

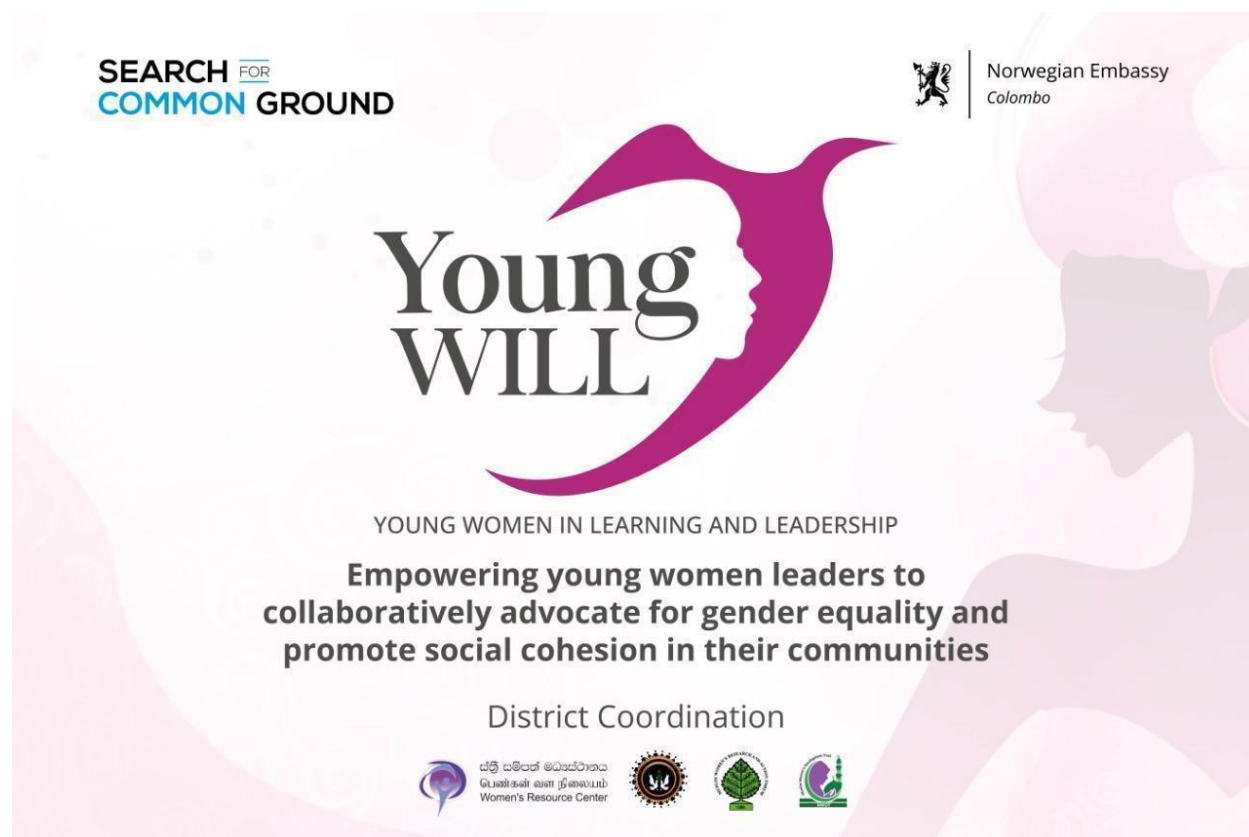


Lessons Learned Report

Young Women in Learning and Leadership Project

2021-22 in Sri Lanka

**Report on Results, and
Documentation of Lesson Learned of the “Young WILL” project
in Ampara, Batticaloa, Kurunegala and Puttalam (2021-22)**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report takes the reader through the experience of implementing the YoungWILL project and the lessons learned from it. The project was implemented in 4 highly challenged districts of Sri Lanka: Ampara, Batticaloa, Kurunegala, and Puttalam. Through direct training sessions, the project trained 80 selected young women leaders (YWLs) with the objective of increasing the awareness, skills and confidence on the subjects of women, peace and security (WPS) as well as social cohesion. They were supported by 25 local mentors who were trained to facilitate the YWLs' process of learning and application of the newly gained WPS related knowledge and skills. They were expected to conduct at least 4-5 mentoring sessions per YWL group on the basis of facilitating the journeys of YWLs. Upon the completion of training, the YWLs were expected to develop and conduct an advocacy-based intervention in their localities to address one or several specific WPS related issues they have observed in their area. Two (2) such initiatives in each district were supported by seed grants and the YWLs are expected to lead the implementation of the initiatives. The final stage of the project opened room for YWLs to share their experience and familiarize with the culture of YWLs from all districts through exchange visits.

The YoungWILL project successfully completed the training of YWLs and mentors, conducted 8 context analysis exercises with each YWL group, planned and implemented 8 SGIs, conducted 2 exchange programs and capacity building workshops for the mentors between September 2021 and May 2022. We worked hand in hand with the SFCG project team, trainers, partner organizations, mentors, and the young women leaders to understand the experience of each district, each group of participants and stakeholders during the last 3 months of the project. We then reflected on the lessons learned, best practices and recommendations. We are impressed by how all the group's related to district level project teams and beneficiaries battled through rapidly changing and socio-economic and political realities in Sri Lanka, in addition to Covid related restrictions, to achieve the expected outcomes of the project, namely;

Outcome 1: YWLs have increased knowledge and understanding on advocacy strategies and have identified issues related to WPS in their communities

Outcome 2: Networking and relationships among YWLs and between stakeholders are improved across language, ethnicity and other divides

The success of the YoungWILL project format is evident in how the YWLs grew through it. The study confirmed that through implementation of multiple training and capacity building workshops for YWLs and mentors, and networking sessions between them and local stakeholders enabled young women leaders to get hands-on experience on addressing locally important and dominant WPS issues. In so doing, the YoungWILL project has set path for a holistic and collective approach to both empower the youth and drive local societies towards inclusive development. This key highlight of this project experience can be further unpacked to examine how rigorous

and transparent selection of beneficiaries (YWLs and Mentors) can lead to successful completion of advocacy projects and capacity building exercises. Furthermore, the participants learned an eye-opening process of engagement capable of enabling their own transformation into effective change-makers of generation Z.

The youth truly enjoyed this **compact project model that brings together training, facilitating, networking, project planning and the actual use of newly-gained knowledge, skills and networking**. It should also be stressed that, the success of these young women leaders have a history beyond September 2021 since they have worked with SFCG and the same district partner organization for about 2 years prior to this YoungWILL project. Therefore, the continuous attention, grooming and experience have also played a key role in the success of this project and the YWLs. This study therefore recommends national level agents of youth empowerment like SFCG to **continue and encourage working with the same young group for 2-3 years until the youth teams feel confident as young leaders and change agents in their respective localities**.

To further enhance this holistic model of empowerment and social change, this study recommends **that the stakeholder involvement in similar projects be encouraged at their early stages**. One strategy to get such enthusiastic local stakeholder engagement is to include representatives from all sectors-- private, state, civil society and community--to the pool of mentors. In addition to making the seed grant projects more collaborative, this can also encourage collective impact projects in each selected locality through the inter-sectoral collaboration built through the SGIs. In terms of selecting youth, we recommend the **recruitment of youngsters who have not been able to make use of the opportunities offered through formal paths of education and leadership**. The purpose is to avoid the rate of dropouts during the project as well as to not exclude anyone from the process of empowering the youth.

One key set of learnings and recommendations come from the context in which the YoungWILL project battled through. The **flexibility the donor practiced throughout this project in terms of financial management and programming** is highly appreciated by all actor groups because it has helped SFCG, as the main implementer, to achieve the project goals despite the fast changing political, economic and social environment. Hence, the continuation of the flexibility in budget reallocations and more room for manoeuvring with programming are recommended. The range of SGI projects conducted by the YWLs highlights the value of allowing the youth to build advocacy projects around what they see as problems in their own localities. The seed grant projects identified and conducted by the YWLs have revealed very subtle but important gender aspects of various social issues such as the harassment of young women through social media, lack of support received by young female social workers from their communities and families, and lack of economic participation of females due to period poverty. All these non-mainstream WPS issues were revealed when the local networks of YWLS, mentors and other stakeholders were encouraged to address issues they saw as important. Hence, the **enabling environment created by the project for such authentic attempts to address local level WPS challenges** is appreciated.

It is also **recommended to not allow the selection of beneficiaries and mentors through snowballing technique** because this YoungWILL project model is highly dependent on the equal levels of commitment and corporative nature of the 4 local-level pillars, namely YWLs, mentors, stakeholders (of state, private, civil and community sector) and the partner organization (PO). All the pillars should be selected through a rigorous and participatory screening process. Also, it is highly recommended for partner organizations to develop substantial networks with every sector to be able to easily mobilize support for YWLs projects when needed. When selecting partner organizations from districts, it is highly recommended to pick POs with thorough understanding of the subject matter (i.e.: WPS) or the commitment to learn and facilitate learning of the same. In view of discouraging the dependency on low-resource sectors like local governance bodies, **it is recommended to promote more supportive stakeholders from the private sector in the locality.** This will also break the myth that social change and youth empowerment is a responsibility of only the state and civil society.

Last but not least, this study highlights and suggests the improvement of strategic coherence and vision of youth empowerment and collaborative advocacy around WPS issues by combining the training, networking and actual implementation of projects with all gender groups. While having only young female leaders in this program helped them to grow freely as youth leaders, the inclusion of other genders during the SGI seems to have helped certain aspects of specific WPS themes (i.e.: harassment on social media).

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCA	Collaborative Context Assessment
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GN/GND	Grama Niladhari / Grama Niladhari Division
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GS	Grama Sewaka
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPI	Key Person Interview
PO	Partner Organization
RF	Results Framework
RQ	Research Question
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SGI	Seed Grant Initiative
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
WDO	Women Development Officer
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YWL	Young Women Leaders
YoungWILL	Young Women in Learning and Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

1.1. The project description

The ‘Young WILL’ or ‘Young Women in Learning and Leadership’ project expects to see ‘Empowered young women collaboratively advocating for gender equality and promoting social cohesion in their communities’. The Young WILL project which empowers Young Women Leaders (YWLs) in Ampara, Batticaloa, Kurunegala and Puttalam Districts” was implemented by Search for Common Ground, Sri Lanka spanning from 1st September 2021 to 30th May 2022, supported by an allocated budget of USD 101,569. The project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The selected communities are from Ampara, Puttalam, Batticaloa and Kurunegala districts and are coordinated by selected partner organisations based in respective districts. The partner organizations selected for the four districts are Sarvodaya Shanthi Sena (Batticaloa), Women’s Resource Center (Kurunegala), Muslim Women's Development Trust (Puttalam) and Muslim Women’s Research and Action Forum (Ampara). (See the map 1)

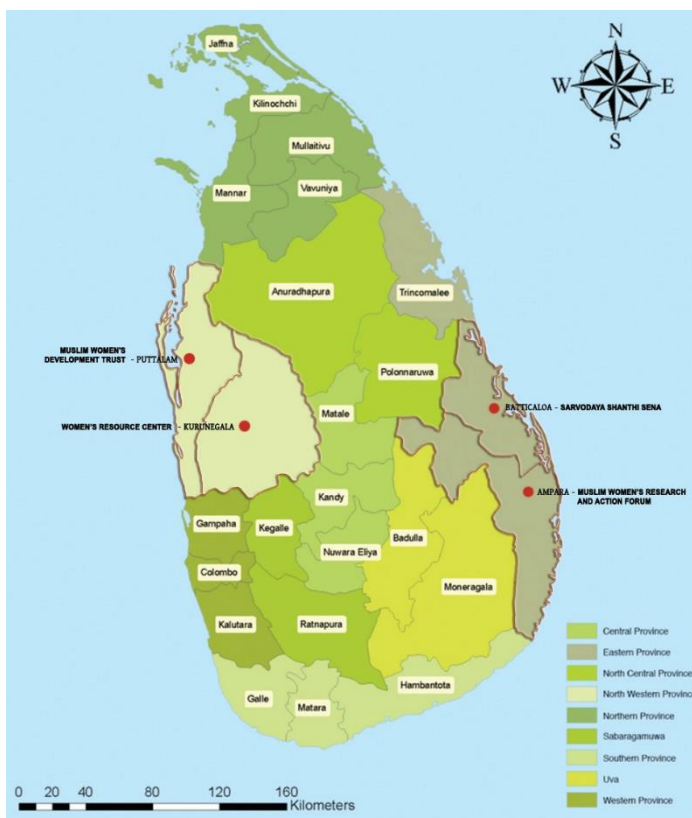


Figure 1: Selected districts and district partners

The approach followed in this project is informed by Search’s experience in Youth 360 approach and their expertise in Women, Peace, Security and GBV related training. The project activities include:

- (1) WPS, GBV, Advocacy and Gender training;
- (2) Collaborative Context Assessment (CCA)
- (3) Seed Grant Initiatives (SGIs)
- (4) youth-led activity implementation
- (5) Networking with stakeholders;
- (6) Cross-district exchange visits
- (7) Advanced training and clinic sessions which are especially organised for the mentors who facilitate the journeys of the YWLs.

The project's overall objective is to empower emerging women leaders to collaboratively advocate for gender equality and promotion of social cohesion in their local communities. Once the training component is completed, they should be able to identify local issues relating to women, peace and security and/or GBV and to collectively design responses for the identified social issues. Specific outcomes related to this vision are as follows (See Results Framework in annexures for more on outcomes and output).

Outcome 1: YWLs have increased the knowledge and understanding of advocacy strategies and have identified issues related to WPS in their communities

Outcome 2: Networking and relationships among YWLs and between stakeholders have improved across divides, including language and ethnic differences.

As for direct beneficiaries, targeting the age group between 18-29, the project selected 80 YWLs (expected to represent all ethnicities). The main project activities, listed above, are designed to achieve a minimum of 35% increase in the awareness among the 80 YWLs on WPS and social cohesion through direct training sessions. They are supported by 25 mentors from the ages of 38-55 who are trained to facilitate the growth of YWLs during the project period. They are expected to conduct at least 4-5 mentoring sessions per mentor, helping the YWLs process of learning, especially their application of the WPS and social cohesion. Upon the completion of training, the YWLs are expected to develop a practical advocacy-based intervention in their localities to address one or many specific WPS related issues in their area. 2 such initiatives in each district are supported by seed grants and the YWLs are expected to lead the implementation of the initiatives. The final stage opens room for the YWLs to share their experience with other districts through exchange visits.

Further, the project anticipates the YWLs to develop networks with stakeholders (minimum 3 from each district) and fellow YWLs-- across-divides--from other localities. The process of training, project designing, implementation and sharing of experience should allow the YWLs to expand their network of contacts in the field and to gain experience that they can share in the future as they personally engage in solving WPS related issues locally.

1.2. The socio-economic context of the project

Sri Lanka presents a mixed picture with respect to gender equality. Sri Lanka was ranked 73rd out of 188 countries in the UNDP's gender inequality index (GII), which measures gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation. The country's rank in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report produced by the World Economic Forum is low at 109 out of 144 countries, driven by a large gender gap in wages for similar work.

(Source: Sri Lanka Voluntary National Review on the Status of Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, 2018)

Considering the low performance in terms of the wellbeing and development of women and girls, Sri Lanka has shown signs of paying attention to the 5th goal of the SDGs: 'Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls'. This goal was introduced to address gender inequality from its roots. In this context, during a recent visit to Sri Lanka, Officer-in-Charge for UN Women, Asia and the Pacific, Sarah Knibbs highlighted the need for gender responsive policies and made 2 suggestions to the country's decision makers:

1. "crises have gender-specific impacts that disproportionately burden women. Investments in gender-responsive research and adopting a transformative approach to designing economic and social policies that promote the realization of women's rights is a crucial step towards inclusive recovery".
2. In order to ensure that women's needs [from the current crisis] are addressed in response and recovery efforts, it is essential that Sri Lankan women are included in all decision-making spheres.
3. Gender-responsive national planning and budgeting processes ought to be prioritized to ensure the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable, providing them equal opportunities to contribute as the country works towards recovery.

While there is such pressure on the decision makers to include more women in decision making and the labour force, it is very important to have projects like YoungWILL to prepare women at ground level to take on the challenges of the era they live in. As understood by almost all the stakeholders and beneficiaries, the YWLs have received a golden opportunity not only to understand the ways in which to advocate for WPS and social cohesion but also to practice that knowledge on the ground through this project.

In most societies around the world, young women are merely accommodated within the socio-economic and political structures that treat men and women unequally. Hence, young women rightfully deserve external and additional support to emerge and thrive as leaders who can peacefully promote and advocate for social change that makes the world more just and sustainable for all genders and all beings. Search for Common Ground (hereafter referred to as



Figure 2: During a workshop for district partners

‘Search’ and/or SFCG) has actively addressed this gap since its establishment in Sri Lanka. Its attempt to enhance the capacity of young women to collaboratively advocate for gender equality and promote social cohesion in their communities will be studied following the methodology explained in this study report.

1.3. Barriers and challenges to women’s empowerment

The value of representation in a democratic society where one community cannot be adequately represented by another cannot be overestimated. This applies to stakeholders across any social divide including gender. Hence, empowering women to represent themselves and to be the agents of the change they wish to see in the world in order to make the society a liveable place regardless of one's gender remains a priority. This is even more important in patriarchal societies such as those still stuck in the list of ‘developing countries’; considering ‘women’ as equal partners of social and economic development can be eye-opening. Based on the experience of the researcher, in culturally gender-biased societies, the space enjoyed by the non-privileged groups such as ethnic minorities and non-male genders, remain relatively narrow when compared to the same of the power actors, particularly male members of ethnic majorities. In the context of such dynamics and power struggles between those who hold different gender identities, females and other non-dominant gender groups need support to enhance their access to equal opportunity and social justice. The YoungWILL project specifically addresses the lack of participation of the young women in social structures.

Empowering young women to become leaders and get more involved in decision making is a pressing need in Sri Lanka. Despite its proud beginnings with the world’s first female prime minister (in 1960) and a female president ruling for 2 terms 1994-2002), the current trend of female representation in power positions remains very low and uninspiring. (Wanigasinghe, 2022) Female political representation in the national parliament remains as low as 5.4% in 2020.

The phenomenon of the gender-divide in politics (in Sri Lanka) is multi-layered and not merely based on legal considerations. Rather, social, cultural and economic factors have a deep impact on women’s political empowerment [or not] ... It is crucial to embrace a holistic approach to touch upon different aspects undermining women’s chances to engage in the public sphere. Briefing paper 116 (DRI, 2021) prepared in 2021 by Democracy Reporting International in its recommendations suggest:

A comprehensive national machinery to empower women in the public sphere would be essential to address the visible and invisible barriers to women’s participation. Such a system can ensure direction, continuity and strategic support to government and civil

society organizations efforts to attain substantial equality between women and men in politics. (pg 2, DRI, 2021)

Further it suggests that,

Tailored programmes may be developed to target girls and boys in schools to promote gender-sensitivity, awareness of women's rights and the need to eradicate stereotypes and discrimination against women. (Pg 19, DRI, 2021)

Given the above context, this study appreciates and acknowledges the multiple attempts taken by SFCG and other partners to enhance the knowledge, confidence, and skills of the young women around the country.

YoungWILL project is fortunate to begin on a strong foundation laid by the projects SFCG previously conducted, such as Young Women as Drivers of Peace: Providing 360°, an 18-month young women empowerment initiative funded by UNPBF, and Women in Technology-Young Women in addressing hate speech, a 5-month digital capacity building of young women initiative funded by UNDP. As these projects witnessed, young women in Sri Lanka are not able to take leadership roles in their communities. They are unable to address important and critical aspects such as GBV, and WPS, due to the lack of opportunity and impeding structural and cultural barriers. Hence, this project builds on a fertile ground which already has a group of motivated young women who have gained substantial skills in collaborative leadership, social cohesion, and digital literacy through above mentioned projects. They have built networks and relationships with key stakeholders within their community as well as with their peers across districts. To build upon and continue the successful initiatives taken by previous projects, this project focuses on the next level of support for these young women to further improve their skills and capacities, enabling them to take leadership to promote gender equality, the WPS agenda, and social cohesion in their communities, and to collaborate and strengthen their relationships with key stakeholders.

1.4 Timeline

Following diagram is a digitalization of the project timeline as remembered by the project coordination officers from the POs. This was picked from the outputs of the final project review meeting.

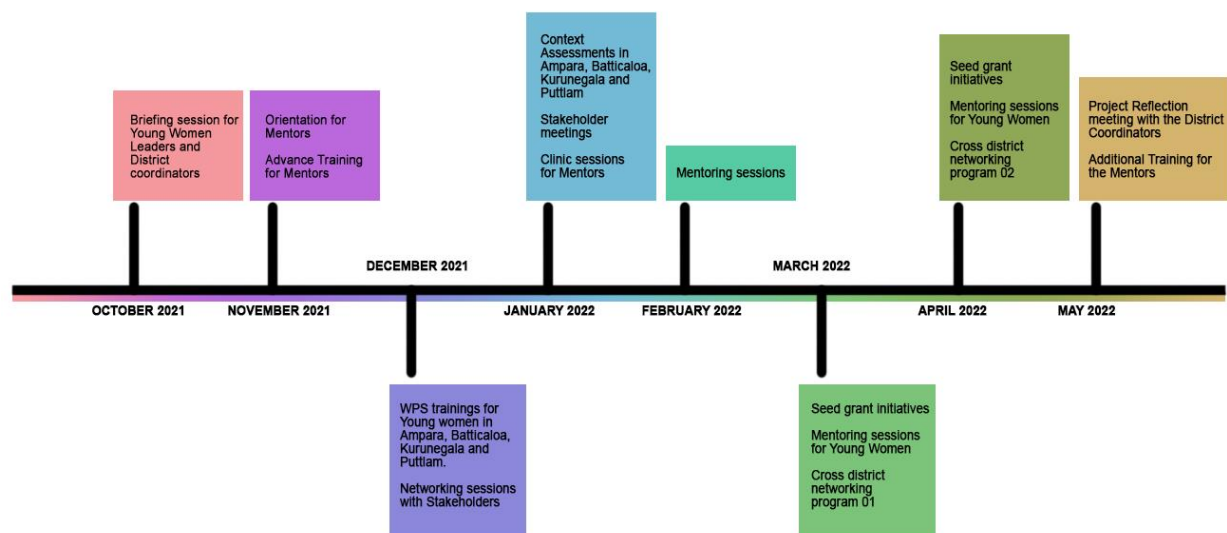


Figure 3: Timeline of project activities

2. OBJECTIVES, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1. Study objectives

The main objectives of the assessment are as follows:

- To determine the achievements of indicators of the project and develop case studies to showcase the success of the project on participating young women
- To document the lessons learned, best practices, and challenges to inform future work and planning of Search, its partners and donors

The specific research questions (RQs) in relation to these principles are drawn from the ToR. The supportive research questions that breakdown the RQs given in the ToR are as below. (See annexure 1 for more details).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Main Question based)	Research (outcome)	Indicators given to measure the of achievement vs target	Data sources	Points of engagement with project team and stakeholders
Has the project empowered young women to collaboratively advocate for gender equality and promote social cohesion in their communities?		% Increase awareness on WPS / social cohesion issues among those who participated in the initiatives: 50% increase targeted	<p>Mini survey on level of awareness pre and post training</p> <p>Questionnaire Survey</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p>	<p>100% of the beneficiaries covered by mini survey and questionnaire survey (75-80 responses to the QS)</p> <p>3 interviews per district with key stakeholders</p> <p>2 FGDs with YWL seed grant receiving groups</p> <p>Interview with Project Manager(s)/ District coordinators</p>

			Participatory Observations on how the new awareness is used by YWLs
Do the selected young women have an increased understanding and knowledge on advocacy strategies and have identified issues related to WPS in their communities	<p>% YWLs with increased knowledge on gender, WPS, and non-adversarial advocacy: 35% increase</p> <p>% of YWLs who have implemented small grant initiatives and reports that the mentoring and coaching sessions supported them to design and implement their small grant initiatives: 70% of participated</p> <p>Number of issues identified in the collaborative context assessment (CCA) that are integrated in to YWL's advocacy campaign/ seed grant initiatives: 2 issues per district</p> <p>Number of emerging women leaders trained on gender, WPS, non-adversarial advocacy, project design (Disaggregated by ethnicity, religion, and district): 80 YWLs trained</p> <p>Collaborative context (CA)assessment are conducted: 2 in each district</p> <p>Number of YWLs who attended Collaborative context (CA)assessment: 80 YWLs attended</p> <p>Seed grant initiatives based on the issues identified through CA implemented by</p>	<p>Questionnaire Survey</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p> <p>Content analysis of SGI proposals made by YWLs</p> <p>Attendance sheets prepared by SFCG/ District partners</p> <p>Output database prepared by SFCG</p> <p>Lists of YWL groups</p> <p>Participant observations</p> <p>AAR reports</p> <p>Training Reports</p> <p>Participatory observations during CCAs</p>	<p>100% of the beneficiaries covered by mini survey and questionnaire survey (75-80 responses to the QS)</p> <p>3 interviews per district with state, youth and mentors</p> <p>Interview with Project Manager(s)/ District coordinators</p> <p>2 FGDs with YWL seed grant receiving groups</p> <p>Participatory Observations during CCA and events organized by Seed Grant initiative groups</p>

	<p>young women groups in the targeted district: 2 in each district</p> <p>Number of mentors participated in the training sessions: 25 trained</p> <p>Percentage of trained experienced mentors who have conducted mentoring and coaching sessions: 70% of the trained mentors</p> <p>Number of mentoring sessions conducted by each mentors (physically and remote mode, desegregated by each mentor and district): minimum 4 by each mentor</p>		
<p>Are networking and relationships among young women leaders and between stakeholders improved across divides, including language and ethnicity?</p>	<p>Number of Government and NGO actors who have pledged/expressed their willingness to support young women leaders to promote social cohesion in their communities: 3 per district</p>	<p>Focus Group Discussions</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p>	<p>2 FGDs with YWL seed grant receiving groups</p> <p>3 interviews per district with state, youth and mentors</p> <p>Interview with Project Manager(s) and district coordinators</p>
	<p>Percentage of young women who have reported increased and/or expanded relationships and networks with diverse groups or individuals such as YWLs of other targeted districts and government, NGOs, community leaders</p>	<p>Questionnaire Survey</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p>	<p>100% of the beneficiaries</p>

	<p>of their own district, etc.: 60% of all YWLs</p> <p>Percentage of trained young women leaders who are able to share an example of engaging with other stakeholders or mobilizing resources for their initiatives to address WPS related local issues: 60% of the YWLs participated in SG initiatives</p>	<p>FGDs</p> <p>Project activity monitoring reports</p>	
	<p>District level networking and engagement sessions (Direct/Virtual) are organized and held between young women leaders and district level government officers and key NGOs/organizations working on women's rights, WPS, gender equality, and social cohesion: 2 sessions per district and 40 participants from each district (desegregate by sector)</p> <p>Number of cross district exchange visits conducted: 2 visits mixing all districts</p> <p>Number of young women leaders participating in the (direct/virtual) cross district exchange visits: 80 including the hosts</p>	<p>Questionnaire Survey</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p> <p>Event reports</p> <p>Attendance sheets</p>	<p>100% of the beneficiaries</p> <p>2 FGDs per district with seed grant receivers</p> <p>Interview with Project Managers and district coordinators</p>
Overall Quality of Project Delivery	<p>Project achieving its goals and generating best practices is taken as the indicator here.</p>	<p>Questionnaire Survey</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p> <p>FGDs</p> <p>KII with Project Manager</p>	<p>3 interviews per district with state, youth and mentors</p> <p>Interview with Project Manager(s)/ District coordinators</p> <p>2 FGDs with YWL seed grant receiving groups</p>

Table 1: Theoretical framework

2.3. The scope of the Study

This study covers the full length of the YoungWILL project and was assessed by a consultant researcher hired locally. The consultant observed the project implementation from March 2022 through April 2022 and collected data through KIIs, FGD, participant observations with a selected representative sample of people and events. Only the final/exit questionnaire survey was designed for 100% of the YWLs.

2.4 Methodology

The study and the assessment were done during the final 3 months of the implementation of the project. The consultant used a mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to collect information. The data was collected through a questionnaire survey (quantified), focus group discussions, key person interviews and participant observations during selected project activities (qualitative). The data collection tools such as questionnaire and semi-structured KII and FGD guides were approved by SFCG at the inception stage.

Sample was to be selected in each method based on the time that was allocated for this study. A random stratified sampling method was selected to represent the diversity within any subgroup such as mentors, YWLs and stakeholders. Sample selection was taken seriously to ensure that at least a few members from all the groups who were involved in this project are captured. The demographic analysis of respondents is as follows:

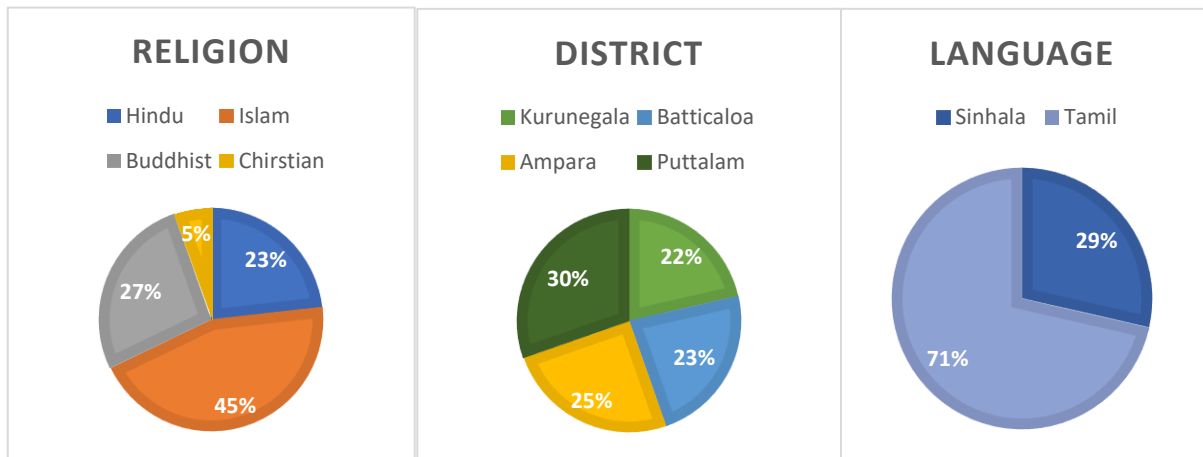


Chart 1: Demographic analysis of survey respondents

The data collected from the qualitative field work were then recorded and stored on Google drive allowing in-built analytics to organize the findings for the questionnaire survey. Method of grouping was used to convert the questionnaire responses to percentage values.

The qualitative findings of the KIIs and FGDs were analysed using the Hierarchy chart, an organizational chart that helps visualize the hierarchy of qualitative data in terms of weight given by the informants. It helps to find patterns in data (transcripts) pertaining to major topics emerged in the interview. It also gives an overview of data as it shows colour coded themes and sub-themes sized by coding references.

Ex: the stakeholders from state, civil society and community sectors were interviewed to understand their experience and insights about the YoungWILL project. Based on their responses a hierarchy chart and the word cloud hierarchy were produced.

The patterns emerged at these analytical exercises (quantified responses to the questionnaire and responses received for qualitative field work such as KIIs and FGDs) and the participant observations were then overlaid and triangulated in order to generate lessons learned, best practices and recommendations.

8 case studies were separately documented to capture the stories of change. (See chapter 6)

2.5 Limitations

The limitations emerged during the study include:

- **Participation issues:** This assessment is limited by the lack of representation of those who did not participate in the data collection process. 85 YWLs were invited for initial training and only 70 participated. From the trained group 66 completed the SGI component and 56 submitted the final questionnaire survey; the calculated response rate is 80%. Hence the findings only represent the majority's view and could not be generalized and taken as representative of the views of the 100% of the YWLs.
- **From the Informants' end:** some KIIs happened virtually the ability of the researcher to get more authentic and full responses was limited. However, in such cases the written responses provided by the informant were taken as the final output of the KIIs and were analysed simply as qualitative findings which are not supported by researchers' notes. Hence the findings came through virtual interviews are not always as rich as ethnographic fieldwork this researcher intended to carry out on the field (Ethnographic methods can be used for short term studies when and if minimum. hours of participation of the researcher in the research environment is completed.) This resulted in compromising the storytelling nature of the reporting especially where case studies are reported.
- **Limited Field visits:** The field visits were limited due to multiple unexpected challenges such as scarcity of fuel, curfew and emergency law due to country-wide anti-government protests. Hence participatory observations (the researcher taking part in key project activities conducted by each group) were not possible during all key points of the YWL journeys. The field visits and participatory observation sessions were limited due to the overlap between project activities and SGI events. Hence, the research was limited to

interviews and the researcher was unable to observe project activities as originally planned. This reduced the first-hand experience of the researcher.

- **Scope:** While the lessons were learned and best practices were documented, this consultant is not specifically contracted by the ToR to assess the quality of partnership between Search and district partners. Hence, no deep questions about the partnership was included in the research tools. However, certain concerns highlighted about the partnerships by interviewees were taken into consideration in LL, BP and recommendations.
- **Time limitations:** The limited availability of time due to project's time and the activity format limited the depth of this assessment by limiting the field investigation. Hence, some aspects such as qualitative gaps in participation of YWLs and the quality of facilitation by partners were not adequately observed by the researcher. The researcher faced some difficulties in building trust to allow more cooperation which may have had very subtle impact on the findings.
- **Translation:** This study was done by a Sinhala speaking researcher with the help of translators to understand Tamil speaking YWLs, PAs and mentors and the researcher believes that some information may have gotten lost in translation. The contact hours also affected the 'storytelling aspect of case studies' by the researcher who did not receive the non-verbal components of communication. Writing a case study story based on a list of points given by the translator was challenging as it limits the connection between the writer and the storytellers during FGDs.

3. RESULTS/ ACHIEVEMENTS

This chapter, organized around the assessment matrix and the results derived against each research question, especially the indicators, targets and data sources as laid out in the inception report. This is followed by an overall study based on a content analysis exercise done on the results of qualitative fieldwork (See 3.4).

3.1. Research Question 1: Empowered?

Has the project empowered young women to collaboratively advocate for gender equality and promote social cohesion in their communities?

Key indicator	target vs achieved	data source(s)
% Increase awareness on WPS / social cohesion issues among those who participated in the initiatives	50% increase targeted 44% increase achieved	Mini survey on level of awareness pre and post training, Questionnaire Survey, Key Informant Interviews

Table 2: Key indicators of empowerment

As per project monitoring data (mini survey before and after training) provided by SFCG, the overall level of awareness on WPS and Social cohesion issues among the YWLs who participated in the training sessions (70/80 participated) is 99%. This is an increase of 44%. This was also evident in the participatory observations during CCAs where identified social issues were deeply analysed and presented by the YWLs to the stakeholders. Particularly in Ampara district where the researcher of this assessment was present for the entire context assessment, the confidence in which the YWLs used the concepts of WPS to understand and articulate the ground level WPS issues they selected to address through their SGI was impressive. Similar level of awareness was observed during the exchange visits. Following is a picture of a problem tree prepared by a group of YWLs applying their new awareness on WPS to understand the ground situation they witnessed and wanted to address.

The researcher believes that this growth and level of confidence comes from 'ground testing' the knowledge through SGIs. 44% of growth is reported immediately after the trainings and 99% was reported after completing all the project activities. The stage between the YWLs' self-assessment on the level of awareness was the implementation of SGIs. Therefore, the use of SGIs help YWLs to test their awareness against the ground reality. Overall, it clearly shows the profound (positive) impact of developing and implementing a social-change project on the level of confidence of the young women leaders.

The increase of the level of awareness of other stakeholders and indirect beneficiaries of this project seem to be very sharp and positive as well. Following quotes taken from the data collected through KIIs mentors, group leaders and stakeholders provide a rich picture of various aspects of this achievement and also suggests a few areas that can be improved. Complementing the results of the mini survey (discussed above) on the increase in the level of awareness, a group leader from Batticaloa said,

Another leader from Ampara said,

[illegible]

This evidence suggests that even the stakeholders who participated in the SGI events organised by YWLs have gone through a clear increase of their level of awareness and confidence. When asked about the empowerment of the YWLs, the project manager said,

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3.2. Research Question 2: Ground Tested?

Do the selected young women have a better understanding and knowledge on advocacy strategies and identified issues related to WPS in their communities?

No	Key Indicator	Target	Results
01	% YMLs with increased knowledge on gender, WPS, and non-adversarial advocacy	35% increase	44% as per mini survey done immediately before and after the training, 99% based on the YWLs' exit survey done after the completion of SGIs
2	% of YMLs who have implemented small grant initiatives and reports that the mentoring and coaching sessions supported them to design and implement their small grant initiatives	70% of participated	82% of the selected YWLs (66/80) have completed ALL the stages of the project successfully
3	Number of issues identified in the collaborative context assessment (CCA) that are integrated in to YWL's advocacy campaign/ seed grant initiatives	2 issues per district	8 Issues (100% achieved)
4	Number of emerging women leaders trained on gender, WPS, non-adversarial advocacy, project design	80 YWLs	64 trained Ethnicity: Sinhala-20; Tamil -17; Muslims-27, Religion:Buddhist

	(Disaggregated by ethnicity, religion, and district		19;Hindu- 15; Islam 27 and Christian-3(80% achieved)
5	Collaborative context Assessment (CCA) are conducted	2 in each district	8 CCA (100% achieved)
6	Number of YWLs who attended Collaborative context	80 YWLs attended	55 attended
7	Seed grant initiatives based on the issues identified through CA implemented by young women groups in the targeted district	2 in each district	8 implemented
8	Number of mentors participated in the training sessions	25	20
9	Percentage of trained experienced mentors who have conducted mentoring and coaching sessions	70% of trained mentors	20
10	Number of mentoring sessions conducted by each mentor (physically and remote mode, desegregated by each mentor and district	Minimum 4 by each mentor	All required sessions were completed (100%) 82 sessions

Table 3: Key indicators of knowledge transfer

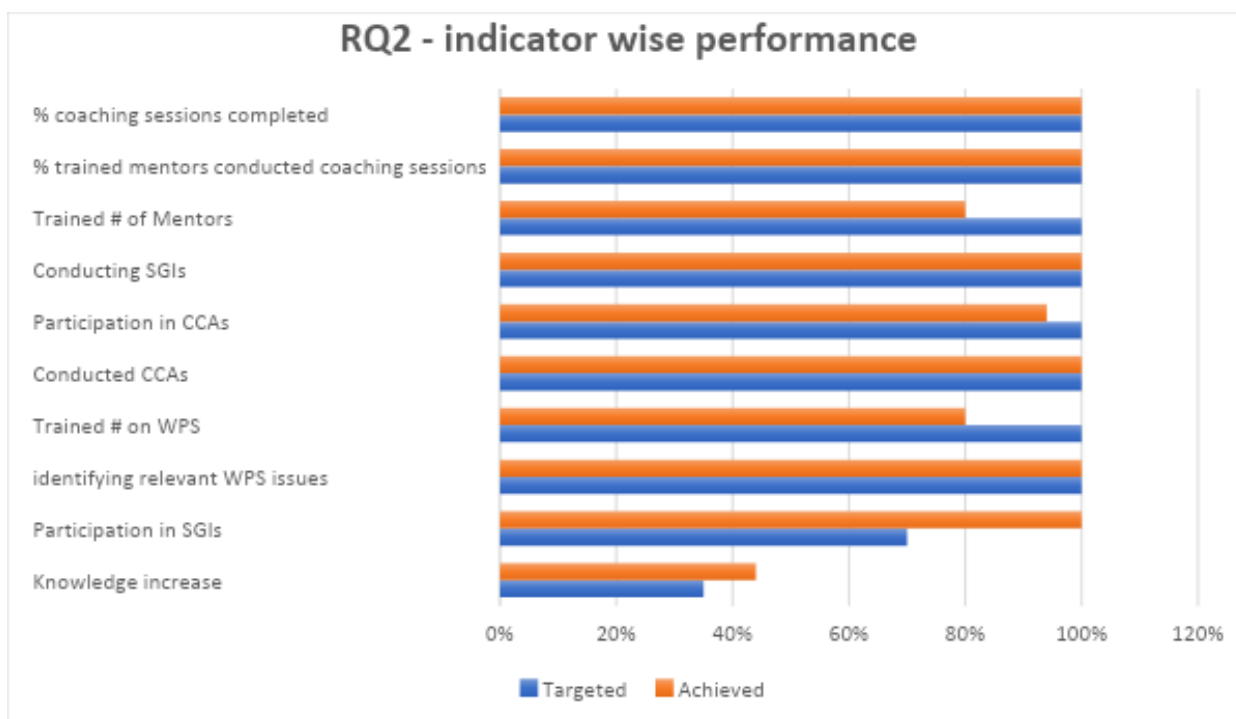


Chart 2: RQ2 - Indicator wise performance

Above indicators and level of achievements are supported by the questionnaire survey filled by the YWLs.

Increase in level of awareness: Q 13-18 of the YWL questionnaire provides related information. According to them 99% of YWLs feel that their knowledge/awareness on WPS and social cohesion issues and the role of young women in social change have increased.

Knowledge on collaboration, tools and creativity: 98% of YWLs report that their knowledge on how to collaboratively advocate and address issues and context assessment tools have increased. 92.85% have agreed that their skills on how to use collaborative context assessment tools for social change projects have increased while 96% of participated YWLs said that they developed the skills to creatively address WPS related issues.

There are no YWLs who have missed all the mentoring sessions and only 19.64% of YWLs have attended less than 3 sessions. Remaining over 80% have attended 4 or more mentoring sessions and 41% of YWLs have attended more than 6 mentoring sessions. (See: Q 38 of YWLQS)

96% YWLs have agreed (responded as very helpful or somewhat helpful) that the Impact of coaching sessions by mentors on design and implementation of SGIs is very high.

During the group discussions, the YWLs very often mentioned how they were supported by mentors: *'Mentoring sessions were very useful in prioritizing the interventions we wanted to make and plan a realistic SGI within the budget and the time frame'*, said the group leader of the Community Care group. Achievers group highlighted the support they received from the mentors during the SGI planning while Star Wings group explained how multiple mentoring sessions were useful in making the SGI project more responsive to the local communities.

The results of qualitative research conducted by the consultant support the above finding and add more depth to the above analysis.

Project Manager in her KII said,

Even I learned a lot on WPS through this project. Training was comprehensive and deep. We tried to avoid lecture type and went in to more engaging. It was still difficult for some YWLs and some groups considered it irrelevant. We gave enough knowledge, through practical examples...

We also taught about the problem/solution tree.

She further added,

If not for context assessment, the issues would have been addressed superficially. Ground level applicability will be less analytical; the credit goes to the deeper understanding which is demanded and promoted by the CCA.

This was reconfirmed by the trainer who facilitated the cross-district exchange workshops who said,

I can say very confidently that these young girls are trained so well; they all know the key focus areas of WPS and they can also relate those to ground situations!

Further, the POs were very appreciative of the impact of the training and the hands-on learning opportunities the YWLs received through YoungWILL.

The training our girls and mentors received are investments in to this whole field [local development and WPS], they have shown how empowered they are. This impact will last long and they will surely inspire many others.

Said the head of the PO in Puttalam district.



Figure 5: YWLs at field trip to Cave Temples on Dambulla, Sri Lanka (During the second exchange visit)

About YWLs successfully conducting their SGIs and becoming change agents, the interviewed stakeholders highlighted following perspectives:

Growing confidence as change agents:

*YWLs got stronger by implementing this program, now they must be feeling more confident about their ability to change their society
it is impossible for YWLs without years of empowering experience, and conducting such program; but they did it.*

Going beyond training and working with real ground issues:

*These kids are very lucky to receive this training and opportunity to do social work. Families also feel safe to send kids because they know and trust us well
This project also empowered us the women leaders of the village to go to families with domestic violence and child abuse and inform them on ways to seek Legal aid
Training and implementation package enabled the knowledge and skills to register in their mind-set. Their worldviews have changed - now they are not hidden in bedroom and kitchen. Leadership is practiced there, not just training. This model should be popularized...*

Use of creative tools for social change:

*This intervention gives hope to little girls from the school. They now want to become street actors as well... but the parents are not yet there to allow grownup girls to act in public!
I am motivated to use drama as a tool for social change*

(Source: KIs with stakeholders)



Figure 6: SFCG's M&E manager and a mentor advising a group of YWLs during CCA

The multiple quotes above shows that the knowledge transfer aspect of the Young WILL project was very successful as all the parties interviewed agree on the same. Looking at the patterns of responses given by the YWLs through questionnaire and the YWL group leaders through KII/FGDs the researcher is convinced that the transformation observed in almost all YWL groups have a

positive correlation with following factors:

1. The length of the total time the YWLs work with facilitators on improving their knowledge and skills;
2. The ability of the implementers to allow ground application of the transferred knowledge once the training sessions are over; and
3. The level of support provided to YWLs to attempt social change goals on their own through collaborative context assessments and seed grant initiatives.

Hence, continuation of this project implementation and knowledge transfer model is highly recommended for future projects. For more details, please see best practices and the recommendations sections.

3.3. Research Question 3: Connected?

Are networking and relationships among young women leaders and between stakeholders improved across divides, including language and ethnicity?

NO	Key indicator	Target	Results achieved
01	Percentage of young women who have reported increased and/or expanded relationships and networks with diverse groups or individuals such as YWLs of other targeted districts and government, NGOs, community leaders of their own district, et	60% of all YWLs	A.rate of reaching out to stakeholders 88% B. YWLs who made friends with YWLs from other districts 90%
02	Percentage of trained young women leaders who are able to share an example of engaging with other stakeholders or mobilizing resources for their initiatives to address WPS related local issues	60% of the YWLs participated in SG initiatives	94% of trained YWLs completed the SGIs
3	District level networking and engagement sessions (Direct/Virtual) are organized and held between young women leaders and district level government officers and key NGOs/organizations working on women's	2 sessions per district or 40 participants from each district (desegregate by sector)	100% achieved

	rights, WPS, gender equality, and social cohesion		
4	Number of cross district exchange visits conducted	2 visits mixing all districts	100% achieved
5	Number of young women leaders participating in the (direct/virtual) cross district exchange visits	80 YWLs	55(Kurunagala-11,Ampara-13,Batticaloa-16 and Puttalam-15; 15 Sinhala, 17 Tamil,13 Muslims and Buddhist 14,Hindu 16,Islam 23 and Christian 2)

Table 4: Key indicators of networking and relationships

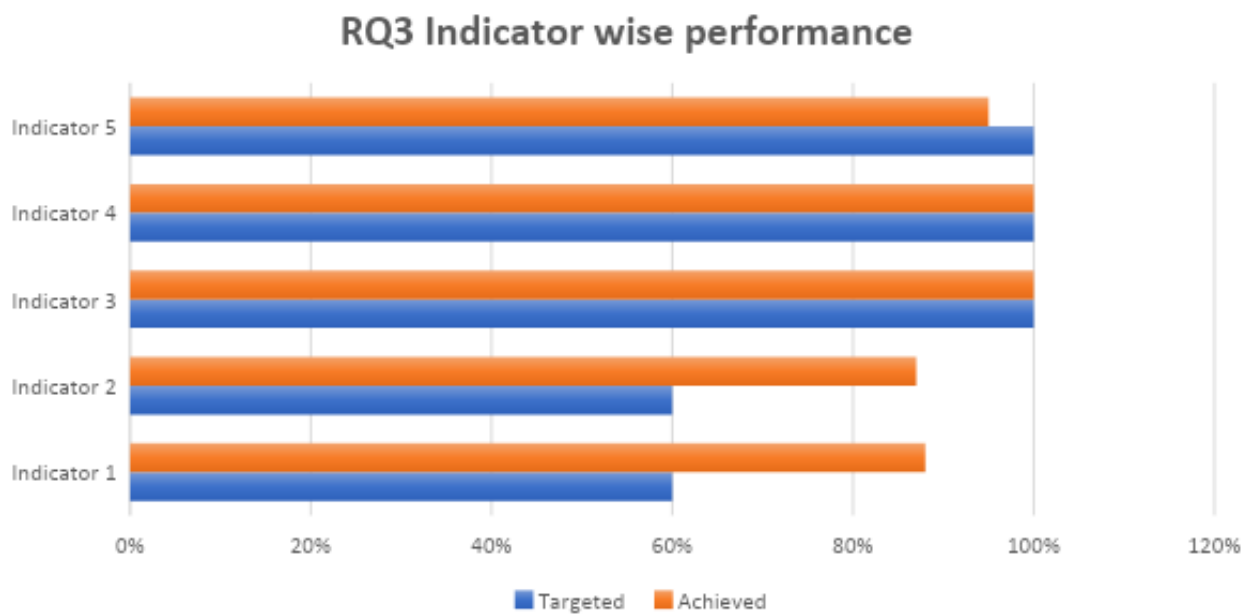


Chart 3: RQ3 - Indicator wise performance

RQ3's indicator 1: the percentage of young women who have reported increased and/or expanded relationships and networks with diverse groups or individuals such as YWLs of other targeted districts and government, NGOs, community leaders of their own district are represented in the responses received for multiple questions of the YWL questionnaire. some are listed below,

- 88% of the YWLs who responded to the questionnaire indicated reaching out to community leaders and government officers for collaborations
- Following the exchange visits 90% of YWLs made friends and connected with YWLs from other areas. The steps taken by them to continue the friendships with groups from other locations/districts are FB/ WhatsApp (89.29%), other social media 28.57%, exchanged phone numbers 50%
- 92% YWLs said the SGIs positively changed attitudes among the local community towards the role and importance of the YWLs. Further, 94% said, the stakeholders started to consult us after participating in SGI activities. One example for this was the team of YWLs who worked with Uhana DS of Ampara district getting invited to conduct sessions on alternatives for sanitary napkins after their SGI initiative. Also a group of YWLs from Puttalam got invited by local NGOs to conduct sessions of cyber security for the youth in the area after they organized the first ever Tamil medium session under the same subject through their SGI.

For indicator 2, of RQ 3, nearly 87% of YWLs were able to share examples of collaboration. The most common collaborators cluster from the state sector was the Grama Niladhari, (the grassroots level state representative who reports to Divisional Secretary) Samurdhi Officer (grassroot level officer in charge for social safety net program) and the District Secretary (appointed SLAS representative for each administrative division) ; 46% of YWLs have met with this cluster and the statistics on other common collaborators are, elected officials (MP, council members) 5.36%, religious leaders 3.57%, village level societies 12.5%, local business organizations (farmer/ fishery and small business collectives) 1.79%, village elites 7.14%, and other NGOs 12.5%.

For Indicator (3) district level networking and engagement sessions (Direct/Virtual) were organized and held between young women leaders and district level government



Figure 7: Mentors at the end of the cross-district exchange program

officers and key NGOs/organizations working on women's rights, WPS, gender equality, and social cohesion. All 8 groups were connected with stakeholders and some stakeholders volunteered to improve the CCA while others responded well to the requests of YWLs regarding the state support for their SGI activities. Only one discouraging news was recorded from Ampara, where a politician refused to give the state-owned auditorium for the SGI activity. It was also noteworthy that the connection maintained by the district partner office played a key role in getting or not getting the state support.

The 2 contrasting examples from Ampara district clarifies this point well:

In Kalmunai where the partner organization's presence and network is strong the YWLs received a privately owned auditorium along with a huge discount but in Uhana of the same district where the partner organization's networking was weak the SFCG project manager and a strong women's organization from the area had to work hard to convince the state officials only to get rejected on their request for a state owned auditorium based on a mere and baseless doubt the local politician had over the intentions of the YWLs.

In places where the partner's work was acknowledged and trusted by the local politicians such excuses based on baseless suspicions were not thrown at YWLs. Group was certain that, even though, in this case, it looks like the anti-NGO sentiments of the local politicians were playing a key role, it is only the excuse given by a politician who did not want to take a risk by supporting ground level initiative organized by an organization he does not know personally.

Some common ways of in which stakeholders supported the YWLs as listed by team leaders were, to finalize problem tree analysis AKA context assessment, to select beneficiaries, to get state officer's support, to find resource people, to find the best venue within limited resources, to gather beneficiaries and for data collection, to convince villagers on the project idea, to find ways to make the programme more effective, to gain knowledge on non-violent communication, to encourage group members and to network with useful stakeholders.

Allowing the project to achieve 100% on indicator 4, two cross-district exchange programs were done. The resource person who facilitated both the exchanges visits said,

The YWLs from all the districts seemed encouraged to build friendship with YWLs from other districts and their excitement about the culture of other ethnic groups grew positively during the exchange workshops.

Also, 98% YWLs claimed that the exchange visits improved relationships with youth from other locations. 97.5 % of YWLs who attended exchange visits said, these visits also improved relationships with other ethnic groups and stakeholders. The observations the consultant made at 2 sessions conducted in Kandy and Dambulla reconfirmed this development of YWLs.

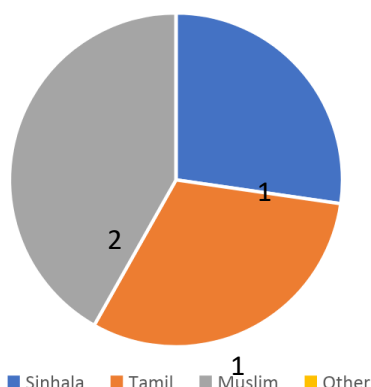
After a long period of being stuck inside their houses and towns due to Covid19, the YWLs were brought in for a residential exchange program held at a city that is very new to them. The exchange visits were not limited to sharing SGI experience, it also allowed them to closely

observe their “cultural other” (AKA the other ethnic groups living in the same country) and made connections with them. They were grouped in a way for each group to represent all districts and all ethnicities, taken on a small city tour and were challenged to plan and execute a cultural show. The insights of YWLS after going through this experience was remarkable and the change in their behaviour towards those who do not speak their language nor dress like them were eye opening. Some comments are:

- *We joined this project without deeply knowing the others but through this programme we came to know what the others are doing in other districts. It made me feel good to be a part of this program. (YWL from Puttalam)*
- *I was part of 3 projects through SFCG, I am happy to see all communities in different areas are addressing the difficulties that women and girls are facing in their communities. (YWL from Puttalam)*
- *on the first day I could not make new friends; second day I walked to them and asked for their names; then friendships grew stronger over time and I am so happy to have friends across the country. (YWL from Kurunegala)*
- *I thought these are good girls to associate but I cannot understand Sinhala; but now I am excited to learn Sinhala and last night our cultural program showed us we can get together despite language. Even after the program we went to all the rooms and woke up others and had fun together. (YWL from Puttalam)*

The project manager of YoungWILL also agreed that the exchange visits have shown results in terms of exposure and acceptance of the ‘cultural other’. She also highlighted that having more time between activities would have helped the YWLs to gain a better and deep/reflective experience. The number of YWL’s completed cross exchange visits is 55 and the ethnic composition of the participants was as below.

Ethnic mix of participants



Religious Mix of Participants

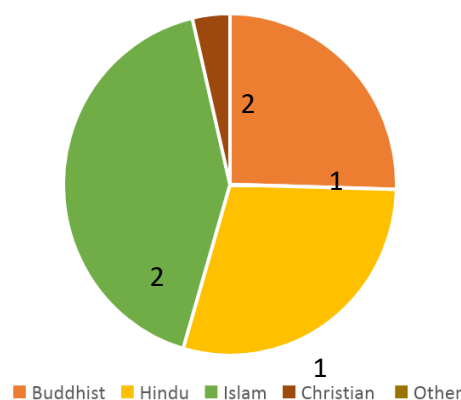


Chart 4: Demographics of participants

Looking at the positives of networking, cultural exchange and collaborative development practices as discussed above, a lesson can be derived from YoungWILL to include more ‘first hand

ground level exposure (getting exposed to everyday life of the fellow YWLs from other districts/cultures) to the cultural other of any community' through future programs. This idea is further explained in the recommendation section.

3.4. Do the qualitative findings confirm above results?

Overall quality of the project's delivery and structure are studied and discussed here.

This section of the study report builds on the content analysis which was done from the adopted points of view (insider view as commonly referred by ethnographers) of various key parties who were involved in the YoungWILL project, such as YWLs, POs, mentors and stakeholders. Hierarchy charts were prepared to



Chart 5: Hierarchy chart of YWLs' perceptions (Blank)

understand the level of attention and emphasis displayed by different groups to the different aspects of the project and they were integrated with word clouds that capture the main ideas under each focus taken by the responders. The findings from the vantage points of these parties are presented separately.

3.4.1 What did YWLs see?

Based on the responses received during the 8 focus group discussions the consultant conducted, with YWL groups, the following hierarchy chart was prepared.

The chart displays the emphasis given by the YWLs to each aspect of the process. They were very appreciative and expressive about the help they received from the stakeholders (including mentors) and the project manager (SFCG staff) and team. The respondents made the same level of effort to provide the consultant with examples to both the challenges they faced and the praises they received. Hence, the levels of emphasis show a positive but critical and balanced view they have about their involvement as social change agents through this project.

Further their next highest attention was given to futuristic aspects such as things to improve as a group, things to be proud of (and therefore continue) and their social responsibility towards making the quality of life better for women in their society. In terms of thematic content, the attention of YWLs were given to a range of topics but a few specific trends can be observed.



Chart 6: Hierarchy chart of YWLs' perceptions

As per more than 80% of YWLs who took part in FGDs, the main forms of support they received due to the structure/model of this project was from the stakeholders and the SFCG management team. The mentors and direct stakeholders (who took part in the CCA and networking sessions) were instrumental in getting the attention and support of the influential state sector actors who had access to information and resources needed for beneficiary selection, venue selection and some communication channels important for the local development projects. The SFCG staff was appreciated for the knowledge/training they were given during the first stage of the project and the support that was extended during the planning and implementation of SGIs. The support received during writing proposals, managing the budget and scheduling activities was particularly highlighted.

In terms of challenges faced by the YWLs the most repeated was the unbearable and unforeseen levels of inflation as well as the fuel scarcity. Almost all the YWL groups were affected by these 2 challenges during the SGIs and they were supported by stakeholders and POs to adjust their workplan accordingly. The actual transformation of the YWL support systems and the commitment of YWLs to their social responsibility was obvious and the consultant specifically witnessed the hardship some groups went through to achieve their SGI goals within the budget at a time the value of the grant given to them had depreciated by +70%. A group in Puttalam and another in Batticaloa said,

The taxies were too expensive; we shifted to public transport but some of our members decide to walk to the houses of the beneficiaries because the public transport (buses) is not reliable nor safe for women.

Some members of the Puttalam district were coming from a faraway village called Kottaramulla, and with the fuel crisis their public transport systems became even worse. The mentors then volunteered to provide



Figure 8: Discussion on the relationship between the cost of female hygiene products and the women's economic participation, Ampara district

accommodation at their houses for

those girls so they can take part in group activities. These collective and collaborative practices based on empathy were not rare among the YoungWILL project community.

3.4.2 What did Stakeholders see?

The study team noticed that, the stakeholders had given the highest weight to making suggestions to all the parties involved in the project including SFCG. The researcher believes this is because the stakeholders were attracted by the project's innovative structure as the collective approach of the same was marked as highly influential and efficient by the stakeholders.

The content analysis of stakeholder responses proved that the YoungWILL's approach to training the YWLs, i.e.,

facilitating them to get hands-on with the ground situation, is highly appreciated and recommended by the stakeholders. The stakeholders were enthusiastic and positive about their willingness to support the YWLs in future for similar projects. More importantly, the YWLs were

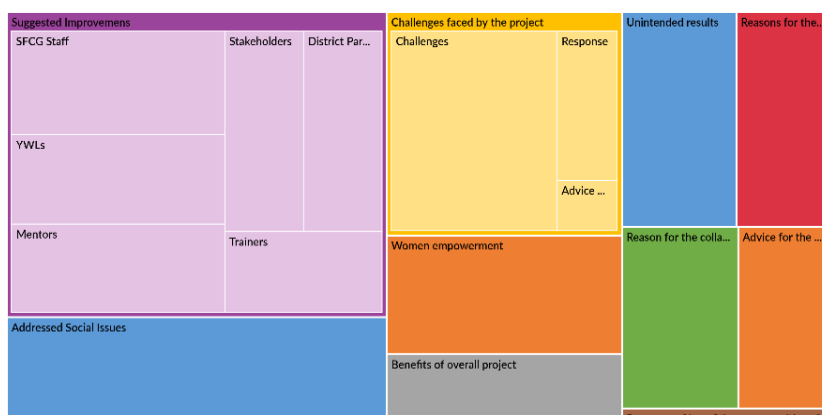


Chart 7: Hierarchy chart of stakeholders' perceptions (Blank)

advised by almost all the stakeholders to continue their initiatives without waiting for big grants. Mentors were seen as a very constructive and essential group and were encouraged to continuously support the YWLs and protect them. For both YWLs and mentors, the need to improve their language skills was highlighted.

The stakeholders were impressed by the range of issues selected by the YWLs to address through their SGIs. The SGIs covered from very controversial and taboo subjects such as domestic violence, microcredit related abuse, impact of drug addiction and alcoholism on the quality of life of women and children to unnoticed but key issues such as lack of knowledge on available state sector self-employment support programs and the high costs of sanitary napkins. The selection of wide range of issues marked the boldness and the confidence of the YWLs who were trained to look at the issues they live with as opportunities for social change. Fundraising for future projects and the safety of the girls (YWLs) were the most commonly mentioned challenges by the stakeholders.

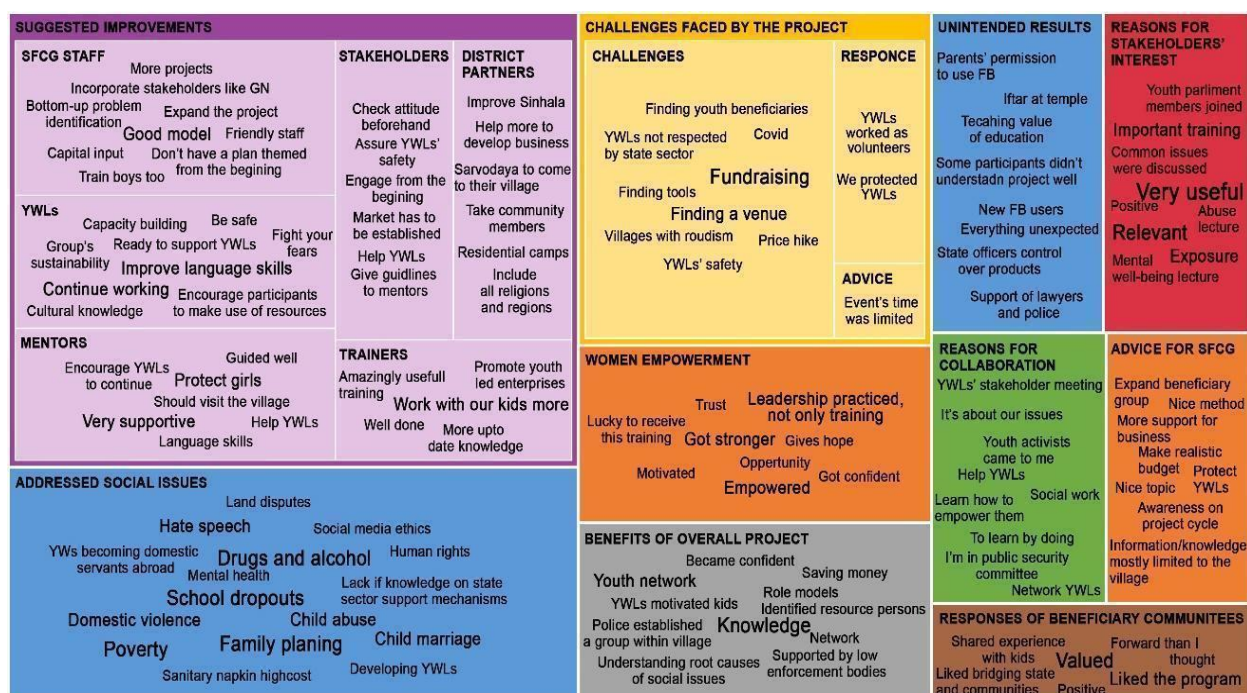


Chart 8: Hierarchy chart of stakeholders' perceptions

The researchers identified this enthusiasm among various stakeholders including state officers, local governance leads, parents of YWLS, local civil society organizations and even some private sector partners as a very positive trend that emerged from all the 8 SGIs. In Ampara, when the price hike resulted in the cost of venue to rise from 8,000 to 20,000 LKR, the mentors convinced the owner of the reception hall to consider a deduction of his rent as their contribution to the development of the society. As a result, the venue was provided for 7000 LKR and the owner was appreciated by his society the generosity displayed to the young girls who wanted to inform their

society of the digital bullying and harassment that targets the girls of the locality. Not only here, but in almost all the SGI stories, the researchers have noticed the social impact of SGIs on circles other than the immediate and focused circles targeted by the SGIs.

3.4.3 What did Mentors see?

The mentors were interviewed through KII and were observed during training sessions and SGI events to prepare this study. However, this section mostly captures the content shared by them during the KIIS conducted with them. It is noteworthy, that the mentors selected represented all the sectors including state, civil society and community. However, leading businesswomen of any locality were not included in the pool of mentors hence no such representation was noticed. Mentors as a group paid more attention to the ways of improving their contribution and creating more opportunities for YWLS. Initially, the consultant noted some confusions among the mentors about the expectations from the program but their enthusiasm sky rocketed with the implementation of SGIs where they clearly realized the critical importance of their presence, guidance and support to the growth and success of YWLS. While some most committed mentors showed significant improvement in their capacity to facilitate the journeys of YWLS, a general consensus on the role of mentors as facilitators (as opposed to teachers) was clearly established by the end of SGIs.

IMPROVEMENTS			WOMEN EMPOWERMENT		UNINTENDED RESULTS	ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE PROJECT	
YWLS Get use of this network Dedicate Be responsive Phone ethics Publicity Active participation Volunteer participation Take responsibility Time management STAKEHOLDERS Lack of enthusiasm Language skills Active participation Support resource wise Good Networking opportunities SFCG Good staff Avoid cultural festivals No change needed Time duration Fight for more resources MENTORS Build image Practice facilitation Be more friendly with YWLS Language skills Be strategic ID with card Select proper kids Keep YWLS engaged PO Transparent selection criteria Publicize in the region Provide IDs for mentors Select freshers Networking TRAINERS No change needed Include fun games Variety of trainers			YWLS Different from other girls Attitudes changed Increased knowledge Not afraid of social media Connected to ground level Network Courageous Identify projects Questioning norms Recognition Mature Write blogs Responsible Leadership skills developed Sustainable network MENTORS Proposal Network WPS writing Technology P/S tree Facilitation		POSITIVE Support of men Socialization space New friends No unnecessary dragging Peace of mind Fast proposal writing skills More use of state sector resources NEGATIVE Not enough time No deep thinking Low attendance Happy to receive money State sector asking for money	Lack of female leadership Boys marry too early School dropouts Dependency on men Protection of women headed households WPS issues Drug addiction Oppression on women Unhealthy family environments Cyber crime Poverty among women Abusing girls Domestic violence	
SUPPORT/ RESPONSES			ADVICE		BENEFITS/BENEFICIARIES		YWL'S FUTURE PLANS
STAKEHOLDERS Good responses CBO appreciated Only granted permission- No contribution Helped with venue State officers were excited Offered refreshments Supportive MENTORS/ COACHES Supported from behind Connected with state officers Selecting beneficiaries Invited officers Helped to make plans realistic Resource people BENEFICIARY COMMUNITIES Community leaders appreciated Accepted YWLS slowly Religious leaders appreciated Inter-community gathering Supportive for venue Reluctant to open-up			FOR DONORS Provide more money Train males Visit other cities Arrange visits to other countries Good model Not too complex More exposure Beneficiaries from all communities CHALLENGES FACED Resource allocation Villagers were reluctant to open-up YWLS from 4 areas Far away locations Network coverage Price hike Time management Absent group members Beneficiary selection		Good income YWL's families The locals Hotel owners Target group by SGI Service providers/ vendors Families of SGI participants REASONS FOR THE INTEREST OF THE PROJECT Improve will power Recognition of YWLS Aligns with my field Trust MWDT Safety of women Mentoring Social development To help young women Empower disabled girls To make Young Woman Leaders		Share skills we gained - Deaf YWLS Stay in touch with villagers To work as Social worker Continue training No plans yet Make best out of state facilities WRC take them to other programs

Chart 9: Hierarchy of mentors' perceptions

The mentors highlighted the need for active participation from the stakeholders and many of the mentors said they are determined to be friendlier and more engaged with YWLS in future projects. The increased level of knowledge on women's empowerment was appreciated while

the importance of selecting the most suitable beneficiaries as YWLS and mentors was stressed. The importance of reaching out to YWLs who are deprived of opportunities such as university education and exposure to social work through other organizations was highlighted for 2 reasons: Those who are deprived of other opportunities are comparatively more committed and were observed making the best use of the opportunity given, while those who had other opportunities can end up curtailing the success of the project by leaving the process half way through. Few such cases were reported in Kurunegala district where one team lost 50% of its members by the time they reached the second stage of SGI implementation. An interestingly coinciding pattern was also observed by the study team: More privileged the YWLs are (in terms of wealth, education opportunities, language skills, ethnic and religious identity) the less committed and empathizing towards the opportunity the project gave them to become a more socially responsible YWL. This was also confirmed by the trainers who observed less attendance and commitment among the YWLs who represent ethnic majority of the country. However, there are stories of a few highly-committed YWLs from the ethnic majority. Hence the researchers do not wish to generalize this finding which has some significant validity.

3.4.4 What did partner organisations see?

The 4 partner organizations which helped SFCG to reach out to and manage YWLS, mentors and stakeholders, and are designed to be the key pillars of success of YoungWILL. The collective model of operation is very inclusive and progressive but makes the success of the project heavily dependent on its key pillars; namely SFCG, POs, YWLs, mentors and stakeholders. When one pillar fails the whole project suffers in terms of quality and may even find it difficult to complete. According to the participatory observations made by the researcher, all the partner organizations have made the minimum required contribution to the project; while some did better than others, some could have clearly improved their role. Based on the responses received from the district coordinators who work for the POs, most emphasis was given to the ways in which each pillar of the project can improve and how the YWLs were empowered through the project. Let us look at the contents represented by each 'big box'.

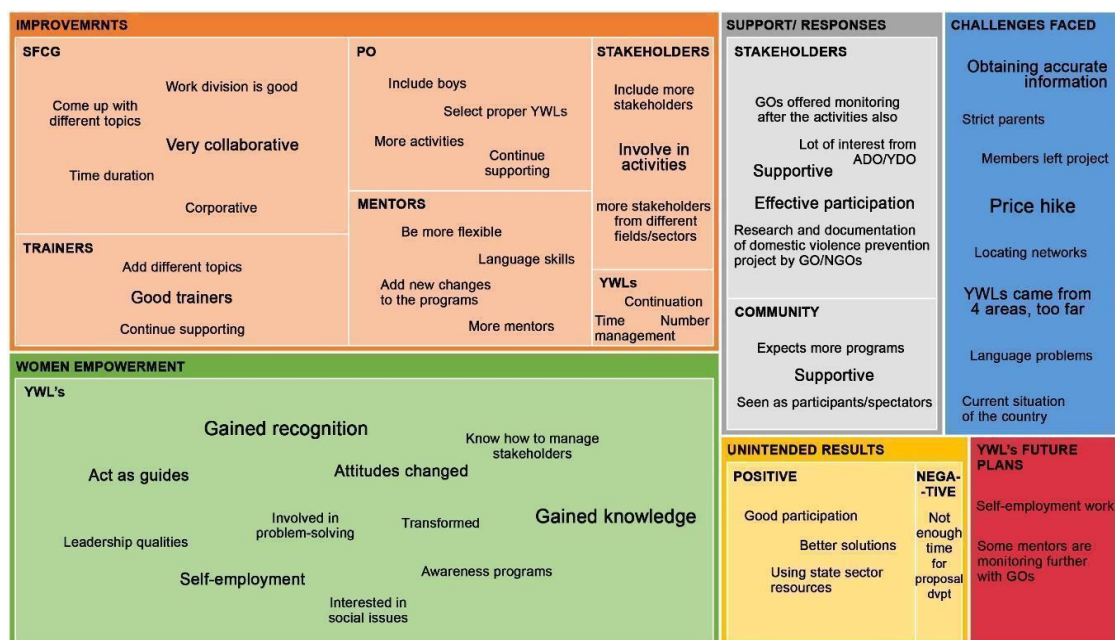


Chart 10: Hierarchy of partner organizations' perceptions

The representatives of POs (AKA District Coordinators) have highlighted the importance of all the pillars making better contribution; SFCG was requested to pay attention to time allocation for each of the project activity (i.e.: SGI implementation) after paying attention to cultural, economic, environmental and political situation within the project time period

The POs are generally satisfied about the opportunity they received to be a part of the grooming process of the local YWLs. They recognized the balance between knowledge, experience and recognition received by the YWLs as the result of “one project” and further appreciated the change of attitude s among YWLs which had made them more sensitive to their social responsibility. The steps taken to support and guide local women through SGIs to become independent during a very challenging year for Sri Lanka was also highlighted.

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

This section documents the lessons learned and best practices of the YoungWILL project based on previously analysed results of qualitative and quantitative field work. The LLs and BPs presented here are directly connected to recommendations in the next section. The chapter is organized around 5 key areas of practice identified based on the patterns of responses that emerged from the research.

4.1 Where transparent and rigorous process of beneficiary selection took place, key actors and beneficiaries were successfully retained:

Some district partners adopted a transparent, detailed and somewhat lengthy processes of selecting YWLs. One district relied on their personal networks for recruitment for YWLs. Those who maintained a formal and controlled process of beneficiary selection managed to retain a comparatively larger number of YWLs throughout the stages of YoungWILL (training, project planning and implementation) while the informal selection process failed to do so. The BPs observed under this area were,

1. Selection of YWLS thorough one-on-one interviews which helped POs in understanding the priorities of potential YWLs before recruiting them as beneficiaries minimizes the rate of dropout. Replacing the vacant spots during the process to ensure the opportunity is not wasted is a BP observed in one district. In one case, the district PO paid very good attention and when 2 dropouts were reported, they immediately brought two replacements for the vacant YWL positions. In the district where the project had lowest rate of retaining YWLs, the spots opened due to dropouts were not made use of by the PO. This made clear that the resources can be more effectively utilized by reallocating them to new YWLs. However, in this case POs and mentors have to work hard on ensuring the new YWLs catchup on the missing components.
2. Reaching out to comparatively less privileged communities (i.e.: rural, minority, economically challenged, less access to formal education) when selecting YWLs has worked better because the YWLs with more opportunities and high level of privileges are more likely to deprioritize the project activities. When those with less opportunities were selected, they valued and prioritized the YoungWILL project activities and their participations and commitment was high. The observations made by this researcher reconfirms this because the YWLs who came from the least privileged backgrounds paid more attention and were more committed; their high levels of attendance and improvement are only two indicators.

3. The selection of mentors who represent multiple sectors through a similarly professional process is key to the success of the balanced approach of guidance and a diverse support infrastructure for the YWLs. In places where POs were not very supportive in networking, the mentors representing multiple sectors have helped YWLs to network with relevant sectors effectively.

4.2 Successful approach to transfer knowledge and skills to the YWLs and mentors: YoungWILL (+ previous projects) provides evidence for a new approach to work with generation Z.

SFCG was recognized by all the parties interviewed by the consultant, for its creativity and approach in finding resources and justifying initiatives to allow YWLs to apply the knowledge and skills they gained to change the ground realities as well as for continuously working with the same group of YWLs. The donors kept changing within the 2.5 years but SFCG managed to maintain the relationship and allow YWLs to grow incrementally.

This study identified such continuation and allowing hands-on learning as a very effective model in dealing with youth empowerment. This BP raises a few more concerns and those can be listed under LLs in this area.

Difficulty in isolating the impact: It is noteworthy to mention the difficulty the researchers can face when they try to isolate the impact of one project (i.e.: YoungWILL) because the beneficiaries, have inherited skills, knowledge and confidence from previous projects, and have used those to make their YoungWILL SGIs successful. As shared by the project manager, YoungWILL project alone is not to get full credit, all the projects and continuation between SFCG and YWLs for 2+ years gets the credit for this. When they learned new things about technology in the previous project, they started helping out those around them and SGI formalized their community engagement. Their leadership qualities shined more after giving the WPS exposure through YoungWILL.

In one district, one group identified 'online safety of young women' as the key problem to address through their SGI. They then conducted a workshop, recruiting a 300+ youth network to meet the minimum influencer group to make reporting on FB successful. While this was not the focus of this project, the WPS related aspect of project the YWLs managed to make use of the knowledge they gained from digital peace to address a WPS issue in their locality. It is a good sign to see youth becoming more resourceful and creative.

Hence, this study recognizes that the continuation of work with the same youth group by bringing in a variety of thematic projects is impactful as a method to work with Gen Z whose interests, speed of life, lifestyle and commitment for social change are different to millennials and the generations before.

Added burden of managing multiple short-term projects:

The downside of having to manage multiple short-term projects and donors involved in one group makes the life of the project team harder. This was well explained by the project manager who said that short term projects are very stressful, have to spend on time but also create impact while generate the same amount of documentation we would do for lengthy projects. She has had to put in a lot of time for admin and financial management (common at SFCG and we cannot avoid this because of their standard procedures, specifically challenging for short term projects) so could not focus as much as she wanted on the impact generation. She believes that her team should avoid short term (>12 months) projects going forward. This researcher also observed how the manager and her team had to put in lot of extra effort to meet the project goals successfully within the limited time period given to them. While the project was saved from any negative impact that this could have caused, the team might not sustain in the long term if this rate of hard work continues.

4.3 Strategic Coherence: YoungWILL balances the elements of empowerment such as knowledge, skills, network and practice by combining training, networking and seed grants components.

The operational and theoretical framework of this project could be framed as the biggest LL and BP found in this study. The project first identified YWLs and mentors and trained them separately on WPS and facilitation skills. Then the 2 parties were brought together by a Collaborative Context Assessment (CCA) which created an opportunity for both groups to come together and work-hand -hand with other stakeholders within their network, to address a social issue(s) selected by the YWL groups through SGIs. This promoted a collective impact approach that strategically connected all local parties to drive social change “together”.

The Young WILL perfectly aligns the theory and practice AKA knowledge and application. SFCG and especially the management of the project has achieved a greater sense of order and organization across the project to make sure the rhythm of the overall project makes YWLS realize valuable lessons on their own. This researcher believes that the methodology mentioned above and the strategic coherence of the same allows the successful transformation of young minds and the improvement of power dynamics and networks at local level, allowing room for bottom-up social change.

Also, among the appreciation received by the YWLs from the local communities and stakeholders, the most frequent comments were that SGIs were very useful and relevant to the communities and about how delighted they were to witness the hidden talents of the local girls to lead social change. Hence, this seems like a less intimidating way to intervene into social change at local level because the locals do not take it with resistance, unlike what often happens when outsiders try to fix local issues.

4.4 Maximizing Stakeholder involvement to localize and sustain the impact

It was learned through the YoungWILL experience that without a stronger circle of stakeholders supporting YWL initiatives the impact and ease of doing social change projects can get negatively affected. Varying levels of stakeholder involvement was observed at 8 SGI projects even though the district level targets were met. This study group observed how some SGIs struggled to achieve the targets due to the lack of support received from local stakeholders. One such example is how a group of YWLS who organized a one-day workshop to improve connectivity between communities and local-level state sector services and officers, among other solutions to local development challenges, were denied the request to use a government owned auditorium by a local political leader due to a mere suspicion or fear he had about possible political party involvement in the proposed SGI. The YWLs then had to conduct their workshop at a local venue which was still under construction and the hardship the audience and the organizers went through was tremendous.

It was observed that the ease of getting state support also depended heavily on the (1) health of the network and relationships the PO has built locally and (2) the level of effort given by POs to connect SGIs with ongoing local (and national) development processes. The program manager explained this situation mentioning that increasing the involvement of stakeholders was a goal based on previous projects. Since this was comparatively difficult during the pandemic this project included a networking session and asked district partners to bring in 6-8 stakeholders for the context assessment. In some districts the target was met and the stakeholders helped the SGIs and it was a successful strategy.

The researcher observed in one district, the stakeholders have joined the training sessions that were meant for mentors and YWLs instead of the CCA. In all other districts the networking with stakeholders and discussions on possible ways to support SGIs happened at CCA after mentors and YWLs were trained separately. However, in the district where networking happened before time the stakeholder support did not come in naturally. Instead, the state sector officers who were recruited as mentors stepped in and brought necessary state support despite the absence of stakeholders during CCA. At the POs' reflection meeting held after the completion of YoungWILL facilitating the stakeholder support better was brought up by a few PO officers and possible solutions were suggested. (See recommendations section for more)

Avoiding cultural festival can also help improve participation of all stakeholders... It was commonly requested to avoid challenging cultural practices such as fasting time (Ramadan season) and major cultural festivals like Sinhala-Hindu new year season.

4.5 Successful knowledge Transfer methods to the current generation of youth

The lessons learned under this section is , that the current generation will become interested in social issues if the issues are logically presented to them along with some resources to address the same. This model of training and implementing a small project on ground through the newly gathered knowledge seems to be a proven model to take capacity building outside the closed rooms and to link with ground level realities. It is observed that the current generation finds 'hands-on' social change work to be 'magical' due to their general addiction to social media and various 'hands-off' social engagements. The opportunities to directly deal with ground realities seem to make them uncomfortable at first but with some extra push through (such as use of mentors and continuous follow up by district partners through social media platforms like WhatsApp) 'human-to-human' interactions such as mentoring and friendly guidance and inspiration. The role of mentors in this knowledge and skill transfer process is immense. The parallel training given to the mentors on 'facilitation ', while YWLs get trained on WPS and advocacy was a very wise investment in terms of knowledge transfer and empowerment of women leaders of all ages. In some districts, the mentors are planning to continue the work with YWLs beyond the project period and assist them in organizing and implementing social work. The dedication of the mentor who is also a sign language interpreter and her determination to continue working with the group to bring local funding to assist differently abled youth from the area is a great example of such success. The trainers and PO staff across districts have appreciated the enthusiasm and experience brought in by the mentors as a key driving factor that pushed the project towards the success. They believe that the mentors successfully bridged the gaps created by the lack of experience and networking of YWL's as well as allowed the project to give customized case-based attention to each group of YWLs and their SGIs.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

For this recommendations section, the findings of qualitative and quantitative research and project monitoring data was taken as the key inputs. This section is directly linked to section 4 of this report.

5.1 For better selection of beneficiaries

This study reconfirms the importance of effective and efficient selection of the 3 key actor groups; YWLs, Mentors and POs. We recommend that

- POs be selected on the basis of their commitment to the empowerment of youth, health check-up on their relationship and network with local stakeholders, ability to allocate at least one full time coordination officer to the project, overall attitude and willingness to work as backbone support during the period of active involvement of multiple stakeholder groups.
- Once the POs are selected, ideally, SFCG and PO should recruit mentors together based on their track record as women leaders, knowledge and experience in representing/working with various stakeholder groups and network within and outside the sector they represent.
- The YWLs can be selected by a panel that includes SFCG, PO and mentors (and selected stakeholders, if possible) through a rigorous selection process that may include entry interviews. The ideal group of YWLs for the YoungWILL model can be selected on the basis of the relative level of access an individual applicant has to become a youth leader (lower the better), level of privileges the individual enjoys in terms of education and employment opportunities (lower the better), the level of oppression /marginalization faced by the individual (higher the better), the willingness to work with highly oppressed social groups and from extreme climatic and political, economic, social, and technological conditions with less facilities (higher the better) and the level of clarity and determination an individual has to become an impactful young leader in her society (higher the better). Above criteria were derived from the participatory experience and KIIs held with the YWLs.
- Maintaining a pool of potential and deserving young leaders for the area in association with key stakeholders such as Women Development Officer (WDO) to recruit when needed is a local level practice recommended for a PO. This is to recruit and retain the best and most deserving individuals who will also do justice to the project by prioritizing, completing and learning from it.

5.2 For continuity of the project's impact (sustainability)

Paying attention to the growth of YWLs, and by considering the reflections of mentors and POs, this study concludes that SFCG's decision to continue to engage with the same youth group for 2.5 years utilizing the support of various donors has played a critical role in shaping the personalities and leadership qualities of the YWLs. Hence, we recommend,

- SFCG to stick to the practice of continuing to work with a selected youth group by going beyond the time frames imposed by resource limitations until they feel that one YWL group is capable of taking over social change responsibilities on its own. Once a group of YWLs has launched its own journey as an independent young-leader group and when SFCG determines that it has achieved the goals of youth empowerment SFCG can take the project to a new group.
- However, we acknowledge that this same practice of signing up for short-term projects to be able to stay engaged with YWLs causes continuous pressure on the SFCG project management team by generating an unnecessary amount of project reporting, financial reporting and administrative duties as demanded by various donors and their procedure and non-uniform requirements. This can drain the project team's energy and compromise the quality and amount of time spent on the field working with the youth. Therefore, it is recommended that,
 - SFCG only signs up for projects that are longer than 12 months to balance the quality and quantity of project delivery.

Above recommendation is to SFCG in situations where long term funding (more than 3 years) is not available.

- the POs and mentors are encouraged to keep the YWLs engaged through local networks to ensure their journeys remain relevant and their skills are not wasted. Continuous communication with SFCG and YWLs between projects is highly recommended.

5.3 A promising model for advocacy training and youth empowerment

We recommend that the YoungWILL model be widely promoted and further experimented with to derive more effective and efficient models that might be location/culture specific. Because this study finds the YoungWILL project which has 3 components (knowledge, collaborative planning and implementation of a change project) can create a complete journey for a young woman to become an entry level advocate of WPS and Social Cohesion within a relatively short period of time.

- With some improvement in time management to allow more time to reflect and absorb, YoungWILL model can become an immersive learning model for advocacy training.

- Hence allocating resources for a quick ground-testing of the new knowledge transferred to the YWLS is highly recommended for future use whenever social change is to be achieved through collective means.
- YoungWILL model of operation and the structure of project activities are highly appreciated due to their strategic coherence and documenting. In addition, capturing and mainstreaming the same is recommended to ensure more immersive learning opportunities are given to emerging youth leaders.
- This model can massively enhance the aspect of networking across sectors at local level and some networks built through the SGIs are promising to become extensions of support mechanisms that enhances local-level inclusive development. The reporting and management team on domestic violence in Batticaloa and Self-employment support team formed in Puttalam are 2 such promising examples.
- In addition to meeting at a place that is new to both groups (for the exchange program) the YWLs were interested in visiting the neighbourhoods where other YWLs live and witness their everyday life and cultural festivals. This stresses that SGI concepts need not be very complex and surprisingly novel all the time, but letting the youth from multiple communities to associate each other can open up more paths to social cohesion and overall wellbeing.

5.4 For maximizing stakeholder involvement

- It is recommended that, in future, all the pillars/ key actor groups of any project that follows the YoungWILL model engage state, private and civil society as early in the process as possible. Some stakeholders interviewed by the study team specifically mentioned ways in which they could have helped SGIs if they were informed early on.
- Further, the Puttalam district PO said that he should have deliberately connected the SGIs to ongoing state-driven social development programs and enabled more support for YWLs. As per the PO, he did not see the critical importance of such involvement until they witnessed the magnitude of the impact that can be created through SGIs in their locality.
- However, all POs agreed that YWLs should also experience the real challenges of collaboration hence over preparation of the ground to make YWL's engagement with the real world 'too rosy' is not recommended.

We also suggest to get leading business women of any locality to be included in the pool of mentors to maximize the participation of the private sector and to positively influence YWLs for innovative social change practices such as social enterprises.

5.5 To face Political Economic instability in SL better...

This study appreciates the flexibility the donors allowed during this project and recommend all the donors and national level project lead organizations (like SFCG) to follow this example and allow flexibility in budget allocations to allow successful adaptation to changing needs of the beneficiaries and to build resilience to face macro-economic and political challenges.

- It is recommended that all future projects to build a budget line for 'contingencies' that could be used in such emergencies. Further, the ability to absorb unexpected price hikes was stressed and a few suggested the possibility of allocating a contingency pot of money at the beginning of the project. The donors may maintain the right to approve expenses under that line.
- The solidarity between the members (SFCG, POs, mentors and stakeholders) of the collective journey is the best ground level strategy to be recommended at this point given the crisis situation. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the POs maintain contact with mentors and YWLs alike and develop an understanding between PO and stakeholders (state, community, civil society and private sectors) to ensure the YWLs engage with social work despite the resource limitations during the economic crisis and political instability of SL.
- It is recommended to look into availability of transport for the YWLs to safely reach home after project activities and, in some cases, providing short term accommodation might be a safer and more economical.

5.6 For localizing the impact and better supporting emerging leaders ...

This recommendation is not directly for SFCG, but for both donors and the ket stakeholders such as state. YoungWILL project directly aligns with the priorities of the country and the SGIs developed by the YWLs have also addressed issues that are of national and local importance at this point in history. Hence it is highly recommended that projects like this be encouraged and supported widely for the following reasons:

- It directly addresses a set of challenges faced by young women in rural Sri Lanka plagued by poverty, disempowerment and related issues by providing them with opportunities and resources to get exposed and try hands-on experiments with social change that could provide a foundation for the making of future female leaders who can cut across common social divides such as language, culture and religion.
- The current context is challenging but provides a very good opportunity for true young leaders to emerge by actively changing the ways in which their localities cope with nationwide challenges such as the scarcity of food, poverty, the lack of access to education and civil unrest.

- SFCG and POs can ideally play a role in providing guidance on creative and collective approaches to address local level challenges by supporting YWLs to battle through their selected fights.
- The support that the POs, mentors and stakeholders can offer in the individual journeys of YWLs, especially those who have already missed the opportunities given by the formal means (such as university and vocational training) to be given more priority. The impact of such individual support is immense because, as we understood, the guidance most YWLs get from their families is not very visionary from the PoV of leadership and social change potential of the young women.

5.7 Avoiding challenging times and festivals

The YoungWILL program was conducted during 3 main religious and cultural programs. The YWLs and Mentors managed to complete the project but unanimously requested to avoid festive times such as Sinhala-Hindu new year (Mid-April) Ramadan (April-May) and Christmas (end December) in future projects to avoid poor attendance and lack of commitment from the beneficiaries' end and to be inclusive.

6. Case Studies

[YoungWILL](#) is a project carried out by Search For Common Ground Sri Lanka (henceforth referred to as “Search”) aimed at empowering young women leaders (YWL) to collaboratively advocate for and promote gender equality and social cohesion in their communities. The project was implemented in eight villages across four Sri Lanka districts (see figure 1). In the spirit of placing decision-making power in the hands of youth, and in accordance with the [Youth 360](#) approach to peacebuilding, the YWL determined their own metrics for success. The following sections provide an insider’s look at how the projects were carried out in each village. Read on to learn more about the incredible projects that were crafted, implemented, and assessed by emerging YWL throughout Sri Lanka.



Figure 9: 8 SGI locations

6.1 Kurunegala District

6.1.1 Super Leaders - Palugolla of Nikaweratiya

Sanduni and her team joined the YoungWILL project with open minds eager to learn how they could increase levels of peace in their village. While participants came from a multitude of small neighborhoods, a common theme arose in their reflections surrounding the role of women in their communities. One member of the group reflected that, “[i]n our society, women do not know their place and the respect they deserve, hence they have no pride.”

The Super Leaders team viewed the YoungWILL project as an opportunity to connect with Search’s mission of transforming the way the world deals with conflict. By leveraging Women Peace and Security (WPS) priorities, the group was able to successfully implement local grant initiatives that helped build bridges across traditional conflict divides. Sanduni, the team leader, said during her reflections on the project that “we have learned so many skills, including strategic

ways to work as groups to achieve targets collectively, proposal writing, time management, and how to adapt to and face changing situations... We recognize that women have enormous energy but they need to be given more prominence in society.”



Figure 10: Super Leaders team

The Super Leaders set out to promote equity and justice while challenging common gender-based misconceptions that they identified in their community such as “women cannot work together as groups”. The Super Leaders met with state sector officials like Grama Niladhari (GN) and Women Development Officers (WDO) to discuss common issues faced by residents in Palugolla. The most pressing were issues of domestic violence, substance abuse, unemployment, access to education, and poverty. Through their work, the Super Leaders found that while resources existed in their village that were specifically allocated for women's development, no working management system was in place to properly utilize them. One WDO noted that the “women of the village are active... they listen and are enthusiastic but they do not get enough opportunities...”

Sanduni reflected that “after listening to the experiences and opinions of the WDO, my YWLs wanted to make things better for all women, but we had to think realistically and narrow down the target group of the small grant initiatives because we had limited resources.”

The Super Leaders selected widows and women-headed households as their primary beneficiaries based on findings from their research that identified this group as particularly vulnerable to issues like sexual harassment and coercion due to their lack of economic independence. The Super Leaders met with representatives of their target population and, through open dialogue and collaborative decision-making, determined that traditional home gardening and agriculture practices were the most comfortable paths toward economic

development for these women, and therefore where the small grant funding should be focused. In the words of one Super Leader, their operating theory of change was that “when we help them start self-employment [through agriculture], they earn the respect of the village, and eventually the need to use sexual bribery to survive and other dependencies will disappear.” The participant also noted that traditional home gardening activities would have positive benefits for the mental and physical health of the women in their community as well.

They set about implementing a small grant initiative and hosting a community skill-building workshop for the local women. Implementing their plan was not as easy as they expected, Sanduni reflected. The biggest barriers to implementation were complications due to



Figure 11: Skill-building workshop

the COVID-19 pandemic, fuel scarcity, and a lack of public transport options, which ended up forcing 50% of the Super Leaders to withdraw from participation by the time the grant initiatives were ready to be implemented. Additionally, a suddenly imposed curfew meant the gardening workshop they had planned needed to be postponed at the last minute. Despite these complications and setbacks, the remaining 5 Super Leaders remained dedicated, and the group managed to successfully conduct the workshop on a different day. Feedback and responses from the participating community members were “very encouraging” according to the Super Leaders group.

While it is, of course, unfortunate that some members had to prematurely exit the group, Sanduni highly commended the adaptability and persistence of her Super Leaders, commenting that the remaining participants worked “twice as hard after 50% of the team dropped out.” During reflective discussions among participants that were facilitated after the project implementation period, the YWLs expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn about community



Figure 12: Palugolla workshop participants after receiving plants and seeds

peacebuilding, conflict analysis, and finance management. The Super Leaders maintained an enthusiastic energy and a forward-thinking attitude, with many already hoping to participate in similar projects in the future in order to continue developing their skills and helping their community.

6.1.2 Achievers - Mangulagama of Panduwasnuwara

The Achievers group in the village of Mangulagama identified issues faced by the women in their community that included domestic violence, sexual harassment, and a lack of economic independence. The group then leveraged a problem tree conflict analysis approach and arrived at a consensus that predatory micro-credit loans were a significant root cause for many of the issues that women were experiencing in their community. The Achievers explained that many Mangulagama women lacking economic independence



Figure 13: Achievers group



Figure 14: Community needs assessment meeting

take out micro-credit loans with high interest rates out of desperation, which in turn creates significant levels of familial tension, leaving women vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual exploitation when they are unable to pay the money back. This is understood to heavily affect the security and self-esteem of women and families in the community. Beyond that, it fosters a strong sense of shame, perpetuating a culture wherein women feel unable to seek help or speak about their troubles outside of the home.

In response to their conflict analysis findings, the Achievers sought out financial management resources for the affected women in Mangulagama that would help them pay off their current debts and work toward a more

stable financial standing while also working to remove the stigma surrounding debt in order to facilitate more open dialogue and community solidarity. The Achievers worked with WDOs in their district to gather resources and build paths to financial freedom for women in the community. They worked hard to facilitate a community workshop for women burdened by micro-credit loan debt that aimed to empower women with skills for responsibly managing finances, facilitating open dialogue both in their households and their community, and seeking out resources for some of the other aforementioned problems that can stem from this type of debt. Following the workshop, the Achievers group leader reflected on the project by saying, “[t]he project was a success! The villagers appreciated and thanked us for bringing awareness on micro-credit to their village. The youth of the village also invited us to come back and said they like to work with us too.”

When asked to reflect on their effectiveness as YWLs and community peacebuilders, many members of the Achievers group expressed that they were grateful for the opportunity to participate in a project like this because it allowed them to cultivate and improve their own skillsets while simultaneously contributing to increased levels of peace in their community. Several members reflected that their presentation and public speaking capabilities improved and they gained new abilities to conduct holistic conflict and root causes analyses. The participants finished this project feeling accomplished and proud of their impact on the community as young women. The group leader provided a succinct summation of their reflections by saying, “as girls, we did something big, and we are glad that we are a part of a long-term social change process...” The group felt motivated to continue their peacebuilding work and has since become involved with two other Search projects. This strongly speaks to the effectiveness and



Figure 15: Focus group discussion

sustainability of empowering young women with the skills and platform to increase levels of peace and social cohesion in their communities.

6.2 Ampara District

6.2.1 Idea Group - Udagirigama

The Idea Group, operating in the Udagirigama West (W88) village of Uhana DS in Sri Lanka's Ampara district, was the smallest group participating in the YoungWILL project with only four YWLs. However, that did not prevent them from implementing an incredibly impactful small grant program in their village focused on **three WPS challenges** they identified through conflict analysis activities and Key-Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government and community leaders:



Figure 16: Idea group

1. Barriers to economic and educational participation for women due to **burdensome cost of menstrual products**
2. Lack of economic independence for many women due to **inability to gain access to education**
3. **Lack of awareness** regarding state sector support options for women to overcome economic, educational, and social challenges



Figure 17: Problem tree analysis workshop

raise the kids well so they can try to overcome the cruel cycle of poverty."

Further context assessment work and discussions with key stakeholders revealed the interconnectedness of Udagirigama's challenges with domestic violence, substance abuse, and low educational attainment. To illustrate this finding, the Idea Group highlighted this quote from a local village woman: *"Many vulnerable families in this area have drug or alcohol-addicted men as their fathers and husbands, and the mothers and wives are forced to*

To address the deep-seated challenges that women in this community face, the Idea Group organized a workshop that brought together women and girls from the village with state sector officials who introduced themselves to the community and increased awareness of programs and avenues available to women for social, economic, and educational development. The state sector officials also shared resources badly needed by the women in the community, the most popular of which being a low-cost handmade sanitary pad solution to cut steep menstrual hygiene costs. In fact, one workshop attendee later brought in homemade sanitary pads that she had made for her daughters, stating that the workshop gave her the idea of turning it into a business that could help other village women access affordable and sustainable period products (see figures 10 and 11).



Figure 19: Workshop participant displaying her homemade sanitary napkins



Figure 18: Learning to sew sanitary napkins

Feedback from the community on the full-day workshop was overwhelmingly positive. Two of the most commonly expressed sentiments are captured below in these quotes from the community:

“Thank you for bringing state officers to us. We had no idea that we have so many paths of support available to us! We do not go to their offices and they do not visit the village often enough either.”

“Thank you for thinking about our real issues, like sanitary napkins. We never thought we can make them at home!”

State sector officials were pleased with the success of the workshop as well and encouraged the YWLs to continue using them as a resource for future community-building opportunities. The officials also made a point to encourage workshop attendees to make the most use possible out of the work conducted by the Idea Group in order to maximize the potential economic and social benefits. The Idea Group YWL participants were largely satisfied with the level of work they were able to complete in Udagirigama. They recognized that the needs identified in this community for greater economic, social, and educational opportunities are not unique to Udagirigama, and many expressed wishes to conduct more workshops in other villages. Since the close of this project, the Idea Group has been invited to present its conflict analysis findings and workshop structure at a meeting of women's societies in the Ampara district. More than anything, the YWLs are proud of the impact they were able to create in their community by simply finding ways to increase awareness and effectiveness of existing support channels. They look forward to scaling such a sustainable program design in order to help more communities increase levels of independence and social cohesion.

6.2.2 Star Wings - *Kalmunai DS*

Star Wings selected the Nappattimunai colony, Marathamunai, Pandurippu and Central-camp areas of the Muslim division of Kalmunai DS in Sri Lanka's Ampara district as their implementing region. They focused in on a very specific problem that the women in these Muslim regions faced: sexual harassment experienced by female volunteer social workers. The Star Wings wanted to focus on empowering a group of women that were already invested in bettering their community. By offering resources and support avenues specifically for marginalized social workers, the Star Wings aimed to maximize the strength, credibility, and effectiveness of these women as they continued to carry out vital community services in the long term.

Through context assessment work, the Star Wings came to the conclusion that many female volunteer social workers faced barriers in the form of negative gender stereotypes and sexual harassment from men in the community in need of social services. These barriers hinder the effectiveness of social workers in the community by suppressing valuable ideas brought forth by women, prohibiting women from traveling alone to carry out community services, and prohibiting women from rendering community services without a male counterpart present. In order to address these barriers, the Star Wings set up a workshop that aimed to change community perceptions surrounding the field of social work and women's place in it.

The workshop began by first inviting young women to discuss their goals and hopes for their community, as well as what barriers they believed to be in their way. Later, community elders were invited to hear the young women's thoughts and participate in productive dialogue that

moved toward breaking down some of the negative gender-based stereotypes that have existed in their community for generations. In facilitating the workshop this way, the Star Wings hoped to help “adults realize how they have been blocking the journeys of their own kids... We believe these small changes will slowly make society safer and more accommodating for girls.”



Figure 20: Star Wings workshop for young women

The Star Wings took their goal of changing community perception a step further by encouraging media presence at the workshop. In so doing, they ensured that their message of social cohesion and gender equality was as widely received as possible. This was a very successful tactic - the team received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the media personnel as well as the general public. In fact, the number of positive responses that they received has motivated them even further to conduct additional workshops in the future. In the words of one of the participating YWLs:

“We gave the news to local media - Dan TV, Metro leader, supeedsam webpage, central TV, Sammanthurai news website, shortnews.lk, RKS Tamil website, and a Thamilan newspaper - they all covered our work and the parents appreciated our work. After seeing us there [in the media], they will easily let us engage in social work in future! On social media, many congratulated us and wished us all the best. There are many more issues in our society. More awareness is needed. We realized the gravity of this after engaging with it directly, and we [our community] need more help to help deserving people.”



Figure 21: Discussions with community elders

6.3 Batticaloa District

6.3.1 Kadiroliyaal – Illangani

Illangani is a remote fishing village in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka with a history of violence. YWLs participating in the Kadiroliyaal group were eager to collaborate with Search Sri Lanka to promote social cohesion and peace in their community. They all expressed excitement at the opportunity to learn valuable skills such as conflict analysis, advocacy, networking, and project management. Through their conflict analysis work, the group identified poverty and poor access to education as drivers of conflict. Some of the consequences of these conflict drivers were identified as high levels of domestic abuse, substance abuse, suicide, divorce, childhood pregnancy, and mental health issues. As they continued to apply newly learned conflict analysis tools to their findings, one participant shared this reflection:

“Prior to YoungWILL, we were only able to identify issues. Now, we see roots and results, too. Further, we can envision solutions... what we see as solutions here are encouraging education to reduce school dropouts, eradicate substance abuse, change attitudes, and increase opportunities for self-employment.”

The Kadiroliyaal group focused on domestic violence in their community as the issue that they felt they could create the most impact. They set out to establish relationships with community leaders and created a village working group that was tied to the Divisional Secretariat office to ensure that the work they were creating would last beyond the YoungWILL timeline. Once all stakeholders were brought together, they formed a plan to increase awareness of the dangers of domestic violence, as well as the legal channels available to victims in the community. Beyond their central message, they also wanted to highlight the importance of education and challenging gender-based discrimination. By coordinating with local school administrators, the group successfully created a street drama program that aimed to make learning about such difficult and stigmatized issues engaging and fun. The Kadiroliyaal group is grateful for the support and collaboration of



Figure 22: Group discussion with villagers and state sector officials

local school administrators and village elders, which proved essential in changing the initially dismissive attitudes of many community members.

Below are some anonymous feedback quotes that the group received from those involved with the street drama project:

“For your age, you choose a big topic and conducted a successful program in a very challenging place”



Figure 23: Street drama performance

“You did a big project with limited human and financial resources”

“Drama was very realistic and very relevant to the kids, can you do more?”

The Kadiroliyaal group was very proud of the work they were able to conduct in their community, particularly because they know their extra efforts of establishing channels to ensure that this work will continue following the end of the YoungWILL project means their community will continue to engage with community-building materials that promote peace and gender equality. The Kadiroliyaal group leader summarized her reflections by saying:

“We were afraid at the beginning because the place is very violent and challenging for inexperienced social workers like us... More than anything, school kids received the drama so well and even took us as role models; their reactions were very warm... It is inspiring to see the young women leaders of the Kadiroliyaal group aspiring to become a group of influence in the area by working with communities and schools in the area on the most pressing social issues.”

6.3.2 Puravi-Pawei

The Puravi-Pawei group saw the YoungWILL project as an opportunity to maximize women’s contribution to social change. The participants chose to focus on deaf women as the beneficiaries of their project in order to serve a subset of the population that lived at an intersection of several classifications of marginalization. The decision to uplift the deaf community produced benefits not just for the community as a whole but also for members of the group itself. One of the deaf women participating as a YWL in the Puravi-Pawei group reflected that joining the group had helped her “to be bold and courageous despite using sign language. As a result of these newly gained qualities, I even got a job at a leading company in Sri Lanka!”

In order to increase awareness and visibility of deaf women in the Batticaloa district, the Puravi-Pawei group chose to focus on creating media projects that would document and share the stories and perspectives of women who were heads of their households and were either deaf themselves or were mothers of deaf children. The Puravi-Pawei group first held a photography



Figure 24: Behind the scenes of the documentary

contest on social media to capture how the local society views this group of women. Then, they filmed a documentary on the topic and held a premiere for an audience of media members, women's organizations, and other single women in the community. The goal of bringing these groups together to view their documentary was to ignite a community discussion around the

role of women in their communities and build bridges of communication between stakeholder groups to increase levels of support and advocacy.

Unfortunately, the Puravi-Pawei group ran into some issues with their mentors, citing that they did not receive adequate support or guidance from two out of the three mentors assigned to them. However, despite this setback, the documentary premiere event was reported to be successful and well-attended. Continue reading below for a few comments received by representatives of community organizations who attended the premiere:

"My village's youth group in Manmunei north appreciated the film. Thank you for your hard work for your age and gender."



Figure 25: Puravi-Pawei group leader giving an interview to a local media member

“We also work but our work is not very intense like yours, we appreciated your hard work...” -Representative from the New Arrow Women’s Organization

“The Batticaloa Deaf Women’s Association praises Sinduja for becoming a role model and a leader for the deaf community.”



Figure 26: Guests arriving for the documentary premiere at the Deaf Federation Auditorium

Encouraged by the positive community feedback they received, the Puravi-Pawei group feels proud of their accomplishments and hopes to continue uplifting marginalized voices in the future. The team expressed gratitude for the opportunity to foster new knowledge and skills through this project. According to the group leader, the team demonstrated clear improvement in their presentation skills, proposal writing abilities, and overall levels of confidence. The group also placed a high value on the opportunity to help identify key social issues and encourage discussion around traditionally taboo topics surrounding gender equality and sexual abuse. Most importantly, the Puravi-Pawei group reflected on how proud they were to be a part of such an effective experience that positively impacted the deaf community in their village.

6.4 Puttalam District

6.4.1 Community Care - *Palavi and Karamba*

The YWLs participating in the Community Care group chose the Palavi and Karamba villages of Sri Lanka's Puttalam district because they are places with particularly high rates of school dropouts, child marriage, unemployment, and domestic abuse. Through a problem tree analysis with a focus on gender, the YWLs were able to connect many of the prevailing issues in their communities to a lack of economic opportunities and financial management skills for women.

The Community Care group came to a decision to implement a three-part workshop in each village to teach local women skills surrounding self-employment, financial literacy, and economic independence. The group collaborated with local state officers to carry out their project and reflected that while these relationships were integral to the success of their project, they did not form easily. Group participants noted that



Figure 27: Skill-building workshop

it was difficult to convince some state officers of the legitimacy and importance of their project as well as to coordinate with their busy schedules. By remaining dedicated to their goals and their community, the Community Care group was able to overcome these challenges and carry out successful workshops for local women. The group of YWLs also facilitated networking channels between the workshop participants in each village, allowing for women to build relationships with each other across dividing lines in order to increase social cohesion and strengthen community support channels.

30 women in total participated in two workshops taking place in each of the selected villages. The workshops focused on three potential paths toward greater economic independence: making material goods (fabric bags), making prepared food for sale, and home farming. At the end of the three-part training workshops, the Community Care group held an exhibition that brought together both workshop groups as well as other key community stakeholders to increase exposure and networking opportunities for the women and their new ventures (see figure 20).

The team received very positive feedback from the workshop participants. One participant particularly encouraged the YWLs to continue their work with this comment:

“Please continue and do not give up. We [the older generation] were stuck at home, but you can go beyond that and take society forward...”

The Community Care group finished the project feeling more motivated than ever to continue and expand upon the work they were able to carry out in Palavi and Karamba. In the future, the YWLs hope to create more training workshops that build upon the skills they taught in their last workshop so that the women in the community can take their new livelihoods to even greater heights. The Community Care group hopes to collaborate with the Industrial Board and other government



Figure 28: Exhibition of goods for participating women

offices to teach women how to package and market their goods for sale to further increase levels of economic independence and prosperity in their communities.

6.4.2 Squad Goals - Puttalam and Kalpitiya

Squad Goals team was strongly inspired by the previous SFCG led Digital Peace Building projects; hence their focus for their SGI was on cybercrime and hate speech. They are thankful for the opportunity they received through YoungWILL to turn their learnings into a social change project and also for the training received through YoungWILL on various skills such as planning projects, budgeting, conflict tree analysis, conducting advocacy programs for victims, Solution tree technique, need of safeguarding victims of conflicts, proposal writing and report writing.



Figure 29: Workshop group

YWLs selected Puttalam and Kalpitiya DS divisions and identified Puttalam as a place with good education level, freedom, and high self-employment options compared to Kalpitiya. In Puttalam

the population is Tamil 25% and Muslim 75%. The focus of the project was on, Online harassment caused mainly because the youth use phones and social media, but they are not aware as to how they should report /block, how to seek justice when something bad happens and lack of knowledge about update installations and what they need to do in situations where cheaters steal money through online sales, financial frauds, hacking problems of FB/email/WhatsApp and also the mechanisms to deal with virus and spam that corrupts phones.

After the context assessment, identification of problems (Problem tree) and identification of solutions (Solution tree) was done, the group prioritized the problems and started the proposal writing. Selection of sites was the next challenge, but the PO of Puttlam District helped the group in narrowing down and to cut the program to fit within the budget. Selection of beneficiaries and preparation of hand bills, finding resource persons, arranging a venue, inviting stakeholders and making banners were the next tasks. After finalizing invitations and membership forms the group looked into refreshments, stationary and other arrangements which also included travelling cost of participants.

The group stated, “we initially planned to create a WhatsApp group with 300+ local youth who like to create a safe space for the youth. We were told that when 300+ users report one person/post on social media, as an online safety measure, the platform acts fast to remove that person/post. We are working towards this goal and will continue beyond this project's timeframe as well”.

The team received good comments from the community and stakeholders. Munas from SEDO said, “Don't give up, this is a very good initiative, please continue” Tanzym, Youth development Officer of the Puttalam DS Division mentioned, “*This is very good, this is the first time an online safety session was done in Tamil medium*”. Sham Dixon (21), Palavi noted “*Please let us join if you do this type of youth programs again*”.

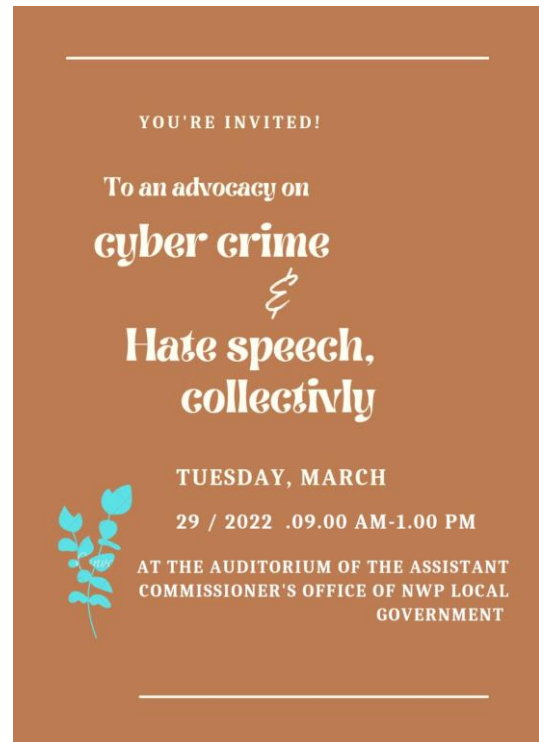


Figure 30: The invitation card prepared by the Squad Goals