



Paths To Peace

April 2025

Implementing Research for Social Cohesion

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, achieved a significant milestone when the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka conducted a social cohesion activity at Pettigala Tamil College in Balangoda under the guidance of Dr. Chandana Pathirana. The intervention addressed educational challenges identified through their research, focusing on vocational education awareness for plantation community students.

The principal of Pettigala Tamil College, Mrs. Tamil Selvi, highlighted the challenges that necessitated the activity. "Balangoda Pettigala Tamil College is a school with limited facilities located in a challenging area. Most of our students come from working class families in the Pettigala Estate. These children, often deprived of equal opportunities, have minimal resources available to them. During online education, we faced many difficulties due to the lack of technological access. Without proper family guidance and positive influences, these children are more vulnerable to anti-social activities. However, by implementing training programmes focused on vocational guidance, we can give them a clear direction for the future. Their talents and potential should not be limited to the estates and they can be guided towards greater opportunities," she said.



The session received institutional support from key stakeholders, demonstrating the multi-sectoral collaboration that characterises the project's approach to reconciliation and social cohesion. Mr. S.W.A. Wijewardena Silva, a Skills Development Officer at the Ratnapura District Secretariat, said, "As government officials, we work to support the skills development of school children and youth across various sectors. In plantation areas, we have observed a lack of interest in vocational education among young people. Without the right understanding and guidance, parents often steer their children into plantation labour for immediate income rather than encouraging further education or skills training. If we can provide the right support and guidance to school leavers, we will strengthen the future workforce of our country," he said.

The session engaged 30 students from Grades 10 and 11, providing comprehensive information on post-secondary vocational education pathways. Initial assessment indicates that it has influenced educational decision making among participants, particularly with students who were inspired to continue their education after completing O'Level examinations. Qualitative feedback suggests an enhanced awareness of and interest in quality vocational training opportunities among the students, representing a positive shift in educational aspirations.

Similar activities are being planned across 11 additional locations. This replication demonstrates the scalability of the research based approach and indicates potential for sustainable impact beyond immediate project parameters. This development represents a critical success in the project's trajectory, operationalising theoretical research findings into cohesion activities for lasting social results. The collaborative engagement between academic researchers, government officials and community institutions exemplifies the project's core objective of mobilising university-state engagement for reconciliation and social harmony.

Research to Study Impact of Elections

Two research sharing sessions were conducted in Anuradhapura and Batticaloa under NPC's Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project. Project Manager Ben Perinpanayagam said that the goal of the research was to empower people to make informed decisions and encouraged participants to understand the new findings and contribute meaningfully to the decision making processes within their communities. He urged them to identify and focus on areas requiring concentrated efforts from both civil society and the government.

The sessions were facilitated by Ms. Crishni Silva, a senior lecturer from the Department of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Colombo and one of the two lead researchers behind the study on factors influencing voter preferences in elections, presented the research methodology, highlighting how to validate the data collected and interpret the findings accurately.

Participants saw how closely the research findings reflected the outcomes of elections. However, they also voiced concerns that the expectations of the public, particularly in relation to the political system, economic recovery and broader community aspirations, remain largely unmet.

Ms. Silva discussed the challenges and barriers hindering the progress toward the systemic change desired by the people, creating opportunities for participants to engage in dialogue, share their perspectives and listen to one another's views. The participants appreciated the research effort, recognising the dedication of the academics and enumerators who contributed to this comprehensive, island wide study.



Women Unite for Resource Mobilisation and Advocacy

Under the Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) Project Phase 2, funded by National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a training programme on resource mobilisation and advocacy campaigns was held in Katunayake bringing together 75 women leaders from Badulla, Kandy, Kegalle, Matara, Monaragala, Nuwara Eliya and Polonnaruwa.

The programme began with a session on the theoretical perspectives and history of resource mobilisation conducted by Dr. Manoji Harischandra, Senior Lecturer at the University of Kelaniya, where participants reflected on the implications of human resource mobilisation.

“Today, most people and organizations focus solely on financial and material resources, ignoring the creativity and potential of human skills. The value of human resources is being diminished and, as women leaders, we must work to revive and mobilise our communities,” a woman leader from Kandy pointed out. “People are driven by personal gains rather than collective progress. Mobilising people towards common goals is essential and we, as a network, have the strength to achieve it,” a participant from Monaragala said.

The second session, facilitated by Dr. Pavithra Jayawardhana Senior Lecturer at the University of Colombo, focused on the implementation of resource mobilisation theories. The session highlighted the leaders’ desire to address social issues in their communities despite the challenges they face. “Cultural and economic barriers are among the obstacles to mobilising women. We must break these barriers,” a participant from Nuwara Eliya said.

The final session, led by Ms. Gimhani Ekanayake Lecturer at the University of Kelaniya, focused on designing and implementing advocacy campaigns, a component of resource mobilisation. Participants appreciated the technical and strategic aspects they learned. “The important thing is planning. As the saying goes, if you fail to plan, your plan is to fail. We learnt how to plan and implement an advocacy campaign,” a participant from Matara said.

Beyond the learning experience, participants appreciated the opportunity to strengthen their connections across the seven districts, recognising that collective power is critical for social change. They expressed enthusiasm for more centralised trainings, emphasising that building a women's network was vital to achieving their shared goals.



Strengthening Interfaith Collaboration Through DIRCs

NPC, through its Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation and Social Justice (PAIRS) project supported by Misereor and CAFOD, conducted 10 District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) meetings across the country, marking a significant step in promoting peacebuilding, civic awareness and inclusive dialogue in post-conflict regions.

The collaborative, multi-location approach brought together over 300 diverse participants, including religious leaders, women leaders, youth representatives, government officials, media professionals and civil society actors. Each DIRC meeting reinforced the local network of peace advocates and provided a structured platform for education and forward planning.

A highlight was the focus on religious freedom and legal awareness, with resource persons such as lawyer Buddhima Chaturanga Wijesinghe, Father A. A. Nawarathinam and Dr. Darshi Thoradeniya facilitating sessions on topics ranging from religious rights and civic duties to social inclusion policies and election preparedness. These discussions helped DIRC members understand their legal rights, constitutional roles and responsibilities as citizens.

In Vavuniya, a session led by J. Jeyatheepan allowed participants to identify and resolve local ethnic issues, showcasing the DIRCs' growing capability as a mechanism for grassroots conflict mitigation.

In Matara, the spiritual and cultural relevance of Ramadan was explored by Maulavi Mohomad Hizam, creating a space for mutual respect across faiths while in Jaffna, Hindu cultural perspectives on peace were shared by senior lecturer S. Ramanarajan, bridging academic insights with traditional values.

In Nuwara Eliya, women leaders and youth engaged in dialogue around civic engagement, rights-based governance and ethical voting facilitated by lawyer Selladurai Lalithambigai. These conversations planted seeds for more informed, participatory citizenship among future generations.



DIRC engagements across districts such as Ratnapura, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Monaragala, Badulla, Jaffna, Vavuniya and Kurunegala reflected a coordinated national effort that is decentralised and locally owned. By merging structural reform, issue tracking and knowledge sharing, the project demonstrates how peacebuilding can be community driven, sustainable and inclusive.



Strengthening Rule of Law and Safeguarding Religious Freedom

A training session on the rule of law was conducted by NPC's Action for Religious Coexistence (ARC) project for 32 Divisional Secretariat staff in Kalutara representing 14 Divisional Secretariats across the district, marking a significant step towards enhancing good governance and service delivery at the divisional level.

The training was facilitated by Mr. Jagath Liyana Arachchi, whose engaging and interactive approach created an energetic learning environment. His facilitation style encouraged participants to actively contribute to discussions, reflect on their responsibilities and explore the real world application of the rule of law in public administration.

The session covered key principles including upholding legal norms, ensuring accountability and promoting justice within public service systems. Participants left with deeper insights and practical knowledge that will enhance their ability to serve the public fairly, transparently and efficiently.

In addition to the core theme of the rule of law, the session also provided space for reflection on the importance of religious freedom in strengthening social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. Recognising that religion holds a significant place in many people's lives, participants were reminded of the delicate balance needed to maintain respect and understanding across diverse communities.

"Religion is a valuable aspect of people's lives and many give it high priority. However, sometimes this strong attachment leads to negative actions or misunderstandings. To address these contradictions and conflicts, we must ensure religious freedom. When people are free to practice their faith without fear or discrimination, it creates space for mutual respect and understanding. Religious freedom is a key foundation for building reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in our communities," said M.N.F. Riswana, National Integration Coordinator at the Mathugama Divisional Secretariat.

"The laws we have in Sri Lanka regarding religious freedom are sufficient to allow everyone to practice their religion freely. However, it's important to remember that no one has the right to criticise another's religion or culture. Respect is essential. As long as we follow the law and respect each other's beliefs, everyone can enjoy their religious freedom without any barriers," said M.M.M. Bilal, Muslim Affairs Officer at the Kalutara District Secretariat.

The session not only deepened the participants' understanding of legal principles but also reinforced the value of inclusivity and mutual respect within Sri Lanka's multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. It was a timely reminder that rule of law and respect for religious freedom go hand in hand. Both are fundamental to building resilient communities, fostering national integration and ensuring that governance serves all citizens equally and fairly.



Urgent Reforms Required to Safeguard Economy and to Promote Reconciliation

Sri Lanka has received a breathing space of three months to negotiate with the US government regarding tariffs to be imposed on Sri Lankan exports which is of utmost importance as the US is Sri Lanka's largest export market. Sri Lanka faces a similar challenge to protect its export markets with regard to the EU, which is currently favouring Sri Lanka with its GSP Plus tariff concession. This tariff reduction is conditional on Sri Lanka's adherence to 27 specified human rights conventions. Sri Lankans, including the political leadership, should come to terms with the fact that we need to have cooperative relations with major powers, whether it is America, China, Europe or India.

The National Peace Council notes that in 2021, the EU Parliament passed a resolution recommending the continuation of its GSP Plus tariff concession being made conditional upon the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Enacted in 1979, the PTA has been widely criticized for enabling arbitrary detention and torture due to provisions allowing for extended administrative detention, limited judicial oversight, and convictions based on confessions to the police, most misuse being in the north and east. The PTA has also permitted the government to hold people for long periods without expediting investigations. Prior to the presidential and general elections last year, the ruling party pledged to abolish the PTA.

NPC welcomes the Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya's statement in parliament that the Cabinet of Ministers has approved the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Justice to appoint a committee to provide recommendations to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act as amended (PTA). There are laws to handle crimes even without the PTA and it is superfluous as many had pointed out. Having pledged to abolish the PTA in the NPP's election manifesto, the decision to appoint a committee to look into repealing the PTA should not be seen as a time buying exercise to meet the EU conditionalities to renew the GSP Plus tariff concession.

We also urge the government to take quick and effective action to resolve long standing issues of missing persons, war time violations of human rights and return of land taken over by the military during the war. We welcome Prime Minister Amarasuriya's statement during a recent visit to Jaffna that the people of Sri Lanka should no longer be burdened by conflict and the government is committed to ensuring peace and stability across the country. It is noteworthy that the day before she visited Jaffna a key road in Jaffna that had been closed for over three decades for security purposes was re-opened.

The NPC also welcomes President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's announcement during his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the government would move forward to hold the long postponed provincial council elections. As in the case of the PTA, we urge the government to appoint a ministerial committee to look into the strengthening of the provincial council system, reduce the powers of the governor, and empower the elected authorities with greater allocation of powers and financial resources. By undertaking these measures, Sri Lanka can convince both the local population and the international community to participate more wholeheartedly to improve the economy and the country at large.

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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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