

NO TO GENDER VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA

A rights-based approach to increasing safety
and equality for women and girls



Canada

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DEVELOPINGWORLDCONNECTIONS

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With multi-year funding from Global Affairs Canada, Developing World Connections (DWC) is poised to implement a new program, “No to Gender Violence in Sri Lanka”, that will assist in a country-wide effort to effect meaningful change in the values and practices toward gender equality and sexual gender-based violence.

DWC’s specific role is to improve status and increase safety for women and girls in three districts of Sri Lanka: Hambantota, Batticaloa and Kilinochchi. Two of these districts were heavily impacted by civil war, which ended in May 2009 leaving many lingering effects, among them, PTSD and higher rates of gender-based violence than average.

BACKGROUND

Gender stereotypes prevail and the concept of male supremacy persists in Sri Lanka. It is considered normal for men to be dominant and maintain power and control. Cultural norms give more power to men over women and set lines of conduct where women and men have different and unequal access to and control over resources. Gender-based violence in Sri Lanka is pervasive, cutting across class, race, ethnicity and religion.

A U.N. report says more than 60 percent of women across Sri Lanka are victims of domestic violence. Girls and women face gender-based violence in forms like child marriage, female genital mutilation (in some parts of the country), trafficking for

sex, physical punishment, sexual, emotional or psychological violence.

Alcohol and drug abuse are rampant, and violence is especially prevalent in areas most affected by the civil war. In rural areas where employment opportunities for women and girls are limited. Women and girls are often locked into financial dependence on husbands and fathers. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified. Security, health and money worries heighten tensions and are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.

Incidences of gender violence are drastically under-reported, or not taken seriously and poorly investigated by authorities. To a large extent, gender violence is essentially invisible, unrecognized by the government and accepted by society.

With the passing of Sri Lanka’s “Domestic Violence Act” in 2005, there has been a rising awareness of the issue. However, the recognition of gender-based violence, as a power imbalance, is yet to be commonly accepted.

In 2018, a National Action Plan was created to address gender violence with all levels of government obligated to carry out specific goals. However, more adequate training and resources are required in order for this National Action Plan to be effective.



TRAINING

Training is at the heart of DWC's "No to Gender Violence in Sri Lanka" program and is the main mechanism leading to safer women and girls.

This training will provide more effective leadership for those working to implement the National Action Plan. This includes representatives of the Ministry of Provincial Councils, Women's Federations, Youth Caucuses, Local Government, NGOs, and officers working at a village

Women's Federations represent the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs at the local level and play a key role in the counsel and support of abuse victims. By strengthening their professional capabilities and improving their management processes with practical training, they can develop and implement an operational plan that better supports victims in the three districts.

Priority topics include early marriage and child mothers; research on root causes violence in a post-war context, cybercrime, overcoming misconceptions, and reducing backlash to gender equality.

Canadian volunteers, including specialized social and youth workers will work with Sri Lankan counterparts to bring international perspectives, new approaches and skills to the project.

Comprehensive values-changing leadership training will sensitize government officials at the village, Division and District level and offer practical measures to prevent, manage and work to eliminate gender violence and improve the safety of youth and adults in the three districts.

Training for civil society organizations will build a strong and inclusive movement with motivation to educate the public, provide victim-sensitive justice, medical and rehabilitation services, and expand income support programs.

Practical training for educators will help them to deal with bullying, ensure a safe environment and provide sexual and reproductive health training for youth.



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CURRICULUM

Listening and learning from a variety of voices, in particular women and girls, will inform the development of the program and its training material. The program will begin with a comprehensive workshop which brings together training and curriculum experts from both Sri Lanka and Canada to create the training approach for the program.

The delivery of the curriculum will take into consideration the complex and sensitive nature of the subject. A culturally sensitive approach for different audiences will ensure that while training results in a shift in values and attitudes, it is delivered in a way that is not threatening or shaming.

WOMEN AND GIRLS AS BENEFICIARIES

While victimized, unsafe women are impoverished no matter their income level, this program has been designed to work among the poor in three districts in the country.

Providing practical help to victims to meet their urgent needs is an important element of the program. For women and girls in unsafe situations, or to mitigate their risks of violence, emergency services like transport to hospital, medicine, food

and hygiene products, plus referrals to relevant counselling and legal aid resources will be provided.

Women and girls in each of the districts will receive training and awareness-raising that opens their eyes to unequal gender roles, traditions that hold them back, and self-talk that accepts that they are inferior to men. Stronger supports will help to gain more control over their lives and shift unconscious messages from their upbringing, education, and life experiences.

MEN AND BOYS AS BENEFICIARIES

Shifting societal values means being able to win over others on the value of gender equality and that violence in whatever form is not tolerated. Overall, this program targets nearly 50% men and boys as beneficiaries. The desire to bring violence out of the private sphere and to achieve behavioural change must actively engage men.

As more women are empowered and equipped to oppose and protect themselves from abuse, potential resistance is a reality. By challenging underlying power structures of traditional males, many who consider gender violence a private matter, there is the possibility of backlash that can result in an increased number of reported violent acts.





To counter this, local NGOs will engage men in violence prevention training. Using a human rights-based approach, concepts will be introduced that challenge gender stereotypes and cultural values, redefine concepts of masculinity, and offer advice on how to improve relationships through non-violent conflict resolution.

The training material will be tailored to meet the men where they are at and move them along a continuum ranging from overtly hostile, to indifferent, all the way to active allies. Awareness-raising activities will be emphasized rather than a lecture format. This will include problem-based learning, role plays, case studies, and group work. Involvement and interactive discussion will become an outlet for men to share their personal experiences.

YOUTH AS BENEFICIARIES

Youth make up nearly a quarter of Sri Lanka's population. The program will harness the energy, idealism and creativity of youth activists to act as change agents amongst their peers. Effort will be made to integrate young men into every output of youth programming.

The potential to reach large youth audiences through social media campaigns will be used as a powerful instrument in promoting gender equality messaging. There will be

opportunities for youth to implement their own ideas to challenge social values. This will include street dramas, visual arts, music, competitions, scholarships, and prizes. Workshops on conflict management, organizational administration, social media and videography will round out youth training sessions.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS BENEFICIARIES

Civil society organizations are on the frontline of Sri Lanka's fight for gender equality. The project will seek to strengthen and equip these organizations to better serve their beneficiaries and achieve long-term objectives of the program.

COMMUNICATING OUR IMPACT

Ultimately, safer and more secure girls and women will lead more productive lives. As they are empowered to exercise their human right to personal security, they will be able to claim a greater measure of equality in society.

Stories from the field will communicate the human impact of the project. Statistical changes in key indicators, such as perceived safety of women and girls, will allow us to measure the program's impact.

Showcasing the program's achievements as sustainable with the potential to be replicated in other locations.

Alleviating poverty, creating social justice and engaging
people to discover the things that connect us all.

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