



Paths To Peace

APRIL 2024

PUJA Sparks Conversations on Transitional Justice and Truth

Information sessions organized by the People Unite for Justice and Accountability (PUJA) project sparked a discourse on Transitional Justice (TJ) and truth telling among government officials and stakeholders. Led by NPC's Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera and Mr. Jagath Liyana Arachchi, sessions were held in Gampaha, Jaffna and Kandy to provide insights into TJ mechanisms and the need for truth acknowledgment.

Participants engaged in discussions, raising questions such as the implications for victims of issuance of death certificates and the nuanced challenges of the TJ processes. Comments emphasising the necessity of expertise and eligibility in managing TJ effectively resonated with participants, underscoring the importance of competent leadership in driving change.

One of the PUJA project's partner organizations, Peace and Community Action (PCA), has taken a step towards fostering community driven accountability and justice with the establishment of the District Truth and Justice Forum in the Ampara District. With 50 members from civil society organizations and influential figures, the forum encourages community driven accountability and justice.

PCA is involved in documenting land rights violations supported by the District Truth and Justice Forum; the partnering organization conducted meetings with government sectors to address the issue. By amplifying community voices and engaging with authorities PCA, in collaboration with the PUJA project, seeks justice for affected individuals.



Empowering Women's Voices for Change

In Kandy, a group of women is paving the way to enhance political representation for women within the region. These trailblazers were initially part of the Women Organized for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE), a project that covered seven districts across Sri Lanka. Although the project has concluded, their commitment to fostering change in their communities continues.

Some of the women initiated United Women Voice of Democracy aimed at increasing female participation in politics. "The movement includes over 500 women from different backgrounds. I believe that the strength of women is showing through this movement," said one of the organisers, Mrs. Siththi Rizmiya.

Leading the partner organization, Mrs. Sudharshini Prasangika, was confident in the solid relationships established with government officials and local leaders, which she believes are crucial for advancing the movement. These alliances are expected to provide support, resources and collaborative opportunities, thereby enhancing the movement's role in promoting women's political engagement.

The United Women Voice of Democracy movement is an example of how the WOICE project has made a lasting impact by showing what can happen when women come together and speak up for change.



Government Officers Work Together for the Community

The progress review meeting of the advanced certificate course on Sustainable Peace and Inclusive Service Delivery through Diversity was conducted in Negombo with the participation of representatives from Eastern, Jaffna, Ruhunu and Sabaragamuwa Universities, facilitated by NPC Chairman Dr. Joe William, NPC Treasurer Prof. T. Jayasingham and NPC Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera.

Sixteen participants including the course coordinators representing the universities and resource persons provided lectures and practical activities. Participants conducted a detailed review of the five modules and shared success stories, how participants were selected for the course, participation, the methods used to launch the course, how effective the course was and how the course was implemented. Challenges they faced, unexpected results and lessons learnt were also discussed.

Ms. Surana Vanthila, a course participant at Sabaragamuwa University, said, “We held a language camp at an estate to put into practice what we learned theoretically during the course. Currently only 30 to 35 government officers are taking part but it would be good if others could join. The ambulance service is not coming here because of bad roads. Children on the estate have to walk 10 to 12 kilometres to go to school. These kinds of courses can involve many government officials and we have had an opportunity to think about the meaning of inclusion.”

The Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty of Ruhuna University, Mr. Renuka Priyantha, said, “Everyone on this course joined because we wanted to gain knowledge. Nonviolent communication was discussed in one module. Government officials who joined our course carried out an activity in the Hambantota Malay Colony to put what they learnt into practice. The aim is to find out whether these people live harmoniously and to practice nonviolent communication.”

Continuing to receive the contribution and support of the government to expand the provision of inclusive services creates a foundation for a society with equal opportunities and equal acceptance for all.



Collaboration Brings Unity and Understanding

The Outcome Harvesting Programme was held in Negombo, bringing together 28 participants from Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs) to share and analyse their success stories.

NPC's Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera opened the session, setting the stage for productive discussions and promoting cooperative strategies among participants who explored the method of outcome harvesting, a tool used for evaluating project results. Several success stories were discussed, underscoring the positive effects of collaborative projects that uphold pluralism and the rule of law. Representatives from 14 different locations presented their experiences, showcasing effective teamwork and the transformative impact of collective action towards peaceful coexistence.

One success story from Bandarawela Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC) in the village of Gonamutta where caste discrimination had long been an issue. To address this, Bandarawela LIRC hosted a Thai Pongal celebration that included both high and low caste members. Integrating traditional festivities with volleyball games, the event fostered unity and understanding between the two groups. Long term monitoring by the LIRC showed that inclusivity began to flourish, altering social dynamics and paving the way for increased harmony in Gonamutta.

The Outcome Harvesting Programme was not only a platform for documenting success but also a celebratory reflection on past achievements and a blueprint for future efforts. These narratives highlight the effectiveness of the strategies employed and serve as a source of inspiration for continuing efforts to foster unity in diversity.

Peacebuilding Through Facilitation Skills

To work effectively on topics such as peace and reconciliation across communities with a variety of stakeholders requires knowledge and confidence in facilitation skills and workshop design.

A programme for NPC staff facilitated by corporate and NGO sector representatives highlighted the concept of a workshop as part of a transformative process linked to specific peacebuilding goals.

The sessions focused on creating an environment conducive to active participation, empowering participants to contribute equally. Building on this foundation, current challenges faced by NPC projects were addressed, exploring strategic facilitation techniques and workshop design that could enhance project implementation.

The challenges revolved around navigating sensitive cultural and religious nuances, which require not only respect and awareness but also a skilled approach to dialogue and facilitation.



“Providing workshops and activities focused on team building and collaboration can help project teams develop trust, improve communication and work together more effectively,” a participant said.

By investing in the staff's professional development, each workshop and meeting can advance peacebuilding initiatives. Through well designed workshops and expert facilitation, staff are better equipped to address the nuanced dynamics of groups and improve engagements with community actors.



Solving Problems Through Community Collaboration

A facilitation meeting was held in Kandy as an activity of NPC's Protecting Civic Space in Sri Lanka (PCS) project to identify problems in the community and conduct appropriate measures focusing on freedom of association.

In Teldeniya, one of the most important issues is that the government was not initiating problem solving in the community. State officers such as development officers and social service officers identified about 12 community issues such as domestic violence, early marriage, lack of proper waste management and unemployment that needed to be addressed.

The project provided a platform for planning. For instance, participants decided to introduce a proper mechanism to solve community problems and formed a committee and appointed a leader, who was a woman.

The committee agreed that issues focusing on freedom of association will be addressed through the support and guidance of NPC. Other problems will be solved by the committee, which began to prepare an action plan to address them. Being able to support initial mechanisms that can be sustained independently of financed projects has been a success through the project.



NPC Celebrates Tamil and Sinhala New Year

NPC continued its tradition of celebrating days that connect us all by marking Tamil and Sinhala New Year, focusing on the themes of the universe, the sun and unity.

The coinciding of the sun's transition between the zodiac signs of Pisces and Aries symbolises new beginnings and the eternal bond between nature and humanity.

Connecting on days and celebrations regardless of ethnicity and culture reminds us about the colourful cultural tapestry that connects all Sri Lankans. By lighting the hearth and sharing of milk rice in the office, NPC combines celebration with a deeper understanding for the one another as we work towards unity and reconciliation between ethnic groups in the country.



International Role in Ascertaining Truth Continues to be Relevant

On April 21, the country marked the fifth anniversary of the tragic Easter Sunday bombing that claimed the lives of approximately 300 persons and left more than 500 others injured and maimed. The enduring consequences of the Easter Sunday bombing need to be kept in mind. The economic repercussions, stemming from the decline in foreign investments and tourism, continue to haunt the country, contributing to the economic challenges faced today. The National Peace Council is particularly concerned that the erosion of trust in government leadership, exacerbated by perceived failures in accountability and transparency, remains a pressing concern for all citizens. Unfortunately, this leads to frustration and loss of faith in the system, which can also lead to further injustices.

Despite official inquiries and investigations, questions remain regarding the events leading up to the Easter bombings. While some of those responsible have faced repercussions for their negligence, the prevailing sense of a cover-up persists. The revelations of withheld information only reinforce the need for a renewed commitment to uncovering the truth. The justification for the UN Human Rights Council to continue with its evidence gathering unit in Geneva comes from the failure of successive Sri Lankan governments to ascertain the truth and act on it. The effort of the Catholic Church in the country to canonize those who died, to either elevate them to sainthood or martyrdom is to keep the issue of the mass killing alive both nationally and internationally. There have been international precedents for this.

As we reflect on the events of Easter 2019, we must also acknowledge the broader context of violence and injustice that has marred Sri Lanka's history. From the civil war's brutal conclusion in May 2009 to the atrocities of past decades, including those of the JVP insurrection that reached its height in 1989, the scars of conflict and violence run deep. In our pursuit of reconciliation, we must confront the painful truths of our past and strive for a future built on justice, accountability, and healing. Looking ahead, the quest for justice must transcend partisan interests and electoral mandates. The forthcoming elections and transition of government presents an opportunity to reinvigorate efforts towards accountability and reconciliation. It is imperative that the government leadership, today and in the future, prioritizes the pursuit of justice and transparency, free from the constraints of vested interests.

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Our Vision:

A just and peaceful Sri Lanka, in which the freedom, human rights and democratic rights of all peoples are assured.

Our Mission:

To work in partnership with different target groups with an aim to educate, mobilize and advocate the building of a rights conscious society of people that work towards a political solution to the ethnic conflict, reconciliation and equal opportunities for all.

National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, 12/14 Balapokuna Vihara Road, Colombo 6, Sri Lanka

Website: www.peace-srilanka.org

Email: info@peace-srilanka.org

Tel: 011 2818344, 011 2854127

Fax: 0112819064