



Paths To Peace

May 2024

Addressing Gaps in Public Services to the Malaiyaha Community

Under the Sustainable Peace through Pluralism and Inclusive Service Delivery project funded by Freedom House, research was carried out to identify the shortcomings in delivering public services to the Malaiyaha community. The research focused on 10 estates and divisions in the Ratnapura district in areas where the Malaiyaha community lived.

The research was conducted by Grama Niladaris and development officers enrolled in the advanced certificate course in pluralism and inclusive service delivery at the Sabaragamuwa University, which is implemented by NPC.

While selecting research areas, the officials did not choose an estate or division within their own service areas because people may have been reluctant to share information about their problems and challenges. There was also a possibility that the researchers would not report the information accurately.



Thirty community facilitators and human rights defenders from the Malaiyaha community were trained in the ten estates and divisions. After the training, a meeting was organized to build relationships between government officials and community facilitators. Initially, the community facilitators were reluctant to discuss their problems with government officials regarding public services.

To overcome this situation, group activities were conducted to build trust between government officials and community facilitators. This was important because the community facilitators and human rights defenders served as access points for issues related to obtaining government services.

A data contributor from the Hapugasthenna Estate said, "There is a hospital in the estate. However, it has only one doctor. Sometimes when the hospital closes for lunch, it is unclear when it will reopen. On some days after closing for lunch, it doesn't reopen until the next day. If a critical patient arrives during these times, they cannot receive treatment at the estate hospital."

A data contributor from the Noragalla Estate said, "We receive services from our maternity clinic officer, who speaks Sinhala. While we have the ability to understand basic Sinhala, there are times when we need the help of another person to understand some of the instructions given. It would be even better if we could receive that service in our own language."

Community facilitators play an important role in bridging the gap between the Malaiyaha community and government services. By building trust and fostering open communication, they help ensure that the community's real problems and challenges are heard and addressed. Their involvement is essential for creating a more inclusive and effective public service delivery system.

Community Cooperation for Problem Solving

A facilitation meeting was conducted in Horana for state officials including development officers and social service officers under the Protecting Civic Space (CPS) in Sri Lanka project to identify problems in the community focusing on the freedom of association.

The participants identified about 10 issues facing people in Horana such as drug addiction among young people, childhood pregnancy, early marriage, lack of proper waste management, unemployment, child abuse, school absenteeism, public transport issues, environmental pollution, care for senior citizens, lack of vocational training and absence of marketing facilities.

In order to address these diverse problems, participants at the facilitation meeting decided to form a committee called the Horana Civic Space Protection Committee and appoint a leader.

The committee agreed that freedom of association issues would be addressed with the support and guidance of NPC. The committee would also look into the other problems facing the community by preparing an action plan and acting as a pressure group to lobby and advocate for ways to solve them.



On The Road to Peace

A safety and security training session was organized under the People Unite for Justice and Accountability (PUJA) project in Colombo led by human rights activist Ruki Fernando for 24 representatives from Center for Human Rights and Development, Peace and Community Action, Right to Life and NPC.

The programme aimed to enhance the participants' knowledge and practices in safeguarding their operations against potential threats, underscoring the importance of strong security measures in the unpredictable climate of humanitarian work.

NPC is spearheading efforts to foster political consensus on accountability, an essential component for inter-ethnic reconciliation and the reinstatement of public trust in Sri Lanka. Throughout the past months NPC has been conducting a series of district level information sessions, engaging 750 state officers to underscore the significance of Transitional Justice (TJ) in Galle, Hambantota, Kalutara, Monaragala and Kurunegala.

NPC also convened meetings in Matara and Gampaha with various groups from its extensive network ranging from religious leaders to women leaders and state officials to advocate for truth telling to foster a collective understanding and commitment for TJ.

"Our aim is to facilitate inclusive dialogue and collaboration, paving the way for lasting peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka," one of the participants said.

The project's partner, Peace and Community Action (PCA), organized a training programme on enhancing the understanding of TJ and reconciliation for 25 participants from the Ampara and Trincomalee districts to deepen their understanding of TJ concepts and foster collaborative dialogue. PCA has also been documenting land rights violations and holding meetings with government officials to address the issues through the District Truth and Justice Forum, amplifying community voices and seeking justice for affected individuals.



A TJ awareness meeting was conducted for Journalists for Rights, a trade union partner of Right to Life.

Senior journalist and editor C. Dodawatta emphasised the media's critical role in promoting TJ and sustainable peace, urging journalists to educate the public on the ethnic conflict's historical roots and the importance of fostering a pluralistic society.

The meeting introduced the creation of TJ stories for the upcoming PUJA website, encouraging journalists to investigate and share their communities' experiences.



Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation for NPC Projects

A training workshop on Monitoring and Evaluation was held by NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project to enhance the participants' understanding of how monitoring and evaluation is conducted, supported by two specialists from GIZ who participated as resource persons.

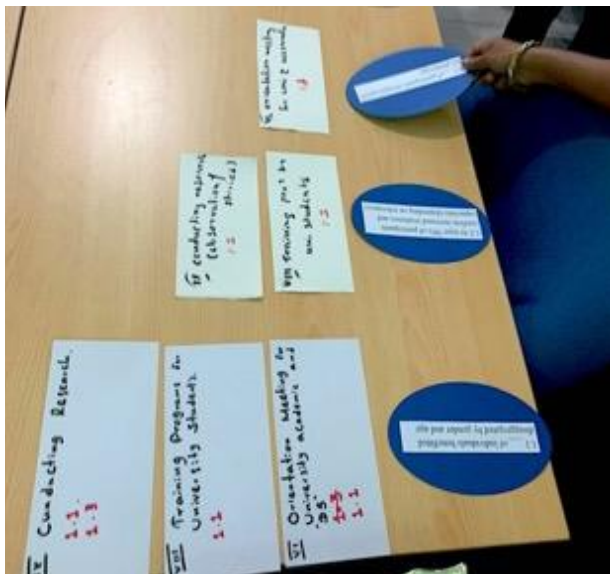
Detailed sessions provided insights into the processes and methodologies used for monitoring and evaluation in the project, emphasising their importance in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation.

Other monitoring and evaluation officers at NPC also joined the workshop, fostering a collaborative learning environment and allowing participants to gain a broader perspective on monitoring and evaluation practices across different projects. Through this training, participants were able to obtain a clear understanding of the MUSTER project's operations. They also gained knowledge on the preparation and modification of project reports, an essential component for transparent and accountable project coordination.

The workshop enhanced the monitoring and evaluation capabilities of NPC's project teams, contributing to the continuous improvement of project outcomes and the achievement of strategic goals.

The project will enable university students to do social research and link up universities and state institutions to promote a research-based collaborative approach to responding to issues of reconciliation and cohesion on the ground.

It will strengthen university students' capacities to do research with mentoring by an academic so that a culture of applied research is encouraged within the university structure and facilitate cooperation between state administration and academia to build support for collaborative engagement between the two entities for the collective good of the community.



National Advocacy Session Sparks Hope for Religious Rights

A national advocacy session was conducted for representatives from NGOs from Batticaloa, Ampara, Vavuniya, Mannar and Trincomalee with the participation of political and religious leaders including MPs S.M.M. Musharaff and Alizhahir Moulana, party secretaries and NPC Executive Director Dr Jehan Perera.

The meeting was to advance the goals of the Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) project by fostering collaboration and engagement across various sectors. The diverse representation of attendees underscored the nationwide importance of the advocacy efforts. The participation of stakeholders, along with the valuable insights shared by the political and religious leaders, contributed to the success of the session.

Mr. Musharaff and Mr. Moulana emphasised the critical importance of religious freedom, which intersects with other human rights such as freedom of conscience and the rights of association and free expression. They said that they would take the issue of religious rights to the national policy making level. A Religious Freedom Charter was handed over to the politicians.

The participation of NGO representatives highlighted the collective commitment to the cause. The session paved the way for continued collaboration and sustained efforts essential for achieving the envisioned outcomes of the advocacy initiative.

The session was significant not only for its immediate achievements but also for its long term impact. Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders highlighted the collective commitment to religious freedom as a fundamental human right.

The promise of incorporating religious freedom into national policies offers hope for a more inclusive and respectful society. The programme was a crucial milestone in the project's aim of ensuring a meaningful impact on the targeted communities, laying the groundwork for lasting change and the promotion of religious harmony across the country.



Government Must Follow Example of Civil Society to Remember Lives Lost

The joint commemoration event titled “Turning Point” held on May 17 at Viharamahadevi Park in Colombo was in memory of the loss of life that took place 15 years ago at the war’s end for people from all sides. It is an indication that the wounds of the three-decade long war are beginning to heal. The event was organized by a civil society collective consisting of inter-religious groups, different NGOs and Diaspora groups.

The National Peace Council appreciates the leadership role played by the Dharmashakthi Organisation, the Institute for Democratic Reforms and Electoral Studies (IRES), the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA), Sangha for a Better Sri Lanka (SBSL) and Global Tamil Forum (GTF). Those at the evening open-air event were persons of all ethnicities and religions, religious clergy and politicians. The images shown at the event and the words spoken represented a common concern for all life, including security services personnel, lost during the war.

Unfortunately, the continued polarization on the issue of memorialization is to be seen in the way in which May 18 is commemorated in the north and east of the country as a day of sorrow, while May 19 is commemorated by the government as Victory Day and promotions are given to members of the security forces. The presence of security forces has been strengthened prior to the commemorations scheduled to take place in the north and east, as it has been ever since the war ended.

The National Peace Council condemns the arrest and harassment of those who wish to mark May 18 or that week as a period of sorrow owing to the loss of civilian life, which are also Sri Lankan lives whoever they may be, in the last battles of the war. The path to national reconciliation is not for members of the security forces to drag men and women away at night from their homes and arrest them as happened last week in the east for trying to commemorate their loved ones.

There can be no reconciliation process if there is no justice. Those who wish to commemorate have a right to do so. In fact, the Reparation Act provides for it. Section 27 of the Reparations Act states that “collective reparations mean, such measures as are intended to recognize the right to an effective remedy and benefits to the communities or groups of aggrieved persons and shall include(a) means of remembrance of deceased persons, including memorials...” If there is to be reconciliation, it is incumbent on the government to uphold the law and observe the example that civil society organisations provide in commemorating all who lost their lives and replicate it on a macro-scale.

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Our Vision:

A just and peaceful Sri Lanka, in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all peoples are assured.

Our Mission:

To work in partnership with different target groups with an aim to educate, mobilize and advocate the building of a rights conscious society of people that work towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, reconciliation and equal opportunities for all.

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