



Paths To Peace

January 2026

Women Lead Recovery After Cyclone Ditwah

NPC's Strengthening Women's Leadership in Sri Lanka project, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, supported communities severely affected when Cyclone Ditwah made landfall in November, triggering one of the country's most devastating flood disasters in over 20 years. Nearly 2.2 million people across all 25 districts were impacted, including communities engaged through the Women Organised for Inclusion through Community Engagement (WOICE) project. Homes, livelihoods and basic necessities were lost overnight, pushing already vulnerable families into deeper hardship. Amid this crisis, women emerged not only as survivors but as leaders driving relief, recovery and community resilience.

Across WOICE locations, women took responsibility for protecting households, organising relief and supporting neighbours during and after the floods. Despite being disproportionately affected by disasters due to social and economic inequalities, women played a central role in early warning efforts, managing food and water security, supporting informal evacuation spaces and restoring daily life in affected communities. Their leadership helped ensure that assistance reached those most in need while strengthening trust and solidarity during a time of uncertainty.

While women's contributions were indispensable, their leadership often remains undervalued and constrained by limited access to decision making spaces, resources, land ownership and financial protection. The experience of Cyclone Ditwah highlights the importance of formally recognising and supporting women-led disaster responses. Empowering women is not only a matter of equity; it is essential for building resilient communities capable of withstanding future climate related crises. Through the WOICE project, NPC continues to strengthen women's leadership as a foundation for inclusive recovery, long term resilience and sustainable peace.



Strengthening Youth Participation in the Electoral Process

As part of NPC's Active Citizens for Elections and Democracy (ACED) project, funded by the European Union, a series of mentoring and training programmes were conducted for youth and their network members to strengthen youth participation in elections and democratic processes. These initiatives were particularly important in the post-2022 aragalaya context, which highlighted a significant gap between youth aspirations and existing political representation.

Three training programmes were held in the Batticaloa, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa districts, bringing together youth representatives from NPC youth networks and other youth-led networks. A total of 97 youth participated, including university students, youth actively engaged in politics, youth council representatives and social media campaign activists.

The programmes were conducted by Dr. Crishni Silva, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science at the University of Colombo, who facilitated the sessions through interactive discussions and participatory learning methods focused on youth political engagement and leadership.

Participants gained a deeper understanding of the current state of youth political participation, the challenges faced by young people in accessing political spaces and the opportunities available to strengthen youth representation. Discussions explored how youth activism can be transformed into sustained political engagement, the importance of political literacy and ways to rebuild trust between youth and political institutions.

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Youth from Polonnaruwa District, including members of NPC youth networks, shared their active involvement in grassroots political work and highlighted the need to rebuild and strengthen the Youth Council. They emphasised the importance of forming a districtwide youth platform that includes both urban and rural youth, as current engagement is largely limited to town areas. Participants also discussed the need to expand youth political activities beyond urban centres to ensure broader representation.

A key concern raised by youth in both the Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura districts was the migration of youth to Colombo for higher education and employment. Participants explained that distance and time constraints make it difficult for young leaders to remain engaged in district level political activities, weakening sustained youth participation. They stressed the need for continuous mentoring and training programmes, especially for youth engaged through NPC youth networks, to maintain momentum and strengthen long term involvement in democratic processes.

The training sessions also covered youth leadership and political activism, challenges and opportunities in youth politics across different provinces and an overview of the Campaign Finance Act, helping participants better understand the legal and institutional frameworks governing elections.

Through these programmes, youth from NPC youth networks and other youth platforms were encouraged to reflect on their roles as change makers within their communities. By strengthening political awareness, leadership skills and collaboration among youth networks, the project continues to support inclusive democratic participation and contribute to long term democratic stability.



Strengthening Unity, Preserving Culture and Empowering People

Interventions by NPC's Plural Action for Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (PAIRS) project, funded by Misereor and co-funded by CAFOD, saw 1,294 participants including youth, women leaders, religious leaders, and government officials actively engaged in initiatives aimed at strengthening peace, inclusion and social resilience across the country. Women and youth emerged as central agents of change driving dialogue, leadership and local solutions, reaffirming the project's commitment to inclusive, nationwide peacebuilding.

A meeting of religious leaders in the North Central Province, organised in collaboration with the Anuradapura and Polonnaruwa District Inter Religious Committees (DIRCs), brought together 40 senior religious leaders from major faiths who shared insights and recommendations to strengthen collaboration, inclusivity, mutual understanding and reconciliation across communities in the North Central Province. The exchange highlighted a collective commitment to peace, harmony and respect across religious and ethnic boundaries. Participants were informed about NPC-led initiatives promoting peace, social justice and inclusion, inspiring many to express interest in joining and supporting the organisation's work. The meeting fostered stronger networks among religious leaders and government representatives to advance community level reconciliation and inclusive development.

An actualisation activity was held in Badulla in collaboration with the Future in Our Hand Development Fund (FIOH) Badulla empower youth, especially Malaiyaha youth, through inclusive vocational pathways and reconciliation. Bringing together 198 participants including youth and government officers, the programme created a shared platform for young people from diverse communities to access clear, practical information on vocational training and employment opportunities while reinforcing the principles of non-discrimination, equal access and social justice. With a special focus on Malaiyaha youth, who continue to face structural barriers to education and employment, participants engaged with institutions such as the Technical College, the National Youth Council and vocational training centres. The strong engagement of youth and institutions underscored a shared commitment to inclusion, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, marking a significant milestone in empowering unemployed youth in the Badulla District.

“Today I learnt that timely access to vocational pathway information can transform life choices. The initiative was a valuable opportunity for younger participants to positively shape their personal and professional futures,” said Azhagan Jayanthi.



An actualisation programme was held in Puttalam, together with Women Organization for Development, Equality, Peace and Temperance (WODEPT) Puttalam, to restore important legal documents and promote inclusion and social justice for Ditwah-affected communities. The initiative addressed one of the most devastating consequences of disasters - the loss of legal identity. Sixty families across 28 Grama Niladhari divisions lost their National Identity Cards (NICs), cutting them off from public services, banking, education, employment and social protection with women, youth, the elderly and economically vulnerable groups bearing the heaviest burden. Through coordinated action by government officers, 42 NIC and 24 birth certificate were issued in a day, restoring access and trust between citizens and the state.

“Getting my NIC restored an essential document I had lost due to the disaster, enabling me to regain access to important services and opportunities,” said one resident said.

An actualisation activity under the Ratnapura DIRC focused on the marginalisation of Malaiyaha Tamil artists and hereditary cultural groups who possess traditional knowledge passed down through generations but remain excluded due to caste-based discrimination, limited access to technical training and weak institutional recognition. Bringing together government officials and nearly 100 artists for a dialogue strengthened awareness among them on inclusive cultural governance and reactivated the Ratnapura cultural authority, ensuring Malaiyaha Tamil community representation for the first time as a milestone in restoring dignity, recognition and inter-ethnic understanding. Senior art lecturer Dasun Ranwatta emphasised that Sri Lanka’s indigenous arts across Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities have long lacked protection mechanisms, noting that such programmes provided renewed direction and sustainability for cultural heritage.

Another actualisation activity was conducted in Ratnapura focusing on empowering women entrepreneurs engaged in caste-based traditional industries. The programme, in collaboration with the Environment and Community Development Information Centre and Ratnapura DIRC, addressed structural barriers faced by women including limited access to finance, weak institutional support and social marginalisation that continue to hinder enterprise growth and livelihood security. Nearly 200 women entrepreneurs participated in the initiative, engaging directly with government and private sector stakeholders to learn about loan schemes, self-employment benefits and entrepreneurship support available through the Ministry of Rural Development, state banks and local government institutions. Provincial Commissioner L. M. P. W. Bandara highlighted the importance of supporting self-employment during a time of national economic hardship, noting that the programme provided knowledge and encouragement to low income producers striving to build sustainable livelihoods.



An actualisation activity was held for women Local Government Authority (LGA) leaders in Batticaloa in collaboration with the Human Rights Civil Committee (HRCC), aimed at strengthening the participation and inclusion of women in local governance, empowering leaders to address systemic challenges and promote community level peacebuilding initiatives.

The inclusive forum provided a safe space for women leaders to openly share their experiences, highlight challenges and collaboratively explore solutions. Key issues raised included the insufficient implementation of the mandated 25% women's representation in councils, undervaluing of women's opinions in decision making and discrimination between elected and appointed members, all of which hindered unity and effective participation. A memorandum outlining the challenges and recommendations was presented to the Provincial Local Government Commissioner and the Mayor of the Municipal Council.

"The discussion was very useful and empowering as it provided a platform to voice our concerns and seek collective solutions," said V. Sasikala, a LGA leader.

The LGBTIQ community is absent from formal peacebuilding and inter religious dialogue processes. Deep-rooted social stigma, limited understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation, religious sensitivities and the lack of safe spaces for conversation have contributed to silence, misunderstanding and exclusion.

An actualisation activity was organised in collaboration with the Dharmashakthi Foundation and the Colombo DIRC, bringing together over 45 participants, including senior government officials, religious leaders from different faiths, civil society representatives, women leaders and youth to create a courageous space for open and respectful dialogue.

The programme demonstrated that even sensitive and contested issues can be addressed constructively. Concerns raised by religious and community leaders rooted in fear, misinformation or moral anxiety were responded to calmly and factually without confrontation or dismissal.

"The LGBTIQ community is not something strange or different. We are all human beings living in the same society. Therefore, freedom, justice, equality and fundamental rights should be equally guaranteed to everyone," said Bishop Asiri Perera.



Opportunity to Address Injustice in Post-Cyclone Resettlement

A fundamental principle of justice is that equal treatment in unequal circumstances can produce unjust outcomes. The government under President Anura Kumara Dissanayake recognised this principle when it provided an unprecedented daily subsidy to Malaiyaha Tamil plantation workers in the 2026 budget. In doing so it acknowledged that structural constraints in the plantation sector had led them to being denied them a long overdue wage increase. Cyclone Ditwah has now exposed again structural constraints in disaster relief and resettlement. The recovery process therefore presents an opportunity for the government to once again address the key constraint that has led to long standing injustice while rebuilding communities affected by the disaster.

Most Malaiyaha Tamil plantation workers do not own the land on which they live or the houses they occupy which are managed by both state and plantation companies due to historical reasons. Due to this factor, they have been unable to access relief that the government has made available to other citizens affected by the same disaster. In the aftermath of the cyclone, the government announced relief measures ranging from Rs 25,000 for cleaning damaged houses to Rs 5 million for rebuilding destroyed homes. Access to this support is however linked to land and housing ownership, a condition that systematically excludes plantation workers.

At a recent discussion on post cyclone rebuilding hosted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives, it was noted that adequate land is available within plantation areas that can be allocated for housing. In recent years, significant areas of plantation land have been used for other economic purposes, including tourism, renewable energy and livestock farming. The allocation of plantation land for such activities demonstrates that land can be released where policy decisions permit. In addition, official assessments presented to Parliament and reviews conducted at ministry level have repeatedly acknowledged that substantial areas of plantation land remain underutilised or unproductive. Estimates run into tens of thousands of acres. These findings suggest that land availability is not the primary constraint.

The National Peace Council calls for the setting up of a land commission to facilitate the vesting of land ownership rights with Malaiyaha Tamil plantation workers in their resettlement process so that post cyclone recovery is fair, inclusive and consistent with the principles of justice. The government, under the leadership of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, has publicly committed itself to equal treatment and non-discrimination for all citizens. In the post-cyclone context, these commitments require targeted and timely governmental action for the sake of justice to a community that was discriminated from the very beginning of the country's Independence when they were denied their citizenship rights.

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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