

The Women's Development Centre

NEWSLETTER 2018



Creating Synergies for Change



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A Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friends and Partners,

First of all, I take this opportunity to greet you on behalf of the Board of Directors, the Management team and the Staff of WDC to wish you all the best for the season and the soon approaching New Year.

Another year has gone by, and I am happy to say that we have contributed inexhaustibly toward the 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals through inclusive community development approaches where we have reached many goals especially involving women, youth and children; however, we have a long way to go.

It has not been an easy journey for us as we faced many major obstacles and challenges in Sri Lanka during this year, with conflict situations arising in Kandy during the month of March. Though the one-third quota for women political participation was introduced during the provincial council elections, our expectations did not materialise due to issues in implementing it. In addition, the major political post October 26th situation where the country encountered a historical unconstitutional fiasco; hindered our work in building governance, inclusion and a peace through a rights based perspective to build a sustainable and equal society.

Despite the hopeless and gloomy situations, we were able to make a difference through increased women participation in various platforms where women stood strong and vigilant utilizing the tools they know best to become change agents within their society and to bring issues at national level for advocacy and policy change.

We present to you some of the highlights of WDC's achievements in the year 2018. Through what we have achieved this past year, we strongly believe we have the endurance to overcome all barriers and become sustainable change agents in building a just and secure society for all.

While wishing you again for the festive season, I take this opportunity to thank you all for the continuous blessing and support rendered towards the WDC and for being a part of our journey.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sashi Stephen".

Sashi Stephen
Executive Director
Women's Development Centre

Our Vision

WDC's vision is to be a leading role model creating a dignified society, serving socially challenged women and children of Sri Lanka.

Our Mission

WDC's mission is to be a socially accountable and sustainable mediator. By intervening through creative, innovative and effective change initiatives, WDC strives to encourage self-reliance and promote equal opportunities for at risk and vulnerable women, youth, and children with/without disabilities. Our organization advocates on a rights based 'bottom-up' approach that is led and supported by a professional team of activists and local networks, that work at local and national level.

Core Values

- To create a society where women and persons with special needs have equal opportunity, access to resources and control over their lives
- To ensure the rights of every individual is protected, practiced and upheld
- To provide a holistic support system for women and girls who have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence
- To work towards a society free from violence against women
- To ensure good governance and democracy through political participation of women within Sri Lanka

Our Strategies

Prevention

- Community Mobilization
- Early intervention/rehabilitation
- Building knowledge and awareness
- Rights Education
- Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR)
- HIV/AIDS & other communicable diseases

Intervention

- Crisis Intervention Centre
- Family and legal counseling
- Legal support
- Community Based Rehabilitation
- Economic empowerment
- Network of Women
- Resource centre

Advocacy

- Campaigning and lobbying for rights
- Women leadership in political participation
- Becoming change agents
- Networking with like minded organisations
- Creating links with government/INGO/NGO structures

Our Programmes

1. Community Development (CD) through mobilization
2. Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) of persons with disabilities
3. Crisis Intervention for survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)
4. Network of Women (NoW)
5. Three social enterprise



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The CBR Programme Supported by RYTHM Foundation

The Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Programme of the Women's Development Centre has enhanced its activities and delivered productive services to its right holders throughout the past 30 years. Initiated as a support for mothers of children with special needs, the CBR has continued to expand its reach and services over the years, creating opportunities and improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities. WDC's role as a resource provider and training organisation has grown within the past year, gradually reaching the strategic objectives of the organisation.

Engaged in a continuous process deriving benefits from lessons learnt, the WDC builds on the already established work structures as well as applicable experiences to operate 7 CBR centres and 3 Integrated units, Special Education Units (SEU) and the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) for youth. The concept of transferring ownership of the CBR centres to the community has received favourable responses from active participation and support of the community by contribution of time, and other resourceful capacities while dealing with state structures, issues pertaining to financial constraints and other drawbacks.

Through networking with state and non-state institutions and other stakeholders in relevance to the wellbeing of children at the CBR centres, the WDC has established links with several departments and institutions in the health, education and social service sectors. Particularly the Neurology Unit of the General Hospital – Peradeniya, ENT clinic of the General Hospital – Kandy and the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) clinic at Sirimavo Bandaranaike Children's Hospital.

The established referral mechanism functions as a two-way process where children from CBR centres are directed to relevant clinics and medical officers for specific rehabilitation services.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR)

TRAINING

The CBR training centre located in Ampitiya, Kandy runs a Vocational Training unit and a hostel for children and youth with special needs. Our goal is to promote independence through education and skills development in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disabilities. Youth above the age of 15 years receive comprehensive training on carpentry, candle making, sewing, rug weaving, cement products, handicrafts as well as home gardening. Trainings are conducted daily by hearing impaired/deaf instructors who have been trained by WDC over the past years. In order to provide business, marketing and training/skills the production centre currently manufactures candles, paper bags, ekel brooms, rugs, cement pots, and coconut spoons to market at the VTC and WDC's Stree social enterprise store located in Peradeniya road. The products are also showcased during annual exhibitions held at the Kandy City Centre (KCC) and various other institutions.



SAHANA HOSTEL

The Sahana Hostel in Ampitiya is home to 32 young girls and boys who are identified as slow learners. The hostel is equipped in providing their basic needs of shelter, food and protection and is run with the help and support of the local community, students from local and international institutions as well as well-wishers. Meals for the children are supplied through community contributions, which has eased the managing of funding for other extracurricular activities for the children. In addition, they attend the Mahinda Special Education school located in close proximity. The children are taught living skills in order to encourage their independence, bringing them a few steps closer towards ensuring inclusiveness and equality within society.

AWARDS RECEIVED THIS YEAR:

- Sujith Jayawardana and Sachitra Sewwandi, two trainees won the 1st and 2nd places at a dancing competition organized by the National Youth Council, putting them straight through to the national level dance competitions.
- At the district level sports meet organized by the Department of Social Services, Kawinda Rajasinghe was able to secure 2nd place at the 100m running event.
- Skills training instructor of the VTC won a special skills award by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce at the competition for new designers.
- Students and trainees at the VTC participated in celebrating the international day for persons with disabilities at the Department of Probations and the Department of Education where they received tokens worth Rs. 21,000.
- This year the center was awarded 2nd place for the best hostels in the central province stepping up from 3rd place in the year 2017.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Fifteen trained individuals at VTC are currently employed, from which two are being trained while working at the Stree café as waiters, attending to customers and focusing on customer service responsibilities. Ten work in the apparel industry and three others remain self-employed.

SOCIAL INCLUSION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

In order to raise community awareness on disability rights, the WDC organizes various events and functions. The annual sale at the Kandy City Centre (KCC) functions during the 16 days of Perahera providing an opportunity for WDC's special needs trainees as well as girls from the production unit at the shelter to showcase their skills and talents. Furniture and handicrafts handmade by the youth were on sale at a specially assigned stall from the 11th – 26th of August 2018. The items on sale had an undeniable demand by both local and foreign customers. Many customers contributed towards the "Hand to Hand" fund of the CBR programme while many others appreciated the good work carried out by the WDC's CBR programme. It was a positive experience for the CBR staff as they met locals as well as tourists with whom they were able to share their experiences in building the skills of these artisans.

Interacting with these talented youth and adults gave many an opportunity to understand the importance in social inclusion of individuals with disabilities and empowering young women to become active citizens contributing towards the betterment of society. We are grateful to the KCC management for giving us the space and opportunity to showcase the talents of our special artisans and highly regard the management for annually promoting activities such as these.

EXPERIENCING THE JOY OF READING

National Braille Library Kandy

The National Library for braille and audio at the D. S. Senanayake memorial library, Kandy, which was established to benefit blind and low vision persons, completed its 8th year in September. The project was a joint effort of WDC, the National Council for the blind and the Low Vision Section of the Kandy Hospital. Annually, the Municipal Council of Kandy funds the purchasing of braille books for the library. Therefore, the library's resources are increasing day by day, providing facilities for more than 65 members, including adults and children. The library is regularly visited by many who borrow as well as use braille and audio books for research and reference.

The library is situated in the heart of Kandy town, making it the only braille and audio library within the central province. Therefore, the library has the potential to keep evolving, attracting more members and expanding its services to the blind community. Through online communication and social media such as Facebook, the library is able to increase awareness on the importance of reading to every individual with or without disabilities. Additionally, an online platform will inform members on the availability of books and new facilities, such as typesetting and enhanced font printing. Members will also have the opportunity to download and install the necessary (speech) software to their computers/smartphones. This way the National Library hopes to further assist the blind and visually impaired community towards building their knowledge and awareness.



"My share of the work may be limited, but the fact that it is work makes it precious."

- Helen Keller

A SAFE HOME

WDC Crisis Intervention Centre for survivors of SGBV

The Crisis Intervention programme that includes the shelter for survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) currently houses 61 women and girls (between the ages of 12-25+), providing a safe and secure environment for survivors of SGBV. The residents at the shelter receive physical and psychological support through counselling, legal advice and guidance as well as opportunities to restart their life towards social inclusion and reintegration.

DAILY LIFE SKILLS

The shelter was created with the intention of providing a wholesome living experience for women and girls who have faced violence, offering a mentally and physically stimulating space. Through daily counselling sessions the residents are able to come to terms with their past and overcome personal challenges and trauma. The girls are encouraged to take part in daily home keeping activities to develop life skills, but most importantly to give them a sense of belonging. At present residents engage in various day-to-day activities as well as vocational training and skills development. Regular yoga, art therapy including wellness clinics and trainings are provided by staff and volunteers throughout the year, giving them a source of release and opportunities to openly express themselves.



SCHOOL EDUCATION

This year, three students sat for their GCE Ordinary Level examinations and at present we have two students preparing to sit for their GCE Advanced Level examination in 2020. Having girls enrolled in school and qualifying for local examinations is a great achievement as we strongly believe that education opens doors providing opportunities to choose the kind of life they want for the future.

Girls attending school are given extra lessons on Mathematics, Sinhala, Tamil and English, as well as two students from the University of Peradeniya provide training on the traditional art of Kandyan dancing. In addition, the girls have taken part in drama competitions and debates organized by local organizations.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

The production center at the shelter provides training for residents in arts and crafts, sewing, weaving, including home gardening and animal husbandry, with relevant skills and guidance provided through experienced trainers. Two girls have been enrolled in a 5-month sewing course at the Singer Company and are due to complete the course by the end of the year. The Perahera sale done together with the VTC Ampitiya was also a huge success with many items being sold out. The production centre not only provides training but also creates opportunity for girls to actively engage in sales and receive exposure in business skills, handling customer care and accounting for sales that take place as the sales income goes back to the residents.

The weaving center functions daily where residents have the opportunity to acquire the skill of handloom weaving. At present two residents who have received training produce hand-woven bed sheets, sarees and serviettes for sale. Few residents have had the opportunity to showcase their skills at Sthree social enterprise during the weekly tours to the café, to demonstrate how cloth is weaved to visitors. Apart from conducting weaving demonstrations they also engage in sales and customer service responsibilities.



In addition, two other residents have received training at the Sthree marketplace from September to December of this year; of whom one has been identified as eligible for a position in the café for the coming year. The girls are provided exposure and training on how to run the café, place orders as well as handle customers in the handicraft section. They are also trained on labelling, issuing invoices, changing displays and making bags and boxes that are used at the store. Three residents were able to take part in a business training workshop conducted at the WDC that was organized as part of an up-cycling project.

A NEW HOME

Over the 30 years serving marginalized and disadvantaged women and children in Sri Lanka, the WDC has been able to accommodate women and girls providing a safe haven and a space for emotional recovery while providing them with an enabling environment to live in.

We hoped we could one day provide a facility with all amenities under one roof to provide a spacious, holistic living experience including dining, recreation, library, kitchen and dormitory facilities, ensuring safety, security and an overall conducive environment for the residents at the shelter. With the support received through the Japanese Embassy we were able to make this dream a reality by building a new home at the shelter premises. The building is projected to be completed by end of this year.



SERVICE PROVISIONS FOR SURVIVORS OF SGBV

UNDP 6-month Project

In order to improve access and strengthen referral mechanisms for survivors of SGBV, a 6-month project was launched in Kandy, Matale, Nuwara Eliya, Vavuniya, Anuradhapura and Batticaloa districts, with the support of facilitators from WDC's Network of Women (NoW). The main objective of the project was to strengthen service provisions from ground level to policy level through building capacities of various stakeholders. 4,900 women, men and youth were made aware of Gender and GBV, SRHR, the National Action Plan on SGBV prevention and the importance of counselling. The main achievements of the project were:

- Raising awareness among CBOs including women's groups and government officials on the National Action Plan on Sexual Gender Based Violence
- Establishment of divisional and district level SGBV prevention committees
- Establishment of 15 school counselling units in selected schools and an integrated counselling unit at the Kandy District Secretariat's office
- Developing two videos for community awareness based on success stories of SGBV interventions and action against sexual harassment in public transportation
(link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HKQ9BSn85A> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kS8pHn4A_Y)
- Legal Intervention on 50 SGBV cases and one sexual harassment case in public transport
- Individual development plans for SGBV survivors and strengthening social reintegration mechanisms
- Establishment of a short term shelter at the Rajarata Praja Kendraya in Anuradhapura



NETWORK OF WOMEN (NoW)

Creating Change One Step at a Time

The Network of Women (NoW), funded by Diakonia since 1995, has been creating synergies for change since the inception of the WDC. The NoW consists of women across Sri Lanka from different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. NoW is a platform for almost 50,000 direct and indirect members across the island who build connections and work towards a shared vision of 'creating a just and secure environment for women and girls'. Each forum plays an important role in working towards achieving this goal. During 2018 the WDC's role was to build capacity of the forums in addressing SGBV, training on Right to Information (RTI), understanding transitional justice in the peace and reconciliation processes, promoting political participation, addressing climate change for environment justice and economic empowerment using innovative approaches through Stthree social enterprise.



<p>KILINOCHCHI Independent organization affiliated with WDC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-help groups for women economic empowerment • Work towards peace and reconciliation and Gender Based Violence 	<p>MANNAR Independent organization affiliated with WDC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide rehabilitation services and shelter care for children and persons with disabilities • Women's rights awareness through Self Help groups 	<p>ANURADHAPURA Women's Groups: 102 Other Groups: Children's club Direct Membership: 5325 Indirect Beneficiaries: 15,000 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New shelter for survivors of SGBV • New initiative for disaster resilience (DRKE) • Working with CNUR on Transitional Justice and Reconciliation (TJR)
<p>MATALE Women's Groups: 21 Other Groups: Children's Groups (8), Elders Groups (3) Direct Membership: 348 Direct Beneficiaries: 798 2018 highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating disability issues in activities • 3 new school counselling centres • Training and support for livelihood development 	<p>KANDY Women's Groups: 22 Other Groups: Elders Group Direct Membership: 800 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in emergency response • Political participation • Strengthened SGBV referral systems • Promoting TJR 	<p>HANGURANKETHA Women's Groups: 52 Other Groups: Youth Groups (12), Children's Clubs (13) Direct Membership: 4588 Direct Beneficiaries: 6845 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New pre-school and counselling centre built • Opening of Hela Ekan with women's group members • Scholarship program for school going children in women headed households
<p>NUWARAELIYA Women's Groups: 35 Other Groups: Children's Clubs (5) Elders groups (21) 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social inclusion of persons with disabilities • Establishing counselling unit • strengthening referral systems • Best group in organizing district level March 12th movement 	<p>MATARA Women's Groups: 10 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly established as a platform to empower women for inclusive and sustainable TJR process in Sri Lanka to work towards women's rights and to strengthen women's leadership to address peace and reconciliation issues. 	<p>HAMBANTOTA Independent organization affiliated with WDC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works towards minimizing Gender and Gender Based Violence. • Micro finance for women empowerment • Working with WDC on women leadership in Peace and Reconciliation process at National level
<p>MONARAGALA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly established as a platform for the project on Empowering women for an inclusive and sustainable transitional justice and reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. 	<p>KALMUNAI Women's Groups: 15 Other Groups: Disabled Persons groups (2) Direct Membership: 557 Direct Beneficiaries: 2697 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro credit scheme for women headed households • Identification of gaps in TJR process 	<p>AKKARAIPATTU Women's Groups: 38 Other Groups: Youth groups (24) Children's Groups (33) Direct Membership: 2697 Direct Beneficiaries: 4761 2018 Highlights:</p> <p>Inception of Project "SUNRISE" for 18 groups of handloom weavers, totaling 272 members.</p> <p>Increase in women's leadership on addressing issues related to TJR.</p>
<p>AMPARA Women's Groups: 28 Other Groups: Youth groups (2), Children's groups (2), Elders groups (2) Direct Membership: 500 Direct Beneficiaries: 1220 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and lobbying for issues related to TJR process • Social inclusion of persons with disabilities 	<p>BATTICALOA Women's Groups: 13 Other Groups: Youth groups (4), Children's Clubs (4) Direct Membership: 390 Direct Beneficiaries: 1540 Areas of Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and nutrition, GBV, TJR, Peace and reconciliation, socio-economic justice 	<p>VAVUNIYA Women's Groups: 8 Other Groups: Youth groups (2), Children's Clubs (2) Direct membership: 200 Direct Beneficiaries: 420 2018 Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly established women's forum • Started 3 new school counselling units • Establishment of SGBV committee

*True Leaders Don't Create Followers,
They Create More Leaders*



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Kirimetiya - The village that shines

At WDC we make it our priority to mobilize communities through actively involving community members as well as state and non-state actors to promote equal access to resources and to ensure their rights. Kirimetiya captured our hearts by the way the community came together, which proved to us that knowledge and awareness with little support and encouragement are key ingredients in the development process.

WDC started a pilot project at a rural village called Kirimetiya with 80 families and 350 residents. Kirimetiya has a population that predominantly speaks Tamil. The village had experienced a haul in development and lack of social mobilization due to unavailability of resources. Within the 30 months, the project was launched and a women's group named "Lakshmi" was created. WDC conducted several awareness and education programmes on various issues including human rights, governance, political participation, RTI, economic empowerment etc. This knowledge gave them the strength to fight for their rights. As a result, women and men have found employment opportunities preventing internal/external migration, which caused social and family disruptions, leading to a high prevalence of women and child abuse.



The Women's Day celebration organized by the group was a depiction of women practicing their rights, through actively participating in a talent show, drama competition, and debate. The celebration also included an exhibition of items made utilizing up-cycled material. Stepping away from tradition, the women's group organized a sports day, where they brilliantly played a game of Elle and Cricket. For the women of Kirimetiya, this was a day that they would always remember.

A co-ed children's club was also formed at the village with a membership of 50 children aged between 3 to 18 years. A number of programmes and activities are organized through the children's club, such as improving reading skills, creating awareness on health, sanitation and environmental conservation as well as other recreational activities. In addition, a safety net was formed by stakeholders and community leaders to ensure the protection and security of the children.

A significant achievement was the establishment of the Preschool, which was established in 2017 to emphasize right to education provided in their 1st language. This is the only preschool that is registered within the region. 8 children were enrolled initially and 4 new children have been admitted since then. We were overjoyed to know that 4 students from the Preschool have gained admission to grade 1 in two neighboring schools. In addition, early childhood development training programmes for mothers and guardians as well as meals for the students are provided through the Divisional Secretariat of Thalathuoya.



STHREE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Promoting economic empowerment of women and persons with disability

Sthree, a social enterprise initiated by the WDC aims to support creative entrepreneurship, ecofriendly production, and economic empowerment of women and persons with special needs in Sri Lanka. The space serves as a marketplace for local women entrepreneurs to sell their beautifully handcrafted products with the goal of economic empowerment. Located just behind the Sthree Shop, is the Sthree Café. The Café uses fresh, locally sourced, seasonal vegetarian cuisine to serve customers an authentic Sri Lankan dining experience. The Sthree café connects all WDC's programs to promote economic empowerment, inclusion and social reintegration. The chefs at Sthree cafe have been selected from the NoW, while the special needs staff and helpers are recruited from the WDC's programmes. We have hosted a series of capacity building workshops related to hospitality services for the manager, chef and service personnel.

With the initial support from Planeterra and WUSC, WDC Sthree has been able to develop this social enterprise into one that delivers exceptional service to customers, while remaining true to the organization's foundational vision and mission. Through various capacity building efforts for local entrepreneurs, artisans and Sthree's employees, the handcraft shop and Café are evolving to become the successful, sustainable businesses that were envisioned upon its inception. The WUSC MCIC project implemented from September 2017 through March 2018 conducted a four-part entrepreneurship training session on business management and entrepreneurship development. WDC staff, through this project, have been trained as Trainers (ToTs) to be able to train others including staff and NoW members. The training targeted entrepreneur skills, self-assessments, generating new ideas, life skill training, importance of networking and collaboration, small business management, business management, and technical skills on product quality, design, colors and branding.

With the successive increase in sales as a result of the launch of the Sthree café, more women entrepreneurs have come forward to engage and work together with Sthree and start their own individual businesses. Over 30 new women entrepreneurs have started working with Sthree within this year, adding to the 38 entrepreneurs previously engaged with Sthree. A group of the frequenting entrepreneurs from Kandy have taken things to the next level by creating an entrepreneur society to plan and work together in order to increase output and ensure quality control. The Women Entrepreneur's Society in Kandy works closely with Sthree and provides a community of entrepreneurs to share resources, ideas, tips and tricks, and other valuable resources. Training for society members has been provided to enhance the quality and standards of the new products. This training has been supported with the formulation of individual business plans and the creation of market-oriented products, with the intention of increasing product output. The entrepreneur society in Kandy regularly meets once a month at the WDC to plan and discuss group activities and events. We hope to further encourage women entrepreneurs throughout WDC's networks and to organize and create more entrepreneur societies island wide. Finding new entrepreneurs is an ongoing process that is done utilizing connections of WDC women's forums. Through these forums women are encouraged to start small businesses targeting national and international customers.

MOBILIZING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organizational Capacity Enhancement & Networking (OCEAN)

The WDC has come a long way in facilitating development initiatives within the division of Delthota, which borders the Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts. This 3-year project is an action that will contribute to a strengthened civil society, which enhances their role in good governance and development processes and practices in two districts Kandawalai (Kilinochchi District) and Delthota in Kandy district. The project's main implementing partners together with the WDC are Sri Lanka Centre for Development Facilitation (SLCDF), and People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL). SLCDF leads the project in the Kilinochchi District and WDC in Delthota.

Delthota is a very scenic vast area that is home to Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities who live in harmony, making it a model division for peaceful coexistence amongst different ethnicities and religions. Cultivation is the main source of livelihood due to the rich fertile soil and favourable climate. However, there is a high prevalence of issues related to lack of accessibility, infrastructure, fresh water, environment degradation/pollution, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse as well as child abuse and SGBV. In order to tackle these issues a Civil Society Organization (CSO) of community leaders was formed and various programmes on enhancing their capacity towards becoming influential change makers have already been conducted and are further planned in the upcoming years. Since the project focuses on the combined involvement of civil society and stakeholders, creating links and building relationships between the groups is vital towards the success of development initiatives.

Thus far several awareness programmes on voters' education and good governance have been conducted at community level. Training of Trainers (ToTs) has also been conducted for village development officers from the Delthota D.S office as well as CSO members on Divisional Development Planning. Following the trainings, each facilitator was given the responsibility of compiling a village development plan, which included the village map, problem analysis, problem tree and solution tree. As of now, 29 books representing all 29 divisions of Delthota have been completed. In addition to that CSDs have been trained on SGBV based on the National Action Plan for Sexual and Gender Based Violence and will be conducting awareness programmes and forming watch groups at village level. Programmes and trainings on the Right to Information (RTI) act are also planned for the upcoming year.

In addition to ToTs, a separate group of facilitators identified at community level is in the process of forming Self Help Groups (SHG) involving low income families, which will later on facilitate the formation of a women's federation that will be joined together with the WDC Network of Women (NoW).

Apart from trainings and community level awareness programmes, a new women's resource centre has been established within the Delthota town, equipped with reading material, posters, computer access and access to counselling and legal advice for residents of Delthota. Many referrals have been made to the WDC through the Delthota women's resource centre and we hope that more and more services are made available to the community.



*'There is no tool
for development
more effective
than the
empowerment
of women'*

- Kofi Annan

SHARING EXPERIENCES

Up-skilling Women and Girls



The workshop supported by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was designed to emphasize on basic concepts of mobile android app development, to educate women and girls on how an app is created and used for building career opportunities in a society dominated by mobile technology.

The 25 participants were selected from WDCs regional women's forums representing Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Anuradhapura, Hambantota, Ampara, Matale districts respectively. Each participant had to create a personal email account through which they could access the App Inventor program which as a result enabled each of them to successfully build apps including a contact list app, recording app and a few basic interactive mobile games. The participants also had the opportunity to experience virtual reality by participating in an online lecture led by Dr. Ishan Abeywardena.

Since the completion of the training one of the participants who is also a member of the Kandy entrepreneurs' society has created an application for her own sewing business and developed two other applications for other individual business owners. Two other girls who participated from Nuwara Eliya conduct trainings as visiting lecturers on App development in a government run computer training institute. The girls were successful in incorporating a basic introduction on app development in to the IT training curriculum of that institute. These trainees will further use this skill in the upcoming COL project – 'Reaching the Unreached' from 2019-2020 targeting 5000 women and girls for economic empowerment.

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION THROUGH INNOVATION

Up-cycled New Product Development

The up-cycle project is a programme designed to combat the burning global issue of pollution through developing up-cycled products using non-degradable waste material. Initial preparation for the project began with meeting few leading design and fashion institutes in order to structure the workshops effectively to successfully benefit our women entrepreneurs. 60 women participated in the first workshop that introduced the programme and the idea behind up-cycling, out of which 30 participants were selected to participate in an incubator and accelerator workshop facilitated by Lanka Social Ventures (LSV) that enabled the women entrepreneurs to conduct personal SWOT analyses, and plan for the future of their businesses. The project will be completed in March of 2019 where entrepreneurs will design at least 10 up-cycled products with high use-value, and market it at the Sthree marketplace.

OUR ENTREPRENEURS

Sthree takes pride in her entrepreneurs as they are the main ingredient for the initiation of the Sthree social enterprise. From what we started as a small informal 'shop with us' outlet in a room in WDC head office to the outlet store we have today, our woman entrepreneurs have grown in number and diversified. Currently, we have 76 artisans actively engaging with Sthree, some of whom have started their own business and others who have expanded their industry by supplying to other department stores.



ENSURING THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Delthota

Naranghinne is a rural plantation type area located within the Delthota division. The winding, difficult terrain leading to Naranghinne reflects the hardships that its residents face due to lack of proper awareness and services made available to them. It was during one of our voter's education awareness programmes that we got to know about the lack of education systems prevalent in the area. According to the residents in the village, the principal of the school failed to perform his due responsibilities, which resulted in the children not receiving a proper education and instead skipping school or playing all day in the school grounds.

When this issue was brought up the community decided to act by filing an RTI application with the support of the WDC to the education department regarding the qualifications one should have to fill the post of principal, and the selection process. The community members themselves were able to complete the form and delivered it to the relevant authorities with assistance.

A few weeks since submitting the form we came to know that the principal had been transferred and the former principal of the Naranghinne school has been reappointed, much to the delight of its residents.

This is a fitting example as to how positive change can happen through knowledge, action and influence. If ever a problem similar to this arises, the residents of Naranghinne would know the process in which to find solutions through and would pass on this information to others.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Kandy is known to be a peaceful and serene place for residents as well as visitors, however this was not the case during the month of March this year when situations of civil unrest occurred within certain parts of the Kandy district. The religious and ethnic conflict resulted in many homes and places of business being burned and destroyed by unruly mobs, leaving many displaced and afraid for their safety. The WDC was able to intervene during this situation of crisis and provide much needed support to those affected, particularly women and children.

Since the WDC has already been implementing projects from early 2017 on empowering women for an inclusive TJR process within five districts including Kandy, an opportunity arose in building social cohesion/reconciliation among different ethnic and religious groups through the trained facilitators and women's group leaders involved within the TJR project.

With the support and coordination of Humanity & Inclusion (HI), WDC was able to implement emergency relief work in the Kandy District. The main objectives were to contribute towards restoring livelihoods of vulnerable households earning their main source of income through small businesses, provide donations as compensation to those dependent on daily wages and to mobilize women from affected areas to form links with diverse women's groups to avoid such further incidents through promoting coexistence. The emergency response was implemented and coordinated with government partners of the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) Kandy and the Divisional Secretariat's office.

In addition, WDC was able to introduce new groups to the existing structures of women's groups, provide training opportunities on health care & nutrition, Entrepreneurship, Gender and community development activities and later focus on involving them in the peace and reconciliation & TJR process.

WOMEN PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

A Community Facilitator of the TJR project

Prasangika Dharmawansa, a resident of Kandy, serves as the Secretary to the Kandurata Women Forum, which is the Kandy district level federation of local women's groups. Prasangika has also been a member of a local women's group in the area for more than 25 years, is actively engaged in politics and has contested in the local government elections held in February 2018.

With the leadership qualities she possessed, Prasangika became a facilitator of the project on 'Empowering women for an inclusive and sustainable Transitional Justice and Reconciliation process in Sri Lanka' (TJR). The project has been implemented within 08 Districts, including Kandy, Anuradapura, Ampara, Matara, Hambantota, Monaragala, Trincomalee and Jaffna. Out of these, the WDC implements the project in five districts. Prasangika stood out among the women leaders who were trained as Change Agents. She was able to meet women's group members representing the North, central, South and East and hear the stories and experiences of women affected by the conflict in Sri Lanka as well as gender based violence. This was an eye opener for Prasangika, as she was able to understand the underlying situation and impact of conflict, particularly on women.



"I was shocked to see the incidents and feared to walk on the streets. I did not expect to see such incidents in my area"

This understanding led her to take an initiative in intervening during the emergency situation that occurred in Kandy earlier this year. She was able to support individuals, especially women and children, during the civil unrest in her locality. Prasangika was able to distribute food, clothing and other essential items to affected families, overall providing relief to 350 families.

This was not an easy task for her as she faced several obstacles, challenges and threats from some community members. However she was able to withstand these challenges with the knowledge and experience acquired through the WDC. Prasangika continues to engage in promoting TJR as a member of the Kandurata Women's Forum, and the Kandy district peace and reconciliation committee. She has been able to share her experiences with other facilitators in the project, further encouraging them to take initiatives to promote reconciliation.

"The knowledge and exposure I received through the TJR project helped me to change my attitude. Now I understand the importance of reconciliation and continue to promote it to make Sri Lanka a better place."

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROJECT FOR MISSING PERSONS

WDC and ICRC project

This International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) funded 6-month project for families of missing persons was implemented in the Nuwara Eliya and Kandy districts to address the issue of missing persons in a combined effort with the TJR process. Through constant yearning, emotional struggles and grief, many families live hoping to be reunited once again with their lost or missing family members who went missing during periods of conflict, particularly the 30-year civil war.

Along with the support of 12 facilitators, the WDC was able to identify 193 families with missing persons spread across 20 D.S. areas, which included members of the Sri Lankan army and Sinhalese and Tamil civilians. These families were provided the necessary support to address psychosocial, land and many other issues as well as be referred towards intervention and redress. 20 memorial celebrations for missing persons were organized as requested by families, which enabled us to realize the need for space to memorialize lost loved ones. We were able to provide some consolation to the families who still remain hopeful for the safe return of their loved ones, by providing them the opportunity to openly memorialize and remember their lost family members.



VOLUNTEERING FOR CHANGE

Ashley Cochrane

This November I took a break from my regular job as Strategic Advisor at the Canadian Medical Association in Ottawa, Canada to volunteer at the Women's Development Centre (WDC) in Kandy, Sri Lanka. The idea was that I would bring my skills and experience to build capacity at another organization while gaining new knowledge and perspectives to bring back to my own. I was drawn to WDC's vision of economic empowerment for women and was thrilled to learn that I would have the opportunity to work for such an incredible organization. I was, and remain, inspired by the passion and faith of the leadership, staff, and volunteers of the organization. Together we considered how my skill set could be put to use to fill gaps within the organization, keeping capacity building top of mind. WDC's enterprise Sthree Shop and Café was the focus. The specific challenges we addressed were around improved communications and increased business. Success in these areas would mean more women with economic empowerment.

When this issue was brought up the community decided to act by filing a RTI application with the support of the WDC to the education department regarding the qualifications one should have to fill the post of principal, and the selection process. The community members themselves were able to complete the form and delivered it to the relevant authorities with assistance.

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CREATING SYNERGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Exposure visit to Sthree



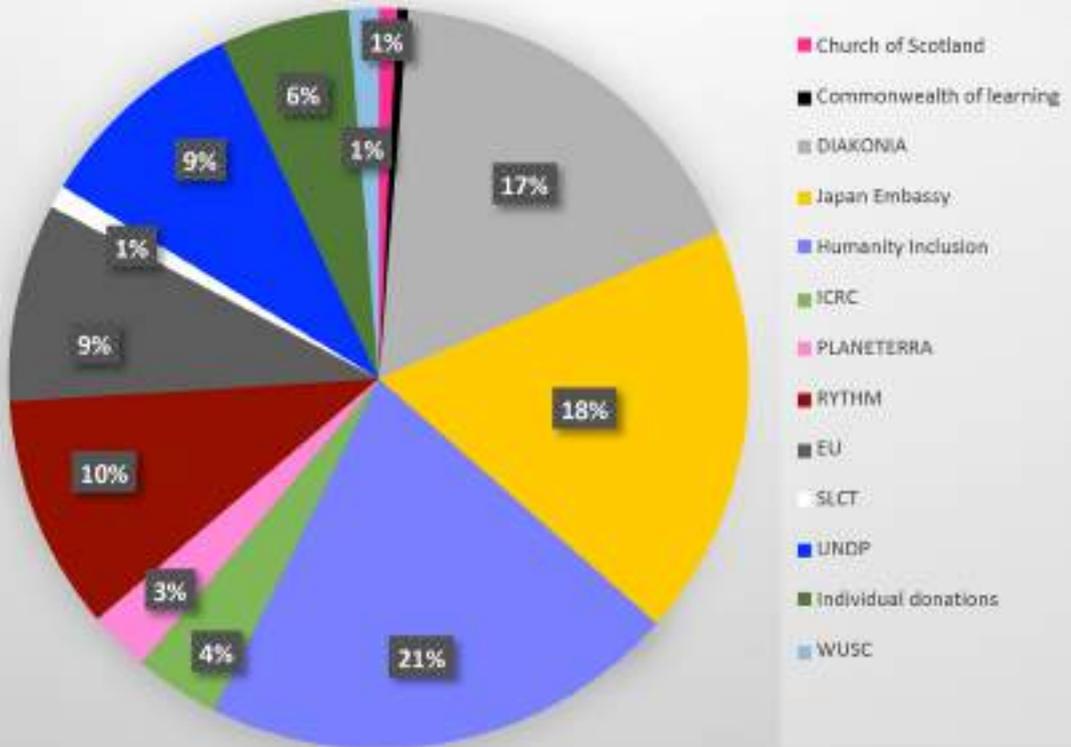
One of WDC's main objectives is to be a role model in mobilizing women to create synergies and to use empowerment as a tool to address all forms of gender discrimination. The Matara Chamber of Commerce (MCC) visited the Sthree Social enterprise for an exposure visit to better understand how the establishment is run and how to re-establish their organization. The exposure visit included a tour of the Sthree handicraft shop and café that enabled us to better explain how the establishment is run, who gets involved and the sustainability and long term goals of the project.

Represented by WDC community development (CD) department including project officers, leaders from the Kandurata forum, as well as members of the newly formed entrepreneur society in Kandy gathered to discuss challenges, lessons learned and to respond to questions regarding the progress and initiation of the Sthree handicraft shop and café. Further, WDC representatives were able to share the vision of the entire WDC programme forming a deeper understanding on the importance in economic empowerment of women to tackle the issue of gender and GBV as well as the differences between a private business and a social enterprise.

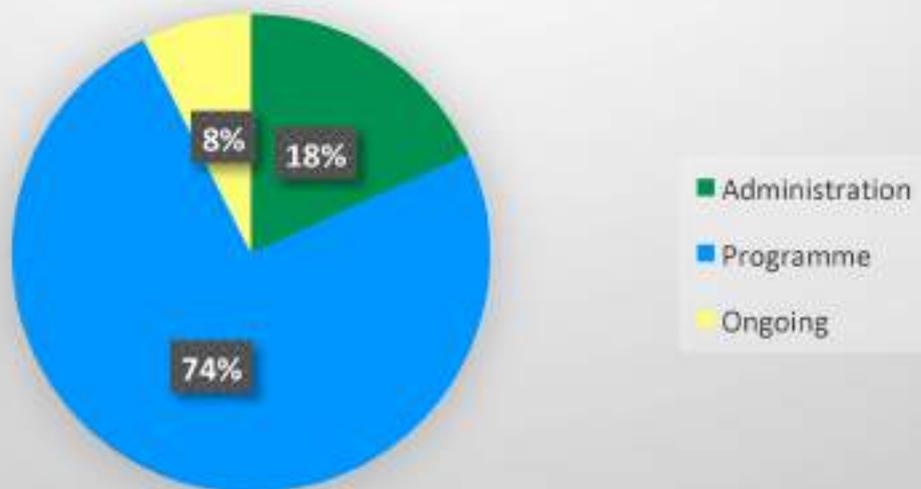
FINANCES

Expenditures for the year 2018

Funds for 2018



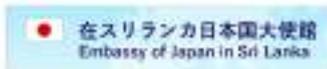
Expenditure Proportion



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Sthree Cafe

