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இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Paths To Peace

January
2022

Bridging the Language Divide

Language was a key dividing factor in the early years of Sri Lanka's independence and it continues to be a source of tension between communities, especially now when there is an economic downturn where resources are scarce and there is competition between people and communities for survival. Differences in linguistic, ethnic and religious identity can become focal points for mobilising conflict.

NPC is engaging in a range of activities that foster national integration and social cohesion. Government support is being given to peace building activities at the local level. Government officials are permitting their representatives to participate in inter ethnic and inter religious initiatives because they do not wish to have conflicts escalating in their areas that could result in the destruction of life and property. They also want to understand the underlying issues and develop ways to handle tension through non-coercive methods.

Through the National Languages Equality Advancement project (NLEAP) supported by Canada, NPC strengthens gender sensitivity and bilingual communication skills of public officers and improves the capacity of ministries to deliver public services in both official languages at national levels. Local Inter Religious Committees (LIRCs) audit the performance of government institutions in their areas and suggest reforms.

The certificate award ceremony for those who completed their second language course took place in Trincomalee where the three ethnic communities live in equal numbers and there is a need for government officials to be able to communicate in the second language.



Exposure Visit to Build National Network

A three day exposure visit to Negombo was conducted under NPC's project Collective Engagement for Religious Freedom (CERF) for 110 Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC) members from Negombo, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Weligama, beginning with an inter religious dialogue to share participants' experiences as LIRC members and their expectations of the visit.

Thelijawila Gnanaseeha Thero, a member of Weligama LIRC, said, "It is a privilege to meet other LIRC members so we can learn about the initiatives they have taken. Improving understanding is the way forward for us."

Participants visited St. Sebastian Church in Katuwapitiya, which had been bombed on Easter Sunday in 2019. Father Manjula Niros Appuhhami said, "As villagers, we have always lived peacefully with other religious communities. After the Easter Sunday attacks, rebuilding lost trust and understanding was a challenge for all of us. You can bring the message of peace to ensure that the painful events that our community had to endure do not happen again." LIRC members prayed for those who had lost their lives.

An inter religious conference was later held in Negombo with the participation of NPC Chairman Dr. Joe William and Executive Director Dr. Jehan Perera. Mrs. A.U. Pathirana, Negombo Divisional Secretary, said, "Inter religious platforms are rare; they bring hope for unity and prosperity". The conference was included with experience sharing sessions by Negombo and Weligama LIRCs and concluded with an entertainment session.

The final day of the exposure visit began with a street drama by Negombo LIRC after which a reflection session was held for participants to share their knowledge. "The exposure visit was a collaboration between East and South. Team discussions helped us to broaden our understanding of LIRC initiatives," said Kurukkal Swasi Sivapalan.

Assessing NPC's Partner Organizations

A partner capacity assessment was carried out in the districts of Vavuniya, Galle, Hambantota, Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Kegalle and Ratnapura for partner organizations implementing NPC's Plural Action for Conflict Transformation (PACT) project.

The assessment examined the financial transparency, capacity to implement activities, achieve results and meet the objectives of the project with proper administrative and financial functions in accordance with accepted rules and regulations with a view to improving these aspects.

After the result of the assessment is analysed, a strategic plan will be developed in collaboration with District Inter Religious Committee (DIRC) members.

Also under the PACT project, three sub committees were established under DIRCs, two in Vavuniya and one in Galle. The committees will take measures to build understanding and trust among different communities and to provide opportunities for the different communities to coexist in peace and harmony.

At the Batticaloa DIRC meeting members of subcommittees were present and participated in doing situation analyses of the areas where the sub committees were established. Members will plan activities for implementation in their communities.

Learning to Prevent Hate Speech

Two training programmes and a campaign on the prevention of hate speech for local government authorities and religious leaders were conducted by master trainers under NPC's project Technical Assistance to Justice Institutions in Sri Lanka in Kandy and Ratnapura.

Participants were given an introduction to hate speech and its sociological background and told about factors that contributed to the spread of hate speech and its social impact.

On the session on social media, they were taught about the rapid increase of internet users, algorithms and google cookies. The speakers used examples to show instances where hate speech on social media had led to violence such as in Myanmar where military leaders and Buddhist nationalists used social media to demonise the Rohingya Muslim minority ahead of and during a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Participants were asked not to propagate hate speech on social media by sharing, reacting or commenting on posts but to report the social media organisations.

The religious leaders agreed that the main reason conflicts arose was because of hate speech. They pointed out that no religion taught hatred. When people were prevented from practicing their religion, it led to hate speech and people hurt the feelings of others, they added.

“As a local government authority member, the training was very useful to me. I learnt the difference between normal speech and hate speech and how it destroys people's dignity. I suggest that this should be taught to all politicians in the country,” said Danushka Kalupahana.

Also under the justice project, an oratorical competition on hate speech and social media was held in Kandy targeting 200 youth leaders in six youth centres in collaboration with National Youth Service Council.

“Thank you NPC, for organizing a wonderful event that was very useful. We will share what we learnt with other youth societies. The programme serves as a platform for us to learn from each other's experiences about hate speech; it is the first time we heard about the concept,” said a youth leader.



Understanding Violent Extremism

To increase the level of knowledge of state officers on Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) concepts and skills for PVE implementation, NPC held two one day training programmes in Ampara and Mannar for 86 District and Divisional level state officers including Grama Niladaris, development officers and social services officers who were directly involved with the community under NPC's project Prevention of Violent Extremism - Capacity Building in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Participants learnt about push and pull factors of extremism the context of post independent politics, the JVP insurrections, Tamil minority alienation and the Easter Sunday attacks.

In Ampara participants discussed land issues and found that local politicians were mainly responsible for polarising different religious and ethnic communities. They recommended that a new law be introduced to ban political parties with extremist ideologies and to prevent religious parties from being involved in politics.

In Mannar participants identified army checked points as a push factor for radicalisation. They did not accept the reason that checkpoints were necessary to prevent smuggling and suggested that smuggling could be prevented by more vigilance in the coastal areas.

Providing a Better Service to the Public

NPC held a training programme on non-discriminatory customer service for 29 government officers and local government authority representatives in Muttur in the Trincomalee District, which included identifying perceptions of discrimination, sharing experiences and learnings on best practices in providing quality, non-discriminatory customer service and examining ways to rectify discriminatory practices. The programme was conducted under NPC's Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Activity (SCORE).

Participants identified solutions based on their experiences. Mr. M.S.M. Niljam, a Development Officer, said, "The training programme inspired me to deliver inclusive services to the public and changed my attitudes."

Mr. Naushad, a Grama Niladhari officer, said he delivered different types of services to villagers and believed that the training would help him to provide more inclusive services. He thanked NPC for giving him the chance learn about the concept. Najeer Kuththus, a Skills Development Officer, said, "It is very important to know about this subject because I have a duty to provide a quality service to the public as a civil servant." Anthony Dhasan Dayalini, a Development Officer, said, "We all have a social responsibility to mitigate these types of discriminatory practices for a better future."



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.

Deal With Both Symptoms and Causes for Reconciliation

The government is commencing a major reconciliation drive in the north of the country this week with the launch of its “Adhikaranabhimani” programme. According to the Ministry of Justice which is coordinating this work it is meant to “ameliorated access to justice for people of the Northern Province.” Several government institutions including those set up under the reconciliation process of the previous government will be conducting two-day mobile clinics. The participating institutions include the Legal Aid Commission, Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, Office for Reparations, Office on Missing Persons, Department of Debt Conciliation Board and the Vocational Training Authority to mention some of them.

While welcoming the launch of the “Adhikaranabhimani” the National Peace Council considers it essential to recognize that transitional justice related issues of this nature need to be victim-centered. They need to bring participants into justice processes as active members rather than treating them as passive recipients. Looking at what victims need in order to fulfill their demands for justice means that the needs of victims and their expectations are heard and acknowledged. It will also be important for the government to ensure that these activities continue in the longer term and on a more macro scale. They need to take place not only before the Geneva sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in March but also continue after them.

The fanning out of government institutions into the north and east will familiarize them regarding the people’s problems on the ground that need resolution. In particular, the provincial administrations of the Northern and Eastern provinces, where the ethnic and religious minorities form provincial majorities, need to be reflective of those populations. At the present time, the elected provincial councils are not operational and so the provincial administration is headed by central appointees who are less likely to be representative of the sentiments and priorities of the people of those provinces. Along with positive initiatives such as the “Adhikaranabhimani” programme, NPC calls on the government to hold the provincial council elections without further delay to ensure that democracy prevails the both the provincial and national levels.

Media Release issued on 26.01.2022

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