



Paths To Peace

February 2025

Promoting Inclusion and Reconciliation

NPC, under its Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project supported by Misereor and CAFOD, conducted a residential workshop focused on inclusion, reconciliation and social justice, bringing together NGO coordinators and National Integration Officers from 25 District Secretariats.

The sessions were conducted by Prof. Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri from the University of Colombo, who led discussions on inclusion, reconciliation and social justice offering participants insights and engaging discussions that stimulated critical thinking. Senior Researcher Shashik De Silva provided valuable ideas through grounded narratives using real life experiences and examples to illustrate these concepts.

The workshop served as an interactive platform where participants engaged in discussions and reflected on their roles in promoting reconciliation and inclusion in their districts. Many said that the training programme had made them realise that these concepts were already embedded within their framework of responsibility as public servants and community leaders.

R. Partheeban, NGO Coordinator from the Mannar District Secretariat, said, “The training programme was excellent. The resource persons delivered their sessions using up to date information. We learned about new topics and are eager to invite the PAIRS project to the Mannar district. This will allow us to promote and implement inclusion in our district.” His enthusiasm highlights the tangible impact of the workshop and the potential for further outreach and action at the district level.



Edward Seneviratne, NGO Coordinator from the Colombo District Secretariat, said, “The training was really good. The resource persons presented evidence related to reconciliation during their sessions. It motivated me to rethink the concept of reconciliation.” He stressed the need to share the knowledge gained from the workshops with decision makers to ensure that they understood the realities on the ground. “State policies and laws are already in place to a large extent, ensuring that everyone has equal recognition, rights and value. But are these policies being implemented in practice? It is not enough to have them in the legal framework; as citizens we have a responsibility to ensure they are carried out in our daily lives,” he added.

From the feedback provided by participants, it was evident that many were already incorporating the concepts into their work environments. They expressed a desire to integrate the issues discussed further into their professional frameworks. However, they also acknowledged the obstacles, limitations and challenges that needed to be addressed to achieve full implementation.

The workshop served as a reminder that while policies and laws exist to promote equality and inclusion, their true impact depends on individuals taking responsibility for putting them into action. NPC, through the PAIRS project, remains committed to creating spaces for meaningful dialogue and fostering understanding among diverse communities. By equipping key stakeholders with knowledge and practical tools, the initiative aims to bridge gaps and strengthen the foundation for a more inclusive and reconciled society.

Advocating for a Youth Quota in Government

Youth are being empowered to participate in the electoral process and ensuring their representation at all levels of government under NPC’s Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (AECD) project, which is supported by the European Union.

Ten advocacy meetings for youth were planned. Follow up meetings were held with youth and district partner representatives via zoom, bringing together youth from various districts including Galle, Matara, Kalutara, Colombo, Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa. The focus was on guiding the youth to develop strategies advocating for a youth quota and greater political participation.

The discussions covered topics such as developing campaign strategies, engaging with political parties in their local government areas, collaborating with journalists and social media influencers to promote advocacy efforts, preparing statements for campaigns and using social media platforms. The youth were encouraged to connect with community networks such as women rural development societies, rural development societies, local sports clubs and other community based organizations to support their advocacy.

The sessions were facilitated by NPC Project Manager P. Benignus and Senior Project Officer Sampath Randunna who led the discussions and ensured that the meetings were productive.

Research sharing sessions were held in the Gampaha, Kegalle and Jaffna districts, which focused on factors influencing voter preferences in elections, providing insights into voter behaviour and offering data to support future advocacy efforts. The sessions were facilitated by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake and Ms. Christini Silva, senior lecturers and researchers at the University of Colombo. Each session was attended by 35 participants including civil society members, religious leaders, youth leaders and women leaders.

The discussions explored the implications of voter behaviour on electoral processes and provided a platform for participants to discuss the findings and their relevance for future campaigns. Participants expressed appreciation for the analysis and recommendations shared.



Identifying Local Challenges for Targeted Actions

NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project supported by NED conducted an issue mapping programme in Badulla to identify community challenges from a grassroots perspective. Three key issues were prioritised, setting the stage for meaningful action.

The issue mapping process spanned two days. On the first day, youth groups shared their perspectives on community challenges while the second day focused on women's groups, allowing them to highlight issues that resonated with their experiences.

A recurring concern raised by both groups was the long standing struggles faced by the Malaiyaha community. Despite living on estates for generations, they lacked land ownership rights. Other significant issues included the absence of birth certificates, unemployment, health concerns, inadequate infrastructure, drug addiction, limited access to government services, language barriers, school dropouts, lack of sexual education and the increasing number of unwanted pregnancies.

While both groups identified similar challenges, the women's group displayed a higher level of awareness about the ongoing situation of the country as reflected in their discussions. One woman said, "Previously, government officials and ministers referred to us simply as estate people. But now, for the first time, the president and the government address us as the Malaiyaha community. Only now do we feel a sense of recognition and respect."

When discussions turned to the political situation, the women's group shared its insights, often ahead of the project team's facilitation. Their awareness extended the Clean Sri Lanka initiative and economic condition of the country. A participant said, "Earlier we didn't watch the news daily. But now we follow it closely, staying updated and critically observing whether the government fulfills its promises."



The issue mapping programme showcased the growing empowerment of women in the community. However, it also highlighted the need for further efforts in strengthening youth engagement and knowledge. The project aims to elevate youth to the same level of awareness and activism demonstrated by the women's group, ensuring a stronger and more informed community ready to advocate for its rights.



Strengthening Collaboration Between Universities and State Administration

A progress review meeting under NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project, supported by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office, was held in Batticaloa bringing together officials from the Batticaloa District Secretariat and research pods from the Eastern University of Sri Lanka (EUSL) to assess the project's progress and determine the next steps.

The meeting was attended by 15 research pod students and four university lecturers from EUSL, along with senior district officials including the Batticaloa District Secretary, Additional District Secretary, NGO Coordinator, Integration Officer, Cultural Officer and Planning Officer. NPC's treasurer, Prof. T. Jeyasingam, also joined the meeting along with the MUSTER project team.

The main objective of the meeting was to review the research findings and identify areas where both the research pods and government officials could collaborate on social cohesion activities. These activities are based on the findings of the research reports and are intended to address community challenges and promote unity.

During the meeting the research pods from EUSL shared their findings, highlighting key issues in the community and potential strategies for promoting social cohesion. District officials provided feedback, emphasising the importance of aligning research outcomes with practical policy actions. The meeting underscored the need for continued collaboration between state institutions and universities to ensure the successful implementation of research driven solutions.

Mrs. J.J. Muraleetharan, Batticaloa District Secretary, expressed her appreciation for the work done by the university research pods. "I am truly impressed with the work done by the research pods in identifying key issues within each research scope in the district. The results, driven by the collaborative efforts of the District Secretary's office and university students, demonstrate how effective a mechanism can be when proper coordination is in place. The government has already initiated several measures and significant progress has been made in addressing the issues. Situations are evolving positively thanks to the actions taken by the District Secretariat officers and government officials. Today most of the issues are nearly resolved and what we see now is far less than what was initially identified. I deeply appreciate the dedication of the students in their efforts to help build a peaceful society," she said.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to continue the collaboration between the university and the government to address community issues and promote reconciliation through targeted, research based actions. The ongoing efforts under the MUSTER project will contribute to sustainable solutions for the district.



Reconciliation Mechanisms Need to be Credible and Acceptable to All

Since the end of the war in 2009, Sri Lanka has faced persistent scrutiny at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva over its handling of post-war reconciliation. Key concerns include missing persons, human rights violations, war crimes, land occupation, and the continued military presence in the north and east. Addressing the UNHRC earlier this week, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to independent and credible domestic mechanisms within the constitutional framework to address these challenges. He said "Domestic institutions such as the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), Office for Reparations, and Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) will be strengthened."

However, the government's reliance on national mechanisms rather than international ones has drawn criticism from sections of the Tamil polity and global human rights organizations. Last year, Sri Lanka rejected Resolution A/HRC/57/L.1 which tasked the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with gathering evidence for potential war crimes trials.

The National Peace Council is of the view that the way forward lies in the recommendations of the Presidential Commission to Investigate Findings of Previous Commissions of Inquiry on Human Rights (Nawaz Commission) appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2020. A key proposal is the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As stated in paragraph 1043 of the Nawaz report: "A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) can provide a historical record of serious human rights violations, influence institutional reforms, ensure accountability, and offer justice and redress for victims."

Speaking in Geneva, Foreign Minister Herath also said "The contours of a truth and reconciliation framework, will be further discussed with the broadest possible cross section of stakeholders, before operationalization to ensure a process that has the trust of all Sri Lankans." It is important that the composition of the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission would reflect these sentiments and include credible representatives of all communities, including women, selected through a transparent and public process.

In a world where international norms are increasingly under threat, by engaging sincerely in this process Sri Lanka has the opportunity to emerge as a moral leader in post-war reconciliation and justice on the global stage.

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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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