

Understanding Differences, Acting on Commonalities

SEARCH SRI LANKA 2019

Reflecting on a Year Gone By

Message from Nawaz Mohammed, Country Director, Search Sri Lanka



Reflecting on the larger picture, I am happy to see that things are on the mend given the bleak situation that the country was facing by the end of the first quarter. The year 2019 has been challenging for Sri Lanka as a country that is still in the process of transitioning from war to sustained peace. The aftermath of the April 2019 Easter Sunday's violence showed how fragile the country's post-war context was and the vast amount of work that needed to be done to heal the wounds of war. Search Sri Lanka remains committed to play its role by creating space for diverse communities to dialogue with each other and assist them to utilize their collective and individual capacities to work toward reconciliation and sustained peace.

Looking inward, I am extremely happy with what Search Sri Lanka has been able to achieve in 2019 by creating common grounds for diverse communities and groups to listen to each other, share their views and establish meaningful linkages that would last beyond the project implementation periods. We also supported

change agents, including women, youth and community leaders with skill development and knowledge improvement in areas such as conflict analysis, transitional justice, peacebuilding, reconciliation, communication and use of social media. With improved capacities,

most groups have been engaging with decision-making structures, institutions, and local community groups to bring attention to their needs, views and aspirations related to peace and reconciliation. Further details about our overall achievements have been included in the introduction section of this document and also in the project specific sections.



Overall, our achievements in 2019 are very significant, especially when you weigh them against what can be described as one of the most challenging years for the country since the organization began to work in Sri Lanka



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In the year 2020, Search Sri Lanka will continue its work toward strengthening the national and local level efforts of transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation in the country by working in collaboration with government bodies, civil society organizations and local communities.

I wish you all a peaceful and happy 2020!

Introduction

Search has been working in Sri Lanka since 2011 with a long-term strategy of supporting the country to move towards sustainable peace and reconciliation founded upon the principles of democracy, pluralism and a just society, as it transforms itself from post-war to post-conflict. With full appreciation of the overwhelming challenges that have emerged in post-war Sri Lanka, Search seeks to promote sustained peace and reconciliation across ethnic, religious and political divides.

In 2019, Search Sri Lanka worked with diverse communities and identity groups with an aim to increase their participation in transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation policies and processes. In this respect, we worked with women, youth, war-affected communities, marginalized and under-privileged groups giving them space to voice their views, concerns and aspirations while providing them skill and knowledge improvement opportunities to engage with decision making structures and public and private partners in bringing attention to their transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation related issues and needs. A great emphasis was also given to create and strengthen linkages between diverse communities and groups with unique experiences of war and violence through bridgebuilding and reconciliation focused efforts. As cross-cutting areas, Search Sri Lanka used popular culture, traditional media and social media treating them as both mediums for communication and outreach as well as platforms whose constructive potential is critical for peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.

The April 2019 Easter Sunday violence re-emphasized that although the war ended a decade ago, the fragile post-war context could unravel in the face of destabilizing incidents. The aftermath of the Easter Sunday incident also indicated the

amount of work that needed to be done in order to the heal of hearts and minds Sri Lankans across the country. In this light, it has become even more important for Search to continue its efforts to create common grounds to help divided communities, marginalized groups and change agents from different ethno-religious, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to get to know each other at personal and communal level while enabling them to engage with transitional justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation processes at local and national level. In 2019, Search made a series of interventions that aimed to:

- to use popular culture to create better understanding among different communities;
- to provide a platform for women to raise their concerns, needs and aspirations as well as influence the state and the government on transition justice policies and processes, and reconciliation;
- to mobilize youth agency as a crucial tool in countering increased ethno-religious

violence and also hate speech on social media and in inspiring innovative approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation;

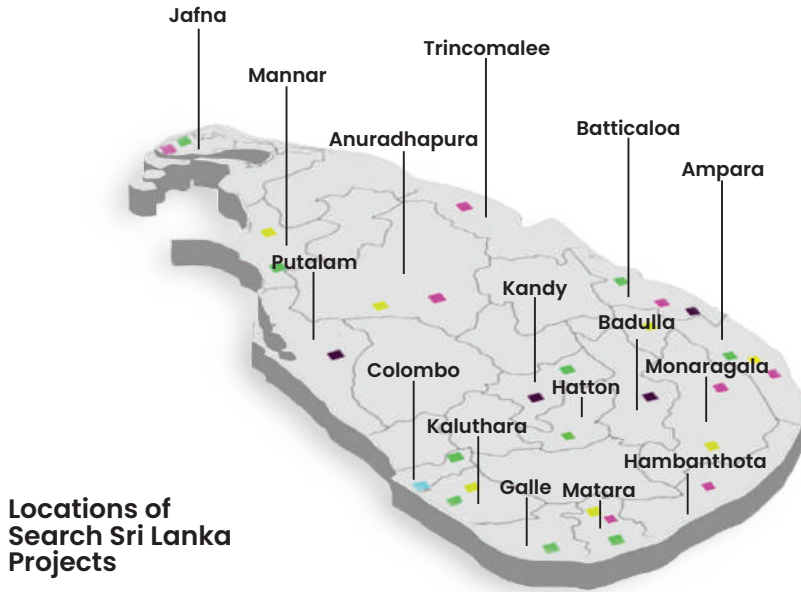
- to create space for inter- and intra-district dialogues between different ethno-religious communities to heal their psychological wounds through shared memorialization of pain, generating empathy for 'the other' and engaging them in discussions focused on repairing the social fabric of the country;

- to facilitate a collective impact approach to develop inclusive urban development and address urban conflicts and spatial injustice.

In 2020, Search Sri Lanka will further reinforce its efforts in the two areas of empowering women and youth given their crucial role in peacebuilding and reconciliation while looking at ways to engage with social media as a cross cutting theme as well as a platform for outreach and communication with diverse communities and individuals.

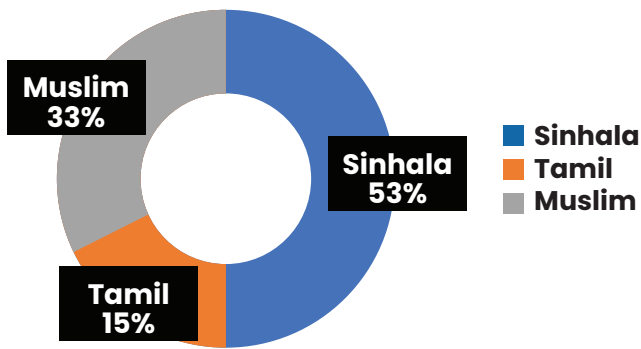


Search Sri Lanka 2019 At A Glance

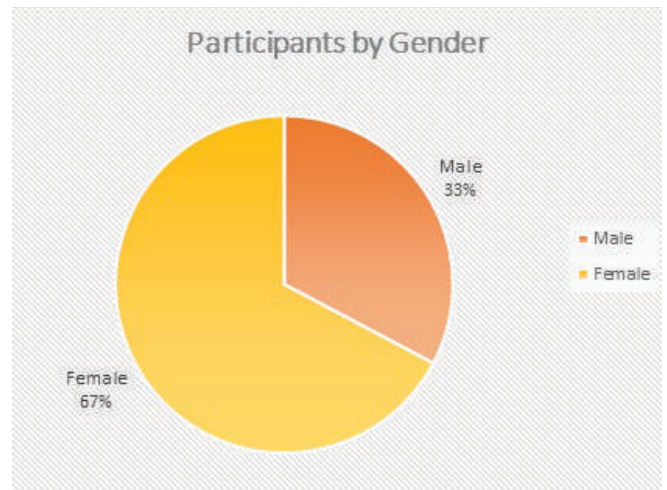


- Cyber Guardian
- Empowering Woman for an inclusive and Sustainable transitional justice and Reconciliation process in Sri Lanka
- We build Colombo Together
- We Lanka
- Community Memorialization Project

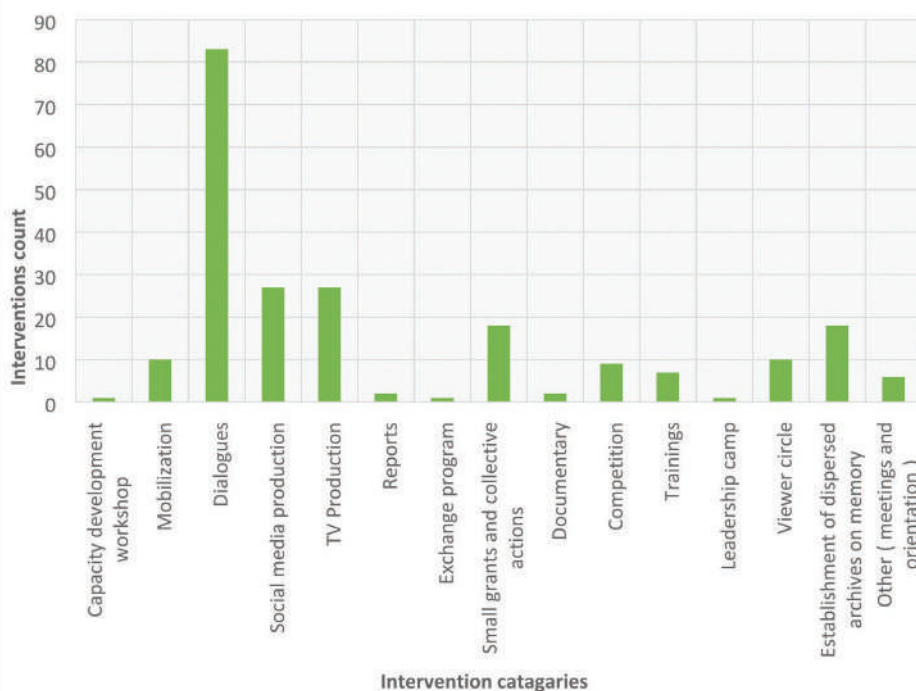
Ethnic Based Participation



Male and Female Compositions of SFCG Project Participants



Interventions



In 2019, SEARCH Sri Lanka reached an audience of over 6MN people through its media programming and media products

Creating Space for Dialogues

The Community Memorialization Project



During 2019, 83 multi-level dialogue sessions were held with the participation of over 2700 persons

In partnership with the Herstories project, since 2016, the Community Memorialization Project (CMP) has taken important steps toward repairing Sri Lanka's conflict-torn social fabric. Based on the critical imperatives of shared memorialization of pain as well as generating empathy for 'the other', the CMP was built on to the Herstories effort to capture individual and shared community narratives to prioritize and strengthen community owned memorialization. The project's objective has been to facilitate an environment that acknowledges and preserves multiple histories, while encouraging empathy through inter-generational transfer and inter-regional sharing of memory to support peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

The CMP's key activities include a three-tiered dialogue process, collecting and archiving of narratives to institutionalize memory and amplifying the core messages emanating from the project through innovative media

programming to engage with the general public. The project was conducted in two phases: In Phase 1, the CMP interacted with over 2000 persons within the selected project locations in Matara, Ampara and Mannar districts through dialogues, community consultations and interviews.

The Phase 1 findings also revealed that participants acknowledged the importance of preserving narratives as well as developing values that will ensure non-recurrence of violence through the establishment of a reconciliation process.

In order to further strengthen the impacts of the three-tiered dialogue process, in Phase 2, the CMP introduced an intergenerational dialogue component by involving youth to engage in dialogue with adults. The dialogue process created safe spaces for communities to share their stories and experiences with a focus on empathetic listening and acknowledgement. The CMP used dialogue workshops to impart

skills for identification of emerging conflicts and practical skills of conflict resolution. As a strategic approach, the CMP has used memory as a previously under-explored tool to support reconciliation among divided communities in the post-war context.

With the consolidation of all the above-mentioned project activities, the year 2019 has seen some encouraging results.

Search Sri Lanka and Herstories Project together have developed a resource pack that can be made use of for similar memorialization-focused efforts. The resource pack and the documented life stories – with permission from the participants – are shared on social media and web-based platforms with a view to create a wider public engagement. The CMP has already held a traveling exhibition apart from hosting an online and a physical archive at the national level, similar to the Herstories project.



"We often thought that conflict is bad but after participating in the dialogue I was convinced that conflict can also be good in terms of understanding others and for the development, if managed in proper manner"

Sinhala participant from Kaluthara



" Earlier, I used to think the war affected only those who lived in the Wannu. But after the visit to Mannar, I realized the war has affected people in other areas, too. When the Muslim lady from Thalaimannar narrated her story, I recounted my own experience in the Wannu"

A young woman from the Wannu



"This is my first visit to Mannar. I felt very sad when I listened to the hardships they have undergone. Had I been born and lived here during the war, I doubt whether I would have been able to cope with similar experiences. Still, people in Mannar have survived those experiences and they are very brave."

A 20 year Sinhala woman from Kaluthura who participated in an inter district youth exchange visit to Mannar

Using Popular Culture to Create Better Understanding Among Different Communities

Change the Channel!

'Thriloka' is a fourteen-episode tele-drama that was telecast on the Independent Television Network (ITN) from December 2018 to March 2019

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoD81W2zu0k&list=PLqTHbZFu4wu8s5-slpaNct8eSie8VNum&index=15>)

The story of Thriloka is about a football team made up of youth from a multi-ethnic coastal village where all communities peacefully co-existed at the start of the story. A Sinhalese team member was injured in a road accident while traveling with his Muslim team member and friend. The peace in their community was shattered following this incident after some Sinhalese youth began to accuse the young Muslim player of deliberately planning the accident. The story depicts how the village's Sinhala and Muslim politicians manipulate this incident for political gain assisted by the misinformation spread by some youth from both sides of the divide. Bonds of friendships and ties begin to unravel fast as dark clouds of

misunderstanding hang over the village. The drama ends on positive note, though, after the villagers realized that a few individuals were behind the escalated inter-ethnic disharmony and they leave aside their bigotry and prejudices to

win the football match.

Thriloka reached over 4.5MN viewers on air and another 1.1MN on YouTube.

Search also commissioned an independent evaluation which was conducted by the Center for Poverty Analysis (CEPA). The CEPA evaluation team conducted two rounds of viewer circles in Kalutara, Galle, Ratnapura, Badulla and Kurunegala to assess the extent to which Thriloka resonated with the audience. The results gathered from the viewer circles showed that the adults understood the importance of key messages communicated through the drama.

Additionally, CEPA assessed viewer comments collected from the Thriloka Facebook group, which also comprised of youth that took part in the two viewer circles. According to their first round viewer circle responses, while their change of knowledge did not indicate a positive change in attitudes and perceptions, 81% of youth and 84% adults mentioned that Thriloka highlighted the importance of living in harmony with all ethno-religious communities.





Comprehension of terms such as reconciliation and social cohesion improved in youth from 23% to 44%, and in adults, from 39% to 71%.

(The second round viewer circle interviews)



"I am not saying social media is the main reason for racism and ethnically motivated riots in the country, but if youth had used social media wisely, we would have been able to minimize the damage of Digana riots. I am glad that the 'Thriloka' drama showed us something similar and how the youth are being misled by false information"

A youth respondent from Mahiyanganaya

"This tele-drama provided us knowledge on what are the main reasons for ethnic issues in the country and through the tele-drama, I learnt how these things are happening in the country".

A female participant from Kurunegala viewers' circle

82% youth and 84% adult participants stated the foremost message they acquired from the drama was the importance of co-existence and reconciliation with people from different ethno-religious communities.

"This story made me a different human being... it made me think anew..."

Pasindu Dilshan Liyanage
(Youtube comment on Episode 13)

"Bride fainting on the Poruwa, groom running away, Muslim girl bringing a Watallappam with extra cashew, the coach being Muslim, the groomsman being Muslim but wearing a Sinhala traditional costume... How much those 22 minutes spoke, how many times it stabbed nationalism and certain extremists in our society with a knife... if expressed simply, it is a great teledrama..."

(Youtube comment on Episode 1)

The increase of comprehension of co-existence and reconciliation among youth is over 50% compared to the first round of viewer circles.

Providing A Platform For Women To Influence Transitional Justice Policies And Processes



During 2019, Search Sri Lanka further consolidated its contribution toward Humanity and Inclusions effort to establish a National Platform (NP) for women in order to facilitate their full and effective participation in the national transitional justice and reconciliation processes and mechanisms. Women from Ampara, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Anuradhapura, Kandy, Moneragala, Hambantota, and Matara districts representing diverse ethno-religious and socio-economic have been provided with the knowledge and skills to strengthen their participation in district and national level transitional justice process in Sri Lanka. Members of the NP, Women's Platform for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation (සංවිඳිකාව සඳහා කාන්තාවෝ or ந ல் லி ண க் க த் தி ற் கா ன ப டெ ண் கள்) have been working toward:

- to be active as a powerful civil society body, influencing the

state and the government for formation of stronger policies for transitional justice and reconciliation (TJR) process;

- to act as an effective body that work intensively on community education on TJR in Sri Lanka to equip people with knowledge and understanding for reconciliation;

- to be a proactive body working with a greater responsibility to prevent any form of future ethnic and civil conflicts.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, throughout 2019, members of NP have been engaging in lobbying and advocacy, data collection, analysis and information dissemination, coordination between the Government and the people and building, maintaining and strengthening relationships.

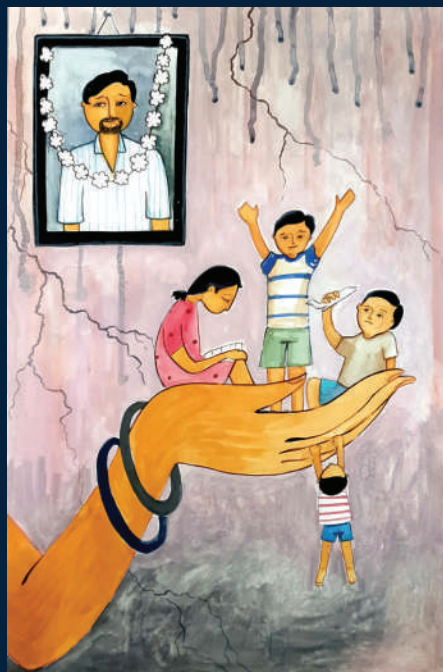
The skill building measures for NP members included mediation and facilitation

training, conflict identification, analysis and management, use of mainstream and social media for advocacy and lobbying on prioritized TJR related issues and networking with journalists. At district level, women identified and prioritized TJR related issues such as resettlement, land issues and missing persons, language issue and female-headed households and their issues. The women members have been conducting district level to bring attention to these issues. With the hands-on training they received in media use and production such as speaking in front of a camera and delivering targeted messages during a given time frame, effective communication and creating media messages, NP members have produced posters, videos and cartoons around prioritized TJR issues. These media products are currently being used for advocacy efforts at national and district level. One of the highlights of this year's advocacy efforts taken by the

NP has been the production of a document on Missing Persons that was recently handed over to the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) including data gathered and recommendations. Over 150 women who make up the National Platform were trained under this project.

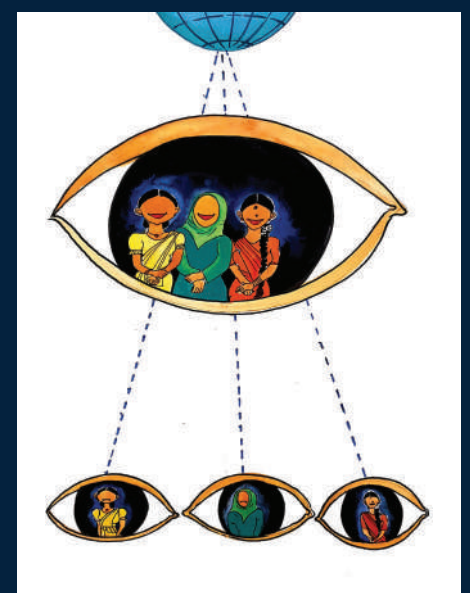
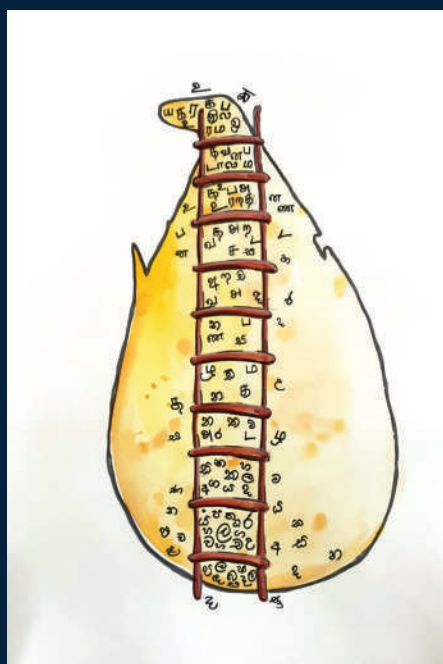


“Most of the women who took part in different activities agreed and understood that all communities are experiencing the negative effects of disappearances. Their increased knowledge impact of all communities”



“The participants are now able to identify issues of disappeared families and present those issues to relevant stakeholders”

“Women who participated in the project are able to identify the issues that prevent us from coexisting with other communities and achieving reconciliation”



Mobilizing Youth Agency for Transforming Ethno-Religious Violence and Hate Speech on Social Media

WT2 : Work Together, Win Together

'Work together, Win together' - WT2- project aimed to engage youth in a discourse about reconciliation while enabling them to become drivers of change. With an idea to make the national reconciliation process more vibrant and participatory, Search Sri Lanka's WT2 engaged with youth and their local communities in ten districts in the Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern provinces of the country. The WT2 used challenges, team-based activities and social media to attract youth and sustain their engagement in peacebuilding and social change-focused activities.

The project was carried out in two phases: In the first phase - entitled "GO Challenge" - Search Sri Lanka and its local partners conducted mobilization activities

in Jaffna, Mannar, Ampara, Batticaloa, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya (Hatton) Colombo, Kalutara, Matara and Galle districts with over 1000 youth; the second phase focused on social media-focused campaigns to counter hate speech and promote positive examples of co-existence and reconciliation. The We Lanka social media campaign enabled and assisted youth groups from the ten districts to produce and disseminate positive stories of peaceful co-existence and reconciliation.

During the next stage, the participating teams produced stories of co-existence from their communities and the best 27 stories selected by an independent panel of judges were featured in a social media

campaign. The youth teams also received mentoring and guidance to produce their social media products. The WT2 process provided plenty of opportunities for solidarity and linkages to be fostered among the youth groups which can now be used as platforms to activate reconciliation focused activities. Responses from the youth participants indicate it has been an experience of learning and enjoyment for them.





"I learned how to work with different regional partners who represent different ethnicities, religious and work cultures. It was different and unique than the conventional interventions we often use for peacebuilding work"



"Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed, it means the damage no longer controls our lives."

"Taking part in the go challenge boosted our confidence and determination to work as a team to achieve a common goal"



"If not for this inter-cultural event, we would not have understood the importance of reconciliation. Everything was new to us. Interactive games, physical activities and history challenge were very useful to improve our teamwork and leadership skills."

The Five Winning Teams and links to their Video Documentaries

Illadhan by Fordycia (Hatton)

<https://www.facebook.com/welankaofficial/videos/215356022692616/>

Helidarawwa by Dream Catchers (Galle)

<https://www.facebook.com/welankaofficial/videos/233600202339441/>

Yawarum Nihare by Avengers (Hatton)

<https://www.facebook.com/welankaofficial/videos/711236842648230/>

Nawathimuda Eka Thathparayak by 4 star (Colombo)

<https://www.facebook.com/welankaofficial/videos/627748071077895/>

Manitham 2 by Blossom (Mannar)

<https://www.facebook.com/welankaofficial/videos/695573210903517/>

Cyber Guardian: Empowering Youth to Combat Online Hate Speech in Sri Lanka

Misinformation and hate speech related contents disseminated via social media platforms can have dangerous, precipitous effects as have proven in the recent Sri Lankan context during religiously-motivated riots that took place in places such as Aluthgama and Digana. During both these riots, extremist groups and mob organizers took to social media and internet based mobile communication apps such as WhatsApp and Viber to spread misinformation and even to share information about riot activities.

In a measure to counter the spread of social media-based fake news and hate speech, Search Sri Lanka supported two tech-savvy youth groups based on a methodology known as Capacity, Counter and Content which addressed related needs among selected youth participants. The first youth group was made up of experienced and established social media users who were also referred to as National Champions; they were empowered to be more involved in peacebuilding utilizing their existing social media platforms to counter fake news and hate speech contents. The second group of youth were selected from Puttalam, Batticaloa, Kandy and Badulla districts and they were trained to use social media responsibly while also capacitating them to use social media positively for reconciliation.

The project was implemented to achieve two specific aims: to



empower youth to be champions that play a positive role in the social media space promoting reconciliation and pluralism; to facilitate a collaboration with external stakeholders to share lessons learned and ideas for improving the country's social media for positive change.

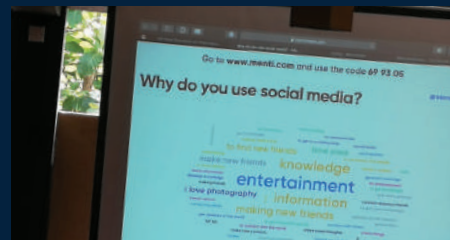
District level youth participated in a three-day bootcamp where they were introduced to different aspects of social media, social media's potential and the role it can play to promote peace and reconciliation. The youth participants also received opportunity to improve their technical skills such as creating contents, posts, video editing, etc. In addition to receiving training in the above-mentioned areas, the National Champions group also received training in the conduct of digital marketing addressing sustainability



Audience Responses to National Champions' Post-Training Social Media Posts

| | |
|----------------|---------|
| No of likes | : 3810 |
| No of Shares | : 30192 |
| No of views | : 58345 |
| No of comments | : 4541 |

related requirements related to their social media platforms. The training has enabled both groups engage with their peers and local communities across different identity groups to promote social cohesion and reconciliation.



Facilitating a Collective Impact Approach to Ensure Inclusive Urban Development and Address Urban Conflicts and Spatial injustice

We Build Colombo Together

We Build Colombo together (WBCT) is an initiative that has been advocating for a Collective Impact Approach (CIA) to ensure inclusive urban development while empowering urban communities to address conflicts and spatial injustice arising from gentrification. In 2019, the WBCT project consolidated its advocacy activities with government officials and public and private institutions to ensure that new mega city and metropolis development projects are based on collaborative problem solving approach and take into account the collective impact they have on communal eco-systems in areas, which have been earmarked for such development projects. Furthermore, WBCT supported co-existence focused and capacity improvement needs of the Kompannya Veediya communities. The Kompannya Veediya communities that are living in urban slum and under-developed areas have been identified for relocation to the Navam City Development Housing complex in few years by the Urban Development Authority.

Inter-Faith Wesak Celebration in Slave Island:

In response to Easter Sunday bombings and heightened hate speech and anti-Muslim activities, WBCT teamed up with local youth to bring together all the religious leaders in Kompannya Veediya to celebrate Wesak at Gunawardhanaramaya temple. The success of the event was reflected in the decision

by the organizers to invite all the religious groups to locally organized religious events to pass the message of strength of coexistence to all. The video documentary prepared parallel to the event was on social media platforms to share the message country-wide.

Improving education and employability of local youth:

The systems map prepared by the WBCT group showed strong connections between the quality of education, employability, income and quality of life in Kompannya Veediya. Hence, WBCT looked into a network of partnerships with a local school, private sector members, and Community Development Councils (CDCs). The interventions made through these partnerships aim at improving educational infrastructure, opening up new fields of employment, giving opportunities to gain experience in private sector jobs, etc.



“WBCT has showed me, how creative a government officer can be within his mandate if he truly wishes to serve the city and its people!” -

“Being a member of WBCT core team has allowed me to expand my knowledge on collaborative urban development and has given me an opportunity to serve communities beyond my neighborhood”

“Everyday Politics of Kompannaweediya is the reason behind success and failure of anything that is started here. Knowing how to navigate such challenging environment and having flexibility to do so is the biggest strength of WBCT. I am happy to lead it together with the core team!”



WBCT engaged with 115 communities and over 330 community leaders on its Identity Cards Project bringing together public, private institutes to work with communities on collaborative urban development projects that are identified and planned by community leaders.

A video prepared by WBCT in response to the April 21st Easter Sunday's violence reached over 40,000 within the first week since release

45 youth were given digital media training to work in community -led projects enabling them to actively contribute toward mainstreaming collective impact approach.



Search Sri Lanka Resources

Search Sri Lanka has a great variety of open source documents and audio/visual material, which can be accessed online by interested individuals and organizations for use with creative production ownership and source acknowledgement for Search where relevant. The resources available online include:

- CMP tool kit – The CMP tool kit has been produced to document and share all lessons learned experiences gained during implementation of the project. The documents have been compiled with a view to inform and improve similar activities on memorialization.

(<https://www.Search.org/tag/sri-lanka-toolkits/>)

- www.memorymap.lk : This online platform has archived 320 village histories and life stories of individuals and groups collected by the Herstories and the Community Memorialization Projects. These stories have been instrumental in initiating dialogues within and between different groups on Sri Lanka's past and the future they want to create together.

- Sikka team Tele series – The thirteen-episode teledrama series was produced by Search Sri Lanka under "The Team" radio and drama series. Although "The Team" has used the global appeal of football in most of the global south countries where the drama series has been produced, in Sri Lanka, the story of the Sikka team was built around the popular game of cricket. The Sikkar team conveyed the significance of reconciliation and co-existence in post-war Sri Lanka and was broadcast in 2016 on Swarnawahini channel. All thirteen episodes are available to watch on YouTube.

(https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=sikka+team+teledrama)

- Thriloka Tele series: The Thriloka teledrama is the second teledrama produced by Search Sri Lanka to communicate the messages of co-existence and reconciliation. Thriloka was telecast on ITN channel in early 2019 and all fourteen episodes are available for viewing on YouTube

(https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=thriloka+teledrama)

Other project related documents and external evaluations are also available on Search's website:

<https://www.sfcg.org/sri-lanka/>

Searchers of 2019



Photos by Sharni Jayawardena (cover) and Search Staff

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