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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை  
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka



# Paths To Peace

May 2025

## Continuing the Journey of Empowering Women Leaders and Youth

Despite the challenges posed by donor restrictions and funding limitations, NPC will be entering a new phase of the Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (VOICE) project, which will run from May 2025 to April 2026 with continued support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The new phase allows the project to sustain and expand its work with women and youth leaders across the seven districts of Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya and Polonnaruwa.

The focus remains centered on two core objectives. The first is to strengthen sub-national women leaders, both existing and emerging, by enabling them to become effective voices for their communities. Key activities under this objective include supporting women leaders to resolve pressing community and reconciliation issues, carrying out joint initiatives with youth to promote intergenerational cooperation and organizing collaborative interventions across neighbouring districts. These efforts aim to build stronger local leadership, foster unity and create platforms for strategic problem solving across communities.

The second objective focuses on building solidarity across districts to support national level advocacy. As part of this, needs based training and information sessions will be tailored to the evolving political and social context. A national campaign will be launched built on the insights and experiences of the clustered interventions with a special emphasis on promoting the effective implementation of the 25% women's quota in political participation.

A national symposium will bring together 125 women leaders and key stakeholders offering a powerful space for dialogue, learning and showcasing the positive outcomes of local initiatives. To further amplify these voices, a video documentary will be produced capturing the stories, struggles and aspirations of women leaders and the communities they serve.

The new phase marks a renewed commitment to inclusive governance and community driven change. Through the collective efforts of women leaders, youth, and community allies the project looks forward to continuing its work of empowering marginalised voices and building a more inclusive future for Sri Lanka.



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# Expanding Research Based Social Cohesion Activities

Ten research pods from four universities conducted their social cohesion activities across different locations under NPC's Mobilising University State Engagement for Reconciliation (MUSTER) project, which is supported by Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) and co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office. This intensive implementation phase demonstrated the project's transition from research to meaningful action.

The research pods from the University of Ruhuna conducted activities addressing ethnic harmony and intercultural understanding. Research Pod One under Dr. Nisanka Ariyaratne's guidance engaged students and teachers, focusing on critical thinking skills regarding social constructs of ethnic and gender norms. Research Pod Two guided by Ms. Mayuri Kularathne facilitated meaningful dialogue bringing together students, teachers and community representatives to explore ethnic division prevention strategies. Research Pod Three conducted its activity at Matara Divisional Secretariat.

The research pods from the University of Jaffna (UOJ) conducted activities addressing distinct community challenges. Research Pod One under Dr. S. Sivakanthan's leadership conducted a disability inclusion activity engaging persons with disabilities, community members and district officials in a constructive dialogue on accessibility challenges and solutions. Research Pod Two guided by Dr. Ahilan Kadirgamar focused on women's empowerment bringing together students, teachers and community leaders, featuring a vibrant marketplace showcasing women's entrepreneurship initiatives. Research Pod Three under Mr. R. Rajeshkannan's guidance addressed cultural, religious and ethnic issues engaging participants in dialogue that concluded with a cultural showcase.

Research Pod Three from Sabaragamuwa University under Dr. Sanjaya Pradeep's guidance continued its focus on plantation community challenges through activities engaging 37 tea estate workers in discussions about socioeconomic challenges, rights awareness and how to engage with government institutions.

Three research pods from the Eastern University conducted comprehensive awareness sessions on their research findings, marking their entry into the implementation phase. Research Pod One under Dr. S. Umashankar's guidance conducted an awareness session engaging school students and academics in a dialogue about its findings.



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Research Pod Two led by Prof. Kanesh Suresh conducted a field session at Kudumbumalai Cattlers Village in Thoppigala addressing key issues faced by the local cattle farming community. The session was led by student researchers and their pod mentor from the university, creating an open and respectful space for discussion.

The cattle farmers, who were direct participants throughout the research process, shared their experiences and reflected on their journey with the project. Many expressed a renewed sense of hope as the research had brought attention to pressing issues that were neglected or suppressed due to local political dynamics. They appreciated the fact that their voices were finally being heard and that their concerns were being addressed through a structured academic platform.

"We are not asking for money or any help. What we want is for the country to recognise our service. We are a cattle farming village and many of us have between 30 to 200 cattle. We produce good quality milk. The price we get for milk is okay but the collection process is slow and not well managed. If this can be improved it will help both us and the country. We believe the research findings shared here will help us get what we are asking for and support our work better," said cattle farmer Thiyagarajah Nimalan.

Another cattle farmer, Mesen Nanthakumar, shared his concern about a long standing issue: "The electric fences are good to stop wild elephants. They mostly come between five in the evening and five in the morning but now the fences are on all the time. This is killing our cattle. We have told the officers many times but still no action has been taken. We hope this project, which is working together with the university and the government, will help bring solutions soon for our village."

Research Pod Three mentored by Prof. Jeevaretnam Kennedy focused on sharing insights with students and academic stakeholders.

These diverse interventions collectively engaged government officials, educational institutions, community leaders, students, persons with disabilities, women entrepreneurs, plantation workers and agricultural communities, demonstrating the multi-sectoral collaboration that characterises project's approach. The activities addressed critical themes including ethnic and religious harmony, disability inclusion, women's empowerment, plantation community rights, agricultural community challenges and intercultural understanding.

The successful completion of the ten social cohesion activities represents a significant milestone in the project's impact with the research findings now being operationalised across multiple provinces and diverse community contexts. This intensive implementation phase validates the project's core methodology of mobilising university-state engagement for reconciliation with student research pods, academic mentors, government officials and community institutions working collaboratively to create sustainable pathways for social harmony and peace in Sri Lanka.



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# Enhancing Civic Engagement and Democracy

Under NPC's Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation and Social Justice (PAIRS) project supported by Misereor and CAFOD, several activities were conducted to strengthen democratic processes and civic space.

In collaboration with PAFFREL, NPC mobilised 16 District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs) to participate in the monitoring of local government elections across the country. This initiative, rooted in the PAIRS project's commitment to accountability and inclusive governance, covered 16 districts. DIRC members and representatives from a partner organization contributed to a transparent, peaceful and credible electoral process. This effort not only empowered grassroots interfaith leaders to engage in democratic practices but also fostered public trust in the electoral system through community driven monitoring.

Further strengthening grassroots civic engagement, NPC organized a DIRC meeting at the Anuradhapura Muslim Jummah Mosque where DIRC members participated in a dialogue linking human rights, law and peace with a special session led by Mr. C. Ranasinghe, Officer in Charge of the North Central Province. The session titled Law and Peace: The Role of the Sri Lanka Police provided insights into law enforcement's role in protecting civic space and promoting peaceful coexistence. In a show of interfaith harmony, the meeting concluded with DIRC members joining in prayer at the mosque.

A facilitation meeting for civil society leaders was held in the Anuradhapura District organized by NPC and the Anuradhapura District Citizen Committee. Thirteen issues affecting the district were identified with the protection of civic space and promotion of pluralism chosen as the top priority. The meeting laid the groundwork for a planned collective action initiative with participation from religious leaders, government officials, youth, media and women leaders.

NPC, in partnership with the Sahana Social Development Alliance Galle, hosted a facilitation meeting for civil society leaders in the Galle District. The session served as a dynamic platform for dialogue, reflection and collaborative planning. Participants identified key issues affecting civic participation and laid the groundwork for a community-led action initiative. Similar meetings were also conducted in Matara, Ratnapura, Kandy, Monaragala, Badulla and Puttalam.



In Puttalam NPC in collaboration with WODEPT conducted a consultation meeting for civil society organizations. Eleven key issues were identified and the group planned a joint activity to address the prioritised issue.

The activities carried out under the PAIRS project exemplify the power of inclusive partnerships, grassroots leadership and inter-ethnic solidarity in advancing democratic governance. From election monitoring to multi-stakeholder civic planning, the initiatives reflect a growing network of peacebuilders and civic actors committed to protecting democratic values.

As these local actions unfold into tangible outcomes, the project continues to serve as an inspiration for collaborative peacebuilding, ensuring that every voice is heard and every community is represented in shaping a just and inclusive future.



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# Voter Awareness Through Social Media

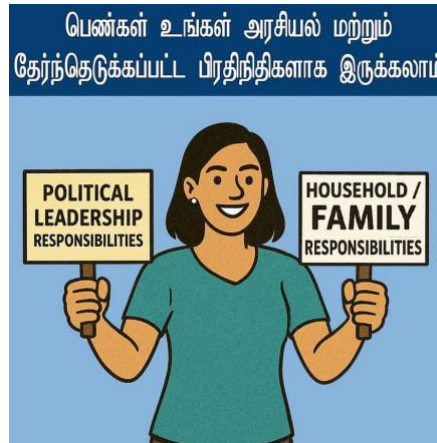
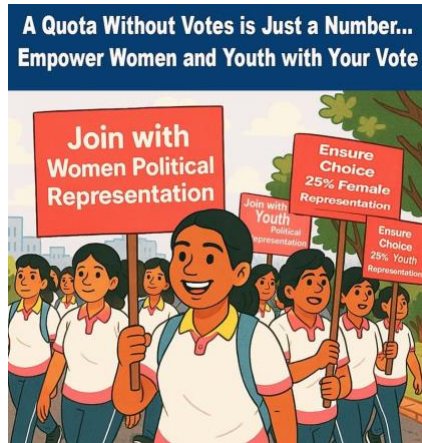
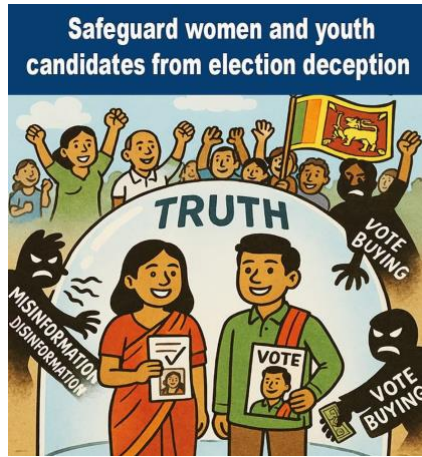
As part of NPC's EU-supported Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project's efforts to advance women's political participation, a targeted social media campaign was launched ahead of the local government elections to encourage voters to support women candidates. The campaign aimed to raise awareness about the cultural barriers and negative narratives that hinder women's participation in politics as well as the widespread mistrust surrounding their leadership capabilities.

Drawing on feedback from past female candidates, many of whom shared their experiences of being side-lined by their own party members during the nomination process and marginalised after the election, the campaign advocated against such deceptive practices, urging voters to be vigilant and not be deceived by election promises.

The campaign emphasised the strategic use of the quota system for women and youth, encouraging voters to make informed choices to strengthen and sustain inclusive political participation now and in the future.

Short videos, infographics and testimonials from grassroots women leaders were shared across multiple platforms to amplify the message and engage a wider audience, especially young voters. Online discussions were facilitated to create space for public dialogue on the importance of inclusive leadership.

These advocacy efforts are ongoing, aiming to promote broader representation and greater inclusivity of diverse communities and groups in political and governance structures.



# Local Government Election Outcome a Call for Inclusive Governance

The peaceful and orderly conduct of the recently concluded local government elections which were held without the large-scale abuses of state power or otherwise that marred previous electoral cycles has marked a refreshing change from the past. It demonstrates a commendable commitment by the present government to uphold electoral integrity and democratic norms. We congratulate the ruling party for emerging as the largest party across the country in 267 out of the 339 local government bodies in which polls were held with an absolute majority in 120. The test of statesmanship will be how the government forms its majorities in the local authorities and deals equitably with opposition led ones.

The National Peace Council sees electoral outcomes in the north and east, which were largely won by parties representing the Tamil and Muslim communities, as signaling their different needs and aspirations and the need for the government to engage more fully with them. The government has made commendable efforts to reach out to minority communities, with high-level visits by the President, Prime Minister, and Cabinet ministers to the north and east. However, these symbolic gestures must now be followed by substantive policy measures that address the historical and contemporary concerns of Tamil and Muslim populations in the north and east, and also in the plantation sector.

The National Peace Council believes that the government's commitment to structural equity and economic justice can resonate more deeply with minority communities if it is combined with a transparent and inclusive decision-making process that respects diversity and pluralism. We urge the government to view the election results as an opportunity to engage more constructively with Tamil and Muslim political representatives as partners in governance. Restoring the provincial council system through early elections, along with a renewed dialogue on power-sharing, could serve as important steps toward rebuilding trust.

With a two-thirds majority in Parliament, the government has a unique opportunity to undertake long-overdue reforms and deliver on its promise of system change for which it received mandates at the presidential and general elections held last year. These include restoring and empowering the provincial council system, expediting land restitution of military-occupied land in the north and east and provision for land for housing in the plantations, ensuring accountability for past violence, empowering local representatives, and resisting encroachments that disrupt the delicate ethno-religious balance.

In particular, the National Peace Council calls on the government to support multi-ethnic, cross-party collaboration in local government to reduce polarization. Provisions need to be made to provide equitable financial allocations to all local authorities for them to operate efficiently and effectively regardless of whether they are run by the government or opposition members. and there should not be any differences between those ruled by one party or the other as each local government authority has equal value which is embedded in the power of the people. Promoting inclusive governance requires deliberate and sustained efforts to ensure that diverse communities are meaningfully represented and engaged in local decision-making processes.

*Media release issued on 13.05.25*



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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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