Matara hinder project impact, requiring strategies to address intergenerational dynamics and ensure inclusive participation. Similarly, challenges in meeting demands in other communities beyond current coverage areas in Hambantota highlight the need for prioritization and strategic resource allocation. (FGDs with TRF members).

Resource constraints and geographic limitations impact project implementation in various regions. Challenges such as poor roads, inadequate transport facilities, and limited accessibility in Kalutara hinder program delivery and community engagement. Similarly, limited coverage of Village Solidarity Forums (VSF) in Jaffna restricts the project's reach. (KIIs with stakeholders).

5.2.7. Legal Standing and Intimidation by Authorities

Lack of legal standing for TRFs in Badulla and accusations of political bias threaten project safety and effectiveness, necessitating efforts to address challenges and ensure community initiatives are protected. Similarly, accusations of political bias and intimidation by authorities in Monaragala undermine community engagement efforts, requiring strategies to promote inclusivity and address prevalent crises effectively. (FGDs with TRF members).

5.2.8. Ethnic and Religious Dynamics

There are challenges related to working among different ethnic groups and the reluctance of Muslim women to openly discuss their problems in Galle. This aspect highlights the need for addressing ethnic and religious dynamics within communities, which can impact project implementation and community engagement efforts.

5.2.9. Youth Engagement and Addiction

The challenges related to decreased youth involvement due to addiction to mobile phones and the trend of school leavers seeking employment outside the area are significant factors affecting community engagement and project sustainability. Addressing these issues requires specific strategies to engage and empower youth within the community.

5.2.10. Infrastructure and Transportation

In regions like Kalutara, inadequate infrastructure and transportation facilities hinder accessibility and program delivery. This aspect underscores the importance of addressing infrastructure challenges to ensure effective project implementation and community engagement.

5.2.11. Dependency on Urban Migration

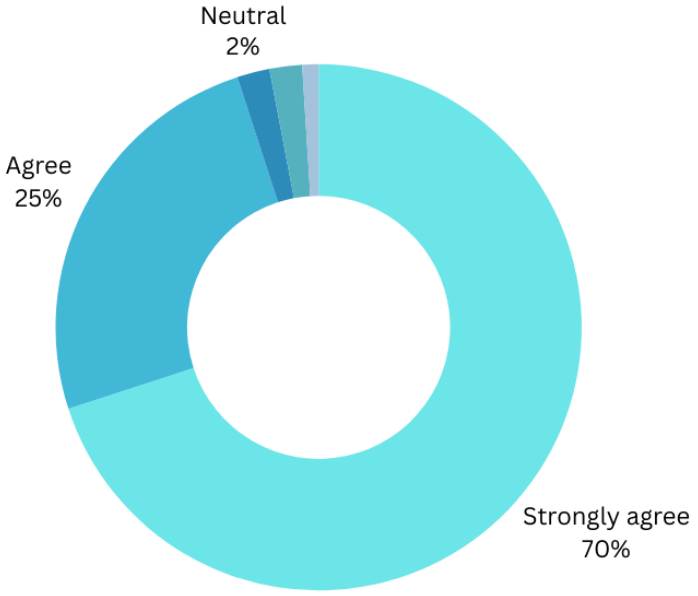
The trend of youths moving to urban areas after completing their examinations in Kalutara indicates a loss of talent and manpower from the community. This aspect highlights the need for addressing factors contributing to urban migration to promote community sustainability and development.

5.2.12. Instances of Domestic Violence

Instances of domestic violence mentioned in regions like Badulla and Kalutara highlight broader social issues that impact community well-being and project effectiveness. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies for promoting gender equality and creating safe environments within communities.

Sustainability

Percentage of VSF members that said:
We will continue the activities of the project even after the project ends



There is a high demand for truth and reconciliation activities in our communities. We plan to expand this pilot project to other areas and villages for long-term sustainability. Improving coordination among Volunteer Support Forces (VSFs) and sharing our experiences will strengthen mobile civil society. Our trained personnel will play a key role in disseminating the lessons learned.
FGD with TRF members, Kegalla

The Peace Gardens exemplifies the strength of community resilience and planning in driving sustainable development. It serves as a model for future actions that integrate community development with environmental stewardship. They showcase a united community effort, demonstrating a shared dedication to ecological sustainability, economic empowerment and the promotion of community collaboration.
Case Study, Kandy

- Leveraging networks and building partnerships ensures ongoing support and resources for sustainability and collaboration.
- Village Solidarity Forums (VSFs) foster unity, address social issues, and promote sustainable development within communities.
- Engaging youth and diverse groups ensures representation and active participation, vital for long-term sustainability.
- Collective action strengthens community voices, education equips communities with tools for navigating challenges and promoting rights.
- Strengthening staff and institutional capacity, along with fostering knowledge-sharing, empowers communities.
- Initiatives such as peace gardens, education support, and women's empowerment contribute to resilience and sustainable development.
- Strong follow up and commitment to long-term effectiveness, ensures benefits continue positively impacting community well-being.

6. Sustainability

70 percent of the participants of the VSF survey said they strongly agreed with the statement *We will continue the activities of the project even after the project ends.* A further 25 percent said agreed with this statement. This overwhelmingly positive response signifies a high level of dedication and willingness among VSF participants to continue the initiatives and efforts initiated by the project beyond its duration. Such a strong endorsement suggests the potential for long-term sustainability and impact of the project's activities within the community. (Survey of VSF members).

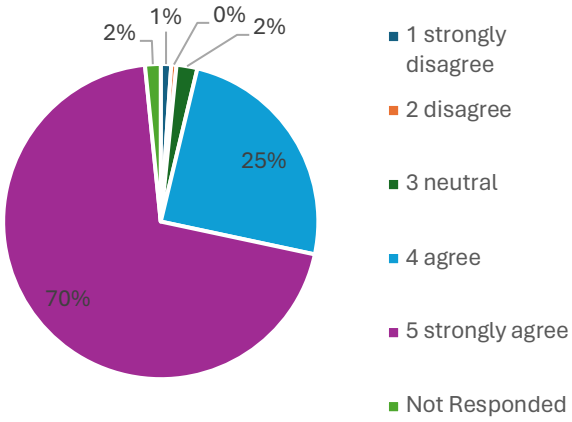


Figure 2: Sustainability as per VSF members

6.1. Network Leveraging and Collaboration

Leveraging networks for future actions is crucial for sustainability, ensuring continued support and collaboration. Building relationships with government sectors establishes valuable partnerships for ongoing support and resource access. Additionally, establishing relationships with additional organizations expands support networks and enhances collaborative opportunities. (FGDs with TRF members).

6.2. Community Development through VSFs

The innovative concept of Village Support Forums (VSF) fosters a culture of unity within villages, laying the foundation for sustainable community development. VSFs will remain operational, serving as platforms for community engagement and problem-solving. Promoting the VSF concept as a means to mitigate issues like racism and caste differences fosters sustainable social harmony and inclusion. (FGDs with TRF members).

6.3. Youth and Diversity Engagement

Engaging youth and diverse groups is essential for long-term sustainability, as it ensures ongoing participation and representation of all community members. (FGDs with TRF members).

6.4. Organizational Development for Sustainability

Organizational development initiatives, focusing on staff and institutional capacity building, are key to sustaining the effectiveness of community initiatives. Sharing knowledge and expertise among trained personnel ensures sustainability by empowering individuals to serve as resources for their communities. Organizational development initiatives and capacity building efforts in Rathnapura ensure sustainability through strengthened networks and trained human resources. (FGDs with TRF members).

6.5. Advocacy and Awareness

Collective action among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including youth and women's groups, provides advocacy opportunities and strengthens community voices. Education on important topics such as reconciliation, democracy, human rights, and gender empowerment equips communities with valuable knowledge and tools for navigating challenges, including during election periods. Continued awareness-raising and advocacy efforts by TRF and VSF members contribute to the protection and promotion of rights within communities. (FGDs with TRF members).

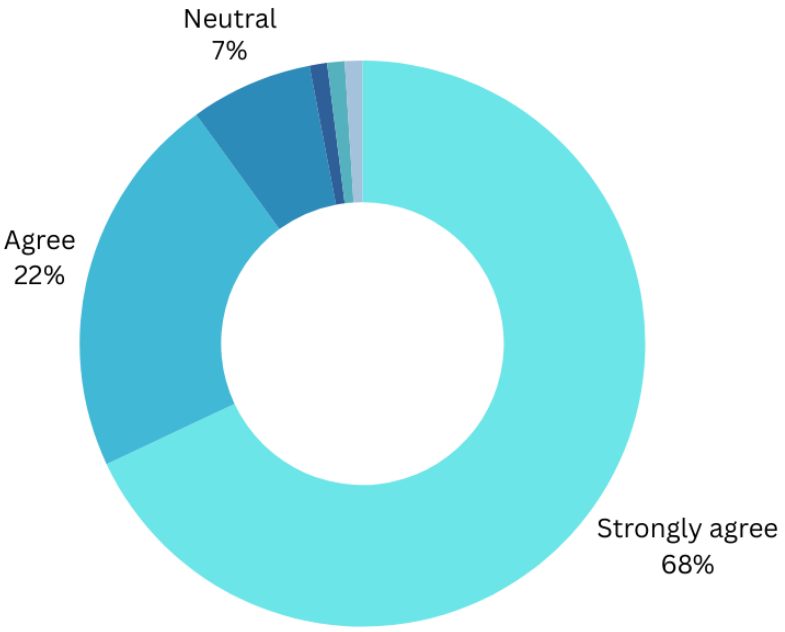
6.6. Community Initiatives for Sustainable Development

Implementation of peace gardens in villages promotes sustainability by fostering environmental stewardship and community resilience. Supporting children's education activities, such as setting up libraries and providing scholarships, ensures the long-term development and empowerment of future generations. Women's empowerment and gender-based violence prevention activities contribute to sustainable community development by promoting gender equality and social justice. Building on successful pilot projects, such as the mobile clinic in Kegalle, and expanding to other areas ensures widespread access to essential services and promotes community well-being. Case studies from Kegalle and Rathnapura demonstrate the tangible impacts of community initiatives, highlighting the importance of continued investment in sustainable development efforts. In Monaragala, the establishment of village-level networks, improved financial management, and the success of peace garden initiatives signify progress towards sustainable community development and resilience-building. (FGDs with TRF members).

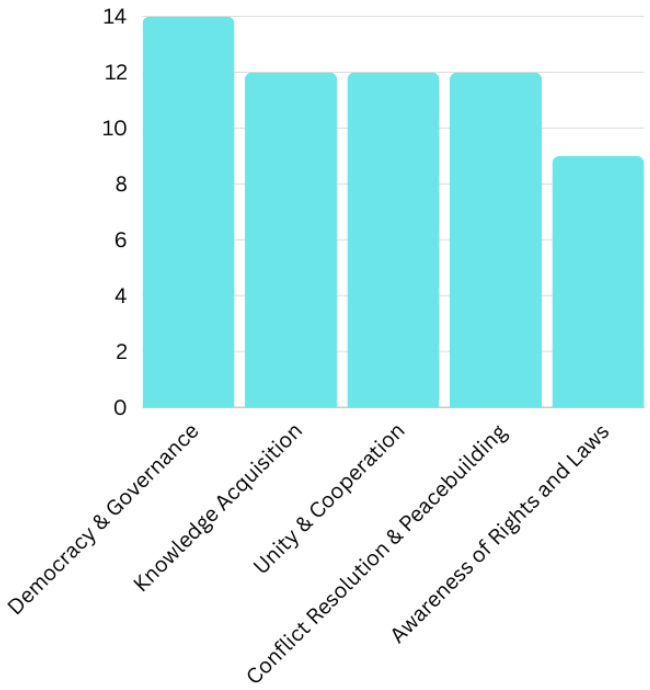
The data regarding the question on the continuation of project activities post-project completion reveals a strong inclination towards sustainability. A significant proportion of key informants, comprising 43 percent who strongly agree and 46 percent who agree, express a willingness to continue project activities even after the project concludes. This support for continuity underscores the perceived value and impact of the project within the community. Such a commitment to sustaining project activities beyond its initial lifespan bodes well for the long-term viability and effectiveness of interventions, ensuring that the benefits accrued continue to positively influence the community's well-being. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Impacts & Lessons Learnt

Percentage of VSF members that said:
The project contributed to reconciliation in their regions.



Main themes identified as VSF members related to impacts & lessons learnt (percentage of respondents)



- TRF initiatives promote social cohesion and enhance community well-being.
- Notable progress observed in inter-ethnic relationships.
- Support for peace gardens and assistance to students contributes to community well-being.
- Efforts foster relationships between different communities, promoting social cohesion.
- Conflict resolution efforts successfully address post-war conflicts and land issues.
- Governance training empowers communities and facilitates conflict resolution.
- Collaboration with government stakeholders and community members prevents violence and fosters empowerment.
- Advocacy for unity and awareness building through peace gardens and social issue addressing.
- Advocacy for marginalised communities' interests and sustainable development.
- Environmental advocacy and protection of isolated communities.
- Strong emphasis on promoting unity within communities to address challenges effectively.
- Initiatives address various social issues like landlessness, women's empowerment, and worker rights.
- Facilitation of positive change and finding sustainable solutions to community challenges.
- Youth engagement initiatives promote inclusivity and facilitate legal issue resolution.
- Emphasis on community leadership, transparency, and accountability.

7. Impacts and Lessons Learnt

When queried about their stance on whether the project contributed to reconciliation in their region, 68 percent of VSF members “strongly agreed” with the statement, while an additional 22 percent said they “agreed”. This substantial consensus among the VSF members underscores a widespread perception of the project's positive impact on fostering reconciliation within their region. The combined percentage of those who agreed, totaling 90 percent, indicates overwhelming support for the project's role in advancing reconciliation initiatives. This strong affirmation from VSF members suggests a deep appreciation for the project's contributions to fostering harmony and understanding within the community, highlighting its significance in promoting lasting peace and reconciliation. (Survey of VSF members).

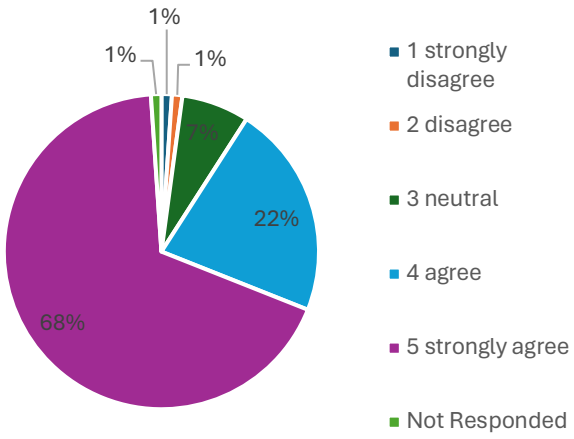


Figure 3: Impacts & lessons as per VSF members

The table presents the most commonly identified themes from responses provided by 187 members of the VSFs when asked about the main lessons learnt:

Table 7: Main themes of impacts & lessons as per VSF members

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Democracy and Governance	27	14
Knowledge Acquisition	22	12
Unity and Cooperation	23	12
Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding	22	12
Awareness of Rights and Laws	16	9
Gender Equality and Women's Rights	14	7
Mental Health Awareness	13	7
Community Engagement and Leadership	13	7
Freedom of Information Act	11	6
Ethnic and Religious Harmony	12	6

Source: Survey of VSF members

The theme of Democracy and Governance emerged as the most prevalent, constituting 14 percent of respondents. Closely following, Unity and Cooperation garnered 12 percent. Similarly, Knowledge Acquisition and Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding emerged as a theme, also constituting 12 percent each. Other notable themes identified include Awareness of Rights and Laws, Gender Equality and Women's Rights, Mental Health Awareness, Community Engagement and Leadership, Freedom of Information Act, and Ethnic and Religious Harmony. Each of these themes received varying degrees of attention from respondents, highlighting a diverse range of concerns and priorities within the community. Overall, the analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of the community's concerns and priorities, ranging from issues related to governance and cooperation to knowledge acquisition, conflict resolution, and social justice. These findings provide valuable insights into the community's collective values and aspirations, which can inform future initiatives and programs aimed at addressing their needs and promoting community development and cohesion. (Survey of VSF members).

7.1. Inter-ethnic Relations and Economic Rights

TRF initiatives in the Central Province, particularly in Kandy, Matale, and Nuwara Eliya, have focused on transforming perceptions, enhancing community well-being, and promoting social cohesion. In Kandy, notable transformations in inter-ethnic relationships have been observed, while Matale's support for peace gardens and assistance to students has contributed to community well-being. Additionally, efforts in Nuwara Eliya to foster relationships between Tamil estate communities and Sinhala villages, along with celebrations like the Pongal festival, have promoted social cohesion and awareness about government services through the RTI. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Ampara, the project facilitated the development of problem-solving skills and knowledge of public interest issues, particularly through the effective utilization of the Right to Information (RTI). It emphasized awareness and training to select the most suitable target group and empowered members to address community issues independently and collaboratively. Furthermore, a stronger network was forged among various forums and governmental bodies, enhancing the community's ability to address economic rights and inter-ethnic relations effectively. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.2. Conflict Resolution and Empowerment

In the Eastern Province, TRF initiatives in Ampara, Batticaloa, and Trincomalee have successfully resolved post-war conflicts and land issues through collaboration and governance training, contributing to community empowerment and conflict resolution. (FGDs with TRF members).

Anuradhapura's lessons underscored the importance of collective lobbying to address community challenges and emphasized peacebuilding efforts through sensitivity and empathy. Moreover, the significant role of religious leaders in peacebuilding was acknowledged, highlighting the project's impact on conflict resolution and empowerment within the community. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.3. Unity Promotion and Awareness Building

TRF initiatives in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa in the North Central Province have focused on promoting unity through peace gardens and addressing issues like drug abuse. Additionally, awareness programs on democracy and human rights, along with strong networks with NGOs, have contributed to community awareness and empowerment. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Galle, the project emphasized the power of unity in addressing community issues effectively and promoted awareness to achieve communal goals. This approach fostered unity and strengthened the community's ability to address challenges collectively, contributing to greater cohesion and awareness. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.4. Solutions for Social Issues

In the North-western and Northern Provinces, TRF initiatives have addressed various social issues such as landlessness, women's empowerment, and worker rights. Jaffna's facilitation role in resolving district-level challenges and Mullaitivu's efforts in identifying and addressing post-war issues reflect the TRF's commitment to community well-being. (FGDs with TRF members).

Gampaha's lessons focused on acquiring effective problem-solving skills and promoting unity to address social issues within the community. Through collective action and awareness initiatives, the project aimed to find sustainable solutions to prevalent social challenges. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.5. Community Cohesion and Conflict Mitigation

TRF initiatives in Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya, Mannar, and Kilinochchi have focused on addressing community issues, promoting peace, stability, and resilience. These efforts include facilitating positive change, social cohesion, and finding sustainable solutions to community challenges. (FGDs with TRF members).

Jaffna highlighted the importance of aligning development activities with public objectives and creating sustainable mechanisms through active community participation. By promoting dialogue and collaboration, the project aimed to mitigate conflicts and foster greater cohesion within the community. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.6. Collaboration and Violence Prevention

TRF initiatives in Kegalle, Rathnapura, the Southern Province, and the Uva Province have fostered collaboration and prevented violence through engagement with government stakeholders and community members. Despite challenges, TRF initiatives have contributed to youth engagement, community empowerment, and conflict prevention. (FGDs with TRF members).

Kalutara's lessons emphasized the role of collaboration in facilitating access to services and preventing violence within the community. Through strategic outreach and empowerment initiatives, the project aimed to address issues such as drug distribution and control effectively. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.7. Youth Engagement and Legal Support

TRF initiatives in the Southern Province have engaged youth, promoted inclusivity, shed light on marginalization, and facilitated the resolution of legal issues. Additionally, interventions in Hambanthota have prevented potential tragedies by linking at-risk students with relevant counselling services, demonstrating the tangible impact of community engagement and support initiatives. (FGDs with TRF members).

Lessons from Kandy centered on engaging youth in community activities and providing legal support to address social issues. By empowering youth and promoting awareness of legal rights, the project aimed to foster greater engagement and participation in community affairs. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.8. Advocacy and Sustainable Development

TRF involvement in the Uva Province, particularly in Badulla and Monaragala, has advocated for marginalized communities' interests, facilitated engagement with government authorities, and promoted sustainable development through initiatives like establishing peace gardens. (FGDs with TRF members).

Kurunegala's lessons included advocacy efforts to promote sustainable development and enhance peace-building initiatives. Through practical activities and support, the project aimed to advocate for long-term solutions to community challenges. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.9. Protection and Environmental Advocacy

TRF initiatives in the Western Province, particularly in Gampaha, Kalutara, and Colombo, have provided protection to isolated communities, prevented violence during crises, and addressed environmental issues. These efforts demonstrate the impact of collective action and conflict mitigation initiatives. (FGDs with TRF members).

In Matale, the project focused on protecting the environment and advocating for sustainable development. By raising awareness and promoting unity, the project aimed to address environmental issues and safeguard the community's well-being. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.10. Strengthening Community Leadership and Engagement

In Anuradhapura, significant lessons were gleaned regarding the specific roles of religious leaders in peacebuilding and the critical importance of selecting resource persons adept at handling sensitive issues. These insights underscored the necessity of involving community figures with influence and expertise to navigate delicate matters effectively. Similarly, in Gampaha, lessons underscored the importance of acquiring effective problem-solving skills and recognizing the strength that comes from unity and collective action. Understanding the significance of harmony and cooperation within communities emerged as pivotal for driving positive change. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.11. Promoting Transparency and Accountability

Colombo's project highlighted the imperative of developing problem-solving and leadership qualities collaboratively within teams. Additionally, a deeper understanding of democratic rights, alongside the strategic utilization of tools like the Freedom of Information Act, emerged as essential components for promoting transparency and accountability. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.12. Fostering Community Cohesion and Collaboration

Galle's experience emphasized the power of unity among community members in addressing challenges effectively. Furthermore, the value of awareness campaigns and the efficacy of working as a cohesive network were underscored as indispensable strategies for achieving common goals and fostering community cohesion. Similarly, Kegalle's lessons highlighted the transformative potential of awareness initiatives in promoting mutual understanding and cultural appreciation within communities. Additionally, the emphasis on participatory approaches and teamwork contributed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.13. Advocating for Holistic Community Well-being

Monaragala's experiences underscored the importance of addressing livelihood development and attitudinal change as integral components of community empowerment. Developing effective presentation skills and advocating for mental health needs emerged as critical aspects of promoting holistic well-being. (KIIs with stakeholders).

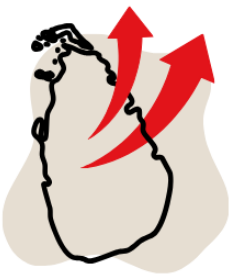
7.14. Embracing Cultural Diversity and Reconciliation

In Nuwara Eliya, the project emphasized the value of appreciating different cultural perspectives and fostering unity within diverse communities. Dedication to common goals and reconciliation efforts were pivotal in bridging divides and nurturing a sense of shared purpose. (KIIs with stakeholders).

7.15. Empowering Communities Through Legal Literacy

Vavuniya's lessons focused on empowering community members through knowledge of legal protocols, rights-based issues, and negotiation strategies. By promoting proactive resolution approaches and minimizing reliance solely on law enforcement, communities were better equipped to address challenges collaboratively. (KIIs with stakeholders).

Recommendations



1. Expand Geographical Coverage & Outreach to include new regions and communities.

2. Engage & Empower more Youth, expand youth networks, and amplify their voices in community development efforts.

3. Strengthen Sustainability & Inclusivity by engaging diverse groups and addressing specific challenges. Strengthen and create VSFs

4. Increase Government Engagement and Accountability for addressing community issues and advocating for rights-based policies.

5. Promote Independent Media and Information Dissemination to counteract biased narratives is essential for promoting transparency.

6. Foster Inter-ethnic and Inter-religious Cohesion, enhance community representation & collaboration across ethnic and religious groups.

7. Further Enhance Economic Rights and Social Cohesion. Facilitate cross-community dialogues and empower networks

8. Build Capacity and Institutionalise Community Engagement. Develop plans & methodologies for effective implementation & scalability.

7. Advocate for Legislative Changes focusing on the elimination of constraints on civil society organisations.

9. Expand Project Scope to more remote villages for reaching underserved communities and extending project benefits.

10. Foster Cultural and Religious Engagement by promoting dialogue and understanding among different religious and cultural groups.

8. Conclusions & Recommendations

The following themes were identified with regards to recommendations made by the respondents of the survey of VSF members.

Table 8: Main themes related to recommendations as per VSF members

Theme	Number of Responses	Percentage
Continuation and Expansion of Programs	29	16
Increase Membership	25	13
Conduct Programs in More Villages	20	11
Increase Practical Activities	17	9
Awareness Programs for Government Officials	14	7
Community Engagement and Livelihood Programs	13	7
Registering and Formalizing VSF	12	6
Provide Training and Workshops	11	6
Youth Involvement	9	5
Monthly Meetings and Trainings	9	5

Source: Survey of VSF members

The table illustrates the priorities identified by respondents, expressed in percentages. Key points include a significant emphasis on the continuation and expansion of programs (16 percent), indicating a desire to sustain and broaden existing initiatives. Increasing membership (13 percent) and conducting programs in more villages (11 percent) are also highlighted, reflecting a commitment to broadening community engagement and extending program reach. Additionally, respondents expressed a need for more practical activities (9 percent) and emphasized the importance of awareness programs for government officials (7 percent). Other priorities include community engagement and livelihood programs (7 percent), registering and formalizing VSF (6 percent), providing training and workshops (6 percent), involving youth (5 percent), and holding monthly meetings and trainings (5 percent). These findings underscore the community's multifaceted approach to addressing various needs and aspirations, informing strategic planning for effective community development and engagement within the VSF framework. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

Recommendations made by respondents of the FGDs and KIIs are provided below:

8.1. Expand Geographical Coverage & Outreach

Expanding TRF activities to new areas and establishing links with additional organizations is essential for broadening the project's impact. Moreover, dividing districts for better project implementation, with a focus on resource-lacking areas, can ensure more equitable distribution of project benefits. Additionally, comprehensive coverage of regions should be ensured by extending outreach and awareness programs to reach marginalized communities effectively. (FGDs with TRF members).

Advocating for the elimination of constraints on civil society organizations, such as the Online Safety Act, is crucial to safeguard democracy and ensure the effectiveness of community initiatives. Implementing entrepreneurial actions can restore economic stability among project members, fostering self-reliance and sustainable development. Enhancing women's participation in politics and providing follow-up support can promote gender equality and amplify diverse voices in decision-making processes. Expanding the project to more remote villages in Ampara district, coupled with educational plans, community-based forums, and awareness programs, can empower existing forum members and extend project benefits to underserved communities. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.2. Engage & Empower more Youth

To empower youth, emphasis should be placed on engaging them through various activities such as sports, cultural events, and vocational training. Capacity-building programs on governance, gender-based violence, and reconciliation should be provided to equip youth with essential skills and knowledge. Establishing youth networks and councils within TRFs can further promote active participation and leadership among young community members. (FGDs with TRF members).

Incorporating youth engagement initiatives into annual plans and involving government officials can foster youth participation and amplify their voices in community development efforts. Advocating for programs focused on drug addiction prevention is essential to safeguarding the well-being of the younger generation and building resilient communities. Increasing training hours and involving more youth as trainers can enhance grassroots-level outreach and capacity-building efforts. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.3. Strengthen Sustainability & Inclusivity

The development of TRF as a sustainable network, emphasizing community welfare over monetary gain, is crucial for long-term success. Promoting inclusivity by engaging diverse groups and addressing specific challenges like economic crises and education can ensure that all community members benefit from project initiatives equitably. (FGDs with TRF members).

Strengthening existing and creating new Village Solidarity Forums (VSFs) with further training, particularly for marginalized communities, can ensure inclusivity and promote community-led development. Expanding the project to surrounding villages and providing practical training to prevent drug and alcohol use among women and children can address socio-economic challenges and foster resilience. Implementing robust programs to change attitudes and provide support for unemployed women through SMEs and vocational training for youth can promote economic empowerment and social cohesion. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.4. Increase Government Engagement and Accountability

To enhance government engagement and accountability, building capacities of government officers and strengthening collaboration with outreach officers and VSFs is essential. Holding politicians accountable for addressing community issues and advocating for rights-based policies can ensure that community needs are adequately addressed. Furthermore, conducting political literacy programs can empower citizens with knowledge about their rights and democratic processes. (FGDs with TRF members).

Publicizing programs extensively and establishing a follow-up mechanism to monitor VSF activities regularly can enhance government engagement and accountability, ensuring transparency and responsiveness to community needs. Addressing youth addiction to drugs and involving parents in guidance, along with considering alternative businesses for project participants, can mitigate social challenges and promote holistic well-being. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.5. Promote Independent Media and Information Dissemination

Establishing free and independent media movements to counteract biased narratives is essential for promoting transparency and accurate information dissemination. Utilizing multimedia platforms and local resource persons can enhance the effectiveness of information dissemination efforts. Additionally, documenting successful interventions and case studies can provide valuable insights for future reference and learning. (FGDs with TRF members).

Increasing the duration of awareness programs and focusing more on violence against women can raise awareness and foster positive social change. Popularizing good programs through

media and providing updated information on awareness topics can amplify project impact and promote community participation. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.6. Foster Inter-ethnic and Inter-religious Cohesion

Promoting ethnic and religious cohesion through collaborative initiatives and peacebuilding activities is vital for fostering harmony within the community. Strengthening networks of VSFs and TRFs can enhance community representation and collaboration across different ethnic and religious groups. Conducting awareness and sensitization programs, especially during elections, can mitigate ethnic and racial conflicts and promote unity. (FGDs with TRF members).

Conducting awareness programs on misdirection through social media and organizing multicultural events can foster understanding and unity among diverse communities, mitigating ethnic and religious tensions. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.7. Further Enhance Economic Rights and Social Cohesion

Sustaining the Peace Garden Initiative and enhancing understanding of new legislation are essential for promoting economic rights and social cohesion within the community. Facilitating cross-community dialogues and empowering women's networks can further promote inclusivity and equality. Additionally, ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in project activities and government services is crucial for promoting social justice and cohesion. (FGDs with TRF members).

Supporting persons with disabilities and expanding income-generating activities for unemployed women can promote economic empowerment and social inclusion. Providing more awareness programs on general law can empower communities and promote social justice. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.8. Build Capacity and Institutionalize Community Engagement

Providing training and capacity building for TRF and VSF members on various topics is essential for enhancing community participation and project effectiveness. Institutionalizing networks and mechanisms for sustained community engagement and development can ensure long-term project success. Developing strategic plans and methodologies for effective project implementation and scalability is essential for maximizing project impact and sustainability. (FGDs with TRF members).

Networking all VSF teams within the district and organizing experience-sharing programs can enhance collaboration and knowledge-sharing among community members. Engaging with government machinery and educating youth groups for informed future leadership can institutionalize community-driven development processes and ensure sustainability. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.9. Advocate for Legislative Changes

Efforts should be directed towards advocating for legislative changes, particularly focusing on the elimination of constraints on civil society organizations. This advocacy is vital to safeguard democracy and ensure the effectiveness of community initiatives. By advocating for the removal of barriers such as the Online Safety Act, civil society organizations can operate more freely, enabling them to play a more active role in community development and advocacy efforts. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.10. Expand Project Scope

Expanding the project's scope to more remote villages is essential for reaching underserved communities and extending project benefits to those who need them most. Recommendations include establishing community-based forums in each village to facilitate local engagement

and decision-making processes. This expansion not only increases the project's reach but also promotes inclusivity and ensures that diverse voices are heard and represented in project activities. (KIIs with Stakeholders).

8.11. Foster Cultural and Religious Engagement

To foster cultural and religious engagement within the community, it's essential to build networks among religious leaders and facilitate cultural exchange through events such as cultural rallies and tournaments. By promoting dialogue and understanding among different religious and cultural groups, these initiatives can contribute to social cohesion and harmony within the community. Additionally, organizing cultural events can celebrate diversity and promote a sense of belonging among community members. (KIIs with Stakeholders).