



Paths To Peace

March 2025

Research Findings for Promoting Unity and Peace

As part of NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project, supported by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) and Co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office, four universities - Eastern University of Sri Lanka (EUSL), University of Jaffna (UOJ), University of Ruhuna (UOR) and Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (SUSL) - have completed 12 research studies aimed at fostering reconciliation, unity and social harmony. The studies were carried out under two key thematic areas: issues impacting ethnic tension and/or relations in the area and fading cultural or traditional practices that foster unity and societal harmony. Each university completed three research projects, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of these critical issues.

At EUSL, the research pods delved into various aspects of reconciliation and cultural preservation. The first research pod focused on the role of religious institutions in social reconciliation, analysing their historical and potential contributions to bridging ethnic divides. The second research pod examined the fading Hindu-Muslim cultural practices, investigating the factors behind their decline and exploring ways to revitalise these traditions to strengthen community bonds. The third research pod explored conflicts over grazing land use between different ethnic groups, emphasising how addressing such disputes could contribute to enhanced ethnic harmony.

UOJ addressed important issues related to disability, resettlement and cultural preservation. One research pod looked into the accessibility challenges faced by individuals with war related disabilities, exploring ways to improve their access to services and promote inclusivity. Another pod studied the role of social organizations in supporting the resettlement of Muslims in Jaffna, highlighting their importance in fostering peace and development. A third research pod focused on the challenges of transmitting folk theatre traditions to younger generations in Jaffna, emphasising the role of cultural preservation in fostering unity and shared identity.

At UOR, the research projects focused on addressing socio-economic inequalities and the impact of historical grievances on ethnic relations. One study explored the stressful conditions faced by estate workers in the Hulandawa Estate, highlighting the inequalities in resource distribution and its effects on community wellbeing and ethnic harmony. Another research pod examined the lingering impact of historical ethnic grievances on contemporary relations with a focus on the Kirinda-Puhulwella area. The third pod studied the factors influencing the decline of traditional medical services among Sinhala and Muslim communities, aiming to understand the cultural shifts and encourage mutual respect.



SUSL focused on the social and economic challenges faced by communities in the region. One research pod examined the social impact of the declining traditional gem mining industry in the Kahawatta area, discussing how commercialisation has affected community unity and socio-economic structures. Another pod assessed the impact of online learning policies on plantation schools, exploring the challenges and opportunities these policies present for educational equity. The final research pod focused on the obstacles faced by individuals from the Malaiyaha community in accessing public service positions due to language proficiency barriers, specifically regarding Tamil language requirements.

The recommendations from these research projects will be implemented through practical activities aimed at addressing the identified issues. The initiatives will focus on promoting reconciliation, cultural preservation and social harmony across the respective regions. Government officials will collaborate with the universities to ensure that the research findings are translated into concrete actions, fostering community development and strengthening the bonds between diverse groups.

At the conclusion of the project, a comprehensive research publication will be produced encompassing the 12 research studies providing valuable insights and recommendations, contributing to the broader efforts of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The Power of Knowledge: Women Shaping Tomorrow

NPC's Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project, which is supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), held a zoom session on women empowerment and resource mobilisation, which brought together over 60 women and youth leaders from the Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya and Polonnaruwa districts.

The session was conducted by Dr. Manoji Harischandra, Senior Lecturer at the University of Kelaniya, who provided insights into resource mobilisation strategies and international women focused frameworks. Recognising the wealth of practical experience among the participants, she sought to bridge the gap between grassroots activism and academic theory. Beyond theoretical discussions, Dr. Harischandra encouraged women to explore diverse fields such as art, entrepreneurship and self-employment as viable pathways to empowerment.

A woman leader from Monaragala underscored the importance of practical application, stating that she had received valuable theoretical insights and now must consider how to apply them in practice. She emphasised that Sri Lanka has had many empowered women in history such as Sunila Abeysekera and Adeline Molamure and that future sessions should include discussions about such influential figures. She also posed an intriguing question about representation in art and literature, noting that there are numerous novels and songs about women but most are written by men, and questioning how accurately men can capture the true emotions and experiences of women.

A participant from Kegalle reflected on a powerful statement from a book she read in her youth, which stated that a woman does not become great through marriage or having a successful marital life but by actively contributing to social progress. She emphasised that they need an active women's movement. A woman leader from Kandy stated that women's empowerment should not be the responsibility of women alone and that exploring ways in which men can contribute to women's movements and empowerment was crucial.

Dr. Harischandra stated that the women were more empowered than she had expected. She expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide theoretical knowledge to practically experienced women and looked forward to staying connected and supporting them in their journey toward further empowerment.

The success of this session reaffirmed the power of combining theoretical knowledge with grassroots experience, ensuring that women leaders and youth continue to drive meaningful social change in their communities.



Mediating for Peace and Strengthening Religious Freedom

NPC's Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) project conducted a mediation training session in Ampara that brought together 40 participants including Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC) members, Community Based Organization (CBO) representatives, youth leaders and government officials. The training session aimed to equip participants with essential conflict resolution skills to mediate religious freedom related disputes effectively.

From the inception of the ARC project, mediation has been a key focus in the 13 districts and 14 locations where the team operates. The session, which was facilitated by M.I. Mohamed Azath Mediation Training and Disputes Resolution Officer from the Ministry of Justice, was a crucial step in reinforcing the role of mediation in resolving religious conflicts and promoting peaceful coexistence. Mr. Azath's engaging and effective approach ensured that participants gained valuable insights into conflict mediation techniques.

During the session, M.J. Raspa, a Mediation Development Officer in Ampara, highlighted the significance of mediation in safeguarding religious freedom. "Mediation plays a vital role in resolving ethnic conflicts by fostering non-violent, fair and sustainable solutions. Through neutral mediators and open dialogue, it strengthens ethnic harmony while promoting religious freedom and protecting religious rights. Mediation helps communities address misunderstandings, break down barriers and create an environment where diverse religious beliefs are respected and upheld. Beyond just resolving disputes, it rebuilds trust, encourages cooperation and nurtures long term social cohesion, ultimately contributing to a peaceful and inclusive society where everyone can practice their faith without fear or discrimination," he said.

The training session is another effort by the ARC team to sustain religious freedom and promote constructive dialogue among diverse communities. During the project, the team identified and resolved numerous conflicts across the 14 locations. With this latest initiative, the expectation is that trained participants will actively apply their mediation skills to address conflicts in their communities and share their knowledge with others.

By empowering individuals with the necessary skills to mediate religious disputes, ARC continues to foster an environment of mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence. This initiative underscores the importance of mediation as a sustainable approach to resolving conflicts and protecting religious rights in Sri Lanka.



Strengthening State Officials' Role in Social Justice

A residential workshop was conducted to enhance the capacity of government officials in the Kandy District under NPC's Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation and Social Justice (PAIRS) project in collaboration with the Kandy District Inter Religious Committee. The workshop brought together 33 senior officers including the District Secretary, two Additional District Secretaries, the Assistant District Secretary, Divisional Secretaries, senior staff from the District Secretariat and the NGO Coordinator.

Facilitated by Prof. Nirmal Ranjith Devasiri, the sessions focused on inclusion, reconciliation and social justice, providing a platform for officials to critically examine policies and practices that impact marginalised communities.

Through discussions and group activities, participants reflected on real world challenges, particularly instances of discrimination, they have encountered in their official roles. Key concerns included gaps in social welfare programmes such as Aswesuma and challenges in disaster risk resettlement, especially regarding land tenure and the exclusion of vulnerable groups from decision making processes.

Understanding the specific challenges faced by different regions is critical to addressing local issues effectively. The training on inclusion equipped participants with the tools to recognise the diverse needs of communities across the country, fostering more contextually relevant solutions for future problem solving. By gaining a deeper understanding of geographical disparities, officials are better prepared to craft policies that are inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of each district.

The workshop deepened participants' understanding of inclusive governance and reinforced their roles as key actors in driving equitable policies.

By fostering dialogue and collective problem solving, the initiative strengthened their commitment to ensuring that administrative decisions are fair, transparent and accessible to all communities.



The PAIRS project made significant strides in fostering social inclusion and interfaith dialogue across Sri Lanka. Two social inclusion training sessions were conducted in Ratnapura and Kandy for key administrative officers, aiming to enhance inclusive governance and strengthen collaborative efforts.

As a benchmark initiative of the PAIRS project, facilitative meetings were also conducted in Monaragala, Kegalle, Galle, Colombo and Puttalam. In total, nearly 400 participants engaged in these activities, reflecting the project's broad impact.

Also under the project, an inter religious Iftar programme organized, coordinated by the Dharmashakthi Foundation, Kollupitiya Masjids Federation and NPC. The event gathered around 200 attendees including Western Province Governor Haneef Yusoof, Rev. Pallekande Rathanasara Thero, NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera and Director of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs Mr. M.A.S. Nawas. Firdaus Moulavi, along with other religious leaders, also participated, fostering interfaith dialogue and strengthening community bonds.

Through these initiatives, the PAIRS project which is supported by Misereor and CAFOD, continues to play a vital role in advancing social cohesion, promoting inclusion and bridging divides among diverse communities.



Mentoring and Training for Youth Representatives

A mentoring and training session for selected youth representatives in the Colombo District was organized under NPC's ACED project, which is supported by the European Union, and is part of advocacy efforts to promote youth quotas across all tiers of government. It aims to enhance youth participation in electoral processes and empower them to take an active role in shaping democratic governance.

The training programme was conducted for 30 young leaders and facilitated by Dr. Mahesh Senanayake, a senior lecturer at the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo. With his extensive academic expertise, Dr. Senanayake provided in-depth insights into key topics including the electoral system, the significance of democratic participation, the necessity of youth engagement in politics and past experiences and challenges of youth involvement in elections. His multidimensional approach offered participants a comprehensive understanding of democratic practices and electoral dynamics.

The session was interactive, incorporating presentations, group discussions and question and answer sessions to encourage active engagement and critical thinking among participants. The youth representatives were drawn from university and educational institute based youth groups in Colombo, many of whom have been actively involved in advocacy movements and political activism. With their potential to serve as pressure groups in championing youth quotas and political participation, the training session equipped them with the knowledge and skills needed to drive meaningful change.

The initiative was timely due to the upcoming local government elections. The programme aimed to inspire the young leaders to educate and mobilise their communities, ensuring greater youth engagement in the democratic process through advocacy, outreach and grassroots initiatives.



Sri Lanka Needs a Comprehensive Solution Not Selective Justice

The UK government's decision to impose sanctions on four Sri Lankan individuals, including three former military commanders, has ignited significant debate. This move comes at a time when large-scale violence continues unchecked in other parts of the world, raising concerns about the application of different standards to different countries. As a non-partisan civil society organization, the National Peace Council (NPC) asserts that the pursuit of truth and accountability must be universal and free from political motivations. Justice cannot be applied selectively. It is needed as much in Mullivaikkal and Batalanda where the violations took place 16 to 37 years ago, as it is in Palestine and Ukraine where they are taking place today.

The UK has stated that it is working through the UN Human Rights Council to advance accountability in Sri Lanka. It has affirmed its commitment to supporting Sri Lanka's human rights reforms. The National Peace Council recognizes that unresolved human rights issues have lasting consequences. The recent resurgence of the Batalanda controversy from the JVP insurrection era demonstrates that historical injustices do not simply fade away. Moreover, Sri Lanka risks further economic and political fallout if it fails to address human rights concerns in a comprehensive manner. The potential loss of the European Union's GSP Plus trade concessions due to human rights concerns threatens the country's economic stability, highlighting the urgent need for credible action.

However, accountability measures alone cannot resolve the country's longstanding challenges. Sri Lanka also requires a political solution that addresses the deep-rooted causes of its ethnic conflict. The ethnic war and past mass violence were not merely criminal acts but part of a larger political struggle. Addressing these issues requires moving beyond legalistic measures to a broader political consensus that lays the foundation for long-term stability. Without a negotiated political framework that ensures fair power-sharing and inclusivity, efforts at accountability will be incomplete and risk deepening divisions rather than healing them.

NPC urges the government to take necessary action by prioritising a negotiated political settlement. A truth commission that is built on transparency and broad participation and independent of political manipulation would be a vital step, but it must be part of a wider reconciliation process rooted in political consensus. The longer the process is delayed, the more scepticism will grow among victims and the broader public about the government's commitment to justice and be seen as deliberate attempts to evade accountability. We believe that a well-structured truth commission, integrated within a larger political reform process, would not only bring justice to victims but also pave the way for lasting peace, reconciliation, and national unity.

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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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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