



# “CHALLENGES FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SRI LANKA”

BY PRATHIBHA MEDIA NETWORK

DECEMBER 2022



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



---

**Prepared by**

A.Sanjanees Sugadhika (*MSoc, LL.B, BSW, Attorney at Law (Reading)*)- *Lead Research Consultant*

**Guided by**

Chaminda Jayasekara - *Chief Executive Officer PMN*

Wijayananda Kadurupokuna - *Director Programme PMN*

**Assisted by**

Madushi Imeshi - *Programme Coordinator, PMN*

Shashika Weerasinghe

Nuwan Pushpakumara - *Assistant Project Officer, PMN*

S.P. Krishani Madushika - *Project Officer - Gender, PMN*

Kalhari Manushika Jayasena - *Administrator, PMN*

Dilni Imalsha Mihiravi - *Assistant Accountant, PMN*

Ashan Sanjanas Monaravila - *Communication Officer, PMN*

# ABSTRACT

This report is a part of a project led by PMN with the support of the USAID IDEA team to "raise the public's awareness about CSOs. The findings of this study will be used to increase public awareness of the role of CSOs in order to establish strengthened connections between both entities. While discussing the role of CSOs, this study focuses on the challenges they face in their operations. This will be discussed, both internally and externally. This project seeks to identify the different strategies, methods, and approaches that have been used by the organizations. This study also attempts to identify their own recommendations and practices that have made their organizations successful in the field.

However, this study has been conducted in a different format than a typical research study. Some of the conventional data collection techniques have been substituted as follows:

1. The pre-test and post-test questionnaires were utilized as questionnaire findings.
2. Radio programs following one day of awareness sessions with six members; substituted for "focus group discussion."
3. Group presentations
4. In-depth interviews
5. TV programs: key informant interviews

The study focused on seven districts in Sri Lanka and identified 10 organizations from each district by Prathiba Media Network (PMN), which is the implementing organization.

In addition to the primary data collection methods, a desk review was conducted to identify existing data and findings.

Through the data analysis, it is expected to identify the possible solutions that can be implemented by civil society organizations to carry out effective and efficient services whilst ensuring their members also inculcate professional values into their lives.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Organisation**

Prathiba Media Network Sri Lanka (PMN) is a registered civil society organization that is based in the Matara District, Sri Lanka. It has over 10 years of experience working in diverse fields, including media, mobile journalism, peace and reconciliation, women's empowerment, social development, environmental protection, and many other fields.

PMN, as a pioneer media-based civil society organization in the district, focuses on enormous projects in more than 10 districts across the country and ensures that effective media approaches are used for social empowerment. As per the mission of the organization, PMN works with multi-disciplinary communities to establish solidarity among them. Further, it aims to promote the socio-cultural and economic development of individuals and groups in society.

PMN was provided with a grant by the MSI-USAID team to implement the following activities under the IDEA (Increased Demand for Engagement and Accountability) project.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

PMN, with the support of USAID, has implemented this project to enhance effective and efficient service delivery from CSOs. This focuses on the communication strategies implemented by civil society organizations to promote their work, projects, and activities. Through this project, engagement was established with members of diverse civil society organizations to identify their roles in society and their faced challenges. A key objective was to discuss opportunities for utilizing media as a strategy to overcome these challenges.

This study is carried out in order to identify the challenges faced by CSOs and their solutions. A further objective was to assess the similar approaches taken by different districts to overcome those challenges. This report is prepared based on the activities and data that were collated from seven districts of the country.

Although this study was not conducted comprehensively as a research study and having gone beyond traditional or conventional data collection methods, it aims to discuss the following areas in the report:

- Roles of Civil Society Organizations
- Challenges
- Solutions

### **1.3 Country's Background**

Sri Lanka is a tropical island nation that has diversity in many fields. Having 22,156,000 people by the midpoint of 2019 (Central Bank Annual Report 2019), the country is rich in socio-cultural and economic diversity. The geographical variations also lead to different lifestyles, needs, and expectations among people. People from this diverse society face multiple challenges in their lives, which vary based on their residing locations, economic standards, and accessibility for goods and services.

By examining the history of the country, it is evident that the country has faced major changes throughout its course which has then resulted in drastic changes to the socio-economic factors of its citizens. Three different invasions from colonizers, obtaining independence, introducing the open economy concept, armed conflict, the tsunami, and ending the civil war were some of the major changes in society.

ADB (2013) highlights how the management, capacities, and involvement of civil societies have changed due to the above-mentioned changes in society. The report further states that the establishments of the CSOs have drastically increased after the above milestones, and the goals and objectives of the CSOs have changed in all forms.

The Civil War had a major influence on the country and its citizens, both in property as well as in person. After this major transition, many organizations started expanding their work and capacities towards work roles in "Peace and Reconciliation" approaches to the Northern Province, ethnic coherence, missing persons, disabilities and financial empowerment for men and women.

Competition for the grants, not having sustainable funding sources, poor management and leadership issues, and procedural limitations are some of the challenges faced by the CSOs around the world, including Sri Lanka.

Due to undisciplined fiscal practices and monetary policies and unplanned debts, Sri Lanka is facing an inevitable macro-economic crisis, which was also triggered as a result of the COVID pandemic (World Bank, 2021). "The Sri Lankan Development Update" by the World Bank also stated that it is estimated the "Poverty Rate" has been doubled during the period of 2021–2022. The report further states that there is a "sharp increase in the cost of living," which has a major impact on the welfare status of the country.

As a result, both government and non-governmental organizations in the country, both profit-oriented and nonprofit-oriented entities, are full of opportunities as well as many constraints and limitations.

This report aims to look at the roles of the CSOs in this widespread environment, along with the challenges they face and feasible solutions. It is expected to analyze similar situations in different districts.

## 2. Literature Review

This section overlooks the available sources which define and discuss the roles and challenges faced by Civil Society organisations both locally and internationally. This comprehensive comparison will help to recognize feasible solutions for the challenges.

### 2.1 Civil Society Organisations

World Bank defined civil society organizations as *“a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.”*

UN has included the characteristics of CSOs in its definition as, non-state, not for profit whereas the World Bank has provided a simple definition as a ‘wide array of organization’ with examples. But both entities have described CSOs as non-state not-for-profit organizations.

*“Civil society is a term that emerged in the 1980s after large-scale movements within certain states were detected. These were broadly anti-government/corruption movements in authoritarian regimes, and they involved a diverse range of actors such as labor unions, charities, and community and religious groups.”*

UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (2015) has defined civil society organizations as; *“Non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market”*. It is further explained that civil society organizations represent a wide range of interests and ties including community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, it does not represent business or for-profit associations. The term ‘civil society organizations’ has become popular in political and economic discussions in the 1980s, when it started to be identified with non-state movements that were defying authoritarian regimes, especially in central and eastern Europe and Latin America. But the nature of civil society - what it is and what it does - is evolving, in response to both technological developments and more nuanced changes within societies. Raffaele Marchetti (2022) in ‘Global Civil Society’ has explained further that these groups were sometimes referred to as the ‘third sector’ in society with the government (public sector) and for-profit businesses/transitional corporations (private sector) comprising other two sectors.

NGOs as a force for good were recognized by the government by taking the first step in 1980 by enacting the Voluntary Social Services Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act that has introduced a system of registration and supervision on NGO activities. Consequently, in 1990, a commission was appointed to supervise the activities of NGOs and to make recommendations for their proper functioning.

## 2.2 History of Sri Lankan Civil Society Organizations

When examining the historical background of CBOs, CSOs, and NGOs establishment in the country, sources depict that, the purpose of current CSOs had been similar during the 18th and 19th century in different other structures. And the sources highlighted how different religions have influenced the establishment of non-governmental organizations which work for the welfare and betterment of people. Few of the proven structures by that time were explained by Civil society briefs Lanka' (2013) by Asian Development Bank.

*"The earliest non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sri Lanka affiliated to the 19th century Christian missions. The arrival in 1880 of the American Theosophists led to the establishment of the Buddhist Theosophical Society, which in turn bore offshoots such as the Women's Education Society (1889), the Mahabodhi Society (1891) and the Young Men's Buddhist Association (1898). This talks about the inspiration from "The Catholic religion" and the next example depicts how "Buddhist Philosophy" was used for creating organizations.*

*Notable among the voluntary organizations spawned by the nationalist movement were the Ceylon Women's Union (1904), which aimed to raise the status of women, and the Ceylon Social Reform Society (1905), which sought to defend the country's cultural values"*

Vinod Moonesinghe explained the above point in his article of "The History of civil society organizations in Sri Lanka' (2018). In his explanation, he showed the possibilities of CSO establishments in early days of Sri Lankan society and how they could be self-organized.

*"Civil society in Sri Lanka appears to have been of considerable antiquity, predating the European colonial conquest. The earliest CSOs were probably localized, self-organized, and self-funded mutual benefits institutions such as Temple Development Societies (Dayaka Sabhas – committees of lay people supporting Buddhist monasteries) and Tank Councils (Wew Sabhas – farmers' societies for the maintenance of reservoirs and distribution of irrigation water)*

He further explained how Christianity influenced the establishment of NGOs as follows *"In the 19th century ecumenical organizations associated with Christian missions emerged as the first NGOs. Many of these being local subsidiaries of worldwide Christian missions, they were also the earliest examples in the country of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Typical of these was the first, the Colombo Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society (now the Ceylon Bible Society), established in 1812. Non-Christian civil society emerged in reaction to these mission-based NGOs, in the form of religious bodies (mostly intent on proselytization, education, and social reform) emulating their structure."*

Apart from the above two examples, the following statement highlights how "Cooperative" systems were established to serve the development of the respective communities. These co-operatives served all the requirements for their village under one roof. *Traditional community-based organizations (CBOs) such as Temple Development Societies and Death Donation Societies (funeral aid societies) were supplemented in 1906 by the first Thrift and Credit Co-Operative Societies, established under the Co-Operative Societies Ordinance. It was only in 1940 that the first Consumer Co-operative Societies were set up."*

Through the above examples and discussions, it can be observed that since ancient times people have intended to establish organizations in order to serve the people and communities for their development. Many modifications have been added and the purposes and aims of these organizations have evolved due to the advancement of the world, such as industrialization, open economy, globalization, advancement in science and technology, improvements in communication, etc.

## 2.3 Roles of Civil Society Organizations

*“The precise number of civil society organizations in the country, notwithstanding the government’s efforts to monitor them, remains unknown estimates varying from 20,000 to 50,000,”* says Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its publication on ‘Civil society briefs– Sri Lanka’ (2013). It further has presented the main categories of CSOs operating in Sri Lanka a: INGOs involved in humanitarian and post-conflict activities, INGOs and domestic CBOs involved in advocacy, Domestic NGOs involved with poverty alleviation in conjunction with government programs, local NGOs and CBOs involved in grassroots development. As per the report it can be shown as follows,

- INGOs involved in humanitarian and post-conflict activities.
- INGOs and domestic CSOs involved in advocacy.
- Domestic NGOs involved with poverty alleviation in conjunction with government programs.
- Local NGOs and CBOs involved in grassroots development,

*“Civil Society Briefs in Sri Lanka 2013”, highlighted the roles CSOs play in their respective communities. According to the report, it states “policy- and country strategy-level consultation, and in designing, implementing, and monitoring projects” as their duties (ADB 2013)*

*The issues that concern most NGOs currently operating in Sri Lanka are poverty alleviation and sustainable development; environmental conservation and green technologies; health and sanitation; education and training activities; rehabilitation and reforms; human rights and issues of peace; conflict-related trauma and rehabilitation; disaster management; rural development; development of slum communities; development of social infrastructure; organizing credit and services; building and sustaining community leadership; cultural politics and rights; research and publication; evangelization; women’s. The dominant identity of NGOs in Sri Lanka has arguably been political and rights-oriented rather than economic and ‘development’ oriented. Their impact has been high through lobbying and advocacy on human rights and pluralism”*

Civil societies have grown in size and importance around the world. A vibrant civil society can ensure that millions of vulnerable people have a voice and that they play a central role in the struggle to further political, social, economic, and constitutional rights. Civil society can identify and raise issues around which collective problem-solving needs to take place. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also play an essential role in contexts of state service reduction or lack of services, particularly in countries of protracted crisis.

## 2.4 Challenges of CSOs

Alix H.M on 'Social Innovation and Sustainable Development (2019) referring to the lessons from International Civil Society Week 2019 stated the challenges of CSOs as:

*“Limited funding, corruption, lack of in-kind resources and manpower, complex political landscapes, crumbling legislation... CSOs are faced with numerous difficulties when it comes to reaching their full potential as change-maker”*

In further, it has also stated that lack of political support impedes systems change, diverging values prevent cohesion among CSOs, and censorship and related restrictions impact grassroots CSOs recognition.

Cornelia Riehle (2018) revealed diverse challenges that potentially challenge the work of CSOs that are working on human rights. *“Accordingly, the challenges are Disadvantageous changes in legislation or inadequate implementation of laws; Hurdles when accessing financial resources and ensuring their sustainability; Difficulties in accessing decision-makers and feeding decisions into law and policymaking; Attacks on and harassment of human rights defenders, including negative discourse aimed at delegitimizing and stigmatizing CSOs”*

While Alix has described several challenges such as funding, resources, and manpower despite political influence, Cornelia has only described the political difficulties and how they have impacted the proper functioning of CSOs. The political context of a society has a great influence on its members and the institution. As per her explanation, other difficulties arise and connect with the ethical decisions and practices.

“International non-governmental organizations in Sri Lanka (INGOs) “a study which was carried out on social capital and trust between the two ethnic groups; Tamil and Sinhala in Sri Lanka (2011) by Sabina Christrup for her master’s study at Lund University identified two main difficulties facing by INGOs when working in Sri Lanka. They are low community participation and government suspicion.

*“Communities in Sri Lanka are not ready for work (projects, workshops etcetera) concerning dialogue and integration. Some people needed to fill their basic needs first because all their belongings had disappeared or been destroyed in the civil war, and many people in that situation had not sufficiently grieved over the losses and destruction from the conflict.”*

Being different from the first and second findings, Sabina Christrup has come up with the challenges of INGOs in the local context, In reference to her study which was carried out soon after the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War, the communities have prioritized the fulfillment of basic needs. Her findings also show a clear similarity to the previous citation as she has discussed about the trust and cooperation of the government in tackling the challenges as: *“innovation leads to increased agility and responsiveness, cooperation and cross-sector partnerships can amplify impact, open dialogue can unveil common ground.”*

James & Malunga, (2006) have spoken about the challenges of CSOs in the Malawi context which can be named as common issues. Some of the issues can be listed as follows; -

- Identity Crisis
- Leadership challenges
- Strategies
- Funding
- Changing Environment
- External Networks

## 2.5 Solutions

Cornelia Riehle's publication on challenges for civil society organizations (2018) has provided the below suggestions to overcome the challenges *"creation of a European fund for democracy, human rights and values, the establishment of an EU coordinator on civil society freedoms, and the creation of a legally binding European monitoring mechanism."*

Non-governmental organizations face multiple challenges, nevertheless, one of the most important steps to overcome these obstacles is identifying what challenges an organization is facing, and the areas where there is room to improve, after identifying these key areas organizations can design a plan to improve, and hopefully overcome the obstacles they are facing.

Sabrina Cristrup (2011)' INGOs in Sri Lanka' believes that using a humanitarian approach to fulfill basic human needs and then expecting their participation for in development is one way of overcoming the challenges of low community participation.

*"Another general difficulty was that the government was suspicious of INGOs, which made it difficult for INGOs to work in some areas. The strategy for overcoming this difficulty was to be humble and cooperate with governmental institutions, try to improve them and, even there, plant some seeds to improve the trust between the different ethnic groups and, in some cases, between institutions in the society."*

ADB report on Civil Society brief, explained further solutions that can be taken to overcome some of the hardships. According to their report, INGOs who are partnering with local CSOs, CBOs, NGOs can make some significant impact by empowering the partner organisations. It stated that enhancing skills for accountability, trainings on effective and efficient implementation of activities are some of them.

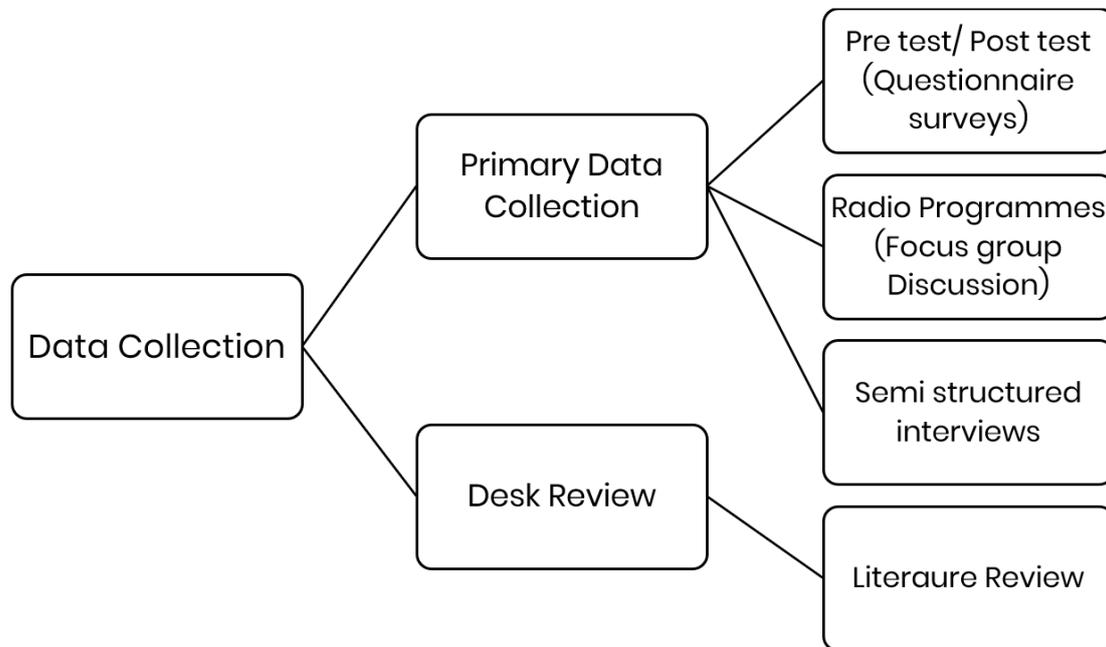
*"NGOs add value in promoting sustainable development through innovation—identifying new approaches and models for specific development activities, drawing upon their close knowledge of local communities; accountability—helping ensure that project components are implemented as envisaged and planned; responsiveness—encouraging the implementation of projects to respond to local needs; participation—serving as bridges between project authorities and affected communities, and providing structures for citizen participation; and sustainability—nurturing continuity in project work, especially when implementing agencies lack capacity or when staffing changes. ADB in Sri Lanka has supported many projects involving civil society in different combinations of the above strengths"*

Challenges and related solutions can be varying from context-wise & country wise. But having a strong government cooperation could ease the working difficulties of all CSOs commonly.

"Challenges Facing Civil Society Organisations Working on Human Rights in the EU" highlighted the possible steps to be taken to reduce the challenges face by CSOs who work in Human Rights (HR). Even though the report speaks about CSOs in HR, those strategies can be implemented for any society with contextualization.

### 3. Methodology

The study is developed by using primary data collection methods and findings from the desk review. The following chart depicts how the data has been collected from different sources which are somewhat close to formal data collection tools, yet different.



#### Sample

The sample size and the selection were pre-determined. Hence this was done along with one day awareness sessions for the representatives from the selected organization in the district, participants for the data collection had to be taken from the same group.

#### Analysis

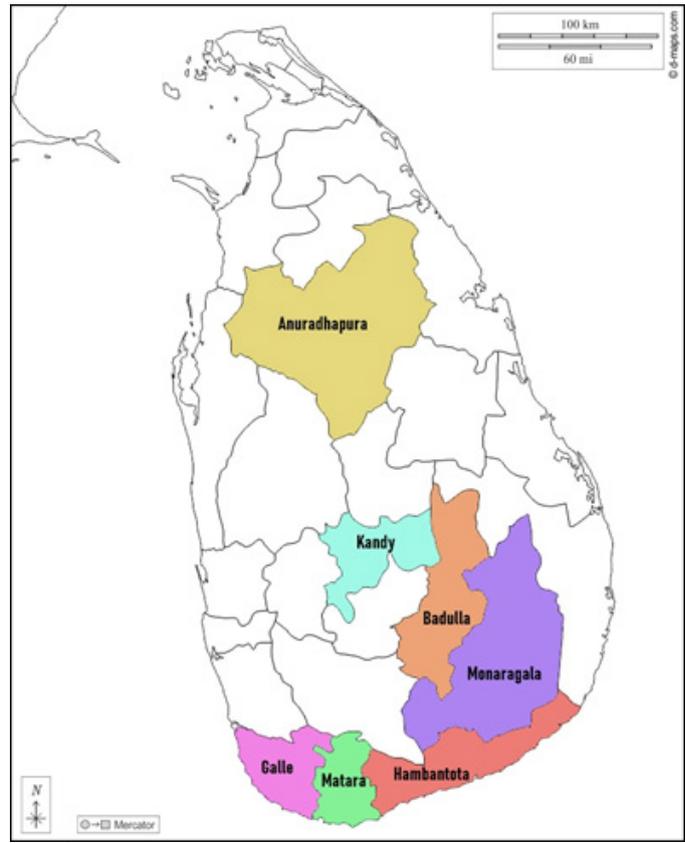
Analysis of the report was mainly done through a qualitative approach, and demographic features were analyzed by the quantitative approach. Thematic analysis will be used for the data analysis, which is explained in the next chapter.

## 4. Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter consists of the data presentation and analysis based on the information gathered. It initially provides background information on the civil society organizations, NGOs, CBOs that participated in the study.

Next, it continues with the data analysis in detail and the responses received from the group activities and interviews. Analyzed data has been presented in themes.

The identification of the themes was one of the core purposes of data analysis. In fact, thematic analysis is appraised as a foundational method and widely used for the analysis of qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

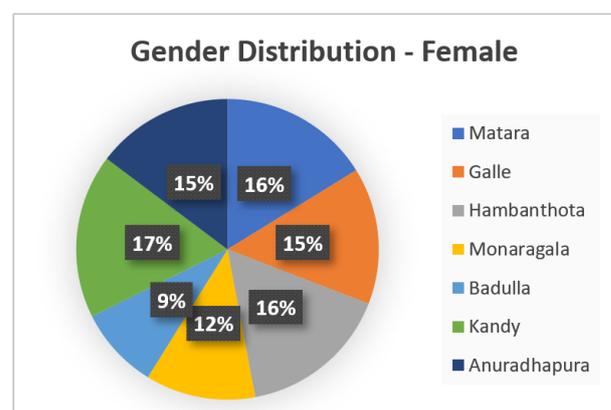
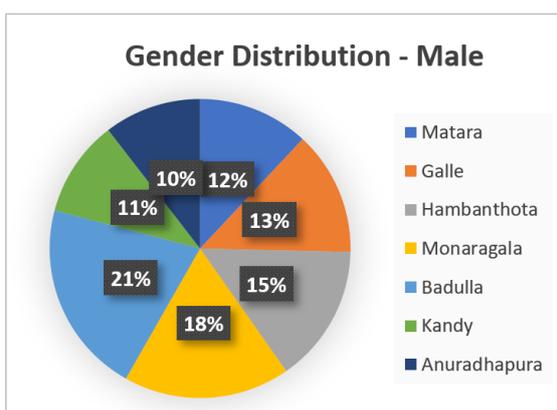
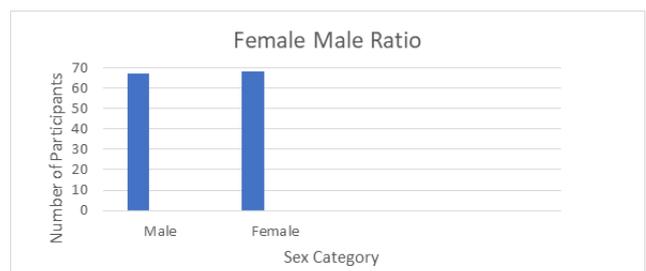


Map 1- Locations of the one-day awareness session

### • Sex Representation

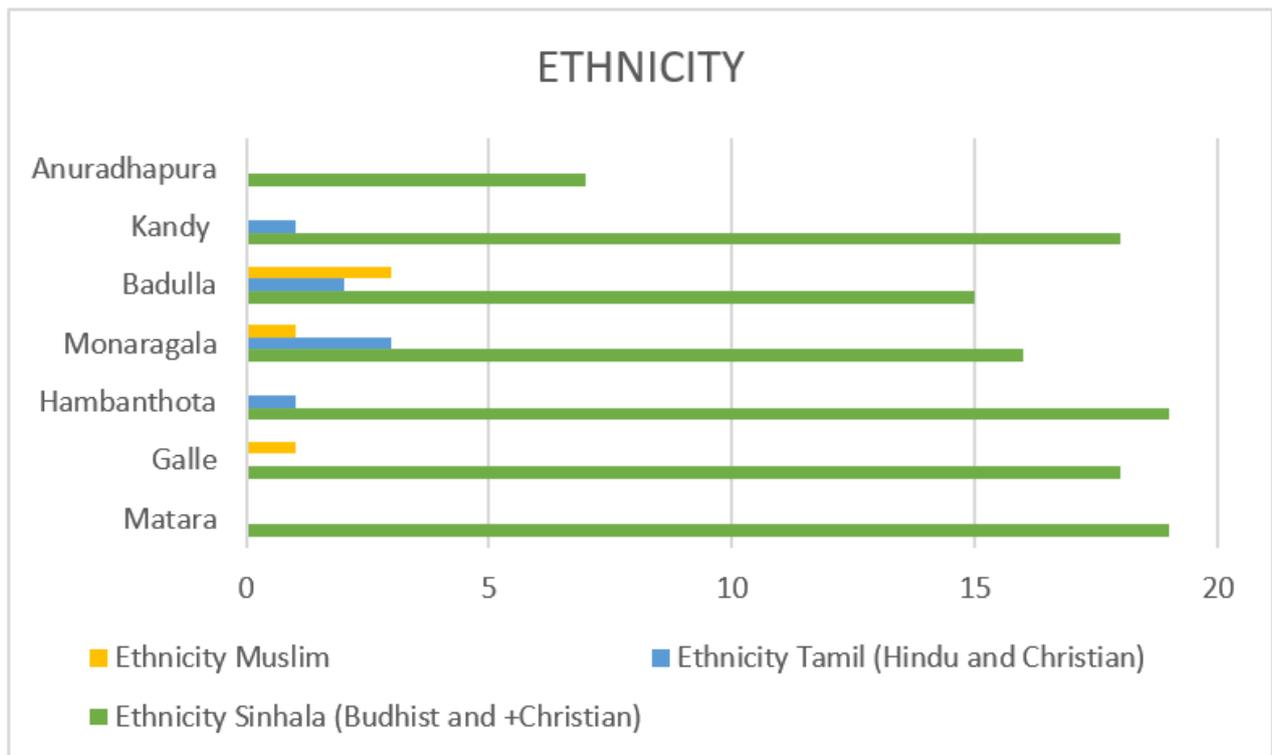
| District     | Male | Female | Total |
|--------------|------|--------|-------|
| Matara       | 08   | 11     | 19    |
| Galle        | 09   | 10     | 19    |
| Hambantota   | 10   | 11     | 21    |
| Monaragala   | 12   | 08     | 20    |
| Badulla      | 14   | 06     | 20    |
| Kandy        | 07   | 12     | 19    |
| Anuradhapura | 07   | 10     | 17    |

Table 1



- **Ethnicity Representation**

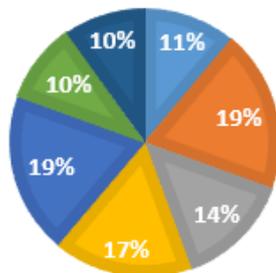
| District     | Sinhala<br>(Buddhist & Christian) | Tamil<br>(Hindu and Christian) | Muslim |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| Matara       | 19                                | -                              | -      |
| Galle        | 18                                | -                              | 01     |
| Hambantota   | 19                                | 01                             | -      |
| Monaragala   | 16                                | 03                             | 01     |
| Badulla      | 15                                | 02                             | 03     |
| Kandy        | 18                                | 01                             | -      |
| Anuradhapura | 17                                | -                              | -      |
| Total        |                                   |                                |        |



| District     | Above 29 | Below 29 |
|--------------|----------|----------|
| Matara       | 08       | 11       |
| Galle        | 14       | 05       |
| Hambantota   | 10       | 10       |
| Monaragala   | 12       | 08       |
| Badulla      | 14       | 06       |
| Kandy        | 07       | 12       |
| Anuradhapura | 07       | 10       |
| Total        | 72       | 62       |

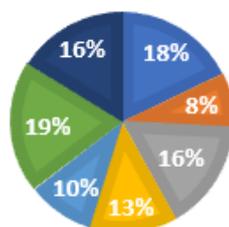
### AGE DISTRIBUTION - ABOVE 29 YEARS

■ Matara      ■ Galle      ■ Hambanthota      ■ Monaragala  
■ Badulla      ■ Kandy      ■ Anuradhapura



### AGE DISTRIBUTION- BELOW 29 YEARS OLD

■ Matara      ■ Galle      ■ Hambanthota      ■ Monaragala  
■ Badulla      ■ Kandy      ■ Anuradhapura



## 4.2 Role of the CSO

The information to define the role of "CSOs" was gathered extensively from three channels: the views of the participants for the one-day awareness session and group discussion, followed by the program and in-depth interviews from the pre-test evaluation forms.

CSOs can be recognized as a powerful source that is able to influence society as a whole. Following are examples of how CSOs can influence the government,

- Implement and improve current public services in a quality manner.
- Provide fair decisions without any biases.
- Equal financial and power distribution
- Working with transparency
- Considering environmental and social safeguards, etc.

CSO can be identified as a communication channel between the government and the people to deliver on their social issues, including protecting the rights of the people. As the government is representing the people of the nation, it is their responsibility to respect the democratic rights of the people, which helps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. CSOs are essential organizations for the people that have been neglected by society and isolated groups, which are known as marginalized groups in society CSOs play a role as advocates to promote justice and protect their rights with accountability.

Most of the time, the top management does not seek out the grassroots levels to identify the real issues in communities whereas CSOs are the agents that have easy access to the grassroot levels, understand the issues that need to be highlighted, and is the voice of the voiceless by improving a positive environment for all the members. This ultimately leads to accessibility to all resources with positive social participation.

Notably, it was observed that many members who represented these one-day sessions believed that CSOs are the medium to practice voluntary work for welfare facilities. It was common among many elderly participants to think that they provide a service free of charge since they are now in their retirement. This perspective limits the definition and overview of the role of CSOs.

In reference to the presented information, the majority of the participants have shared community awareness and training programs as major activities of CSOs. They also have stated certain specific areas in which CSOs are conducting training and raising awareness, including education, drug addiction, gardening, innovation, technology, environment protection, fisheries, violence reduction, child protection, etc. These themes are different from one group to another, each describing their own community and provincial experience. The development of community empowerment and cohesion was also reported by a significant number of participants, explaining their perspective on CSOs' responsibility for a sustainable nation.

This chart consists of a list on the roles of CSOs in different districts and these roles were directly suggested by the participants that attended the one-day awareness sessions.

|  | Anuradhapura | Badulla | Hambantota | Kandy | Matara | Galle | Monaragala |
|--|--------------|---------|------------|-------|--------|-------|------------|
| 1. Developing community cohesion                               |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 2. Community empowerment                                       |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 3. Poverty alleviation   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 4. Training programs   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 5. Community Awareness   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 6. Women's empowerment   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 7. Advocacy  |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 8. Identifying social issues                                   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 9. Agriculture development                                     |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 10. Peace and reconciliation                                   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 11. Conflict management  |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 12. Sustainable development through environmental protection   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 13. Gap filling between community, government and stakeholders |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 14. Women and child wellbeing                                  |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 15. Counselling and psychosocial development                   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 16. Managing grief and complaints                              |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 17. Financial facilitation for self-employments                |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 18. Involvement for identified problems                        |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 19. Human Elephant conflict                                    |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 20. Working for Disabled and Special needs communities         |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 21. Providing consistency and promotion                        |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| 22. Enacting constitution and action plan                      |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |

By analyzing the above chart, it is visible that members of the CSO identified multiple roles of CSOs as their functions. Even though all the organizations do not practice all of what has been mentioned above, based on the objectives and scope of the CSO and what was agreed in the constitution of the CSO, they practice many roles to address the needs of their communities. Community empowerment, conducting various types of training, and poverty alleviation projects have been identified by many attendees. It was observed that many believed both, individual and community development as their key roles. Development in many layers, promoting social cohesion and addressing the needs of special communities such as marginalized communities, women, children, and persons with disabilities are some of the major roles. The above list is further explained below with categorizations.

- Social Action
- Social Empowerment
- Advocacy
- Capacity Development
- Research
- Policymaking
- Promoting and Safeguarding Human Rights
- Social Welfare
- Humanitarian Actions

The above list can be further analyzed as follows.

#### **4.2.1 Safeguards for Human Rights**

This fact was not directly presented to the participants during their group discussions. However, officials from CSOs who joined the TV programs highlighted this fact significantly. In the broad view of the role of the CSO, "safeguarding human rights" is considered one of the most important roles. Hence, human rights cover a wide range of spectrums, such as fulfilling basic needs, psychological needs, rights to decision-making, political rights and, many more. Therefore, this has been further analyzed in this report.

By promoting and defending the rights and well-being of individuals and communities, civil society groups play a critical role in upholding human rights. These organizations are non-governmental and frequently collaborate with other parties like the UN, governments, and grassroots movements to advance and defend human rights. They make varied contributions that cover a range of topics, such as monitoring, reporting, advocacy, and assistance.

When considering the safeguards for human rights, CSOs must initially protect the rights of the people within the organization and beyond as well. As an example, providing space for them to speak up improves freedom of expression by granting opportunities to everyone by accepting and respecting human diversity.

Monitoring the violation of human rights is one of the key tasks of civil society organizations. CSOs sometimes initiates investigations of the reported cases, conducts research, and maintain reporting and follow-ups to make sure that any wrongdoings are disclosed, and offenders are held accountable. They support the transparency and accountability of governments and other actors by offering unbiased and independent judgment.

During the TV discussions, the role of Civil society organizations in supporting victims of human rights violations was further highlighted. There are CSOs that are involved in the advocating process on behalf of the victims. Providing legal assistance, psychosocial support, and referral services are recognized as key tasks. These groups function as a lifeline for people and communities affected by violations of human rights. Some organizations operate "hotlines" to report violations and breaches of human rights, ensuring that the public receives the required help to start over. Additionally, civil society organizations make policy-influencing arguments that impact on human rights practices in the country.

However, from the discussions and in-depth interviews, it was observed that working towards "Safeguarding Human Rights" creates some tension and conflicts between the communities and some officials due to the lack of understanding. It was also highlighted that "Human Rights" is one of the best approaches to connecting with communities and reaching diverse groups to fulfill their needs. However, in order to raise the awareness of the public, CSOs should enhance their visibility within these communities.

## **Social Action**

Social action is a strong method that CSOs utilize to influence the whole society. This was explained by the participants in different ways. As some of the organisations had led and implemented some “Social Actions” with the contribution of communities, they believe it was a successful approach to fulfill the requirement while empowering communities. It is stronger to work together with collective involvement rather than an individual commitment to alert the relevant authority. Therefore, communities must have trust and transparency among community members in order to improve solidarity and implement strong social actions, and encouragement for participation is essential. Equity, justice, trust, and transparency are the core pillars of CSOs.

Members also highlighted the Social Actions undertaken by the collection of CSOs. There are districts such as Anuradhapura and Hambanthota, that run strong NGO consortiums and promote social action. Further, government authorities, NGOs, and the private sector must broaden their perspectives and ideologies towards CSOs, and CSOs must work to change their perspectives as well. CSOs can conduct campaigns physically as well as virtually, to avoid, reject, or redesign unfair political circumstances and to implement positive and fair policy approaches.

## **Social Welfare**

Social welfare is a main segment of a CSO that the communities engage with by considering the benefits that they have been granted. Therefore, welfare schemes need to be implemented within the CSO with the consent of the members. However, the mechanisms for establishing a welfare system need to be monitored, guided, and assisted by expert external parties until the CSO is in the right capacity to operate by itself.

Developed CSOs can request to be involved in government programs, including poverty alleviation programs. As there are many government officers that are accountable and responsible for providing assistance by improving their living conditions.

CSOs need to respond immediately when their members face unexpected situations in their lives. Most of the CSOs were formed with the purpose of involving themselves in such situations, for example, in cases of deaths, to provide financial assistance, and by providing human capital when needed.

Service Provision is another main category under “welfare” that is frequently offered by CSOs. It creates a space for vulnerable populations to directly receive services including access to education, healthcare, shelter, and support for a living wage. They reach populations that may be underprivileged or marginalized. This service provision of welfare aims to fill the gaps left by government initiatives or other stakeholders. CSOs frequently lead the way in social innovation, experimenting with novel strategies to address societal issues. In order to test cutting-edge approaches and models for social welfare that can then be scaled up and copied, CSOs develop and implement pilot projects and initiatives.

Furthermore, CSOs organize mobile campaigns and other projects with the assistance of the government, non-government, public sectors, or donors, in order to provide health facilities, environmental assistance, educational needs, etc.

This was mistakenly assumed as the only or main role of CSOs by many participants that joined the discussion. In the pre-test evaluation over 50% stated that they work in “CSOs” because they believe it is a social welfare, and it results in their personal satisfaction. They expressed happiness when they work towards the betterment of society. This ideology has been identified as a challenge which will be further discussed in the next section.

## **Policy Making**

CSOs can act as pressure groups to lobby governments to identify development priorities and the upcoming needs of society, so that policies and programs are based on local needs as well as available opportunities and capacities. They can influence governments to adopt new and better approaches in addressing poverty and other societal requirements. As a result of globalization, the advancement of science and technology, influences from media and development in transportation systems create advances as well as some complex requirements. The development of education and culture also leads to multiple needs in lives. In addressing these variations and changes in society, it is expected to have amendments in the existing policies, laws, and systems.

The main discussions were with representatives from the CBOs. Even though they represent the grassroots level, they have highlighted the importance of their contribution towards "Policy Making". They also presented the significant involvement of CBOs or local CSOs in Policy development since they represent the actual needs of the community.

However, it was identified that participants above the age of 29 did not highlight the policy making role in some of the controversial issues such as "Missing person, Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights, LGBTIQ rights etc. Whereas their main discussion was framed towards environmental concerns, policies that limit the scope of CSOs and local governance.

## **Social Empowerment**

Empowering communities is important to keep CSOs functioning and running smoothly. It is not an easy task for communities with different ideologies and perspectives to work together for social cohesion.

Empowerment can be explained as empowering people to have their power, equal rights, confidence, and respect in their own communities, on an individual basis and as a community. It is a must to improve the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of the communities so that they are confident to face challenges and threats and speak up for injustices. From the in-depth interviews, it was identified that many CSO representatives were on the path of understanding social empowerment and differentiating it from social welfare. It was mentioned by the CSO officials that it is difficult to explain the concept and importance to the beneficiaries as they are used to being dependent and being in a social welfare state rather than experimenting with their own strengths.

A CSO is an organization of empowerment on a collective level, especially towards the marginalized segments, to obtain equal access to education, welfare, assets, relevant resources, and economic opportunities. CSO's main goal is to assist those who are lacking accessibility to obtain a sense of identity, community, and well-being so they will be able to succeed without being eliminated from society because of their lack of accessibility.

## **Capacity Development**

People develop their own strengths and weaknesses, of which their capacities will be varied according to them. There are instances where people need to further improve their capacities in order to reach their expectations. This process of strengthening a person's or a group's capabilities, knowledge, skills, and resources to successfully meet their own requirements is defined as capacity building and many types of CSOs contribute to these capacity developments. This capacity enhancement can be for psychosocial needs, technical expertise, vocational communication, or any theoretical concepts. The following are some examples for which CSOs provide capacity building:

Training and skill development:

CSOs offer workshops and training programs to communities so that they can acquire the necessary information and skills. The development of entrepreneurial skills, leadership and management abilities, financial literacy, and other transferable talents that enable people to enhance their standard of living and gain independence are some of the examples of these.

Education and Awareness:

CSOs work to increase knowledge and understanding among local residents, with a particular emphasis on topics like sustainable development, social justice, human rights, and the environment. To make sure community members have access, they run instructional programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns.

## **Advocacy**

The term 'Advocacy' emphasizes the representation of people who are unable to represent themselves and CSOs play a major role in it. CSOs play a two-way role to convey their issues for the relevant authorities on behalf of the group of people as well as convey messages to the communities regarding rules, regulations, policies etc. CSOs assist in providing legal assistance whenever needed to protect the rights of their communities and fight for justice.

Apart from the above key roles of CSOs, with regard to the radio programs conducted with the CSO representatives of Matara which highlighted that 'accepting ethnicities and filling gaps between all ethnicities' as a major role of CSOs. This can be derived from their own provincial experience, which is an essential duty for a developed nation. Further, they also stated that CSOs ought to work in areas that have been ignored by the state. For this fact, they have come up with examples of distinct groups in society, including indigenous people, the state sector, refugees, and the most vulnerable groups that are being discriminated against.

Moreover, the Monaragala group has shared their focus on the 'enhancement of knowledge on the legal system' by stating the low legal literacy of their own communities. They also consider 'strong political knowledge or awareness' as an integral part of CSOs establishment in communities, which contradicts common party politics. They strongly believe that communities with strong political literacy may make better decisions for the well-being of their own generations. Similarly, the Anuradhapura group has also shared their community's deficiencies in the legal system and the problems they are facing, such as human rights violations, trafficking, etc.

## Challenges

The following chart illustrates the gathered information on the views of the groups on the challenges faced by CSOs. The majority of participants have reported four main difficulties, including negative community attitudes, low financial funds, low government support, and low community participation. These can be explained as timely challenges facing the CSOs due to the prevailing political instability and economic crisis in the country. Community attitudes and participation are greatly influenced by the promotions of media and social media. Parallely, CSOs also have a major responsibility for developing community trust and relationships in the initial stages of the project cycle.

Under the challenge of 'low government support', participants have mentioned the "contradiction of project objectives with the provincial plan' as a special statement.

Data from the group presentation and radio programmes could be categories as follows.

|   | ANU | BADU | HAMB | KANDY | MATH | GALLE | MON |
|---|-----|------|------|-------|------|-------|-----|
| 1. Low community participation  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 2. Negative community attitudes towards CSOs                                    |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 3. Lack of Financial funds  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 4. Political influence  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 5. Insufficient payments/salaries for profession                                |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 6. Limited time   |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 7. Low government support   |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 8. Community's dependency attitude  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 9. Low technological knowledge / infrastructure of community                    |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 10. Low media support   |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 11. Inadequate knowledge of the staff on technology, language and communication |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 12. Country's economic, political and pandemic challenge                        |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 13. Competition among CSOs  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 14. Inadequate staff appreciation   |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 15. Several CSOs working for the same community                                 |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 16. Religious and cultural challenges   |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 17. Partner organizations inadequate support/negative perspectives              |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 18. Need of adaptation to government regulation in project implementation       |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 19. Leadership and management challenges in the organization                    |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 20. Contradiction of project goals with community's real needs                  |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |
| 21. Communication problems between communities and CSOs                         |     |      |      |       |      |       |     |

According to table 6, which was prepared by the group discussions, poster presentations and the radio presentations, members of the CSOs and NGOs have challenges within their organization itself.

- **Lack of political support**

This can be discussed in different forms. Changes in the political environment within a country leads to much difficulties for the CSOs to implement their projects. Governments also come up with new procedures, laws, regulations with the changes of the government, ministries etc. This limits the capacity of CSOs. Some CSOs also fail to comply with the required instructions.

Additionally, influence by the government and government institutes limit freedom of assembly/association, right to speech and many other social actions and approaches conducted by CSOs.

- **Limited Funds and resources**

As any other organization, CSOs also require funds to operate. More significantly, CSOs, CBOs, NGOs are nonprofit organisations and they do not invest financially to gain income regularly. Whereas to keep their operations running, they rely on grants, contributions, and fundraising activities. Financial support for CSOs were provided by the donors and other organizations, via fund raisings efforts by the CSOs or else through government grants. Financial limitations are the main worry for CSOs. The crucial issue that most of CSOs are facing is the lack of financial assistance and resources.

Having adequate funds or sustainability of funding sources is a frequent struggle. Occasionally, donors change their goals, priorities, and scope of project areas which could cause funding swings and uncertainties. Additionally, it might be difficult for smaller or less established groups to obtain financial support due to the severe competition among CSOs for few resources. These organizations' long-term planning and sustainability are hampered by their financial volatility, which forces them to focus their efforts away from their fundamental missions in favor of ongoing fund-raising.

It was common among all the CSOs, irrespective of the size of the organization, nature of work and number of years in the field; they have all struggle with “sustainable financial resources.”

It was observed that there are a few root causes behind this challenge;-

- Not having sustainable and accessible funding sources
- Relying on one funding source
- Lack of knowledge of available funding opportunities
- Lack of technical knowledge in requesting funds
- Lack of communication skills
- Government restrictions or special procedures
- High Competition
- Failure to establish transparency and accountability

Followings are some of the experiences shared by participants.

This CSO runs a Montessori for children and an after school helping center for low-income families free of charge, within their GN division. They also supply breakfast and lunch for the children.

*Q: How do you cover your finances for the organizations and run the pre-school and after-school class centers?*

*Answer 1 by Participant 1 "Currently, our preschool is being funded by a Catholic parish." Thi Catholic pastor contacts the well-wishers and asks them to donate some funds in order to run the school. Some well-wishers from the community also donate dry rations, stationery, and food for the children and the Montessori. Lack of awareness of the available funding*

*Answer 2 by Participant 2: "Earlier we offered 2 meals per day with a desert for the kids; we were also able to provide eggs, chicken, and fish where necessary, but now we can't offer both. We were used to getting funded by an international organization, and with the COVID pandemic, it has been stopped. Now we get only limited funding.*

*Q2: Have you tried applying for new funding opportunities and any thoughts of consistency of payments in the future?"*

*A by P2 We know that we are at risk; we wrote to a few business organizations in our area. By then, we had received some donations for the meals. Therefore, we have to continue our requests for them from the community.*

This depicts the lack of preparedness and lack of awareness on sustainable financial sources which then limits their operations. According to their plan, the main target is to fulfill their daily requirements and provide what they can for society. It demonstrates that they are not prepared for long-term financial solutions.

- **Failure to establish transparency and accountability.**

This was also identified by the participants. They accepted that there are some organisations within their communities and network that have failed to maintain the transparency of their work and projects. Members highlighted that those organizations do not keep a proper track record of their finance and programme outcomes. As a result, communities refuse and reject the presence of these organizations and projects. Further, the public occasionally tends to generalize it to all CSOs, which leads to trust issues in the community.

Furthermore, due to similar incidents, donors have reconsidered granting funds due to the issues in transparency. As a result, some funding organisations impose many restrictions and procedures, which some small-scale organizations are not able to satisfy.

The following examples emphasizes, that it is a common fact that the lack of trustworthiness towards civil society organizations is a main challenge, and due to previous actions and fake promises, people have been influenced to doubt these organizations. Further, it is important to work with accountability and transparency in order to gain trustworthiness and recognition from community members and have strong and active civil society organizations.

*Q: Why do people have a negative impression of civil society organizations?*

*A1: "To obtain trust and recognition, it is important to provide the background of the civil organizations, including their visions and missions. Also, when appointing leaders, it is important to appoint exemplary and educated leaders. Also registered as a community-based organization, establishing transparency and accountability also helps to gain the trust of the community. Keeping financial records and presenting those to society also supports obtaining recognition and trust."*

*Representative Women in Need; Matara District*

*A2: "Working without transparency by previous civil societies and the fake promises are the main reasons that community has doubts on civil organizations even though the organization has done more fruitful works"*

*Representative District center Sarvodaya: Hambantota*

*A3: "Lack of awareness of the community due to the lack of knowledge. And it is important to make communities aware that we have united the community through inter religion communities to make them collaborative."*

*Representative Monaragala District*

*A4: "We need to raise awareness on the role of CSO's, the objectives, and background of the project. And CSOs have to work with transparency to gain trust and recognition from the society. CSO's does not mean obtaining signatures of photographs but we need to work for the community and without eliminating the negative impressions of the public, it will be difficult to work."*

*Representative Kandy District*

### **Lack of public engagement**

This is regarding the community's support and participation in CSOs' activities and initiatives. As CSOs are working for the communities, it is important to ensure that they work with these communities. However, it is challenging for CSOs to raise awareness, mobilize funding, and effectively promote social change while the general public is disengaged. The lack of active public engagement in Sri Lanka is caused by multiple reasons such as a lack of knowledge and comprehension of the functions and significance of CSOs. Furthermore, it could be due to the mismatches between the expectations of the communities and the method of implementation CSOs provide, which leads to the loss of expectations. It's possible that many individuals are unaware of the work conducted by these groups or the specific problems they deal with. The capacity of CSOs to garner support and participation from the public is hampered due to this lack of understanding.

Participants also mentioned that sometimes the CSOs inability in being creative with communicating about their projects is another reason for this issue. Especially due to digitization, social media platforms, and innovative approaches, it should be a priority for CSOs to be more creative in reaching out to the public and increasing their level of participation. It was also emphasized that the above approaches are very important in gathering youth participation.

## Other points

It is important to develop the consciousness of the community members and provide awareness regarding the objectives, visions, and missions of these organizations and their purposes, in order for the community to be involved with these organizations. Therefore, these organizations can work for the public through a collaborative approach. The unity of the community members assists in establishing strong civil society organizations that work for the community by addressing their real needs and excluding any biases.

In the radio interview, Team Hambanthota shared their own provincial challenge of the 'human-elephant struggle,' which developed through the gradual deforestation by mankind. They further explained the obstacles facing them as a result of this challenging situation, which has impacted community participation and project implementation. Increased income taxes by the current government have had an impact on two-thirds of today's society. Participants have explained their financial difficulties further and mentioned that the prevailing income tax system has worsened their challenges.

Group Monaragala views the 'senior staff' of CSOs as a main challenge, as they limit opportunities for youths. They have also mentioned how the low ICT literacy of these groups has delayed the project's development in the long run. Furthermore, the limited resources including funds, relevant equipment, manpower, or capital remain as a barrier for the CSOs to provide their services to the communities.

|   | Anuradhapura | Badulla | Hambantota | Kandy | Matara | Galle | Monaragala |
|---|--------------|---------|------------|-------|--------|-------|------------|
| Implementing projects with government cooperation                                       |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Government registration and recognition   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Workshops for CSOs & communities on knowledge enhancement                               |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Transparency for financial Management   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Providing financial and non-financial aids to CSOs                                      |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Enhancement of relationship between communities and CSOs through media and social media |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Community empowerment   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Developing a common network among all CSOs  |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |
| Strong constitution and action plan   |              |         |            |       |        |       |            |

Almost all the groups have reported 'workshops for CSOs and communities on knowledge enhancement' as a main solution for the presented challenges. These participants have suggested for workshops to be conducted in areas of fund development, technology, monitoring, evaluation and etc. Parallely, transparency for financial management and provision of financial and non-financial aid was reported as the second major suggestion.

The radio programs also provided solutions for the above-mentioned challenging situations. Team Galle, Kandy, and Badulla mentioned of a 'common network/system for CSO and government' which might provide shared resources, knowledge, and better engagement opportunities for communities. Team Monaragala sees a common network for all CSOs, even at the provincial level, may lead to effective interventions.

'Mobile Journalism' is one of the significant suggestions shared by the Galle team for the media promotions. They have further stated that ensuring the communities are aware through media/social media will improve community participation and establish strong relationships.

Developing the "second line" of leadership can be identified as another key suggestion by the groups of Galle, Kandy, and Badulla. This explains that equipping the next level of leaders to undertake leadership of the organization when necessary. This also helps to provide extra support and additional guidance for a better decision-making process. They have also shared the importance of youth empowerment for the sustainability of CSOs in Sri Lanka.

Further elaboration of the solutions shared by participants have been explained below.

### **Networking & Partnering**

As stated in the above chapters, many districts already operate an "NGO Consortium", where they attempt to find approaches and answers from a common platform. Having strong networking contacts among the CSOs and NGOs within the district/ island wide is very important for effective delivery. This minimizes hardship in finding sources for knowledge and experience sharing. A third person view can be also obtained through networking. However, it is also important to highlight that beneficiaries' privacy should be protected while they are working with external parties.

*"in need of a proper plan and mechanism within the civil society to collaborate with the public and work for the people. Civil societies, the responsibility is in our hands to eliminate the doubts of the people, forget the past and work with new ideas, because civil societies are fundamental for the development of the country."*

*Representative: Task force for biodiversity conservation: Hambantota*

When considering the challenges faced by CSO's, establishing better networking amongst CSO's provides better opportunities and assists in avoiding any weaknesses as well. CSO's also need to have planning and strategies developed by their own for the public to be involved.

*"Civil societies also work individually, and therefore there is no coordination amongst them as well. Also, civil societies may do the same event in the same district to achieve the same objectives, which may cause huge financial misuse and also have limited benefits for the community members. Therefore, it is important for civil societies to have better coordination and unity among those who provide effective services to society. Further, if civil societies work in solitary to achieve their own goals and are eventually recognized as fraud organizations, the community will suspect that all civil organizations are frauds."*

*Representative Monaragala*

*“Civil societies also work individually, and therefore there is no coordination amongst them as well. Also, civil societies may do the same event in the same district to achieve the same objectives, which may cause huge financial misuse and also have limited benefits for the community members. Therefore, it is important for civil societies to have better coordination and unity among those who provide effective services to society. Further, if civil societies work in solitary to achieve their own goals and are eventually recognized as fraud organizations, the community will suspect that all civil organizations are frauds.”*

*Representative Monaragala*

*Civil society networks assists the newly formed small-scale CSOs to not fall apart, as these small-scale organizations may be unable to move forward when implementing processes because they started at a smaller level. If these organizations can work collaboratively with other organizations and other CSOs, they can gain experience, and the impact is minimal for them, without falling apart.*

*Sarvodaya: Badulla District*

Further, it is significantly important to establish coordinating mechanisms and networking patterns within the CSO's to reduce any financial waste by allocating money for the same projects which is less beneficial for the community members. Working towards different projects by coordinating together with other CSOs will help to establish a holistic improvement of the communities. Additionally, it will be more effective for the newly formed CSO's to gain experience by working with other CSO's. By assessing the above ideas of the representatives, collaboration is a core element for the CSOs in working for the public.

Also, by considering other explanations on the importance of coordination among CSO's, the below statement explains that it is important to gain government and other regulatory bodies recognitions to reduce the negative impressions of the CSOs. It was suggested to be implemented as a monitoring mechanism for the coordination of CSOs.

*“It develops the identity of the CSOs, obtains government and regulatory recognition, and provides opportunities for resource distribution. Not only that, but it also helps to achieve the common goals and tasks as a result of a positive involvement, and as a result of that, the negative impression towards the CSOs within the government will be reduced, and it will also help to gain recognition. And the CSO association will be monitored under the direct supervision of the main administrative officer of the Kandy district for transparency, accountability, and responsibilities.*

Partnering with other CSOs, private sector entities and public institutes provides more opportunities for organisations that require technical support, skills support and financial support etc. This assists organisations in the following ways; -

- Proposal Development
- Overcome language difficulties
- More sustainable financial opportunities
- Capacity Development

## **Collaboration with the government institutes**

When considering government assistance for CSOs, it was identified that government organizations have provided their services whenever needed to conduct the certain sessions as stated by a representative of Smile Lanka Organization. And there has not been any hesitation on obtaining government assistance for their projects. However, in comparison to the North central province, it was identified that the CSOs have coordinated with government organizations, yet they are expecting government mediation for their CSO due to the lack of educated members within their CSO . As for the middle-aged categories represented by the CSOs, they are lacking the processes and procedures of the Government and it is important to have government assistance in such case scenarios for the CSO's to function effectively. Following examples elaborates this further.

## **Collaboration with the government institutes**

In assessing all the explanations of the representatives from different districts, it was identified that the media's involvement in publicizing these CSOs is severely lacking. Due to commercialization and financially focused agendas, there are high media requirements that CSOs are unable to fulfill due to a lack of financial capabilities. Further, it was identified that media is the main communication channel that delivers information to communities which have also built trust amongst the people Therefore, the media acquires a significant responsibility in providing accurate and true information about CSOs. Further, media involvement helps to publicize projects and events implemented by the CSOs and will assist in gaining funding opportunities for CSOs. The development of the country can be achieved through the involvement of CSOs.

*Q: Do you receive any opportunity for media publicity?*

*A1: "Actually we didn't receive any opportunity in media and we need more money to spend for publicity through media. We do not have sufficient funds as we are a small-scale organization yet we have implemented major programs. We have done our work through mobilization as a small group and if we allocated more money, we would've gained an opportunity in media. This is our first opportunity and we appreciate and believe that we will have future support mechanisms following this broadcast."*

*Representative of Ruhunu Nadee CBO*

*Q: Do you have Government assistance?*

*A1: "Government has provided significant support by providing awareness programs, workshops and camping programs for children as our organization focusses on children and we required government assistance.. Our objectives will be achieved when we receive government assistance."*

*Representative Smile Lanka organization: Hambantota*

*A2: "The civil organizations mediate with the government more than the government mediates with the civil organizations. Furthermore, civil organizations consist more of the middle age group than the younger generation, and they have difficulties coordinating due to a lack of education, coordination skills, and processes. As an example, the welfare organizations for funeral assistance are performed within the same frame, and it is important to have government officers assist them."*

*Representative from North central*

A2: "society has a negative impression on civil organizations after the eighties and people questioned those civil societies and believed that NGO's are marketing the social issues and media has certain responsibility on publicizing these issues. As it does not provide an exact meaning on the responsibility of the civil society organizations and it has not been properly circulated by the media, it enhanced the doubts of the community on civil society organizations."

*Representative Secretary Valava vam ivura ekabadda govi sanvidhaanaya*

A3; Majority of the media organizations are involved with more commercialization activities than any voluntary involvement. Therefore, it is recommended to have more voluntary involvement of the Media.

*Representative Badulla District*

A4: "Media is the main communication method of the people and it is important for media to understand this responsibility. There aren't any government or private media that publicizes the work and services that civil society organizations provide to the community. There are many programs that are conducted by our civil society to uplift the livelihood of the community and the lack of awareness developed wrong impressions on the work of CSOs. Media is one of the best methods to provide accurate and actual information to the public."

*Representative Monaragala District*

## **Public/ Community engagement events**

It was stated by many participants that they receive low participation from the communities. In order to address this issue, organisations can plan events for communities, from which they can gather participation and make them aware of their organization.

E.g.:-

- Community week- Multiple organisations providing services at one location – and people are made aware of the services provided by the CSOs (Legal Aid, Women support/ Child wellbeing, entrepreneurship/ Human Rights)
- Online events- Using media platforms such as social media, organisations either can organize online events or develop media programmes to be shared amongst different communities which present their services.
- PMN is currently implementing these approaches, by organizing and developing video stories about different issues such as; Success stories of Self Employment, Human Rights, Youth Activism, Peace and Reconciliation, and Women Empowerment.

By analyzing the above-stated solutions from the participants, it can be understood that "Increasing the visibility" of the projects and the role of CSOs is the key towards identifying many solutions for the challenges that are faced by CSOs. Increasing visibility allows the CSOs to be more accountable for the activism they conduct and are held accountable for their actions. Additionally, steps that will be taken to establish visibility can be considered as evidence for the program's implementation and success. This ensures transparency within the project as well. Both transparency and success, are key factors in gaining funds and sponsorships, which solves many challenges such as sustainability issues, lack of funding, lack of human resources and many more. Visibility will also help develop further collaborations and increase public awareness.

The above-mentioned solutions can be mainly categorized into three main sections; -

## **Management**

This section mainly covers internal (organizational) management.

- M&E interventions
- Financial management
- Solid constitutions
- Strong Action plan
- Project management
- Organisational management

## **Relationship/Collaborations**

- With the public
- Government officials/ organisations
- Other stakeholders
- Local/ National and International partners/ organisations

## **Capacity Building**

- Building the capacity of the public
- Capacity building for members of the CSO
- Communication - internal/external
- Capacity development of the stakeholders/ partners in the project

There are many important factors to consider when strengthening CSOs in society, as they play a significant role as a change agent in society.

CSOs need to be strengthened and formally established organizations as they are the communication channel between authorities and the communities. CSO representatives need to be engaged in policy formulation discussions as they are the representatives of grassroot level communities. Unless, as usually practiced, the relevant authorities will formulate policies, rules and regulations with reference to their personal interest, regardless of the people's interest.

CSO representatives are equipped to influence authorities to amend, improve, formulate or reject policies that have not addressed or provides assistance for the needs of the people. They can influence for improved quality, and effective services and resources for beneficiaries in a fair manner without any disparities or discrimination by promoting social justice, human rights and democracy.

Additionally, it is visible that the absence in consideration of CSO's by the government and other authorities results in a weaker functioning of the CSO. CSOs require assistance from the government in every aspect of their work in order to improve their services toward social development. Unfortunately, CSOs have not been recognized as a valuable segment by the government and it is essential for both parties to work together by building trust between them and eventually achieving their goals with successful outcomes.

Further development of strategies to promote and protect CSO's, improving integration from the micro level to macro levels, equity between resource and service distributions, introducing opportunities and linkages for fund sourcing, and designing and implementing long-term strategic policies will assist in ensuring sustainability for CSOs and develop a safe network to the communities. Moreover, authorities must understand the diversities of CSO's and their contributions to the economic development of the Nation.

CSOs need to improve their knowledge and skills in improving their confidence to advocate their work, discuss their issues, reflect on the impact on people from a positive and negative manner, and improve their ability to analyze policies and rules that assist authorities and have useful communities with benefits for both parties.

In some instances, CSOs need to design projects and implement them according to the donor requirements. However, when the implementation takes place, there are huge gaps between the actual needs of the community. This may be due to the special conditions in the local context, differences between the required time period, most suitable and effective methods and approaches and sometimes the utilized models. If the project does not answer the requirements of the target population and only caters to the donor requirements it will lead to a failure and stakeholder conflicts. In order to address this issue CSOs should be competent enough and powerful to convince donors of the expectations and the requirements in designing the project. Additionally, CSOs should also be accountable to the community and explain the process of the project. This directly deals with proper decision-making within the organization, having qualified staff, maintaining quality work, and partnering with necessary stakeholders. All these steps can be helpful towards protecting the rights of people and satisfying their needs.

Weakened capacities or skills will not be useful to effectively continue the CSOs' operations. Establishing partnerships with organizations, resource persons and government parties will provide opportunities for training sessions, workshops and awareness sessions to improve the capacities of the CSO.

Improving internal capacities, personal and professional development, power distributions, working with transparency and accountability, problem-solving, decision making, and leadership are the areas which need to be trained for CSOs, thereby leading to the communities placing trust on CSOs. Marginalized groups are not to be further ignored instead justice and safeguard mechanisms should be promoted to these communities.

CSOs need to invest on their capacity building in order to move forward and attract the government's interest to further engage with them and practically assist in issues. Further, CSOs should ensure transparency and accountability to citizens. And to raise their voice against corruption, strengthen the rules and initiate policies in a fair manner.

Accessibility through technology must be further improved within CSOs, in order to adapt to the global trends in the most effective and accurate manner. It further assists to improve the transparency of CSOs, and the government needs to take this matter into their consideration as CSOs should not resort to function in old ways but with new techniques and tools.

Utilizing social media, email and other networks helps to update and improve the CSO's adaptation to the emerging global trends. Hence changing the public perception of CSOs, so that anyone can be involved without any waste of time.

## 5. Limitations

### a. Non-conventional data collection method

This study was conducted using a mixed method. However, as stated in the previous chapter, this did not follow the formal data collection methods such as questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions. As substitutes, the research team studied and collected data obtained through pretest and posttest questionnaires, observations, and radio programs. And its questions and answers were discussed as the findings of "Focus Group Discussions". Additionally, semi-structured interviews were also conducted.

### b. Lack of understanding of the professional role of a CSO

When conducting the interviews, as well as radio programs, it was observed that some of the participants had a lack of understanding on the "role of CSOs." As a result, some of the answers presented by the participants were not relevant to the posed questions.

### c. Time constraints

Radio programs were designed for 30 minutes, and this study report takes its findings similar to a focused group discussion with time limitations. The Q&A session was limited, and it was followed to a structure.

### d. Selection of the participants

Participants for the interviews and radio programs were the same and were selected from the participants of the one-day program. And the respective organizations have pre-selected their representatives for the day. For the purposes of data collection, the research team had to find participants from the pre-selected list, which then limited the selection options.

The participants to the group discussions, presentations, and radio programs were repetitive to an extent.

### e. Language disparity

This was conducted in 7 districts where the Sinhala language was prominent and ethnic representation was majority Sinhalese. Even though there were a few Tamil-speaking participants to the study, they conversed in Sinhala, and the Sinhala community was the dominant ethnicity in their residing locations. Hence, the northern and eastern locations of the country were not reflected, and this study does not specifically address their issues. Organizations in these two locations mainly work with war-affected communities (Human Rights, missing persons, development, peace, and reconciliation) as a result, there could be more specific issues for these communities.

## 6. Recommendation

- Lack of understanding on the role of civil society organizations

As presented in the data analysis and the discussion, many members that have been working as volunteers or paid employees in CSOs have a misunderstanding of the role they are supposed to play; it was commonly believed that they should provide goods and services for the public rather than empower the communities. Further it was believed that social service is only the provision of social welfare.

Therefore, it is recommended to provide sufficient training for capacity building and professional development training for members of CSOs.

- Geographical variation

As stated in the previous chapter, ethnic and language representation can be focused on any future research. This can be done, specifically, in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Further, another study could be conducted in the same 7 districts but with more focus on 'Tamil-speaking' representation.

- Financial challenges faced by organizations; "Sustainable and Accessible" finance opportunities.

It is common among many CBOs, or local NGOs, that they are not financially stable to implement projects. As per their thoughts, organizations cannot operate in the long term due to the financial difficulty of implementing projects and maintaining the transitional cost.

As a root cause, it was observed that many organizations only depend on the grants or sponsorships that are directly funded to their organizations rather than applying to other possible grant opportunities. It is recommended to organize programs that develop their capacity in sourcing new funding opportunities and developing their technical skills in applying for grants. This can be conducted as training sessions or experience-sharing sessions.

- Lack of technical knowledge in proposal writing or other creative form for requesting grants

It is recommended to convene a discussion at a common place and platform where different CSOs working within the same GN Division/DS Division, explains their role and mandate to the community, and present them to the community leaders or members (can be organized by the NGO consortium). Further, an experience or knowledge sharing platform/center can be established.

- Attitudinal changes

As previously highlighted, it was common among many participants in believing that they are involved in voluntary work as a social service and for their own satisfaction, which needs to be changed immediately. In order to maintain professional qualities and a professional environment, it is important to be re-organized as a profession that empowers communities. Aiming for the beneficiaries to be independent should be the final outcome, so they can survive independently and satisfy their needs. In order to achieve this outcome, it's important to approach them professionally rather than just assisting them.

- Broadening the sample size and diversifying the data collection methods

As stated in the above chapters, data collection in this study report was not conducted through conventional methods. It is recommended to utilize formal data collection methods for future studies.

## 7. Conclusions

CSOs, NGOs, and CBOs—all types of community organizations in Sri Lanka—have contributed their best of standards towards the development of society whilst ensuring that the voice of all sectors/ communities are heard, and their rights are protected. Irrespective of the diversity of their fields, all organizations have worked significantly to uplift societies by improving their relationships amongst multi-stakeholders.

In this report, it was observed that in order to improve the public's understanding of CSOs, it is important to understand their role and the major challenges they face. This assists the public to understand the gaps or delays in services provided by the CSOs, and their expectations.

The data that was mainly sourced from the interviews and group discussion with the participants through the one-day awareness programs depicted that CSOs mainly executes roles such as advocating, social activism, research, capacity strengthening, welfare facilities, and being watchdogs of societies. In the process of ensuring equality, reaching vulnerable groups, and fulfilling the requirements of the needy, CSOs face multiple internal and external challenges such as funding issues, unsatisfactory relationships between the communities, lack of communication, lack of political support, etc. Irrespective of the NGOs' capacity and years of experience in the field, they occasionally face numerous challenges. Amongst them, some challenges are inevitable and may be beyond control of the organization, whilst the remaining could be addressed, mitigated, and resolved through feasible actions such as networking, capacity building, policy review, transition of power, and maintaining ethics and values in their organizations.

Managing the organization and fund-raising sources are vital for the development and sustainability of the organization. In order to provide quality service to communities, CSOs may have to consider restructuring their strategies. It's also important that organizations set priority in providing an open space for the needs and suggestions of their members and employees.

Due to the lack of understanding of the above background information, it may lead to difficulties in engaging with the public for their own requirements and development. Therefore, this report, which emphasizes the role of CSOs, along with the challenges and solutions that may be utilized by CSOs, it additionally supports in raising public awareness. This report presents the potential steps that CSOs can undertake, with the support of the public, to overcome the challenges and misunderstandings. This forms stronger relationships and increased awareness amongst the public on the role of CSOs, which can eventually prove to be efficient and effective.

Therefore, organizing events with public participation, reporting and publicizing the activities and programmes led by CSOs with evidence through social media approaches, and increasing public accountability for these programmes can support in enhancing community engagement. As the main objective of this study is to increase public awareness of CSOs.



[www.prathibamedia.org](http://www.prathibamedia.org) | [www.cojo.lk](http://www.cojo.lk) | [www.realvoice.lk](http://www.realvoice.lk)

 [pmn.srilanka@gmail.com](mailto:pmn.srilanka@gmail.com)

 [prathiba.media](https://www.facebook.com/prathiba.media)

 [@media\\_pmn](https://twitter.com/@media_pmn)

 [prathibamedia](https://www.instagram.com/prathibamedia)

 [COTV - Community Television](https://www.youtube.com/COTV-CommunityTelevision)