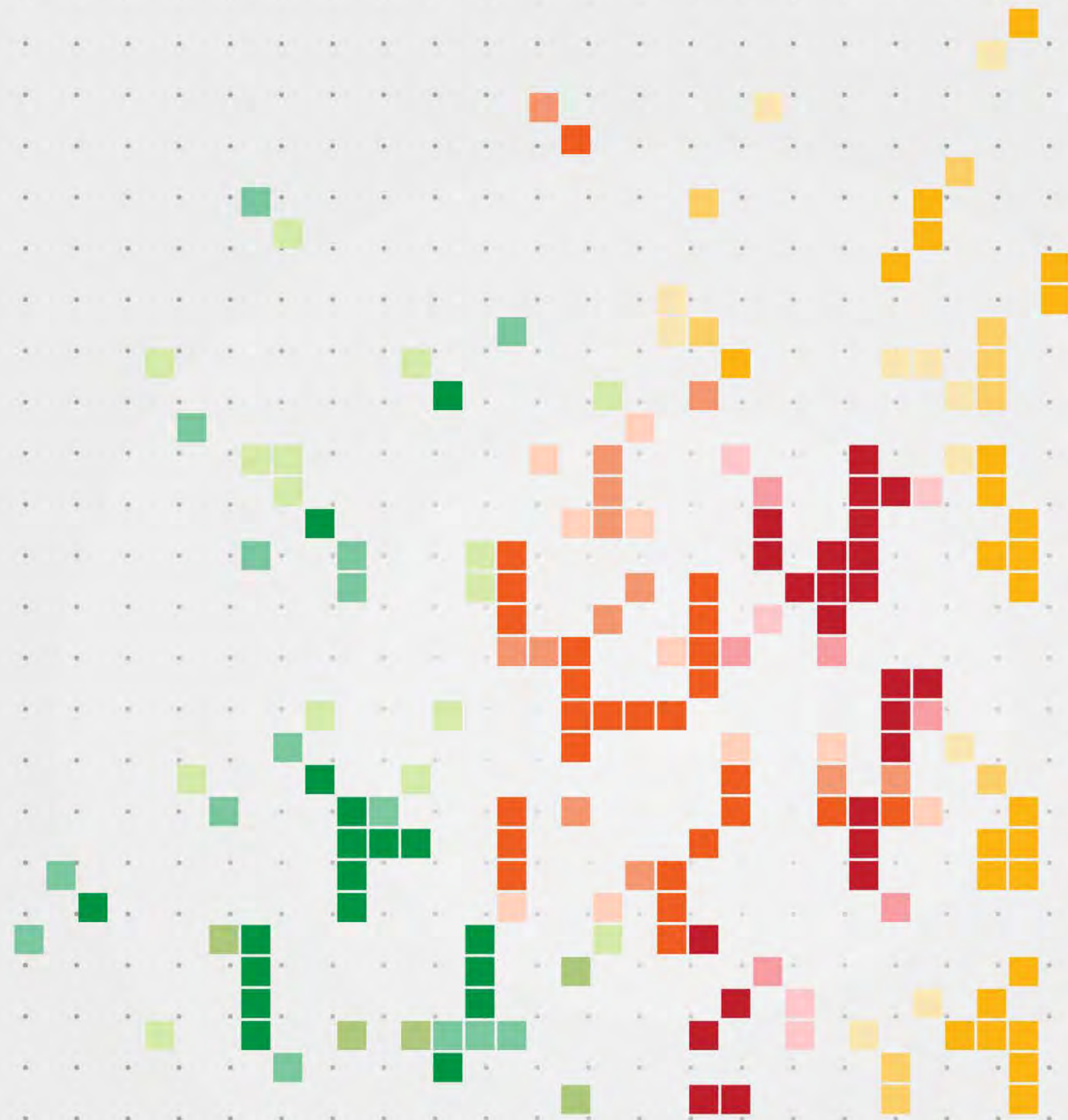


NCEASL

NATIONAL CHRISTIAN
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
SRI LANKA

Annual Report
2023/24

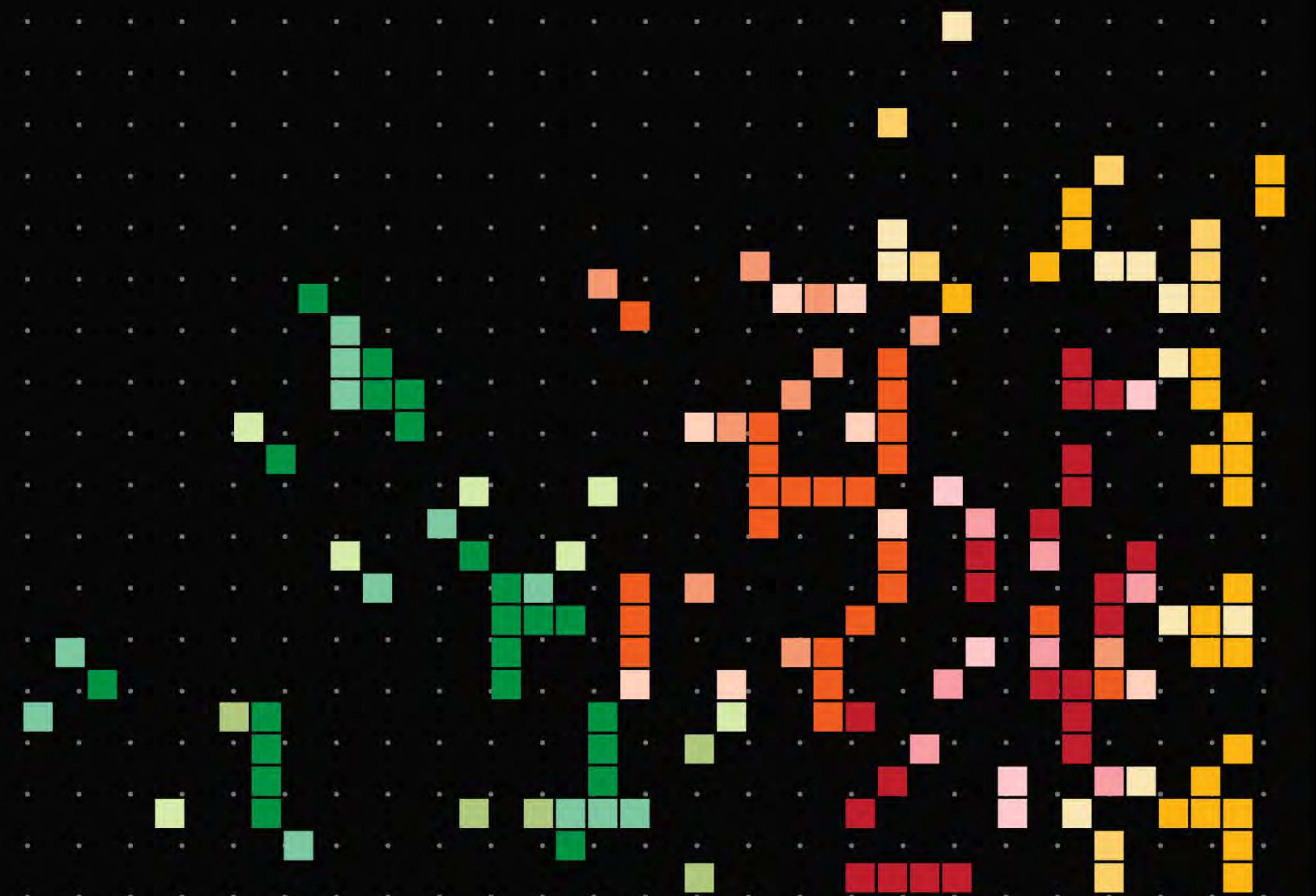


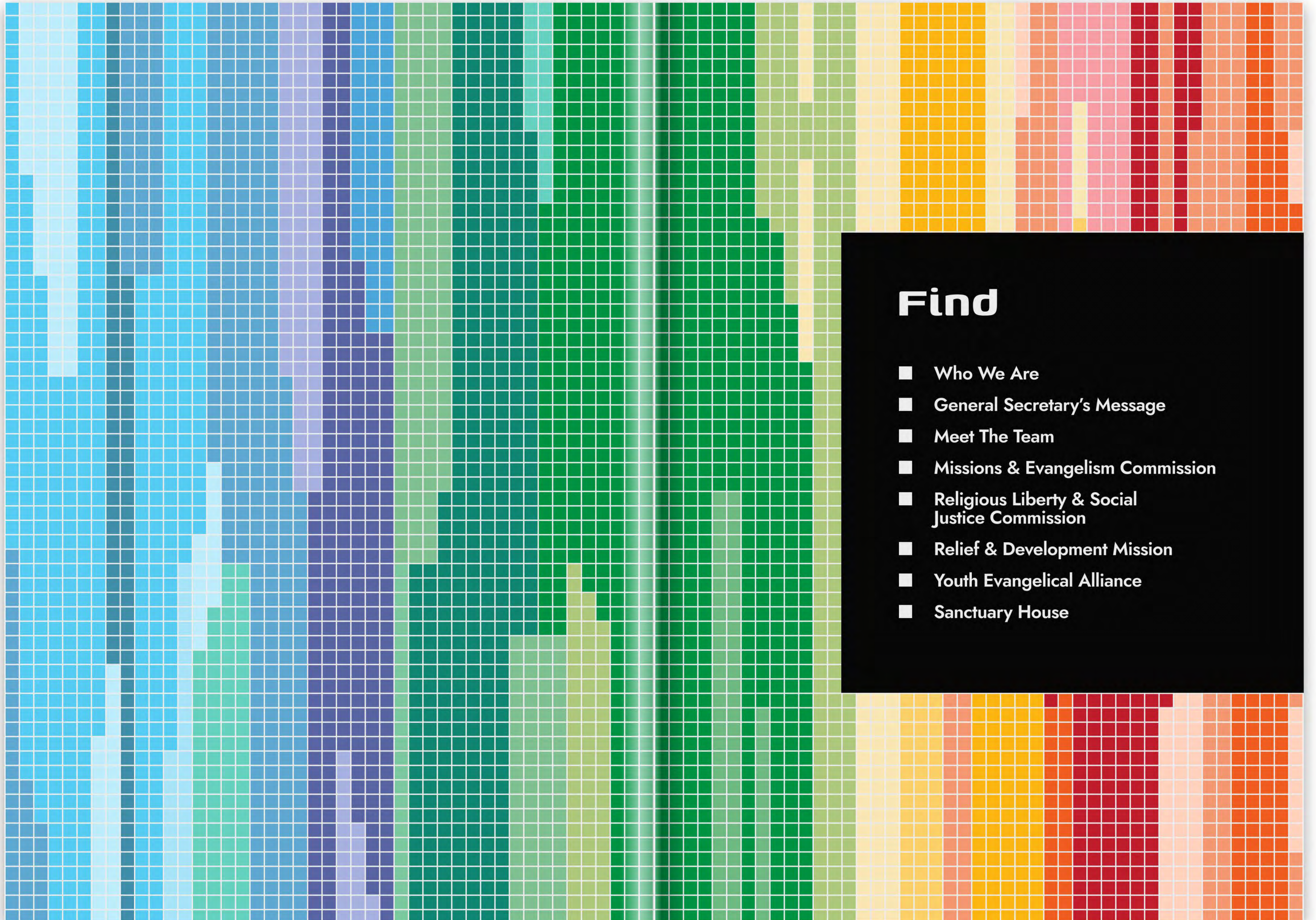
72 EST. 1952
YEARS

**Unifying The Church To
Transform The Nation**



Annual Report
2023/24





Find

- Who We Are
- General Secretary's Message
- Meet The Team
- Missions & Evangelism Commission
- Religious Liberty & Social Justice Commission
- Relief & Development Mission
- Youth Evangelical Alliance
- Sanctuary House



NCEASL



The NCEASL has served the Evangelical Church in the Nation since 1952. At present the NCEASL has a membership of 200 churches and organisations, representing over 200,000 Christians in the country.

It carries out its ministry through 4 broad commissions; Ministry & Evangelism, Religious Liberty & Social Justice, Relief & Development and Youth Evangelical Alliance. With the common ethos being to 'Unify the Church to transform The Nation', their activities reach a group of marginalised communities across Sri Lanka, irrespective of caste, creed or race.

EQUIP

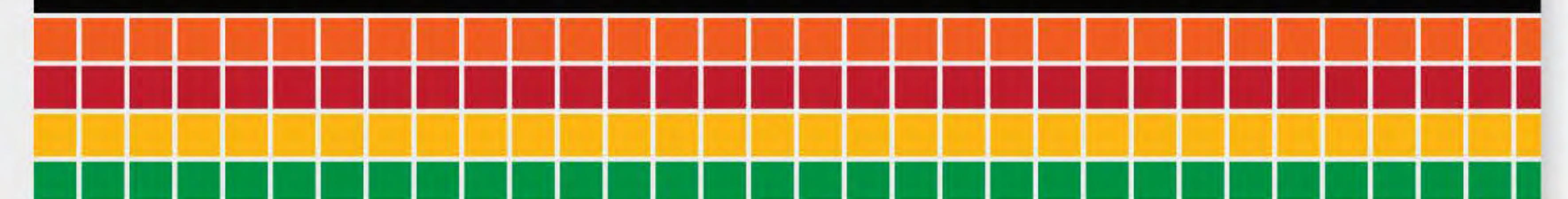
THE NATIONAL CHURCH

ADVOCATE

FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

BUILD

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Message From The **GENERAL SECRETARY**



This year marks the 72nd anniversary of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL). For more than seven decades, NCEASL and its development arm have served both the nation and the church. We are grateful to God for His faithfulness and the growth of our ministry from humble beginnings to its current impactful presence.

Our history traces back to the late 1940s, with the establishment of the Evangelical Fellowship of Ceylon (EFC), later known as the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL). The leadership initially comprised foreign evangelical missionaries serving various churches in our country. In 1951, a meeting of the local evangelical community was convened to select a president-elect, leading to the official inauguration of the Evangelical Fellowship of Ceylon on June 24, 1952, at Lindsay School Hall, Bambalapitiya. These early years saw the inclusion of 608 individual members and 18 churches from Methodist, Anglican, Dutch Reformed, and Baptist denominations.

EFC was active in evangelism, radio ministry, Bible correspondence courses, vocational training, and literature ministry. Such was our impact that the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) produced a documentary film on our ministry. EASL was a founding member of WEF, with our president serving on its first general committee.

In 1972, EASL expanded its outreach by establishing TAFTEE for theological education and a development arm for relief, rehabilitation, and development programmes. The 1983 ethnic riots were a tragic chapter, as our offices, library, and records were destroyed. In the aftermath, EASL's focus shifted more towards relief and development due to the ongoing ethnic strife and civil war.

Recognizing the need for dedicated leadership, in 1990, EASL appointed an Assistant Secretary to oversee the ministry, who later became the General Secretary in 1991. By 1994, it was evident that EASL needed to restructure to remain relevant and representative. In March 1995, a historic restructuring took place, forming a new governing council with representatives from various churches and denominations. This decision marked a significant milestone, driven by the selflessness of our older leadership for the greater good of God's Kingdom.

Since 1995, NCEASL has grown significantly by God's grace. From just one full-time staff member, we now have nearly 90 staff members ministering across all 25 districts. Over the past year, God has used NCEASL staff on the frontline of ministry. Our work with those affected by leprosy through the Alliance Development Trust has been a hallmark. We have also made strides in children's ministry, livelihood programs, environmental stewardship, and truth-centered transformation. The Religious Liberty Commission continues to support the persecuted church with legal aid, practical assistance, and engage initiatives related to research, education and advocacy on religious freedom, promoting social cohesion in the country.

Our Mission and Evangelism team pioneers around 40 churches annually through our church planting ministry and provides training for churches and pastors on contemporary challenges. The youth wing, a recent addition to NCEASL's ministry, offers holistic discipleship training sought after by many churches and brings together youth networks for collective action.

Sanctuary House remains a vital resource, offering facilities for housing persecuted Christians and their families, as well as hosting training programs for pastors, children's camps, Christianity teacher camps, pastor family camps, mission consultations, and seminars.

God's faithfulness has been evident throughout this year. A heartfelt thank you to our dedicated staff, our greatest asset, who tirelessly give themselves to the work of the Lord. We also express our gratitude to our Chairman and the Governing Council for their guidance and wisdom. Finally, all glory to God for His continued blessings in all we do.

In His Service,

Godfrey Yogarajah,
General Secretary, NCEASL

Meet The **TEAM**



AARON



AKSHINA



ARTHUR



ARUN



ALOSIYA



ANDREW



MAYURAN



MESHACH



MIKE



MINOSHA



MOHAMED



NAYOMI



BHUMINI



BINNU



BRENDA



CHARLES



CHAMELI



CHETAN



NAVINDU



NESAKUMAR



NILANTHI



NOEL



OSCAR



PAUL



CHRISTIE



DEENA



DEEPTHI



DENNIS



DEVA



DEVINA



PRAKASH



PRAMITH



RAJAH



RAJEEVA



RAGHU



RAJIND



DINOSAN



DHARSHIKA



DIRESH



DIVYA



EVANGEL



GODFREY



RAHANTHA



RANIL



ROSHAN



RUTH



RUWANI



SAHABANDU



JABEZ



JEAN



JEBASINGH



JEBASUTHAN



JEROME



JOY



SALOME



SANDAMALI



SAMSON



SARAH



SANJULA



SATHISHKA



JUDE



KAJAN



KEMINI



MAHESH



MAHESHI



MADARA



SESHAN



SHALOM



SHEHARA



SHERENE



SHRUTHI



SIVAGAR



MALCOM



MANEL



MANISHA



MARISHA



MERRIL



MAURICE



SIVAKUMAR



TANIA



TISHAN



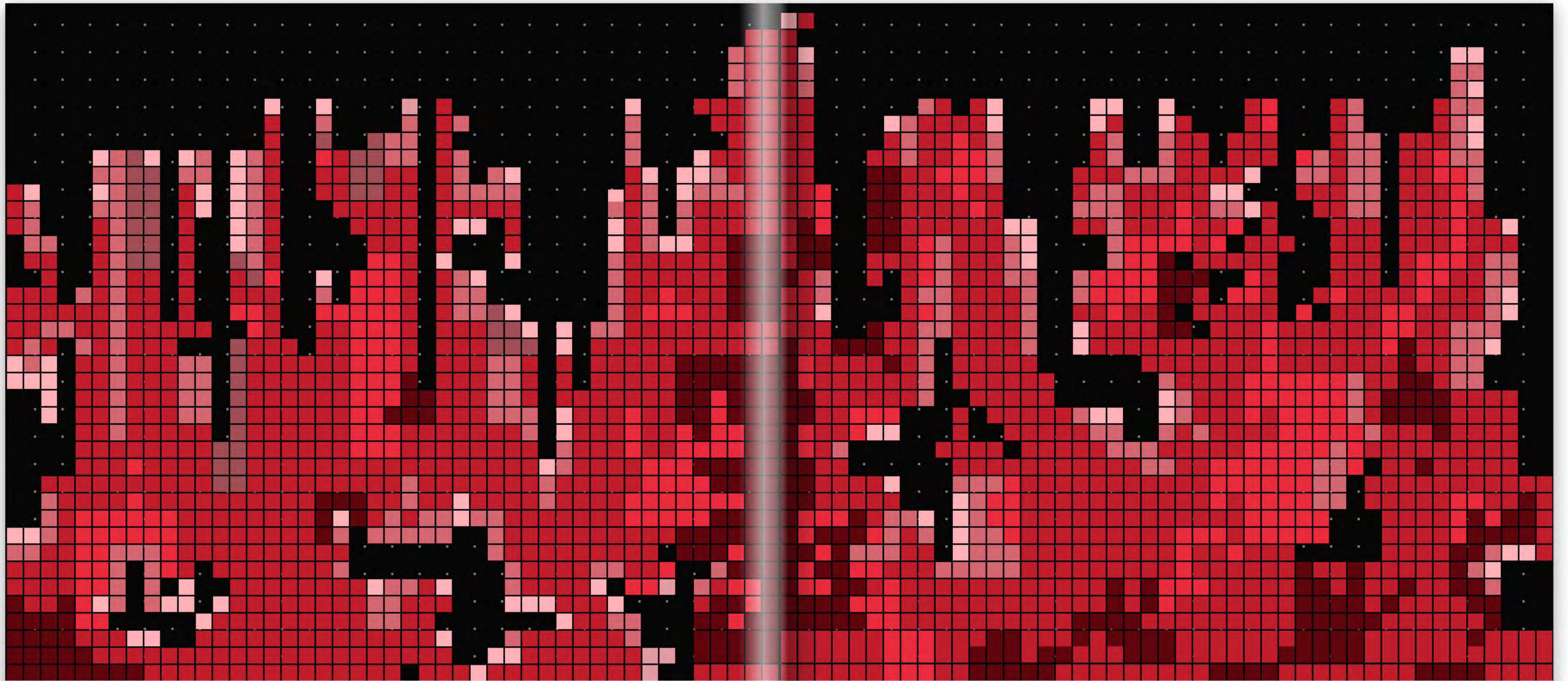
VASTHI



VENUKOPAN



WILLIAMS



**MISSIONS
AND EVANGELISM
COMMISSION**



As Sri Lanka struggled to recover from the economic crisis that drastically affected the nation since 2022, the Missions and Evangelism Commission's main focus in 2023 was to uplift the financial situation and build stability for those serving and belonging to the body of Christ in Sri Lanka.

Further, the Missions Commission carried out programmes to re-focus the calling of mission workers, equipping and mobilising them for the task.



EMERGENCY RELIEF

TO CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Pastors and Christian families worst affected by the economic recession received relief as the Missions Commission responded to this situation and distributed dry ration relief packs worth LKR 10,500 among 5,630 severely affected Christian families across the 25 districts.

The Pastors' Fellowships implemented the distribution; 3,230 beneficiaries were one-time recipients, while 800 in dire economic situations received relief packs in three stages. This helped the recipients stretch their resources among their families, raise their morale, and give them hope while they experienced God's love.



At a young age Vijaya was employed in the Middle East and worked for a Christian family who introduced her to Christ. When she returned to Sri Lanka, she married and had a son. A few years later, her husband died, leaving her to be the sole breadwinner to support her son, her husband's mother, and his sister. To supplement her income Vijaya now sells fruits on the roadside to Ella. This road is patronized by many local and foreign tourists who come to view the beautiful waterfall. "My God is good; he took me to a distant land where I accepted him as my personal saviour. He prepared me for the challenges I am facing today and is faithfully providing for my family. I thank him for providing this relief pack."



Rohitha is married and a father to 2 children; he is the sole breadwinner in his family. He and his family attend a church in Minuwangoda. Rohitha is 54 years old and works at a coir rope-making enterprise and earns a daily wage of LKR 1100/- However, due to the recent incessant rains, he has had no work.

The relief pack he received was a pleasant surprise to him, since Rohitha and his family have not had a meal in 3 days. With tears of joy, he thanked God for his provision and blessed those who made it possible.



Anastine's household consists of her eldest daughter, son-in-law, their baby, and her 16-year-old daughter, who is still schooling. Anastine works for a supermarket store where she sorts and packs vegetables before dispatching them to the store. Recently, Anastine had to undergo surgery; she had to stay away from work for a couple of weeks. "God, in His goodness, reached out to me with this relief pack the day before I entered the hospital. I was so relieved, and I have no words to thank God for this timely provision," she said. Anastine is a new believer in the Lord, and ever since she and her family accepted Jesus into their lives, she has experienced God's goodness and deliverance from the issues she had faced in the past.



Mallika, at 43 years is the sole breadwinner for her family. Her husband, who drove his three-wheeler on hire, is now disabled and is limited to a wheelchair. "To provide for my family, I go door-to-door and sell ready-made garments, which I buy from a wholesale outlet in Maharagama". Providing for the needs of her family single-handedly is not easy. Therefore, her 18-year-old daughter works at a grocery store in her village to lessen her burden, and her son helps the church with ministry work. Mallika has two other children who attend school. She had no words to explain the joy she experienced when she received the relief pack. "By the goodness of God I received a relief pack".

STRENGTHENING

Those working in the missions field were helped to re-focus on their calling as pastors and church leaders.

The Missions Commission conducted several training programmes, further equipping them for ministry and church planting.

The Integral Disciple Making Movement (IDMM) training programme equipped church leaders to pioneer planting new churches. 55 church leaders from Puttalam, Kurunegala, Kandy, Colombo, Badulla and Gampaha districts attended the training.

Professor Somaratne and Reverend Santhalal conducted a seminar on **'Contemporary religious practices and rituals,'** attended by over 100 participants from Anuradhapura.

To mobilise the church to effectively minister to singles, a 1-day seminar titled **'Ministry to Singles'** was held at Assemblies of God Bible College Ja-Ela, Centre for Graduate Studies, and the Colombo Theological College. Dr Barry Danylak conducted the seminar, which was attended by 180 participants.

A 1-day training session was held in Matale for 150 lay workers in the ministry.

A 4-day Bible reading workshop was held in Matara, encouraging 20-25 participants to read the Bible effectively.

To mobilise churches, train and empower pastors to evangelise within the Matale District, a programme titled **'Proclamation & Demonstration'** was conducted for 122 church leaders. Pastor Tim Elmo conducted a seminar for 65 pastors and their wives from Anuradhapura, urging them to reach out to the lost, lonely, and left out.

The **'Pray for All or Bless Five'** prayer initiative was launched with the participation of 400 pastors, leaders, and believers. The programme encourages pastors and their congregations to pray for at least five persons from other faiths by name until they receive Christ. This programme was introduced to Pastors' Fellowships of Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, Kegalle, and Yatiyantota; prayers were raised for the salvation of 3,512 persons.

'Lead like Jesus' seminar was conducted by 37 pioneer church planters from across the island. They were also introduced to the 'Pray for Five' initiative.

A team of Indian pastors representing the South Asian Prayer Council, together with a Sri Lankan team of pastors and leaders, discussed how to establish a focused and strategic prayer movement and build a strong prayer network where the South Asian churches intercede for each other's nations and the worldwide body of Christ.

The **'Real Shepherds Conference'** saw the participation of 75 independent pastors. The guest speakers, Reverend Dr Chrisso Handy, Dr Ajith Fernando, Dr Napoleon and Reverend Allan Fraser, spoke on Shepherds' family, pastoral ethics, effective evangelism and inner healing.



Dr Ravi David conducted **two programmes on 'Caring for the Caregivers'.** The Weveldaniya Bible-Centered Church programme involved 25 pastors and their families, and the meeting held in Nuwara Eliya involved 25 pastors and their wives.

A seminar on prioritising evangelism in their ministries was conducted for pastors and leaders; it was held at Nawalapitiya for 41 participants and at Baptist Church Gonawala for 125 lay members.

A 'Leader's Life and Ministry' conference was conducted for 115 pastors and youth. The objective of this conference was to build healthy leadership among the churches in Sri Lanka by selecting potential leaders and improving the quality of leadership. Resource persons Dr Pham and Dr Mark spoke on the importance of coaching leaders while stressing the Biblical principles that are effective in ministry.

Reverend C. B. Samuel, Senior International Integral Mission Activist, challenged 65 pastors and leaders representing 62 churches nationwide to reach out to communities by practically living the Gospel among them. **At the seminar, 'Standing in the Gap,' the participants were empowered with relevant biblical knowledge and encouraged to stand in the gap on behalf of their communities.**

A team of trainers from the International Christian Mission trained 33 participants on Church Planting.



MISSION WORKERS

ENGAGING WITH THE MISSIONS FIELD

The Missions Commission met with the Pastors' Fellowships from Negombo, Bandarawela, Badulla, Monaragala, Polonnaruwa, and Puttalam. These meetings were a time of review and reflection while also renewing relationships, promoting corporate collaboration, and fellowship among the church leaders.

The Missions further created awareness of the harvest field and the available resources for them to carry out their missions.

In February and July, 33 Pastors' Fellowship Chairmen met to discuss improving evangelism and the prayer force in their regions. The Church Planting ministry initiative supported a total of 40 pioneer church planters from various parts of the country.



SENDING TO THE MISSIONS FIELD

THE MISSIONS COMMISSION CONDUCTED SEVERAL EVANGELISTIC PROGRAMMES.

Two seminars on 'Women Empowerment' with the attendance of 106 pastors' wives and women leaders. These programmes were focused on uplifting women leaders in ministry.

A **3-day youth camp on 'Spiritual Formation'** was held for 35 youths from the Eastern provinces, Trincomalee and Batticaloa and 52 youths from the Uva Province, Monaragala, Mahiyangana, and Badulla. This programme would impact their families, church, and society.

A **1-day youth seminar** in Welimada was held for 100 youths on **evangelism**.

Two children's camps were held for pastors' children in Batticaloa and Badulla in April and June. The camp, titled **'Inner Healing and Capacity Building,'** ministered to 140 children.

52 Sunday school teachers were trained at a **2-day training programme** held in Vavuniya.

THE MISSIONS COMMISSION ALSO SUPPORTED AND PARTNERED WITH EVANGELISTIC EVENTS CONDUCTED BY OTHER MINISTRIES.

Mizpah church held an evangelism event in Negombo in January, which drew approximately 3000 people.

In March and August, the **Lanka Prison Fellowship** hosted programmes for 21 Prisoners' families at Mamadala AOG church.

Sri Lanka Village Gospel Mission distributed approximately 4,000 tracts across 3-days and made 37 contacts for follow-up in the Horana suburbs in March.

Jeewanadiya Faith Church, Raddolugama screened a movie on Jesus to 300 community members in April.

Hebron Gospel Fellowship had an outreach programme in August.

Propitiation of Jesus Christ Evangelical Ministry held an evangelism outreach programme in September in Punagala & Demmodara; 146 People accepted Jesus Christ as their Personal Saviour. They also held street preaching throughout December in the North.

Suhada Janatha Dewa Sabawa, Girandurukotte, held an evangelism outreach programme in December.

Gospel Ministries Christian Church, Matara conducted an evangelism programme in December.

Calvary Worship Church, Kottawa, held an outreach programme in December.

The Wesleyan Evangelical Church, Ranna distributed Gospel tracts in September.

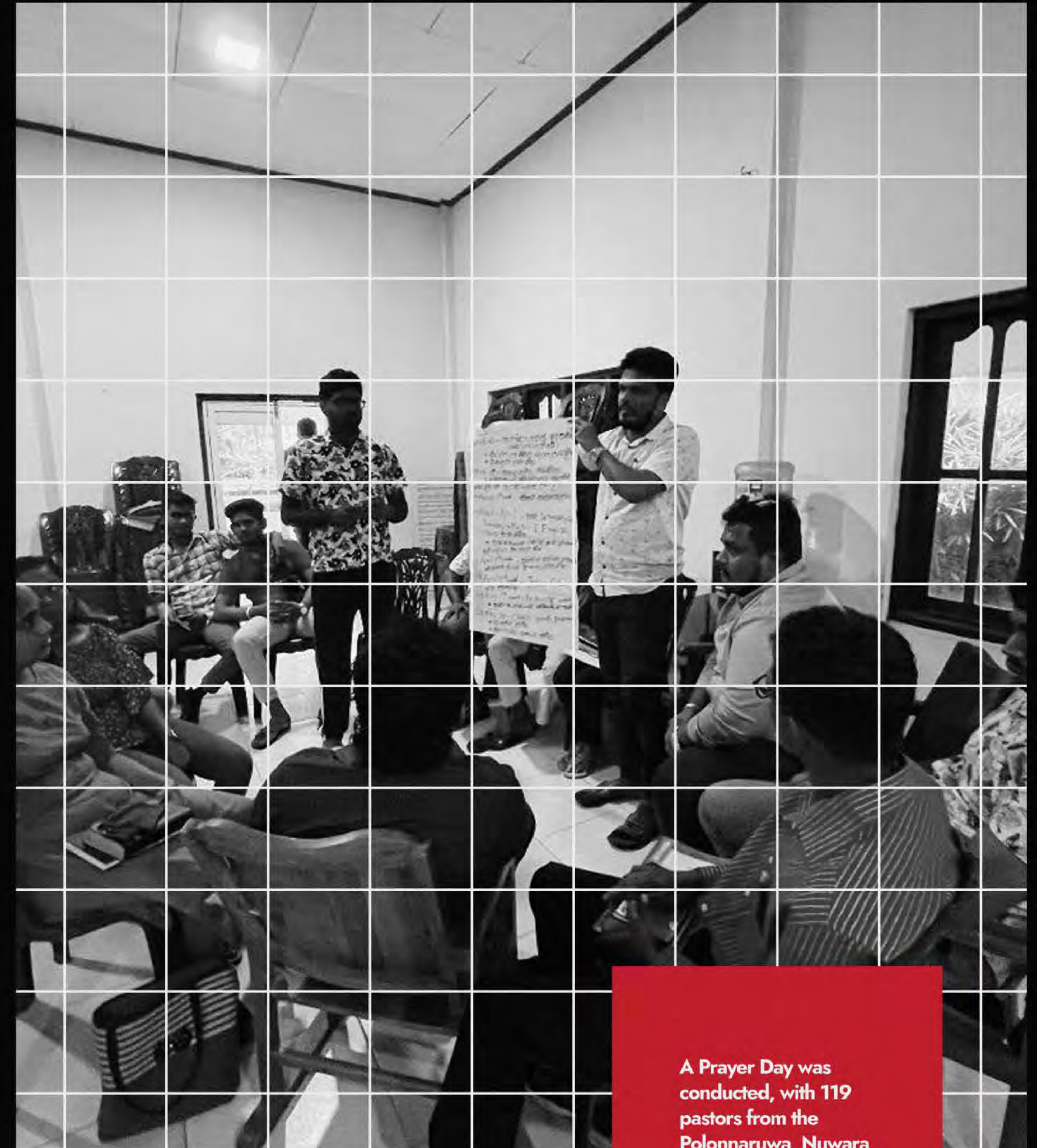
The following evangelistic events were held in the Ratnapura district resulting in 940 persons having heard the Gospel and 301 persons having accepted Christ as their personal Saviour; 60 new believers received baptism in December.

- **Jehovah Nissi Gospel Ministry, Pelmadulla**, held an evangelism event that saw the participation of over 100 people in March.
- **Harvest Church Hapugastanne** had an outreach meeting in May.
- **Foursquare Church, Kalawana**, had an outreach programme in June.
- **Bethel Pentecostal Assembly, Cicilton Estate, Ratnapura** had an outreach programme in August.
- **Nazarene Gospel Church, Balangoda** had an outreach programme in September.
- **Rock of Grace Church, Ratnapura**, had an outreach programme in September.
- **New Life Assemblies of God, Ratnapura**, had an outreach programme in October.
- **Jesus Miracle Ministry, Balangoda**, had an outreach programme in December.

REACHING THE MOST UNREACHED ETHNIC GROUPS

'Reaching Forgotten Ethnic Groups' was a 3-day conference for 140 pastors and ministry leaders across the island. While instructing the participants on approaching this community, the sessions also created interest in them, motivating and encouraging them to reach out to them. A youth participant said, "As a youth leader, I decided to reach out to unreached communities, sharing with them the Gospel and bringing them to salvation. I will also mobilise my youth group to take a burden and reach out to these people".

A strategic planning meeting was held as a follow-up to the conference, which included 40 ministry leaders. Further, 15 pastors from Kegalle received training, encouraging them to work among the most unreached communities.



A Prayer Day was conducted, with 119 pastors from the Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, Kegalle, and Yatiyantota Pastors' Fellowships in attendance.

PRAYER

PROVIDING RESOURCES TO THE NEEDY CHURCH

The Missions Commission supported the needy church in several segments, benefiting ministry workers and Christian believers in rural communities.

<p>62 pastors' children from the Northern Pastors' Kids Scholarship Scheme received financial support through its initiatives.</p>	<p>50 women-headed families from the Northern Province received monthly financial support.</p>	<p>32 most deserving pastors across the island received monthly financial support.</p>
<p>5 pastors received grants to commence livelihoods. The livelihoods supported are goat farming, vegetable cultivation, poultry, textiles, spices, chilli paste & gram businesses.</p>	<p>Roofing materials were provided for the Nawajeevana Drug Addicts Rehab Center in Polonnaruwa.</p>	<p>A church in Bandarawela was assisted with building materials to construct a toilet for their church.</p>
<p>4 new motorcycles were distributed among pastors serving rural areas in Kalutara, Matara, Kandy, and Badulla. They serve in rural areas under extreme conditions, especially poor transport facilities, which prevent the pastors from serving and following up on their congregations.</p>	<p>Pastor Premanath ministers to believers from the estate sector in Nuwara Eliya. He serves 57 church members and 110 children from three locations.</p> <p><i>"This motorcycle means a lot to me and the ministry. Thank you, NCEASL."</i></p>	



The CEA

The CEA is an organisation that brings independent churches together in fellowship with the larger body of Christ. CEA membership promotion meetings were held in Chilaw, Matale, Hatton, and Colombo. In 2023, 32 new members joined the association, totaling 266 CEA members registered with the Missions Commission.

Since the COVID-19 lockdown, 12 Ceylonese Evangelistic Association (CEA) pastor members have faithfully continued to pray online every Monday morning for the country, the economy, salvation, and personal needs.

PUBLICATIONS

4,000 copies of the 'Truth Unrevealed' booklet were printed in Sinhala and Tamil. This book explains essential Biblical perspectives on Christianity to the most unreached communities.

20,000 Sinhala and Tamil copies of 'Do You Know' tracts was printed and distributed.

10,000 Sinhala tracts of 'You are Unique' was also printed and distributed among those who needed to hear the Gospel and good news.

5630
Relief packs

1705
Missions Worker
Training Programmes

4818
Outreach Events

153
Resources to
The Needy Church

40
Church Planter
Support

485
Evangelistic
Programmes

62
Kids
Scholarships

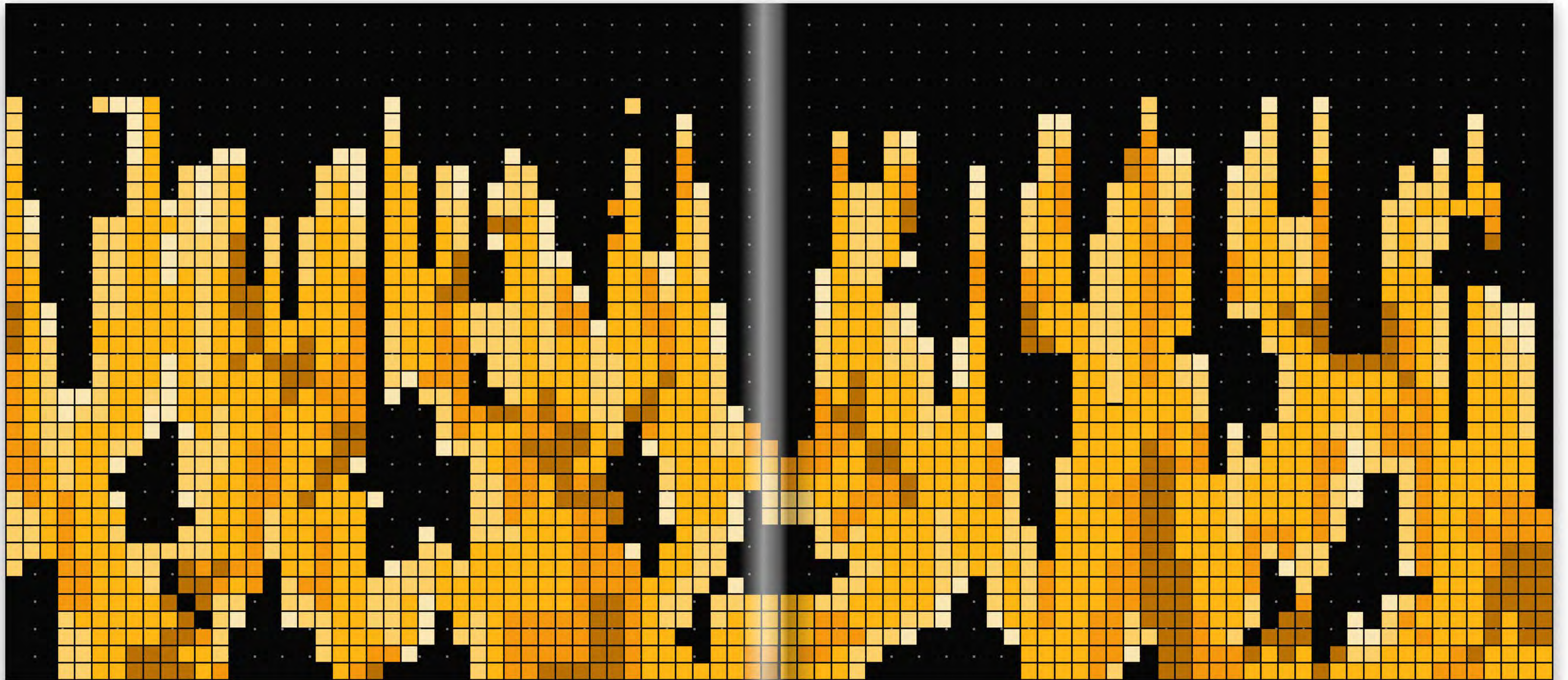
82
Financial
Support

OVERALL HIGHLIGHTS

5
Livelihood
Support

4
Motorcycles
For Pastors





**RELIGIOUS LIBERTY &
SOCIAL JUSTICE
COMMISSION**



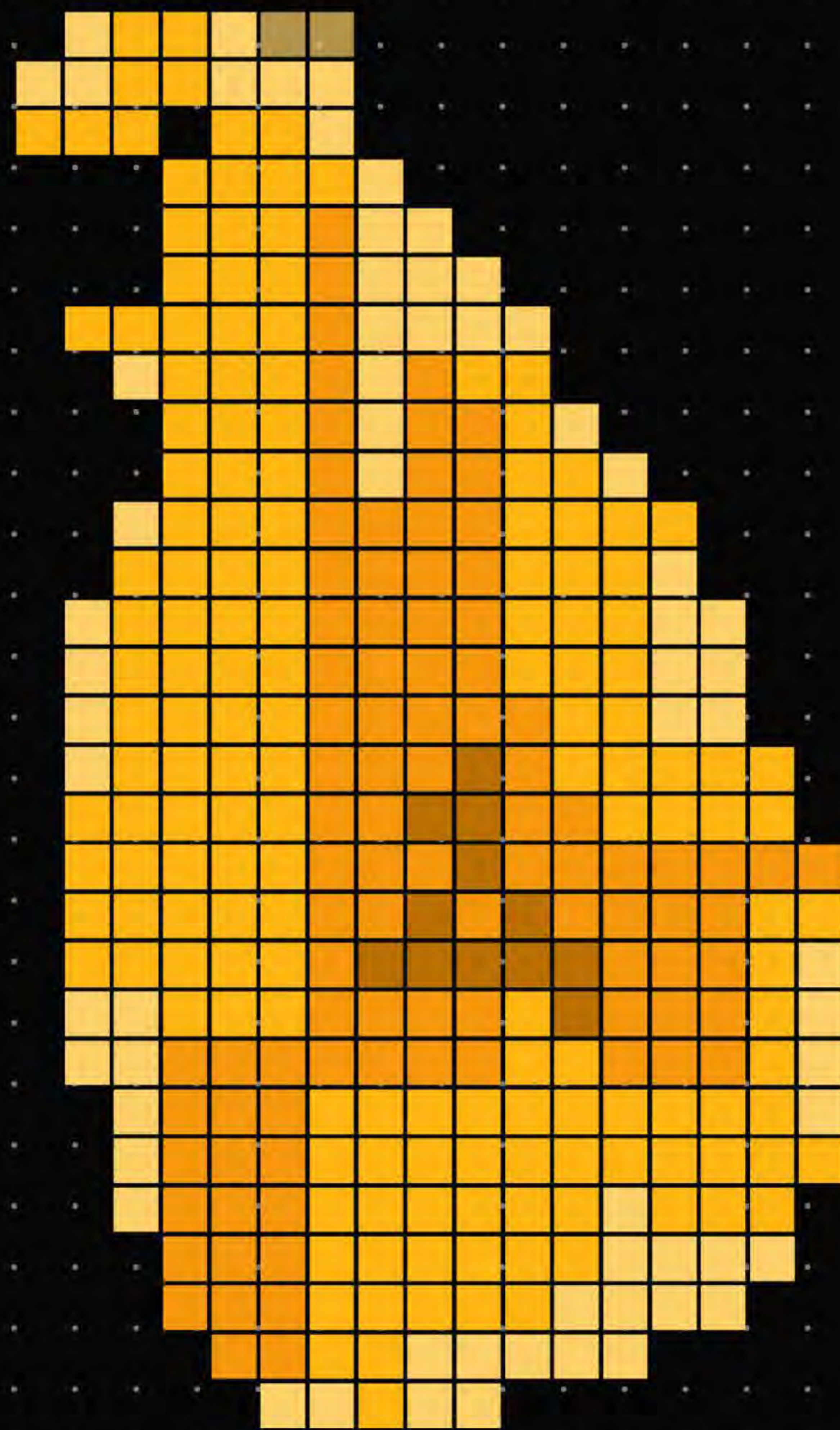
The RLC

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

**promotes
religious freedom
in Sri Lanka &
advocates for
social justice.**

To this end, the RLC carries out local and international advocacy, documents rights violations, and conducts research and training. Furthermore, the RLC provides emergency aid, livelihood support, and scholarship schemes to victims of persecution. Under the Social Justice mandate, the RLC trains and equips youth and vulnerable communities on democracy, good governance, and human rights.

COUNTRY



CONTEXT

Over the past year, Sri Lanka has grappled with significant challenges relating to matters of justice and religious freedom. This was coupled with ongoing economic challenges in the country. While Sri Lanka secured an IMF bailout package amounting to USD 2.9 bn in the early part of the year, and inflationary pressures were reduced, social tensions continued to mount owing to severe austerity measures introduced as part of the reform agenda. Moreover, the period also saw a widening democratic deficit in the country. For instance, local government elections were continuously postponed by the government led by President Wickremesinghe, citing lack of government funds. Moreover, the government also continued its crackdown on dissent and protests.

EASTER SUNDAY ATTACKS

Following 2019's devastating Easter Sunday attacks, a series of investigations were launched to identify culprits and the mastermind behind the attacks. In January 2023, the Supreme Court found a violation of fundamental rights and ordered compensation to be paid by former President Maithripala Sirisena and four other senior government officials involved in national security at the time. However, as of November, there were challenges in fulfilling the required compensation payments, leading the Supreme Court to order the respondents to submit affidavits declaring their assets and liabilities.

In September 2023, Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith urged the government to conduct a comprehensive and transparent inquiry into the attacks, criticising the government's failure to implement recommendations from the Presidential Commission of Inquiry and expressing concerns about the concealment of some recommendations. In response to a Channel 4 documentary on the attacks, which alleged involvement of the State Intelligence Services in the attacks, the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka called for an impartial investigation, emphasising the need for an independent international investigation. A committee chaired by a retired Supreme Court Judge was appointed to look into the allegations made in the documentary.

NEW LEGISLATION

Over the past year, the legislative landscape concerning religious freedom continued to tighten with the government introducing a new Anti-Terrorism law, which has been historically used to target minorities, and an Online Safety Bill, which had implications for religious freedoms, as it sought to criminalise any speech that could cause religious distress. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also expressed significant concerns about these bills, citing potential violations of international human rights law.

Despite calls for withdrawal, on November 7, 2023, the Supreme Court determined that the Online Safety Bill could be passed with a simple majority in Parliament, subject to amendments of specific clauses. The NCEASL was one of the 47 petitioners who challenged this bill in the Supreme Court.

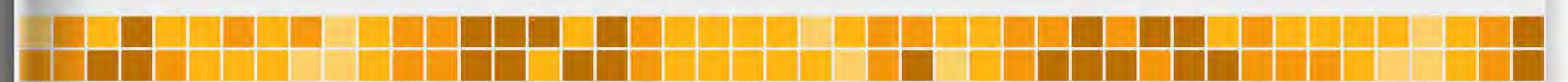
INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY

In September 2023, in an escalation of tensions concerning contested religious sites in the North and East of the country, the Mullaivu Magistrate T. Saravananarajah resigned from his post and fled the country, attributing his decision to threats to his life and pressure from government actors, over recent rulings on contested religious sites.

RECENT ARREST UNDER THE ICCPR ACT

In December 2023, Jerome Fernando, the Pastor of the Glorious Church in Colombo, was arrested under the notorious ICCPR Act for alleged religious insult for making comments about other religions during a sermon preached in May 2023. Subsequently, the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police obtained an overseas travel ban on the pastor, but by that time, he had already left the country.

On 1st December, the pastor was arrested and later remanded until December 13 2023.



SUPPORTING AND STRENGTHENING THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Documentation of Religious freedom violations

From January - December 2023, the NCEASL documented 52 incidents of persecution against Christians and the following observations were made.¹

Incidents of discriminatory action or practice (19 incidents), and threats or intimidation or coercion (25 incidents) were the most prevalent types of incidents perpetrated against Christians during the year. There were also 02 incidents of physical violence, 10 incidents of property damage/destruction and 03 incidents of hate speech or propaganda.

Perpetrators of religious violence and intolerance against Christians have included institutions or public servants (19 incidents), identifiable individuals (24 incidents), religious institutions or clergy (06 incidents), political/social movements or politicians (05 incidents) and unidentifiable individuals (06 incidents).

Places of worship (32 incidents) and clergy (19 incidents) were targeted in most incidents of religious violence and intolerance. This was followed by individuals (17 incidents), wider community (02 incidents), local community (01 incident) and a business (01 incident).

Incidents of religious violence and intolerance targeting Christians were reported in 13 out of 25 administrative districts in 2023.

Documentation of religious freedom violations



From January - October 2023, the NCEASL documented 13 incidents against Muslims.

These incidents involve property damage/destruction (02 incidents), physical violence (01 incident), discriminatory practice or action (07 incidents), threats/intimidation and coercion (03 incidents) and hate campaign/propaganda (02 incidents). Incidents of religious violence and intolerance targeting Muslims were reported in 08 out of 25 administrative districts in 2023.

From January - October 2023, the NCEASL documented 27 incidents against Hindus.

These incidents involve property damage/destruction (06 incidents), discriminatory practice or action (11 incidents), threats/intimidation and coercion (13 incidents) and hate campaign/propaganda (01 incident). Incidents of religious violence and intolerance targeting Hindus were reported in 05 districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces in 2023.



An assessment of harmful speech related to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) on social media platforms² (Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok) against the Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities during the year (January - December 2023) showed that the highest number of harmful speech was against the Christian community, totalling 270. Following this, harmful speech against Muslims amounted to 193, while Hindus experienced the least with a total of 36.

1. A single incident could feature more than one target. Therefore, the summation by type of target is more than the total number of incidents.
2. An assessment of harmful speech related to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) on social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok) against the Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities during the year (January - December 2023) showed that the highest number of harmful speech was against the Christian community, totalling 270. Following this, harmful speech against Muslims amounted to 193, while Hindus experienced the least with a total of 36.

THESE RESEARCH FINDINGS ARE DISSEMINATED THROUGH MONTHLY AND QUARTERLY REPORTS AND ARE USED FOR NCEASL'S EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY EFFORTS.

**SUPPORTING AND STRENGTHENING
THE PERSECUTED CHURCH**

Litigation and Legal Strategies

During the reporting period, the NCEASL continued to **assist 19 churches and 3 Christian children**, who faced discrimination in school admission, by supporting and filing 27 court cases on these incidents.

Our legal department also supported the special determination application that challenged the Online Safety Bill before the Supreme Court within the stipulated time. Apart from filing cases, the project also provided legal advice on these issues.

CHURCH NAME/ CHILD'S NAME	CASE NUMBER	COURT	DESCRIPTION
Bethel Church	SC FRA 133/21	SC	Assault on the Pastor and registration issues
Good Shepherd Church	B 651/23/01 65134 AR 356 B 431/21	MC, Polonnaruwa	The church and the pastor were subjected to an attack, and a case was filed against the pastor. Currently, the pastor has been acquitted
	CA Writ 551/21	CoA	Building approval
School Admission	CA (Writ) 294/20	CoA	School Admission case
The Pentecostal Assembly of Kalutara	96113/21	MC, Kalutara	Pastor barred from conducting worship services with outsiders by police
Foursquare Church	CA (Writ) 312/22	CoA	Burial rights denied in a public cemetery
Jesus Lives Power Church	8060/L	DC, Negombo	Restraining Order from DC
	CA RII 05/22	CoA	Appeal against the order of the District Judge
Lighthouse Church	12672/PC/22	MC, Kegalle	Causing damages to church property
Ayoon Gospel Ministry	8046/PC	MC, Ampara	Case filed against the pastor for disruption of peace
Padaviya Sripura House	CA (Writ) 46-/23	CoA	Building approval and registration issues
Church of Gospel Ministry	47724	MC Mannampitiya	Assault on the pastor
Faith Church, Moragahahena	65572/21	MC, Maharagama	Registration issues

Note: Magistrate's Court (MC); District Court (DC); Court of Appeal (CoA); Supreme Court (SC)

CHURCH NAME/ CHILD'S NAME	CASE NUMBER	COURT	DESCRIPTION
The Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Gonawala	81001/23	MC, Mahara	Pastor barred from conducting worship with others by police
The Christian Fellowship Church	55409	MC, Ratnapura	Attacked on church by the Buddhist monks and a Hindu priest
Jesus Lives Glorious Church	CA (Writ) 498/23	CoA	Writ Application filed challenging the letter issued by the Pradeshiya Sabha
New Life Fellowship Church	60741	MC, Polonnaruwa	Assault on the pastor
El Roi Worship Church	8472/2023	MC, Marawila	Police filed a case against pastor for sound pollution
The Canaan Fellowship Church	Filing an application for extension of bail	CoA	Extension of bail period granted by MC Mount Lavinia
Jesus Calls You Church	B 3267/22	MC, Anuradhapura	Assault on pastor's son and the church
Berea Prayer House	B 460 - 37962/PC/21	MC, Vallaichennai	Assault on the members
Zion Calvary Church	31341	MC, Negambo	Building issues
School Admission Case	SC/Spl/LA/271/2021	SC	School Admission case
School Admission	CA (Writ) 80/2018	CoA	School Admission case
Special Determination	SC (SD) 111/23	Supreme Court	Online Safety Bill Challenged

Note: Magistrate's Court (MC); District Court (DC); Court of Appeal (CoA); Supreme Court (SC)

Advocacy seminars For Church Leaders

In order to equip pastors and church leaders serving in persecuted contexts to respond to violations of their religious freedom and engage with duty-bearers to ensure their rights to free religious practice, the NCEASL RLC conducts regular training seminars for pastors. At these training programmes, pastors are trained on their legal rights, engagement strategies with the authorities when experiencing a FoRB violation and best practices to be followed when addressing FoRB issues. In April 2023 we conducted an advocacy training programme for Pastors fellowships of Puttalam and Anuradhapura and 24 pastors from Puttalam Fellowship and 32 Pastors from Anuradhapura Fellowship benefited from the said seminars. In July 2023, the project supported two advocacy training programmes in Jaffna for over 155 pastors, assistant pastors and Christian ministry workers; and in November 2023 one advocacy training programme was held in Polonnaruwa for 32 pastors and Christian ministry workers.

Training for Lawyers



During this reporting period, two successful resource sharing and strategic workshops for lawyers of Kurunegala Bar and Anuradhapura Bar was organised with the aim of building up a network of lawyers to support our cases, file, and defend against the persecuted pastors and their rights. A workshop for the members of the Kurenegala Bar was conducted on the 1st day of April 2023, and 15 lawyers participated in the workshop and enhanced their knowledge and skills on freedom of religion or belief.

And in the second workshop, conducted for the members of the Anuradhapura Bar, about 12 members participated in the workshop, who were pleased to receive the resources and knowledge shared with them. The President of the Anuradhapura Bar, who is actively involved with RLC by representing the persecuted pastor and his son in two different cases, extended willingness to join hands with NCEASL in future activities.

ADVOCACY

Emergency,
Practical &
Livelihood
Support

Reconstruction & Emergency Aid

During the specified period, 8 churches received assistance from the Reconstruction and Emergency Aid Project, addressing various requirements, including medical expenses, reconstruction support, and other essential needs. Recognising the challenges faced by persecuted pastors and their congregations, the project prioritised immediate relief, which includes coverage for medical bills, provision of food rations, and monthly financial support.

Moreover, the project extended its assistance to reconstruction efforts, including rebuilding damaged property, and the implementation of protective measures such as gates and CCTV cameras. This support not only addressed immediate needs but also fostered confidence and resilience within congregations, enabling them to gather and worship without fear.





Pastor Chandrapala faced an immense amount of persecution from his community. On February 12, 2023, while a Sunday worship service was underway at the home of Pastor Chandrapala in Dodangoda, Kalutara, Sri Lanka, three police officers in uniform and four others in plainclothes, allegedly from the CID, visited the premises. Following the service, the officers informed the pastor that local monks had complained about the illegal nature of the worship services and instructed him to cease operations until an investigation was concluded.

Pastor Chandrapala was summoned to the police station the following day for an inquiry. At the station, he was confronted by seven monks, ten villagers, and a government representative from the Divisional Secretary's office. Despite his defence, the Officer-in-Charge (OIC) requested that he refrain from holding worship services with outsiders to maintain peace in the area. The OIC also threatened to file an enjoining order against the pastor for breach of peace.

Later that evening, a group of approximately 50 villagers, including four Buddhist monks, surrounded Pastor Chandrapala's home and threatened him, reiterating the demand to restrict worship services to family members. One individual even reminded the pastor of a previous incident in 2019 when a mob led by a monk forcefully entered his premises to halt his religious activities. Undeterred, Pastor Chandrapala filed a complaint with the police against the man who threatened him. The OIC subsequently reprimanded the individual, emphasising the pastor's right to religious freedom under Sri Lankan law.

During the visit by NCEASL, it became apparent that he lacked essential protective features like windows, a fence, or a gate. Consequently, NCEASL provided support to help him establish these protective measures. He expresses enduring gratitude for the kindness extended to him. His daughter is also currently being supported in the ongoing Evangel Care Kids scholarship.



Bible Distribution



Over **1,000** Bibles in Sinhala & Tamil languages were distributed among underprivileged Christians island wide.

Kids Gift Packs for Pastors' Children

Over **600** school bags including books, stationery, and DSI vouchers were provided to the children of pastors who serve marginalised and persecuted communities. This was done in collaboration with the Relief and Development Department.



**Scholarships
for children**

**Support
for teachers**

Evangel Care Scholarships

The Evangel Care Project provides financial support to the families of over 230 children through monthly financial payments to their bank accounts. The finances are allocated for the children's transportation to their schools, for their daily nutrition and educational needs such as stationery, books and clothing.

The annually renewed support system is of paramount importance for these families, especially considering the prevailing economic conditions in Sri Lanka. Numerous pastors have expressed the profound impact that the educational scholarships provided for their children have had on their overall well-being and resilience.

**When I started attending school,
I faced physical harm from [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] who targeted
me because of my faith.**



My name is Sam Mayurathan. My father, Pastor Mayurathan, was once a Hindu priest. However, he lost his sight during the war and became filled with anger towards the Sinhalese and Christian communities. He even persecuted churches, causing two to close down and two pastors to flee.

In 2002, my father was desperate and prayed, challenging God to reveal Himself through his healing. The following year, he had a miraculous experience that led him to convert to Christianity.

After my father's conversion, I was born. As I grew, I began to experience the result of my father's decision to follow Christ. When I started attending school, I faced physical harm from older Hindu individuals who targeted me because of my faith. Since then, we have faced many different challenges in like manner, including persecution from our extended family. Despite our challenges, I am grateful for the support that the NCEASL has extended to my family. Your financial assistance has helped us afford my educational needs and renewed our strength and determination to face the challenges ahead.

I am also grateful for the prayers of the NCEASL members. Your prayers have been a source of strength and encouragement for my family. Thank you for your support. May God bless you all.

Youth Ed Scholarships for Persecuted Christian University Students

The Youth Ed Support project is dedicated to empowering the next generation of Christians from persecuted contexts by focusing on providing tertiary education opportunities to young individuals.

37 youth were supported by this project within the year.

This project is designed to facilitate the realisation of God's calling in their lives and equip them to contribute meaningfully to their respective churches and communities. Additionally, it represents a proactive stride toward elevating the overall educational standards within the Sri Lankan church.

In March, the Youth Education Project, led by the RLC team, convened its inaugural online assembly. The primary purpose of this gathering was to acquaint new beneficiaries with the project and to provide them with insights into additional educational resources, including SHDT and E-learning.

Support for Christianity Teachers

44 teachers are currently supported from the following districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Kaluthara, Kandy, Polonnaruwa, Mannar, Nuwara Eliya, Rathnapura, Matale, Trincomalee and Vavuniya.

The Volunteer Teachers Support Project aims to financially aid teachers who volunteer their time to educate Christian children in persecuted areas. Many schools in rural areas lack Christian teachers due to the sparse Christian population in the villages. Consequently, students are compelled to study alternative religions, significantly impacting the children of new believers. Despite being unpaid, these teachers assume the responsibilities of paid staff without corresponding benefits, exacerbating financial challenges in the current economic climate.

The monthly financial aid extends beyond the individual teacher to positively affect both students and the community. These educators serve as crucial pillars in the schools they teach, serving as sources of inspiration, comfort and strength for both fellow students and faculty.



Thamna is pursuing studies in social work and psychology while also actively involved in ministry and teaching in Sunday school. Her future plans after completing the course involve working as a social worker to assist underprivileged individuals and sharing the gospel with them.

Thamna comes from a low-income family, where she lost her father to cancer. Her mother, working as a tailor, struggles to support Thamna and her sister. Engaged in online learning, Thamna must soon relocate to Colombo. The family grapples with financial instability worsened by the mother's health issues, relying on limited savings after the father's demise. The support provided through the Youth Education Scholarship program has been immensely helpful to Thamna. She has successfully completed 400 hours of social work, and she is currently working on her assignments. Her academic performance has been good, reflecting her dedication and hard work. This support has played a significant role in shaping her future, as it has eased the financial burden of her education that her mother couldn't afford.

Thamna expresses deep gratitude to the donors who have generously contributed to this scholarship program. She sincerely appreciates their assistance and prays for blessings upon all those who have contributed to her educational journey.



Julie Cristina has shown great passion and dedication to her ministry and life's mission to serve in a rural school within a context of persecution, as a volunteer Christianity teacher. This has allowed her to serve both Christian and Non-Christian students indirectly. Despite the challenges that came due to her faith and work, Julie pressed forward, hoping to make a meaningful difference in the lives of her students and the communities they came from.

Julie faced challenges in her volunteer teaching journey. Limited funds and the current economic crisis, made it tough to cover travel expenses and provide study materials for her students. Despite this, she remained resilient.

Through financial difficulties, Julie found comfort in God and dedication to her students. She saw each obstacle as a chance to be part of something bigger. This support has been a source of hope. Their assistance not only provided financial help but also valuable mentorship through the teacher's camps, strengthening Julie's impact on her students.

She has expressed her deep gratitude to NCEASL and all those involved for their support, recognising the significant difference it made in her work. Reflecting on her journey, she realised the blessing of challenges and successes, knowing she had become a beacon of hope for her students and colleagues.

Special Projects

Volunteer Teacher's Camp



'The Flourish' Teachers camp took place in August, bringing together 33 volunteer teachers (from each of the districts) for a revitalising retreat of professional development. The camp left participants feeling refreshed and inspired, instilling a renewed vision for their teaching ministries. It provided them with the necessary tools and resources to positively impact the lives of their students.

The camp focused on resilience, offering dedicated sessions on "Facing the Storms: Building Resilience in Challenging Times." These sessions provided emotional and psychological support for teachers navigating challenges in their profession. Critical child-related issues, such as the impact of social media and child rights protection, were addressed by experts, emphasising inner healing.

In addition, experts in child psychology and teaching practices shared insights to enhance participant's educational skills. Practical workshops on storytelling and games introduced engaging teaching methods, fostering creativity and problem-solving. Emphasis was placed on building relationships and preventing burnout, ensuring teachers left with a support network to facilitate children's development.

Special Projects

Kids Camp

110 children were in attendance for the kids camp themed "Keepers of the Kingdom." Participants were divided into the following age groups of 06-11, 12-14, and 15-19.

The central emphasis was on acquainting these young minds with the concept of the King, His Kingdom, and their pivotal roles as Co-heirs and Warriors within it.

The Kids Camp achieved notable success through its engaging format, minimising preaching time in favour of incorporating crafts, dynamic discussions, games, and entertaining skits. The main objective was to foster sustained growth and reinforce bonds among these children, acknowledging them as pivotal to the future of the church in Sri Lanka.



Special Meetings

and conferences

Meeting with civil society representatives on mandatory registration

On 12 September 2023, the RLC organised a meeting of civil society representatives to discuss the issue of mandatory registration of places of worship in the country. During the meeting, the NCEASL briefed the group on current trends and concerns regarding registration, sharing its position with regard to opposition for any move to introduce a mandatory system of registration in the country. The meeting was attended by 15 members of civil society including representatives from the Alliance for Minorities, One Text Initiative, Center for Policy Alternatives, National Peace Council, and Pact, among others.



Meeting on the Community of Practice (CoP) set up on the freedom of religion or belief and development, Copenhagen

During 27-28 September 2023 the Head of the RLC took part in a FoRB and development CoP organised by the Nordic Ecumenical Network on the Freedom of Religion or Belief (NORFORB). Apart from sharing the NCEASL's work on religious freedom and challenges faced in integrating religious freedom into the development work of the country, the meeting also proved to be an important advocacy opportunity as the Head of the RLC was able to meet with Dr Nazila Ghanea, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief and brief her about current religious freedom concerns in the country and particularly the registration issue faced by Christian churches.

Meeting with the USCIRF delegation in Colombo

On 8th October 2023, the General Secretary of the NCEASL and the Head of the RLC met with the visiting delegation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in Colombo and briefed them on the religious freedom situation impacting Christians in the country.

Here, the RLC specifically highlighted concerns regarding registration of places of worship and the government's proposed plan to introduce mandatory registration. During the delegation's visit, members of the Commission also met with the Department of Christian Affairs of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Buddhasasana, discussing the need for more transparent processes when introducing systems for registration.



Meeting with the British High Commissioner



On 13 November, the General Secretary of the NCEASL and the Head of the RLC met with Andrew Patrick, the British High Commissioner in Colombo to discuss religious freedom issues faced by the Christian community in the country. During the meeting, the NCEASL RLC briefed the High Commissioner on recent trends and incidents documented by the NCEASL, highlighting concern about the tightening legal environment in relation to religious freedom in the country. At the meeting, the NCEASL also briefed the High Commissioner about the issue of registration, urging the High Commissioner to take up the matter with government actors.

Strengthened the engagement with the UN Special Rapporteur on FORB

In May 2023, the NCEASL made a submission in response to the call for inputs from the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for her thematic report to be delivered to the 78th session of the UN General Assembly. In its submission, the NCEASL RLC discussed broader FoRB concerns and specifically highlighted issues faced by Christians in the country in relation to registration related concerns, increased social hostility and state involvement in FoRB violations against Christians.

In October 2023, the NCEASL made a submission in response to the call from the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for her thematic report to be delivered to the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2024. The focus of the submission was on transformative responses to the advocacy of hatred based on freedom of religion or belief.

Asia Church and Missions in the New Landscape, Oct. 23'

On 25th October 2023, the Head of the NCEASL RLC spoke at a workshop as part of the Asian Church and Missions in the New Landscape consultation organised by the Asia Evangelical Alliance, highlighting persecution challenges faced by the church in Sri Lanka, discussing possible trends relating to religious freedom that could affect the Church in the region as well.

54th UN Human Rights Council Sessions in Geneva

On 11th September 2023, the NCEASL RLC, together with the World Evangelical Alliance's UN office in Geneva, drafted and delivered a statement on the religious freedom situation in Sri Lanka, highlighting the issue of mandatory registration of places of worship, arrests made under the ICCPR Act citing religious offence and justice for the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks.



PROMOTING THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN SRI LANKA

Information dissemination and incident reporting

Monthly and quarterly releases

From January to December 2023, the NCEASL disseminated 11 monthly releases containing information of the FoRB violations against the Christian community. These releases were shared among the diplomatic community, media, civil society, and other advocacy partners. Apart from this, the NCEASL also disseminated four quarterly reports, analysing trends of FoRB violations in the context of socio-political developments during the respective periods.

Advocacy Brief

The NCEASL also shared an updated Advocacy Brief on the situation of religious freedom in Sri Lanka to be relevant advocacy partners and stakeholders.

INCIDENT REPORT

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE, DISCRIMINATION, INTIMIDATION AND HARMFUL SPEECH AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

2023
AT A GLANCE



TOTAL NUMBER
OF INCIDENTS

43

Research Studies on Religious Freedom



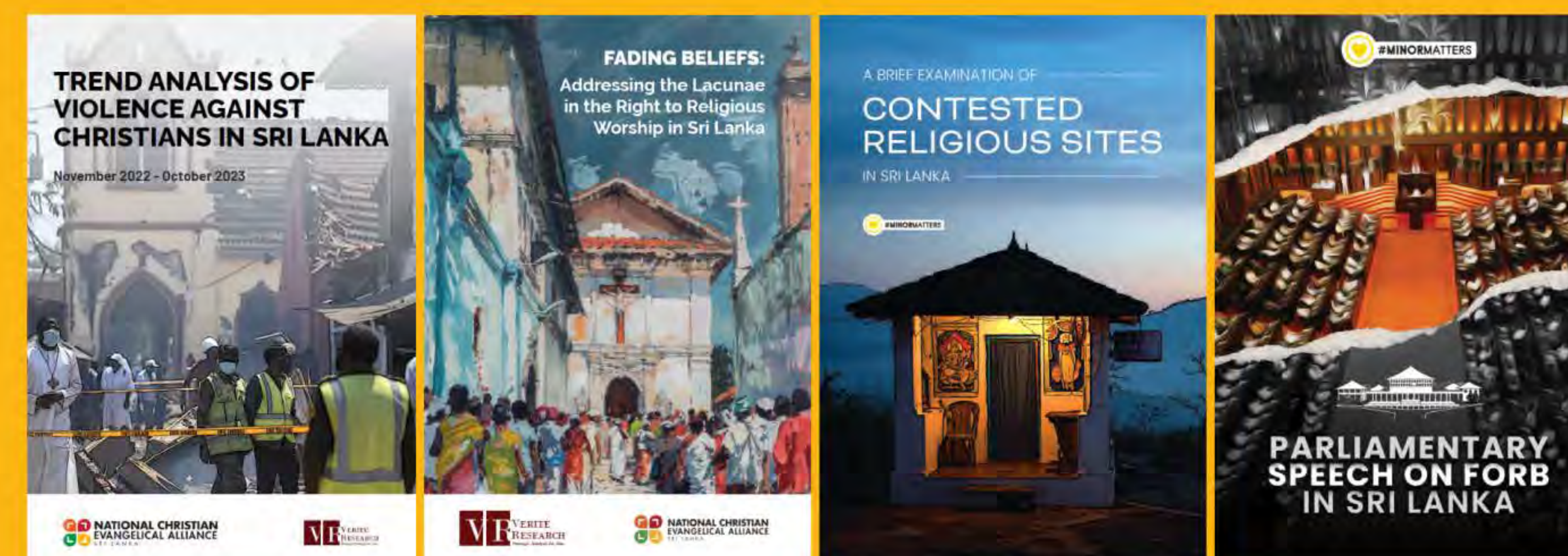
Annual Trend Analysis Report of Religious Liberty Violations (November 2021 - October 2022)

In May 2023, the NCEASL launched an annual trend analysis report of religious liberty violations in the country. The report, a vital advocacy tool for the NCEASL, was produced together with Verité Research, a prominent research think-tank in the country. The report, which was titled 'Religious Violence Against Christians: Disruptions and Distractions', analysed 75 incidents of violence against Christians that occurred from November 2021 to October 2022. The report also discussed underlying narratives that drove violence against Muslim and Hindu communities in the country.

Waging War on Women's Bodies: Gendered Dimensions of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Sri Lanka



In November 2023, the NCEASL published the report 'Waging War on Women's Bodies: Gendered Dimensions of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Sri Lanka'. The report was commissioned by NCEASL and authored by Ms. Shreen Saroor. This research study delved into the intersectionality between FoRB violations and gender, with a specific focus on the Muslim community. The report was translated and published in Sinhala and Tamil as well. The report was launched via the MinorMatters initiative on the 08th of November 2023 at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies Auditorium, featuring an introduction to the report by the researcher, Ms. Shreen Saroor. Mrs Feriyal Ashraff, Professor Savithri Goonesekere, and Dr Sakuntala Kadiragamar also addressed the gathering, responding to the report's findings. Moreover, two Muslim women who had faced discrimination for their faith shared their personal experiences during the event. Among those present at the event were civil society representatives, journalists, activists, researchers and staff members of diplomatic missions.



Annual Trend Analysis Report of Religious Liberty Violations (November 2022 - October 2023)

In June 2023, the NCEASL commissioned Verité Research to develop the annual trend analysis report based on the FoRB violations documented by the NCEASL between November 2022 and October 2023.

Report on Registration of Religious Places in Sri Lanka

In August 2023, the NCEASL commissioned Verité Research to conduct a research study and write an analytical report in English on the Registration of Religious Places in Sri Lanka.

Report on contested religiously significant sites in Sri Lanka

In September 2023, the NCEASL commissioned Bhavani Fonseka to conduct a research study and write an analytical report in English on contested religiously significant sites in Sri Lanka.

Study on the Statements made by Sri Lankan Parliamentarians regarding FoRB in Sri Lanka

The MinorMatters initiative commissioned a comprehensive research initiative aimed at identifying Members of Parliament who have demonstrated a notable interest in Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) during the period spanning from January to July 2023. Our specific focus was directed toward those individuals who either actively engaged with the public or addressed FoRB-related matters within the parliamentary setting. The driving force behind this research arises from our acknowledged necessity to educate policymakers about the significance of FoRB in the context of Sri Lanka. We firmly believe that such awareness among policymakers is pivotal, given their authority to enforce existing legislation, and that it holds the potential to yield benefits for the citizens. This, in turn, can contribute significantly to the mitigation of acts of violence and discrimination rooted in religious differences within Sri Lanka. Our ultimate objective is to orchestrate awareness programs designed to equip parliamentarians with a comprehensive understanding of FoRB, encouraging them to delve deeper into issues concerning these domains in their discourse and decision-making processes and to actively address and advocate for issues on FoRB, fostering a more inclusive and tolerant society. The research study is expected to be completed by January 2024.

WORKSHOPS

AND TRAININGS

FoRB Documentation Trainings



In January 2023, a **2-day training programme on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Documentation** was held for **15 documentation officers** representing 12 different districts within the country. The training was conducted in Sinhala and was held in Kandy.



In January 2023, a **2-day training programme on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Documentation** was held for **6 documentation officers** representing 4 different districts within the country. The training was conducted in Tamil and was held in Colombo.



A 2-day training programme on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Documentation was held for **32 participants** representing 11 different districts within the country. This event took place on the 16th and 17th of September in Mount Lavinia. The training commenced with an introductory segment that provided participants with an understanding of FoRB and its associated legal framework.

The programme then delved into the documentation and ethics of documentation, equipping participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively capture and report incidents related to Freedom of Religion or Belief. The training concluded with a panel discussion featuring four experts who offered insights to enrich the participants' understanding of FoRB further.

FoRB Documentation Trainings



During **17th to 19th November**, a **documentation training for 8 journalists** from Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Trincomalee districts was done in Colombo. The participants were trained on FoRB and documentation. The FoRB training was conducted by Arthur Wamanan while Ranitha Mayooran conducted the training sessions on documentation. The workshop also included a session on psychosocial well-being, which was conducted by Senior Journalist attached to Virakesari newspaper, Ram Kumar and a session on security which was conducted by Vibooshini Balakrishnan from Frontline Defenders.



Two 3-day training programmes were held for 24 human rights defenders representing 14 districts from 6 provinces. The training programmes, conducted in the local languages, took place from the 12th to 18th of December, at the Sanctuary House, Ja-Ela and focused on the legal framework concerning religious freedom, and the documentation of violations. The programme also included sessions on ethics, security and psychosocial well-being, equipping participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively capture and report incidents.



The NCEASL also continued to facilitate ongoing capacity building for the cohort of documentation officers.

1. In June 2023, selected documentation officers were invited to be a part of a workshop focused on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and the Museum of Religious Freedom, developed by NCEASL. The workshop aimed to equip documentation officers on FoRB and, by extension, improve their skills to identify FoRB violations in the community better.
2. In August 2023, selected documentation officers were invited to be a part of a workshop focused on key areas of FoRB, advocacy on FoRB and Documentation of FoRB violations.
3. Furthermore, to provide regular feedback to the documentation officers and enhance the quality and accuracy of reports, the NCEASL conducted monthly meetings with the documentation officers. During these meetings, the documentation officers provided overall observations concerning FoRB in the district and received feedback on their reporting from the NCEASL team.



26 youths from 12 districts participated in a 2-day youth workshop based on the Museum of Religious Freedom. The programme adhered to the curriculum devised by the Museum, encompassing sessions that delved into the concepts of history, the idea of nation and state, and citizenship, all contextualised within the historical events showcased in the Museum. The youth in the programme include individuals affiliated with the MinorMatters and Act Now networks, along with a few who responded through social media outreach. The sessions were facilitated by Sanjula Pietersz, Sarah Arumugam, Bhumini Senevirathne and Akshina Palihawadana and was held at Best Western Elyon, Colombo.

An additional workshop on FoRB was organised for 26 youths who actively participated from more than 10 districts and are affiliated with the MinorMatters and Act Now networks.. The programme was facilitated by Sarah Arumugam and Sampath Samarakoon and also included a session for MinorMatters documentation officers conducted by Salome Ruth. The training was held at Mandarina Hotel, Colombo, in August.

FoRB workshop for youth

Workshop for social media influencers

A 2-day social media influencers training on countering harmful speech and building social cohesion was held on the 13th and 14th of September 2023. The training was facilitated by Sarah Arumugam and included 23 participants from over 10 districts.

A second 2-day social media influencers training on countering harmful speech and building social cohesion was conducted for the second batch of participants and was held on the 24th and 25th of September 2023. The training was facilitated by Sarah Arumugam and included 24 participants from over 10 districts.

A follow-up mentorship training was conducted for the selected applicants from the social media influencers training held in September. Participants had the opportunity to interact directly with a panel of mentors assigned to oversee the activities specified in the proposals. During these interactions, they discussed the proposals, addressed specific issues, and received guidance to make improvements. The workshop was attended by 13 participants and was facilitated by Sampath Samarakoon, Pradeep Kanakasooriyan and Nabeela Iqbaal. All 3 of the workshops were held at Berjaya Hotel, Colombo.



Training of Public Officials from the Provincial Council of Sabaragamuwa



MinorMatters conducted a training on religious freedom and social cohesion on the 4th and 5th of December, 2023, for key decision-makers in government institutions under the purview of the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council.

The training was conducted by Sarah Arumugan (Attorney-at-Law) and Raveendra Sumathipala (Attorney-at-Law). The training covered a range of topics, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, social cohesion, and pluralism, among others. Additionally, the training also delved into the responsibilities of the State in promoting social cohesion and harmony.



Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) System to Mitigate Religious Tensions



Peer Educators Training on Freedom of Religion or Belief

MinorMatters provided a comprehensive 3-day residential training on Freedom of Religion or Belief for 20 young individuals designated as 'Peer Educators'. These individuals were carefully selected from five hotspot districts - Jaffna, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Puttalam, where incidents of religiously motivated violence are prevalent. The training was conducted by Human rights lawyer Ranitha Mayooraan. Following the training, the peer educators will be tasked to conduct awareness-building sessions for community members in their respective districts with a specific focus on youth.

At present, the RLC is in the process of implementing an Early Warning and Early Response System to identify triggers and proactively address and mitigate religious tensions in areas prone to such issues.

The EWER system will comprise of 3 components:

- Framework to analyse critical information from the ground level
- Monitoring mechanism comprising ground-level monitoring personnel
- Response mechanism composed of community leaders to proactively engage in early responses to prevent and de-escalate tensions and prevent violence

While in the initial phase, the EWER system will be implemented in 2 identified districts (Vavuniya and Batticaloa).

The First training workshop for monitoring personnel in the Batticaloa district was conducted on 26th April 2023. Participants received a brief on the Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Framework, with particular emphasis on the trigger factors that monitoring personnel are expected to identify. The second workshop was then scheduled for the 3rd of June, 2023 and located in Vavuniya.

Webinars



Webinar on the Intersection of Elections, Social Media, and the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Sri Lanka

The MinorMatters e-learning initiative conducted a webinar on 'Elections, Social Media and FoRB' in Sinhala on the 1st of March 2023. The webinar was aimed at exploring the intersection between Elections, Social Media and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). The event was attended by over 35 participants who engaged in an interactive discussion forum.

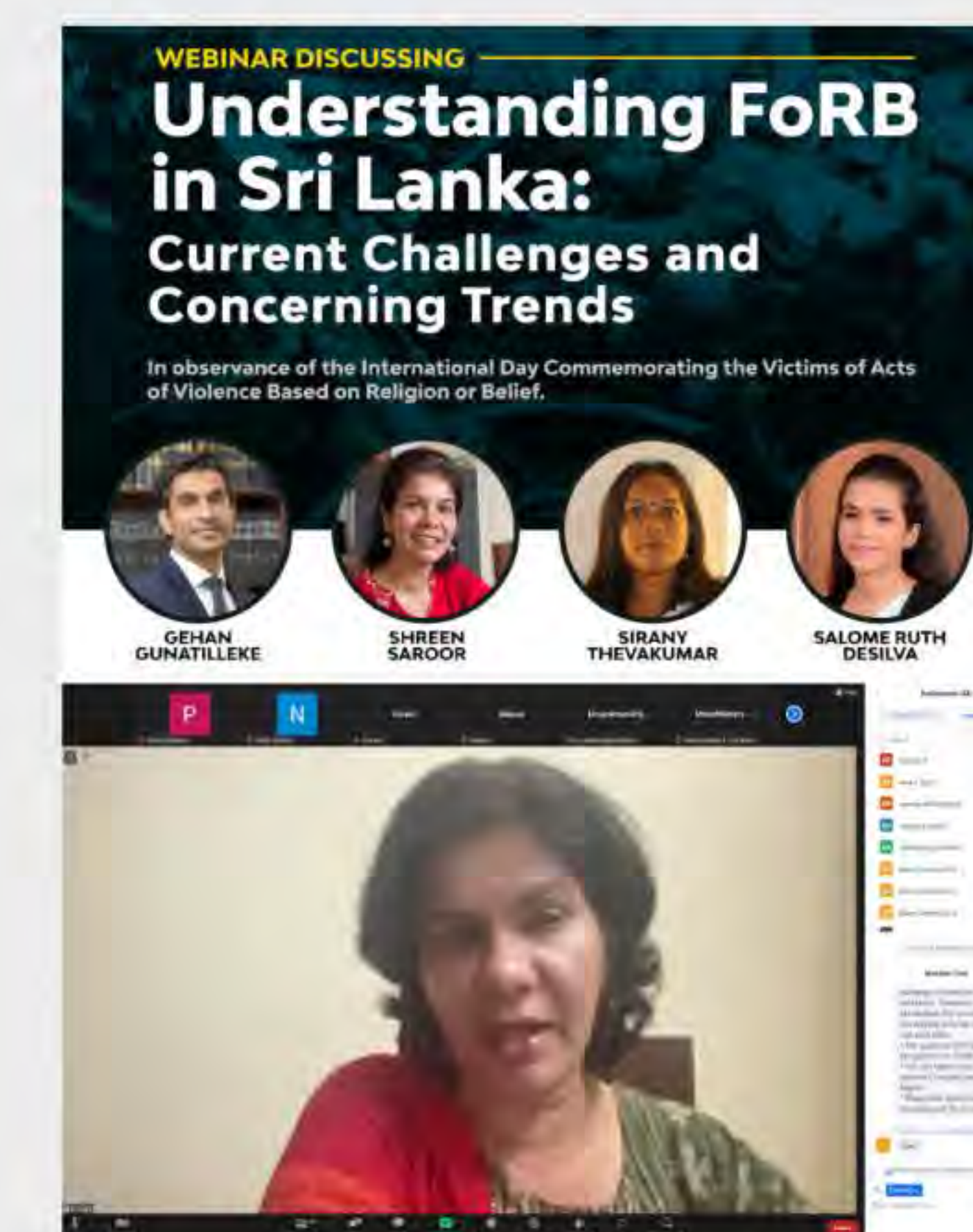
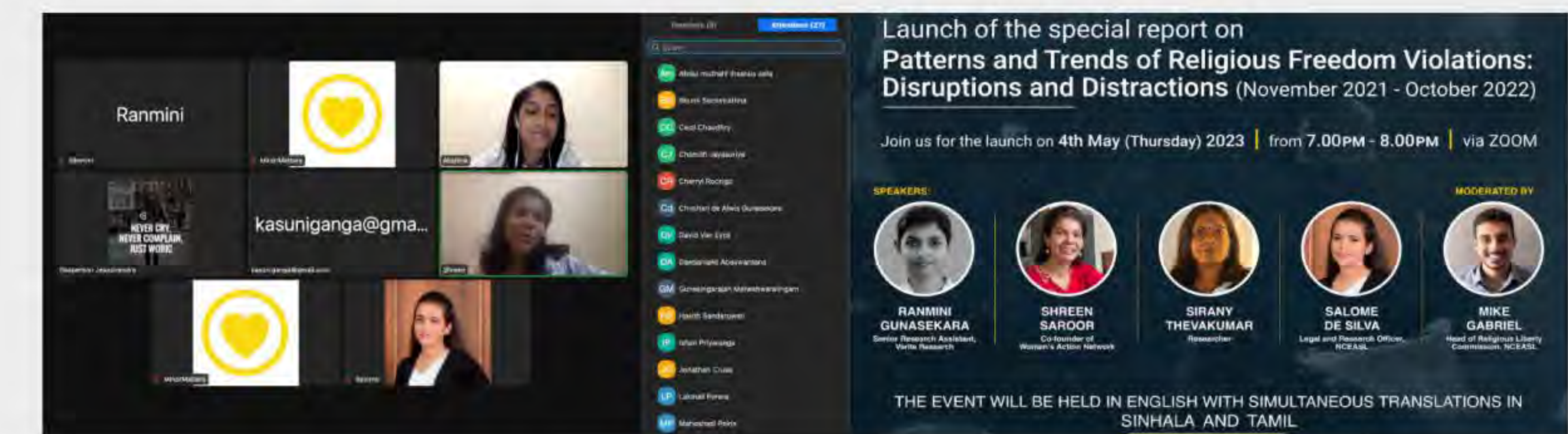
Dr Gehan Gunatilleke explained the profound importance of FoRB in electoral processes and its pivotal role in shaping the outcomes of elections. Mr Darshatha Gamage spoke on the influence of elections on social media, emphasising the potency of social media platforms as a powerful tool during electoral processes. Additionally, he highlighted the implications of social media on democratic principles.

Overall, the webinar provided a platform for individuals to engage in meaningful dialogue and understand the complex dynamics between Elections, Social Media and FoRB.

Launch of the Special Report on 'Religious Violence Against Christians: Disruptions and Distractions (November 2021 - October 2022)

On 4th May 2023, the RLC launched a special report on 'Religious violence against Christians: Disruptions and Distractions (November 2021 - October 2022)'. The report, which was commissioned by the NCEASL and developed by Verité Research, analysed 75 incidents of violence against Christians during this period. The report explored key trends of religiously motivated violence against the Christian community in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the report discusses underlying narratives that contribute to violence against Muslim and Hindu communities in the country.

The launch was held trilingual through Zoom with the participation of more than 40 individuals. The speakers included Ranmini Gunasekara (Senior Research Assistant), Verité Research, Salome de Silva (Legal and Research Officer, NCEASL); and Shreen Saroor (Co-founder of Mannar Women's Development Federation and Women's Action Network).



The International Day of Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief

In lieu of August 22nd, MinorMatters conducted a webinar which captured the core elements of unity and commemoration. Speakers included Ms Shreen Saroor (Co-founder of Mannar Women's Development Federation (MWDF) and Women's Action Network), Ms Salome Ruth (Attorney at Law, Legal and Research officer - NCEASL), Ms Sirany Thevakumar (Researcher and Human Rights Activist) and Dr Gehan Gunatilleke (Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka).

Museum of Religious Freedom

The ongoing MinorMatters campaign remained committed to engaging and equipping schoolchildren, community leaders, and religious figures. This is achieved through the utilisation of the Museum of Religious Freedom, aiming to foster increased social respect for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and religious harmony. The approach involves raising awareness, encouraging introspection, and fostering critical reflection on the historical narrative that has influenced the relationships between religious communities in Sri Lanka.

1. On February 23rd and 24th, the RLC organised a training workshop for 45 school teachers from the Matara District. During the workshop, the teachers engaged in an extensive discussion on the principles of freedom of religion or belief and pluralism.
2. The museum can be accessed through the following website: www.museumofreligiousfreedom.lk
3. In addition, MinorMatters conducted a 2-day training workshop for 44 cultural officers from more than 40 divisional secretariat offices from across Southern Province. The workshop was based on the Museum of Religious Freedom and included sessions on FoRB (Freedom of Religion or Belief), pluralism, and the law related to religious freedom. Throughout the workshop, participants engaged in a range of activities, including discussions, presentations, and case studies. They also had the opportunity to share their own experiences and ideas on how to promote religious freedom and pluralism. The Governor of the Southern Province, Dr. Willy Gamage, attended the workshop.



MinorMatters e-Learning

The e-Learning platform developed by the NCEASL serves as a complementary online resource to the Museum of Religious Freedom, functioning as a centralised hub for learning materials and tools pertaining to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB).

The e-Learning platform can be accessed through the following website: www.minormatters.education



This platform, inclusive of the RLC's proprietary Learning Management System and Mobile App, offers a diverse array of resources such as short courses, videos, and webinars. These resources are designed to enhance learners' understanding of the principles, concepts, and practical applications of FoRB. Additionally, the e-Learning platform facilitates public discourse and constructive debates on FoRB, with a specific focus on promoting critical thinking, particularly among the youth.

The following asynchronous courses were launched during the reporting period:

- Introduction to FoRB (English, Tamil and Sinhala)
- Introduction to FoRB (Tamil)
- Introduction to FoRB (Sinhala)

This course was developed to provide individuals with a basic understanding of FoRB and Human rights. Currently, 60 individuals have registered for the course.





Poetry Competition

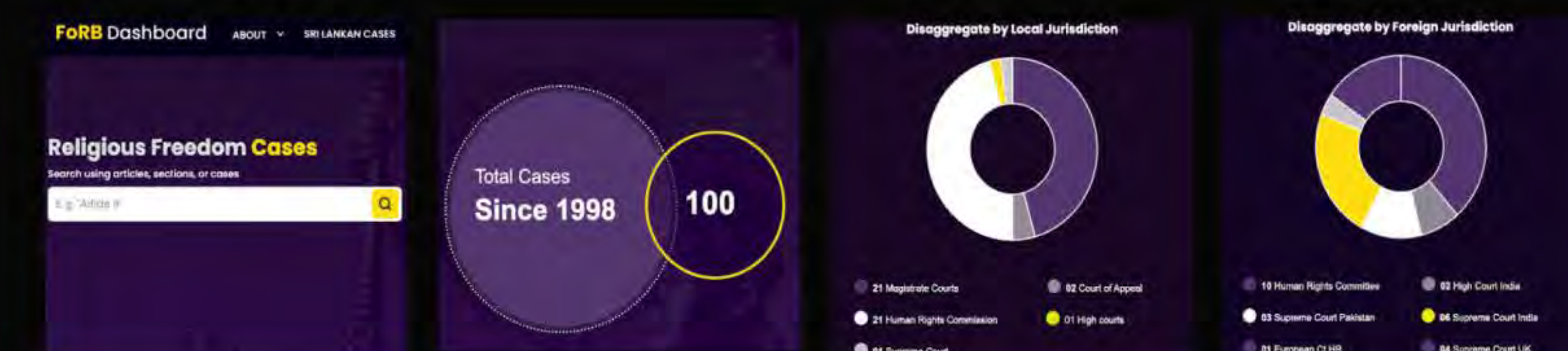
MinorMatters e-learning conducted a creative poetry writing competition under the theme "Together we rise, separated we fall" in the context of FoRB in Sri Lanka. The competition was held in Sinhala and Tamil languages.

E-portal on FoRB Cases

Analysing Religious Freedom Litigation in Sri Lanka

In the reporting period, the RLC inaugurated its Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) dashboard - a complimentary, trilingual online platform encompassing judgments, analyses, and articles pertinent to FoRB jurisprudence, sourced from both Sri Lanka and various jurisdictions. This unique resource serves as a pivotal tool, offering essential data for comprehending the evolution of Sri Lanka's jurisprudence on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

The dashboard can be accessed through the following website: <https://forbdashboard.minormatters.org/>.



Minor Matters Social Media Campaigns

- Independence Day (February)
- International Day of Human Fraternity (February)
- Digana Riots (February)
- Easter Sunday Remembrance (April)
- International Day Against Hate Speech (June)
- Aluthgama Riots (June)
- International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (August)
- International Day of Literacy (September)
- Digital Citizenship (October)

SOCIAL



JUSTICE

Workshops and trainings

Act Now Core Group Discussion

The Act Now campaign has been educating and capacitating grassroots level youth in Sri Lanka since 2019. Over 500 young people representing all ethnicities, religions and social backgrounds from all over the country benefited. Even though Act Now has a network of young people, there have always been a few members who play key roles. They were identified for their inherent leadership and enthusiasm towards social issues. Act Now identified the importance of forming a core group and preparing an action plan to strengthen future activities. Therefore, Act Now conducted a two-day meeting for 10 core group members.

Training on Anti-Terrorism Act : ATA

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was enacted in 1979 as a temporary measurement and made a permanent law in 1982. Since then the act has been used to suppress political opponents of successive governments including journalists, activists and human rights, and particularly Tamil resistance groups. After the Easter Sunday attack in 2019, Muslim society was subjected to hundreds of arbitrary detention under the act. With the widespread opposition and international pressure, the government decided to replace the PTA with the ATA. ATA is much more draconian than PTA and vests arbitrary power on the executive to take control over citizen's democratic activities. Hence an online capacity-building training for the Act Now core group was conducted. Attorney-at-Law and social activist Ermiza Tegal conducted the training.

Training on Issues in the Plantation

This year marks 200 years since the arrival of the Malaiyaha Tamil community to Sri Lanka. A training to equip them with knowledge of historical facts and political demands of the community was conducted. The resource person was Fr. Saththivel, who is a prominent social activist and has been working in the field for decades.

Training on Civic Journalism

A 4-day Civic Journalism training was organised for 18 young people. The trainees were selected out of 245 applications and through individual interviews. The training was the first stage of a travelling exhibition that will exhibit issues related to democracy and human rights which are not adequately covered by mainstream media. The training was conducted by researcher and social activist Sampath Samarakoon and a session on law and media was facilitated by Attorney-at-Law Jagath Liyanarachchi. The youth was trained in depth on ethics, technical aspects and legal aspects of civic journalism. The youth was engaged in discussions and finally came up with a list of key issues that needed to be addressed through the exhibition and an implementation plan.

Social media campaigns

200 years of Plantation People.

The campaign consists of short video clips in which Malayaha Tamil people talk about the difficulties they face in the economic crisis and how they are deprived of basic rights.

Campaign Against ATA

The campaign consists of how ATA is a threat to democracy and needs to be abolished.

Black July

Act Now launched a social media campaign themed 'justice and accountability instead of myths' marking the 40th year since 1983 anti-Tamil programme (Black July). The campaign contained the events that took place prior to the Black July, mass brutalities and key incidents happened during the programme (July 24th to 30th) and government responses before, during and after the programme.

International Day of Democracy

The campaign contained posts on the current situation in Sri Lanka with regard to democracy and human rights. The campaign was themed as "Is Sri Lanka a democratic country?" and brought out the issues such as mass graves, enforced disappearances, media freedom, rights of the plantation Tamil community, militarisation of the North and East and right to memorialisation.

Human Rights day

The campaign launched marking International Human Rights day on December 10th; The content listed out human rights violated by the current issues in Sri Lanka such as enforced disappearances, mass graves and of Malayaha Tamil people.



Blog articles by Act Now volunteers

1. Article on 200 years of slavery of Malayaha Tamils
2. Article on why PTA should be abolished
3. Article on enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka

Statements and Petitions to Human Rights Council

Act Now issues statements condemning the violations of human rights and democratic values in Sri Lanka. Through statements it highlights the concerns the volunteers have regards to the fundamental rights of the citizens enshrined in the constitution.

Act Now also submits petitions to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka stressing the need for proper investigations and actions in that regard.

1. Public statement and submission of petition to Human Rights Commission on brutal suppression of peaceful protest
2. Statement condemning the suppression of peaceful protest
3. Abolish ATA

Participation in Common Struggles

The 6th year of the struggle of the families of the disappeared

February 20, 2023, marked the 6th year of the struggle of the relatives of the forcibly disappeared in the North and East Sri Lanka. Act Now took part in solidarity in the protest march held in Kilinochchi. This struggle is the longest ongoing struggle in Sri Lanka and over 138 parents have died during the struggle without knowing the fate of their children. Successive governments have failed to address the issue except pseudo commissions and other steps taken under international pressure.

Mullivaikkal Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day

Every year on May 18, Tamils in the North and East commemorate their loved ones who were massacred during and in particular at the last stages of the war in Sri Lanka. Act Now participated in the memorials held in Mullivaikkal in solidarity with the victims and survivors.

'Maanbumigu Malayaha Makkal' Walk

'Maanbumigu Malayaha Makkal' Walk, that aimed to retrace the path taken by Malayaha Tamils who were brought to Sri Lanka 200 years ago, to remember their plight and demand their rights concluded in Matale on August 12th. The walk commenced from Talaimannar on July 28 and completed 252 km with the participation of civil society organisations, activists and concerned individuals. Act Now also joined the walk and participated in the events in solidarity.

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

Every year on August 30, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances is commemorated all over the world. Hundreds of relatives of the forcibly disappeared in the North and East gathered in Mannar and held a protest march marking the day and demanding justice for their loved ones who disappeared during and after the war. Act Now participated in solidarity in the march.

33rd Annual Commemoration of the Missing Persons

Annual Commemoration of the Missing Persons is held on October 27th at the memorial situated in Seeduwa every year. The commemoration is dedicated to those who disappeared in the 1987-89 JVP insurrection by the Sri Lankan forces. The commemoration was held with the participation of the families of the disappeared in the South, civil society organisations, activists and individuals. Act Now also participated in the event in solidarity.



Research Reports



Plantation study report

The research report, "A Study of Access to Governance, Public Services and Democratic Rights of the Plantation People in Sri Lanka", was launched on January 22nd in Hatton. The research was conducted by Dr. R. Ramesh, a senior lecturer in policy and governance studies at University of Peradeniya. The study explores the status of access to public institutions, public services and social rights of the plantation people in Sri Lanka which is an area that has received little attention from Sri Lankan researchers. Act Now volunteers, Activists, government servants and local level political representatives participated in the event. An article about the report launch was also published in a prominent Tamil newspaper.



'Act Now' Symposium

Act Now Symposium themed "We Shape Our Future" was held on January 27th at BMICH. Other youth organisations and academics and activists in the fields of human rights and democracy also participated in the event. The keynote was delivered by Dr. Saravanamuttu and activist Sampath Samarakoon spoke on the current democratic situation in Sri Lanka. The event was followed by experience sharing by two Act Now volunteers and a panel discussion contributed by attorney-at-law Aingkaran Kugathasan, Chathura Peiris of Tharunodaya organisation and Janithrika Jayasundara of Transparency International.



National Action Plan on Plantation Issues

Act Now prepared a policy document which will support the National Action Plan and strategic directions to demand the rights of plantation communities in Sri Lanka. Consultations were held covering 10 districts - Rathnapura, Kegalle, Monaragala, Badulla, Matara, Galle, Kandy, Kalutara, Nuwara Eliya and Matale - to collect data. The discussions were facilitated by Prof.Chandrabose and Dr.Rameshkumar.



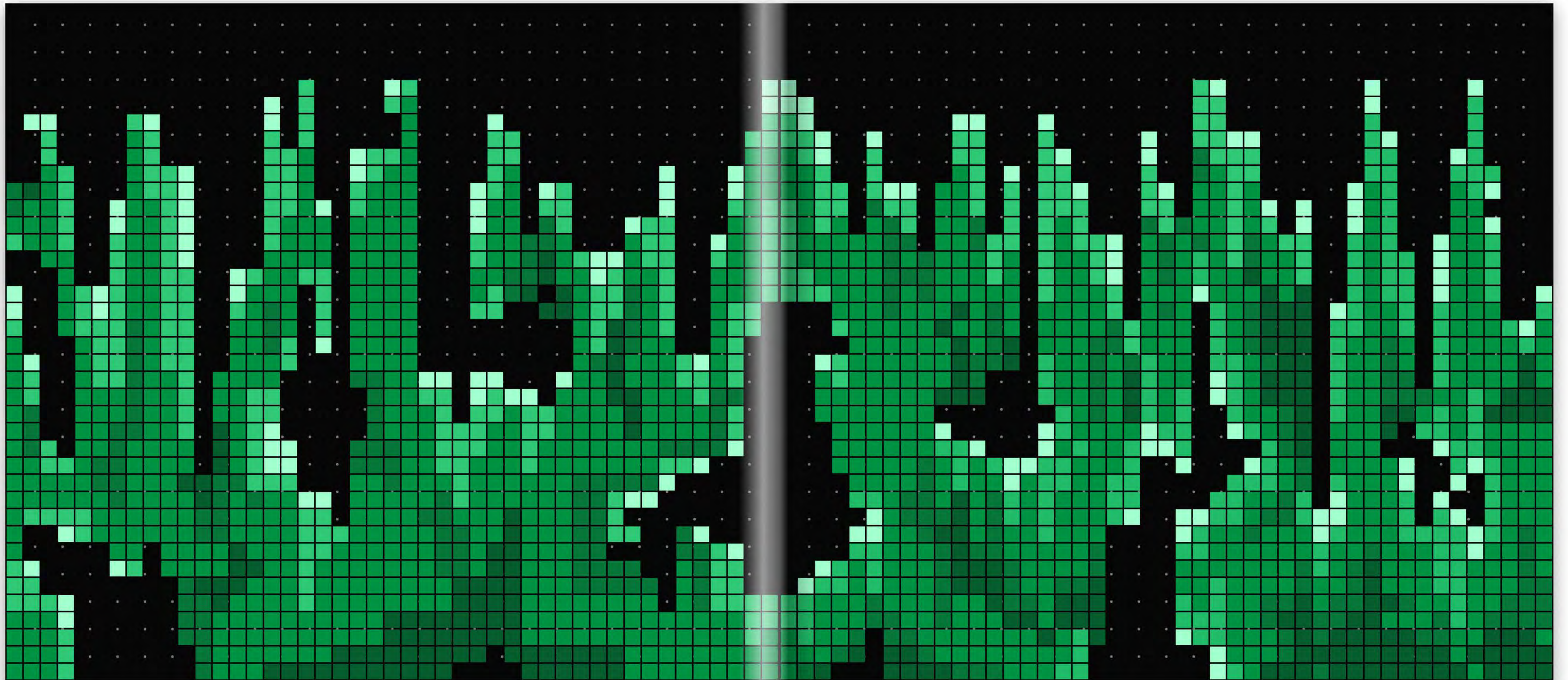
Youth Dialogues

The discussion on power sharing, the 13th Amendment and devolution of power has been re-opened in Sri Lankan society. Identifying the importance and relevance of power devolution, Act Now organised a youth dialogue themed "Inclusive Governance". Youth organisations, Act Now volunteers and other young activists participated in the discussion. Dr. Saravanamuttu, the director of Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and human rights activist Mr. Sampath Samarakoon conducted the discussion.

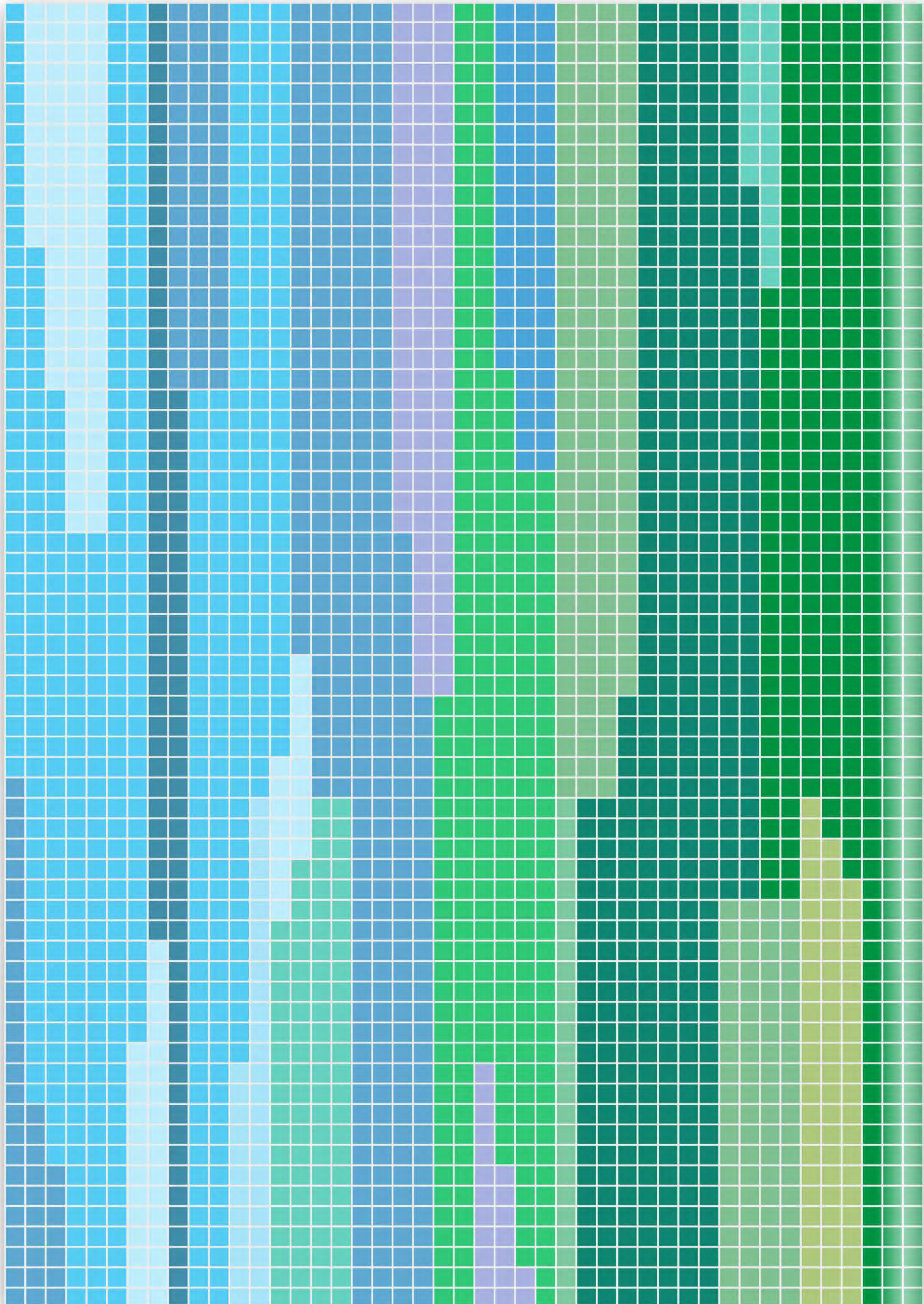


Discussion, Press Conference and Street Campaign on ATA

Discussions, press conferences and street campaigns on the proposed ATA were held in Anuradhapura and Kandy. Act Now youth volunteers, journalists and local civil society activists participated in the discussions. The proposed Broadcasting Regulatory Act and its impact were also discussed in length. The press conferences were headed by prominent activists and Act Now youth in the area. The participants took to the street and distributed message cards to the public following the press conference. The message cards contained 10 different messages on how the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act shrinks democracy and the rights of the people.



**RELIEF &
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**



The Relief and Development (R&D)

Commission of the NCEASL, also known as the Alliance Development Trust (ADT), is committed to building and uplifting vulnerable communities across the island.

The R&D Commission's initiatives are carried forward through its 6 pillars:

- Sustainable Livelihood
- Health
- Peace & Reconciliation
- Climate Resilience & Disaster Response
- Child Participation & Development

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD



The R&D Commission through its livelihood sector supports and empowers entrepreneurs to earn a sustainable income and improve their living standards. With the present economic challenges, vulnerable communities desperately need support.

Through its initiatives the R&D Commission strives to bring economic sufficiency to the homes of persons grappling with poverty.

Recipients who are chosen through a process are given a training on financial management and entrepreneurship and are guided during and after the assistance to ensure the sustainability of their ventures and to build their businesses more professionally and thrive. Beneficiaries who receive grants are engaged in livelihood initiatives such as sewing, agriculture, animal husbandry, grocery stores and small businesses.



The aim is to create a sustainable business model, to be used within communities to bring about change.



The economic recession and price hikes were arduous for all of us. Managing my church and looking after my family was financially challenging; even caring for my congregation and looking into their welfare was difficult and discouraging. "In 2023, the R&D Commission offered me a grant; they helped me to start a business selling motorbike spare parts and accessories. Six months later, with slow progress, I received additional income to sustain my family and my ministry. I am so grateful to God and the R&D Commission for the support I obtained."

Pastor Chadrasekaram, Batticaloa.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD

OPERATIONS & HIGHLIGHTS

IDENTIFICATION SURVEY

Conducted a baseline survey to identify potential entrepreneurs to initiate their livelihood business.

TRAININGS

Conducted training on Financial Management and Entrepreneurship.

GRANTS

Identified and provided more grants to 15 additional pastors in 2023.

FOLLOW-UP GRANTS

Followed up with 55 pastors who were given grants in 2022.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT UNIT

The Business Development Unit (BDU) focuses on empowering, equipping, and building the lives of disadvantaged people, especially widows and differently-abled persons from rural areas, to be self-sufficient through livelihood ventures.

In light of Sri Lanka's economic crisis in 2022, the BDU directed its attention towards distributing seeds to encourage people to create home gardens to promote food security.



BDU Projects

- Live Green Products in Kilinochchi received a dryer to dry fruits and vegetables for export.
- Among the 38 students at Batticaloa Maddikaly Tamil Vidyalayam, an impoverished and low-level school in a rural area in the Manmunai North DS division, 13 sat for their scholarship examination in 2023. The BDU distributed past paper books to these students to help them prepare for their scholarship examinations. These children live in underdeveloped areas, and their parents are daily wage earners. Some children come from single-parent households or are separated from their parents as they work abroad to support the family. Additionally, the BDU provided the school with photocopier toner.
- The BDU provided an incubator to 3 women in Mullaitivu under a self-employment programme.
- Three women entrepreneurs farming poultry in the Punnaicholai Grama Niladhari (GN) division in the Batticaloa district received 85% of the cost of an incubator.
- The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Rakwana received vegetable seeds for their home gardening project.
- A lady in Mullaitivu received LKR 25,000 to repair her push bike. She will use it to take her children to school and for business purposes.

THRIVE FOR GOOD

The economic crisis which followed the pandemic caused a severe negative impact especially among the marginalised and underprivileged communities.

When the nation shifted its focus to organic farming, this decision led to a drastic supply crash as farmers lacked effective alternatives, causing widespread confusion and appeals to the government. The market faced a severe vegetable shortage, resulting in hidden hunger and health challenges amid the pandemic. The most affected were the vulnerable, economically strained families, facing severe survival challenges with chronic health issues.

THE THRIVE FOR GOOD ORGANIC FARMING PROJECT commenced in November 2022 with the primary objective of addressing food insecurity by training selected individuals as Grow Health (GH) Champions and establishing Life Gardens and individual gardens.

This project encouraged people to cultivate healthy, organic produce, free from pesticides, grown in their own home gardens and natural environment.



Madumali, is a young mother with two school-going children. Her husband serves in the Sri Lanka Navy and has limited time for the family. She embraced sustainable farming practices to contribute to their daily needs. With the acquired training and knowledge of carbonic agriculture, she transitioned from conventional to organic farming on a small scale.

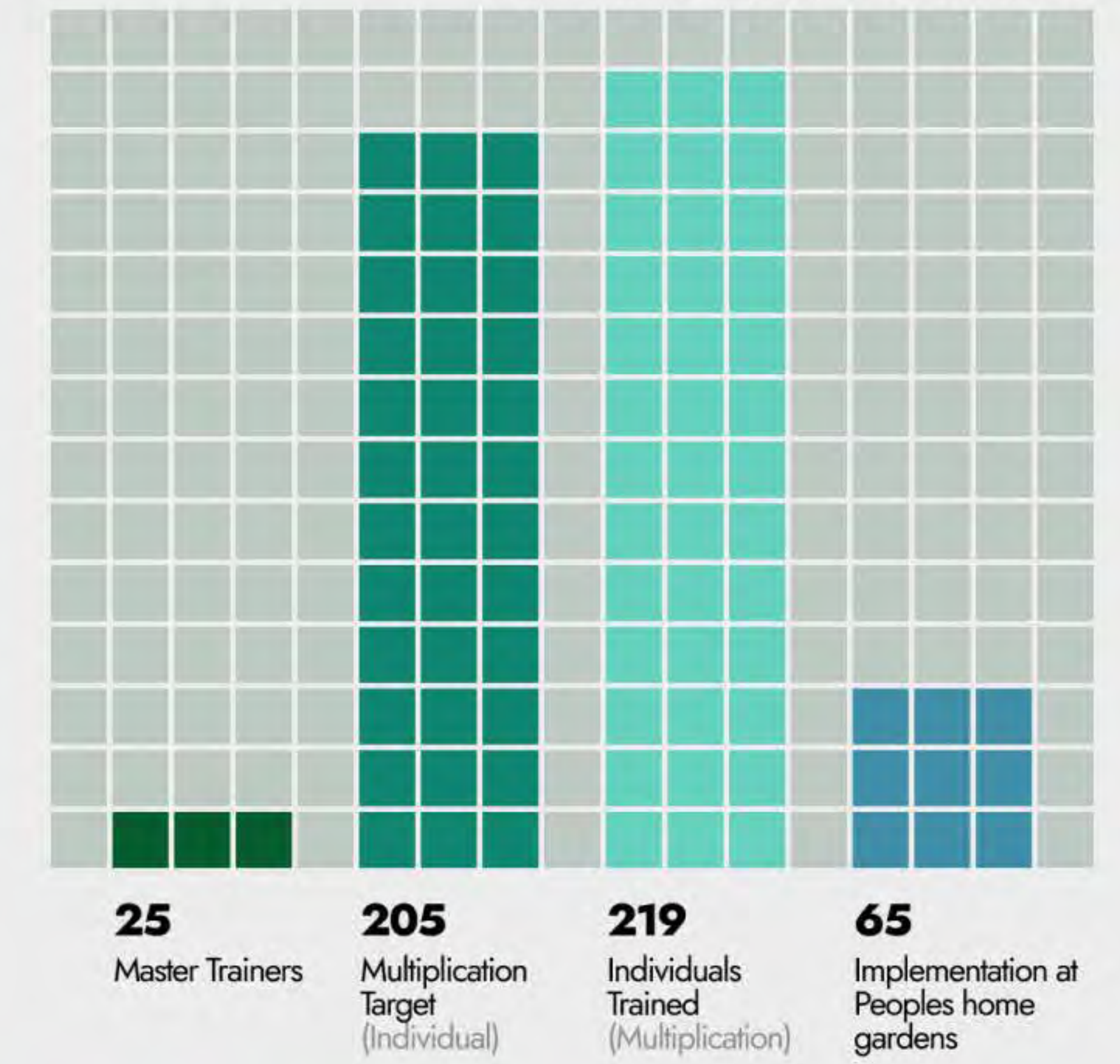
Amidst challenging soil conditions due to the prevailing drought, she cultivated a diverse array of produce, including Green Chili, Bird Chili, Gourd, Brinjal, Ladies Finger, Bitter Gourd, Peanut, Kankung, and various medicinal plants - Turmeric and Lemon Grass. The organic harvest not only provides fresh, chemical-free vegetables for her family; she shares her excess produce with her neighbours fostering community collaboration and a spirit of collective well-being.

In the period under review, the R&D Commission and its partners conducted master training in Carbonic Home Gardening; 3 Training of Trainers (ToT) courses were held across different regions, bringing together 28 people from Vavuniya, Rambukkana, and Colombo.

The hands-on training ensured practical knowledge and long-term retention.

In 2023 the project allowed for further multiplication training across various regions. Ultimately, the project exceeded expectations, reaching a total of 219 individuals trained. Significant progress has been made amid challenges, particularly in terms of knowledge sharing, economic empowerment, and soil conservation.

TARGET AND ACHIEVEMENTS





HEALTH

The R&D Commission is committed to promoting good health and well-being across Sri Lanka's communities, which are most vulnerable to infectious diseases.

The R&D Commission believes in communities living to their fullest potential, especially in underprivileged regions. The health sector aims to contribute to building a healthy nation where people can achieve good health overall.

AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

The year started with a solid initiative to spread awareness, as with every year, World Leprosy Day fell on the last Sunday of January.

Awareness Walks

To facilitate this, the main form of the programme conducted was leprosy awareness walks; these were held in collaboration with many different leprosy stakeholders in multiple districts. Two of these walks in the Moratuwa and Dambulla areas were the most impactful. With a combined reach of nearly 2,000 people, the awareness campaigns lead to the discovery of over 100 new cases. These walks were conducted with the Anti-Leprosy Campaign (ALC) and Regional Director of Health Services (RDHS) offices in the Colombo and Matale districts.



The R&D Commission conducted 18 awareness programmes across 9 districts for village communities, school teachers and children, health staff, and government officials.

In total, the R&D Commission provided comprehensive leprosy awareness to 3,931 individuals. The awareness programmes consisted of the head leprosy Public Health Inspector (PHI) providing vital information on what leprosy is and how to combat it, as well as addressing different stigmas and assumptions surrounding leprosy to confront them and tear down any stigma that may negatively impact those affected.

AWARENESS PROGRAMMES



Mr Yogarajah Dinojan of the Trincomalee district assisted the R&D Commission with their journey of leprosy recovery.

When asked about his experience with leprosy at the awareness programme the R&D Commission conducted, he said, "I have had leprosy in the form of a rash on my hand for the past 7 years. This was identified as leprosy by medical officers and PHIs in my area. My family consists of my parents, younger brother, sister and myself. Since being identified, I have been under treatment for the past 4 months. I have 8 more months to complete the 1 year treatment. The R&D Commission joined hands with the PHIs and medical officials and taught us about leprosy and how it can be cured. The R&D Commission also gave 20 leprosy families dry rations during this process. They also created a self-care group to organise medications as well. This was a 6 member group, and I currently serve as a secretary in this group. We are eager to conduct programmes to identify patients and create awareness in our area. I will keep on working towards eradicating leprosy."

The R&D Commission's Health Team's awareness programmes helped him understand more about his situation, the reason for the medication he takes, etc. He was grateful for the information, especially regarding the self-care and post-medication practices, as he had not been aware of this prior. The awareness also addressed the stigma that he had of himself as well as within the community, which helped improve his quality of life within that community.



ACTION PLANNING MEETINGS



The R&D Commission conducted 11 action planning meetings in Matara, Colombo, Monaragala, Gampaha, Ampara, Galle, Trincomalee, Ratnapura, Matale, Kandy, and Kalutara. The R&D Commission's representatives attended the meetings, including representatives of each district's RDHS office, the Regional Epidemiologist, the relevant PHIs of the district, and the district's Ministry of Health (MoH) officials.

Each meeting facilitated various activities being planned, such as the usual awareness and screening activities, as well as new initiatives such as art competitions and historical surveys to boost awareness and community involvement, as well as following up on past cases and supporting those affected communities.

These meetings helped bridge the gap of participation within the districts regarding leprosy work, allowing for participation by all stakeholders to combat leprosy within the district.

The final aspect of the meetings that have been planned is the special training programmes for the different health-related participants. The specifications surrounding the training programmes are further analysed in the section below; however, the planning of those training programmes, the participants to be included, and the locations are decided at these action planning meetings.



On October 20th, the Karaitivu RDHS area PHI, an anti-leprosy PHI, a midwife, the Ampara Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Coordinator and a R&D Commission representative went on a house-to-house screening. During this, they identified that a resident named Suvendran had been suffering from leprosy since October 2022 and had already started treatment for leprosy but had stopped mid-way. However, his health condition was affected due to his lack of visits to the clinic and his negligence in not taking the necessary medicine. When the team first found him, he was in a severe condition, lying on the floor helpless, not even able to use the washroom. When we spoke to the PHI, he mentioned that he was searching for Suvendran but could not find him.

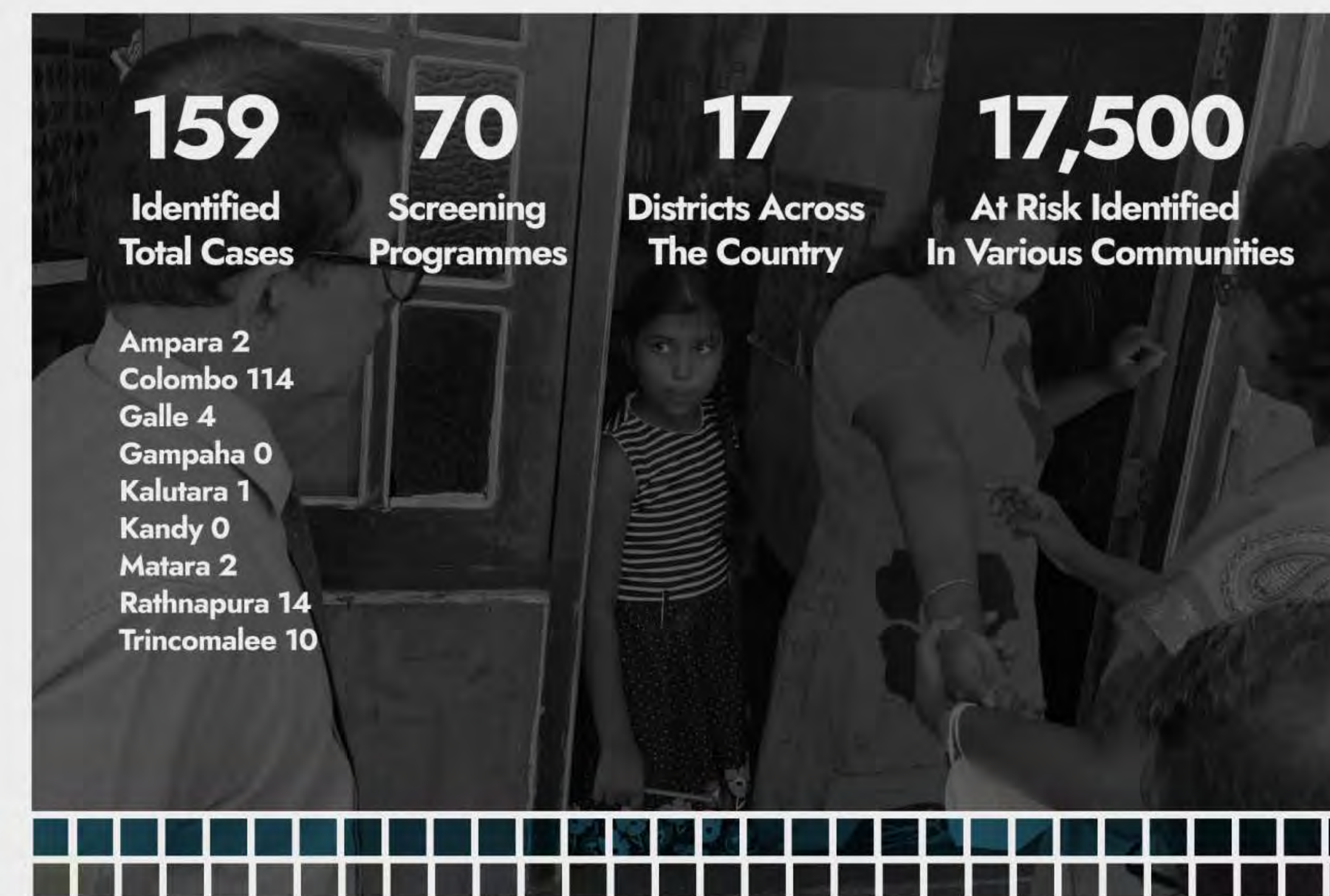
The Kalmunai Regional Leprosy and Karaitivu area PHI immediately reported this to the Karaitivu Medical Officer Health, who came to his house to check his health and realised his condition was not good. During this time, the team also introduced Suvendran's father and mother to her, and the team also found that his father had an unhealed ulcer on his foot for the last five years.

Subsequently, the team discovered that Suvendran was 30, married and had a seven-year-old son. Due to his illness, Suvendran's wife took their child with her, left him and re-married in 2019. As time passed, Suvendran felt helpless and hopeless and lived with his parents in a rented house in deplorable condition. His parents are daily wage labourers who cannot meet their needs with the money they earn. After meeting the team, Suvendran restarted his treatment in 2023 and has made significant progress in his journey to recovery.

SCREENING PROGRAMMES



The R&D Commission, alongside the awareness components implemented in different districts, also provides screening to identify potential new leprosy cases and medical attention and facilities to those in communities that may not have access to those resources. The R&D Commission conducted 70 screening programmes, with 19 being awareness and screening programmes conducted simultaneously and 41 being house-to-house screenings. House-to-house screenings are conducted in communities, where the PHI and other medical volunteers, such as midwives, go to individual houses to conduct a basic screening and then refer the suspected cases to a hospital for further attention. These programmes were conducted in 17 districts across the country, reaching over 17,500 people from various communities that the PHIs had identified as communities at risk of spreading leprosy.



TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The R&D Commission, with the ALC, the main governing body for leprosy in Sri Lanka, and the RDHS in each relevant district, organised and conducted leprosy training programmes for government health staff and medical volunteers. Across the country, the R&D Commission conducted 24 training programmes for PHIs, midwives, General Practitioners, Medical Officers and medical students in nine districts: Colombo, Ampara, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Galle, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy and Trincomalee.

In total, 1,136 participants were involved in this training; many of them were receiving this training for the first time and were included in the screening plans for the districts as volunteers to go out into the field, which would result in an overall net positive for the district. Following this training, more than 40% of all those trained were then involved with screening programmes within the district conducted by the RDHS offices, wherein they assisted with identifying many suspected leprosy cases. However, many have yet to assist in screening programmes in their relevant areas but have been prepared to step in when needed.



SELF-CARE PROGRAMMES

4
Self-Care Meetings held in Colombo & Trincomalee districts

70
Leprosy affected people helped within the community

The self-care initiative provided leadership positions to specific individuals within the groups to coordinate with the RDHS and assist with spreading awareness. Specific responsibilities were also given to the new leads, and they were involved in discussions on how to combat leprosy within the district, which was very useful for progressing the fight against leprosy in their districts. Finally, the main highlight of these groups was that these groups now gave those affected by leprosy a broader community in the form of a support group to help each other and support each other with various aspects of life after leprosy, such as aftercare and counseling.



“I want to make sure that no one else will have to endure the struggles and the pain that my family and I had to go through because of leprosy.”

This statement by Mrs Perera*, the secretary of the recently appointed Moratuwa self-care group, encapsulates why the R&D Commission is involved and committed to defeating leprosy. Her husband had been working in uniformed services for some time, and his hands and fingers started shrivelling and getting deformed; however, he did not have any noticeable patches. When things got much worse, in 2021, he was admitted to the Kalubowila Hospital and was diagnosed with leprosy. During this time, she was working and doing odd jobs; after he got sick, she became the primary earner for the household. Her husband has a negative outlook on life due to his leprosy diagnosis, even though his family hasn't ostracised him. He tries to participate in fishing within the community; however, he gets constantly wounded, as his hands are badly disfigured and injured (clawed), and Mrs Perera has to dress his wounds continually.

Mrs Perera wants people to be more self-aware, taking patches and other signs and symptoms seriously. As a member of the self-care group committee, she spoke to the teachers at her youngest son's school and encouraged them to hold a leprosy awareness programme and talk to the students about it. Mrs Perera has also suggested ideas for awareness programmes in her district to the PHI. Alongside the R&D Commission and the government, she has advocated for awareness of leprosy. Mrs Perera has been a lynchpin in her community to get closer to defeating leprosy in Sri Lanka. She is very passionate about defeating the stigma of leprosy in her community. She wants to see the initiatives she is a part of succeed so that ostracised people can reclaim their place within their communities and families.

***Name changed to protect privacy.*

LEPROSY CONFERENCE



The leprosy convention was conducted with approximately 150 participants on the 8th of November.

The programme was held in collaboration with the ALC under the Health Ministry and the Regional Directorate of Health Services Colombo, which spearheaded it. The R&D Commission and Kaveri Kala Manram (KKM) assisted with elements of the implementation and coordination process. The convention provided an opportunity to collaborate with all the stakeholders involved in eradicating leprosy in Sri Lanka.

This was a significant highlight of the programme as it solidified the R&D Commission's presence within the districts where work is happening with the government. Increased government collaboration is one of the R&D Commission's key goals; this was a positive step towards that goal.

The Honourable Minister Dr Ramesh Pathirana, Minister of Health, graced the event and addressed the participants with a message of encouragement for the future. He also shared his support for the fight against leprosy in the country.

The Director of the ALC, Dr Prasad Ranaweera, the Regional Director of Health Services in Colombo, Dr Chandana Gajanayake, Community Medicine Specialist, Dr Kasuni Kalubowila, the Regional Director of Health Services in Batticaloa, Dr G. Sukunan, President of the Leprosy People's Association, G. Amarasinghe, Leprosy Dermatologist, Dr Indira Kahawita and representatives of government and non-government organisations, as well as doctors and PHIs, all participated in this event.

One of the major highlights of the programme was Dr Loretta Das from The Leprosy Mission (TLM) Hospital in Naini, India, who shared technical knowledge, which included approaches to identify leprosy: capacity building of medical officers and public health staff, case detection via house-to-house surveys, maintaining a proper information management system, reducing the active transmission of leprosy and ways to combat the high number of child cases.

Many of the health officials and PHIs who were in attendance appreciated the training given. They found it very beneficial, especially with the live demonstrations on conducting specific tests to identify signs of leprosy.

This conference also facilitated many avenues for partnership between all the bodies present at the convention, which meant that there would be additional support for the fight against leprosy in all districts present at the convention in the years to come.



PEACE & RECONCILIATION



The Peace and Reconciliation sector aims to build and foster a culture of coexistence, restorative peace and reconciliation among all communities. It hopes to promote a greater intercultural understanding among people of different ethnic groups whilst protecting human rights, peace building and conflict transformation.

Sri Lankan communities still continue to grapple with the elusive goal of religious harmony.

In our pursuit of meaningful solutions that enhance conversations and understanding among different religious groups, it becomes evident that our youth must play a pivotal role.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of others, leaves our youth and young generation vulnerable to extremist ideologies, promoting intolerance and violence.

In response to this the ADT in partnership with Helvetas initiated 'Empower', a programme which engaged over 200 youth, faith leaders, teachers, and families living in conflict-affected communities in the Eastern and Western provinces of Sri Lanka, to address problems they face in their own various backgrounds and communities.

The programme was launched in 2022 and concluded in 2023. Empower's overall goal is to increase tolerance, knowledge, and appreciation of others from different faith backgrounds in a mutual process that encourages prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

The multifaceted approach to learning encompasses immersive activities that encourage communication and understanding between youths of different religions. Through these experiences, we aim to empower and equip young individuals as proactive agents of positive change, and these contribute in working towards the promotion of peace and harmony within their respective communities.

Enhancing Understanding of PVE, Do-No-Harm Approach, Critical Thinking, Leadership, and Negotiation Skills for 200 Students in Christian Sunday Schools, Buddhist Dahampasal, and Madrasas



ADT organized a residential workshop for youth participants; Designed to equip students in Christian Sunday schools, Buddhist Dahampasal, Hindu Arinari schools and Islamic Madrasas with essential life skills, which encompass a fundamental understanding of preventing violent extremism (PVE), adopting a Do-No-Harm approach, and cultivating critical thinking, leadership, and negotiation skills.

Through the PVE instructions students gained the ability to identify signs of radicalisation, challenge extremist narratives, and actively contribute to resilient and inclusive communities. Embracing the Do-No-Harm approach students engaged in positive actions while minimising harm to individuals and communities. Developing critical thinking empowered students to skilfully analyse information, evaluate different perspectives, and make well-informed judgments.

Through the cultivation of leadership qualities, students were inspired to instigate positive change, motivate others, and navigate diverse opinions effectively. Additionally, negotiation skills enabled students to resolve conflicts constructively and foster mutual understanding.



CONFLICT MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT, EMBRACING DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES, AND HARNESSING NEW MEDIA AND TRENDS



By leveraging new media and trends, we can disseminate messages countering extremist ideologies, challenge divisive narratives, and mobilise efforts for social change. Our programme recognises the significance of these areas and aims to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in conflict mitigation, understand diverse religious perspectives, and utilise new media to create a more resilient and inclusive society.

WORKSHOP ON "CULTURE OF PEACE"

This workshop was designed to give the participants a deep understanding and practice of peace-building principles, fostering harmony, empathy, and positive change within individuals and communities with a focus on promoting non-violence, respect, and cooperation. The participants had the unique opportunity to explore the foundations of a culture of peace, develop essential skills for conflict resolution and reconciliation, and engage in meaningful dialogue to create a more peaceful and inclusive world.



EXCHANGE PROGRAMME BETWEEN DIFFERENT FAITH AND ETHNICITY AND A SPORTS/ CULTURAL EVENT

This 2-day programme aimed to create a harmonious and inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and promotes unity among participants.

The programme included a guided tour of prominent religious and cultural sites, providing a deeper understanding of diverse traditions. To bridge the gap between the East and the West and to facilitate interactions and promote shared values among participants, the ADT facilitated an exchange programme between different faiths and ethnicities.

The programme included cultural event and sports/games, involving both boys and girls from various religious institutes. This event served as a platform to promote human rights, generate shared interests, instil social skills essential for democratic citizenship, and enhance social and cultural life.



LANGUAGE CLASSES

The ADT recognises the transformative power of multilingual education as a catalyst for peace building. Multilingual education serves as a vital tool to promote understanding, empathy, and cooperation among different linguistic communities, opening new horizons and creating a foundation for harmonious coexistence. During the period under review English language classes were held for a group of children from Colombo.



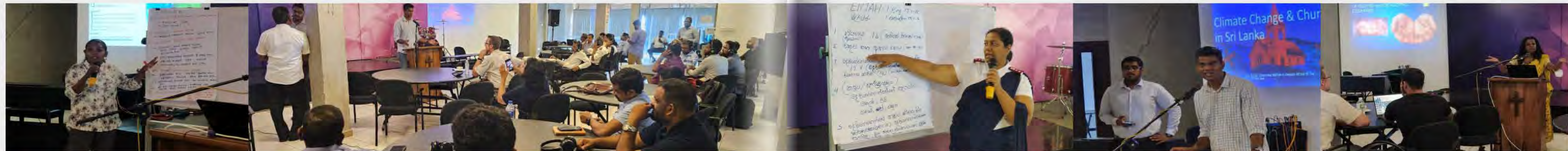
CREATION CARE

& CHURCH OF SRI LANKA

The R&D Commission organised an awareness and discussion programme themed "Creation Care and Church of Sri Lanka". The programme was held on the 1st of November at the Kollupitiya Methodist Church with 42 participants. It was organised for the churches and organisations interested in climate and disaster resilience initiatives.

The programme focused on two significant areas: educating the participants on climate change and environmental degradation and the church's responsibility towards building a safer and more resilient community.

Mr James Pender from the TLM and Dr Ajantha Perera, a Scientist, facilitated the programme. The two experienced resource persons highlighted the impacts of climate-related and progressive environmental degradation in Sri Lanka. The participants shared that the programme's inputs were enlightening and contextual. Further, they shared that they realised the impact on the environment and the church's responsibility towards building a safer environment. The R&D Commission team grasped the inputs from the participants to design a climate resilience action plan.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Over the years, the R&D Commission, under its emergency response sector, has assisted people affected by climate-based and human-induced disasters and, more recently, the economic crisis.

The emergency response carried out by the R&D Commission aims to relieve the vulnerable and most affected people by providing food aid and non-food relief items.

The R&D Commission's initiatives have significantly impacted those who benefit from the assistance as these provisions enable the affected to generate hope.

FAMILIES AFFECTED BY DISASTERS & ECONOMIC CRISIS



1,482

Due to climate-based disasters, specifically floods and droughts, the R&D Commission supported 1,482 of the most affected families in Divulapitiya, Wattala, Galle, Matara, Bopitiya, and Batticaloa by providing them with dry ration packs and hygienic requirements.



1,130

Due to the economic crisis, the R&D Commission supported 1,130 families in Ampara, Vavuniya, Haliella, Monaragala, Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Mattakuliya by providing them with dry ration packs to help ease part of their financial burden and increase household food security.



Nilmini Ajantha, from Sulthanagoda GN division, Malimbada Divisional Secretariat, Matara District, has four children and lives with her husband. To support the family, she cultivates a piece of land belonging to them to earn an extra income. She shared that the cultivation generates a reasonable income, and she is satisfied with her livelihood.

Unfortunately, the heavy rains and floods in Matara, specifically in her area, caused severe damage to crops. This affected communities engaged in cultivation, who relied on income generated through this livelihood. The floods destroyed all of Nilmini's cultivation as the water stagnated, making it hard for her to restart her livelihood. The additional income supporting the family was disturbed, and the family faced many challenges due to the extreme weather conditions that had existed for months and hadn't settled by then. Nilmini came in a canoe and received the relief provided by the R&D Commission.

Nilmini shared that no organisation came forward to help the affected people, and the first organisation to help them was the R&D Commission. She appreciated and thanked the R&D Commission for providing vouchers, which was very thoughtful and timely at this time. She continued to share that the vouchers would help purchase essential things for children and her family's critical needs. Nilmini thanked all the government officers who obtained this assistance for her through the R&D Commission.



CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ECONOMIC CRISIS

The ADT under the Emergency Response Unit, recognised the effect the economic crisis was having on children, especially the most vulnerable children and envisioned to support them with educational needs.

The ADT worked with Government institutions to identify children with disabilities and children who have been orphaned. The ADT also worked with a school to identify children from economically deprived families.

Thereafter, the coordination and support was effectively carried out to these vulnerable children, with the provision of educational stationary packs to fulfil their immediate need at that time.

3

LOCATIONS
Kandy, Colombo, Batticaloa

150

CHILDREN
From various economic, social & physical conditions



My son's name is Niraj, he is 12 years old and he is studying in Grade 7. He is a child with a disability. I have a daughter too; she has finished her Ordinary Level exam and is waiting to do her Advanced level. My husband does not have permanent employment. We live in Rikillgaskada which belongs to Kandy district. The present economic crisis has brought us enormous challenges and made our living more difficult. The education assistance given to my son was very valuable and supported in reducing the financial burden.

We wish and hope that organisations like these will continue to help people like us in future. Thank you for providing us with this school pack.



CHILD PARTICIPATION & DEVELOPMENT

The R&D Commission believes in creating a safe and secure environment for children by giving them access to opportunities vital for securing a better future. Through the children's sector, the R&D Commission supports the needs of children from vulnerable communities by conducting child sponsorship programmes and child-protection awareness programmes for children, youth, parents, and communities.



EDUCATIONAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING SUPPORT TO CHILDREN

The "Educational and Mental Well-being Support to Children" project involved selecting a school.

Consequently, in 2023, the R&D Commission focused on the Batticaloa Maddikaly Tamil Vidyalayam, situated in a well developed district, and conducted the following activities and implemented various programmes for them throughout the year.



PROJECTS

SCHOOL CHILDREN'S PARK RENOVATION AND WALL PAINTING

The R&D Commission made the school a child-friendly environment: the classroom walls were painted with educational paintings, and the play area was renovated. School children's park renovation and wall painting.

EVENING LESSONS

On March 27th, the R&D Commission started the first arts and crafts and English lessons. The R&D Commission also conducted scholarship classes and trained students for the scholarship examination.

Some students were taught arts and crafts, and play activities were held during the class. Additionally, the R&D Commission provided nutritious foods, milk, and yoghurt at the classes.

AWARENESS PROGRAMME FOR THE STUDENTS' PARENTS

An awareness programme for the students' parents was conducted on September 2nd, where the parents were enlightened on the importance of education, children attending school, nutritional needs, health and sanitation, domestic violence and its impact on children, drug prevention, and child abuse issues.

Twenty-seven parents participated and the Principal said the parents had never had an awareness programme of this nature. Parents reported that it was beneficial and learned that family situations and violence can significantly impact children's lives. They also said they would take all measures to prevent such things from affecting their children's lives.

HOME VISITS

Regular home visits are required to understand the students' family situations and academic challenges. This programme aimed to increase regular and evening class attendance, improve understanding of the students' needs, and enhance attendance through personalised support.





CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

On October 9th, the school celebrated Children's Day, during which the teachers were also honoured. The school principal presided over the event, which the parents were involved in organising. The students demonstrated their unique talents during the event; they staged solo songs, poetry, group singing, group dances, solo dances, and speeches.

This programme brought out the students' hidden talents. The students showcased their skills very well; in particular, they staged a short play through a song intending to express their rights and create awareness among their parents. The students also honoured their teachers by giving them flower garlands and greeting cards, which the R&D Commission taught them to make during the classes held for the children. At the end of the programme, students received prizes as well. The participants included 42 students, the principal, six teachers, the school secretary and parents.

CHRISTMAS CAROL PROGRAMME

On December 20th, the school hosted a Christmas Carol programme. The participants included the principal, teachers, students, and parents. Students displayed their artistic talents and sang a carol to celebrate Jesus Christ's birth; the carol explained the love of Jesus Christ. The kids also performed a scene from Jesus' birth. The carol programme conveyed the love and purpose of the birth of Jesus Christ to the students and parents, and the students brought out extra activities.

EXPOSURE VISIT

On September 16th, members of the R&D Commission conducted an educational excursion for 33 students with their school principal and SDS (School Division Secretary). They visited Batticaloa's main Post Office and the District Secretariat, where they were given a clear explanation of the Dutch Fort and its historical significance, followed by an explanation of the activities carried out by the District Secretariat. The students then played in Fort Park and visited Gandhi Park, Batticaloa Gate and Kallady Bridge. The students learned about William Ault's visit to Sri Lanka, his dedication, missionary work, and the schools he opened. Later, they went to Anjaneya Kids Garden, where they had lunch and enjoyed playing games.

The students were delighted throughout the day. They said that important places like the Post Office were in their textbooks, but they had never been there, and it was beneficial to them to visit. They also said they enjoyed playing many games in the Kids' Garden. The principal said that the students had never been on an excursion of this nature since the school began and that it was a new experience for the children.

NUTRITION FEEDING PROGRAMME

Under its Emergency Response sector, the R&D Commission implemented a nutrition feeding programme for preschool and primary school children.

The programme supports families and children severely affected by the prevailing economic crisis and aims to safeguard the children's nutritional status and minimise the health risks due to food insecurity.

The project adopted four preschools in Vavuniya, Northern Province, and a primary school in Patana, Hatton, Central Province.

7,743 meals

Provided to **89 children** in Vavuniya for 88 days.

2,280 meals

Distributed to **76 children** for 30 days, in Patana, Hatton.

Sansika, aged four, attends Valarmathy Preschool in the Maravankulam GN division within the Vavuniya district, a rural community due to prevalent poverty. Most of the community are daily wage labourers who earn an inadequate income to meet their needs. Sansika's family is no exception; the family depends on her father's income, and he works as a cook in a boutique hotel. His earnings are insufficient to cater to the family's needs. Meeting the family's needs proved challenging due to their low income, exacerbated by the ongoing economic crisis. This financial strain resulted in inadequate and nutritionally deficient meals for the children at home.

Sansika's mother expressed gratitude for the nutrition feeding programme introduced through the preschools, emphasising its invaluable assistance. Providing meals to the children alleviated the family's distress, leading to noticeable improvements in the children's health. Parents observed weight gain and increased preschool attendance among the children, attributing these positive changes to the nutritious meals. Sansika's mother thanked the R&D Commission for their support, acknowledging the programme's role in reducing health risks and supporting the preschool children.

"I first thank God for the grace of serving our school children through the nutrition programme. I also thank the R&D Commission for considering our request to provide nutritious meals for these deserving children from the estate. These children have been badly affected by the economic crisis; they used to bring the remaining food from the previous day's meals for consumption. Sometimes, teachers noticed that some children's meals were spoiled and had to be thrown away since they were unsafe to consume. The school children's attendance also decreased due to the financial crisis in their families living in the estates. I have been addressing this concern and seeking support from several organisations. The R&D Commission considered our request and commenced the nutrition feeding programme at the school.

The meals provided by the R&D Commission were sufficient and healthy for the children. Through this programme, the children's attendance increased, and they were able to focus on their studies. I thank the R&D Commission for supporting these children in dire need and the volunteer group for preparing and serving the food to the children. I hope this programme will continue and benefit the children."

Mrs K. S. Sivayogadevi, School Principal - Craigielea Tamil Vidyalayam, Patana

AWARENESS ON CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

A Child Protection Policy is a comprehensive set of guidelines, procedures, and practices designed to ensure the safety, well-being, and proper treatment of children within a church. It outlines the steps and measures that the church will take to prevent child abuse, promote a safe environment, and respond appropriately if any incidents or concerns arise.

Raising awareness about child protection helps prevent instances of abuse from occurring in the first place. When all members of the church community understand what constitutes appropriate behaviour and how to recognise signs of abuse, they are better equipped to prevent potentially harmful situations also it fosters an environment where children feel safe and protected. When children feel safe, they are more likely to engage in church activities, grow spiritually, and develop positive relationships. Church members who hold the leadership should be educated on child protection policy, and they are accountable for maintaining a safe environment. Transparency in policies and procedures builds trust within the community.

Introduction on the Child Protection policy awareness conducted for the pastors

We were able to conduct the awareness session on Child protection policy as a part of the meeting arranged at Sanctuary House Ja-ela for the Ceylonese Evangelistic Association National Pastors on the 12th of July and The Pastors' Conference on the 11th of August 2023 at the Jeevanadiya Faith Church by the Missions Department of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka.

2 Events **141 Participants**



Safeguarding Children:

The primary purpose of a Child Protection Policy is to ensure the safety and well-being of children within the church community. It outlines guidelines and procedures to prevent any form of abuse or harm to children, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, and creates a safe environment where children can grow and thrive.

Legal and Ethical Responsibility:

Churches, like any other organisation that interacts with children, have a legal and ethical obligation to protect children from harm. This helps the church fulfil its duty of care and demonstrates its commitment to maintaining high standards of care and accountability.

Preventing Abuse:

Prevent potential instances of abuse by setting clear boundaries, expectations, and codes of conduct for all staff members, volunteers, and leaders who interact with children. This reduces the risk of abusive situations and minimises opportunities for misconduct.

Building Trust:

A robust Child Protection Policy contributes to building trust within the church community. Parents and guardians can feel confident that their children are safe while attending church activities, fostering a sense of security and confidence in the organisation's leadership.

Mitigating Legal and Reputation Risks:

Without a comprehensive policy in place, the church exposes itself to significant legal and reputation risks in case of any child abuse incidents. Implementing a strong policy demonstrates a proactive approach to child protection, which can help mitigate potential legal liabilities and negative publicity.

Training and Education:

A Child Protection Policy often includes training and education programs for staff, volunteers, and parents. These programs help increase awareness about child protection issues, teach adults how to recognise signs of abuse, and equip them with the knowledge and skills to respond appropriately.

Reporting and Responding:

The policy outline clear steps for reporting any suspected instances of abuse, as well as guidelines for how the church should respond to such reports. This ensures that appropriate actions are taken promptly and that authorities are involved as necessary.

Accountability and Oversight:

By establishing roles, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms, the Child Protection Policy creates a system of accountability and oversight. This structure ensures that individuals in positions of authority are held responsible for maintaining a safe environment for children.

Promoting a Positive Church Culture:

A church that prioritizes child protection demonstrates its commitment to a positive and nurturing church culture. It sends a powerful message that the church values the well-being of all its members, especially the vulnerable ones.

Objectives & Meaning of the Policy for the Church

AWARENESS ON SAFEGUARDING



Safeguarding is a critical topic on which comprehensive training and awareness needs to be given to the community. It is our responsibility to safeguard all individuals including children, youth, elderly members, and those with disabilities.

Safeguarding refers to the measures taken to protect the well-being and dignity of individuals, particularly those who may be at risk of harm or abuse due to their age, health, disability, or other vulnerabilities. It encompasses various forms of prevention, intervention, and support that are designed to ensure the safety and security of individuals, especially those who are unable to protect themselves adequately.

Effective safeguarding training can:

Raise Awareness:

Safeguarding training educates individuals about different forms of abuse, their indicators, and the potential risks associated with vulnerable populations. This knowledge empowers people to identify and report suspicious or alarming situations promptly.

Prevent Harm:

By teaching individuals how to recognize and address potential risks, safeguarding training helps prevent harm and abuse from occurring in the first place. This proactive approach is crucial in maintaining the safety and dignity of vulnerable individuals.

Promote Early Intervention:

Safeguarding training enables individuals to identify warning signs early, allowing for timely intervention to prevent further harm and provide appropriate support to those in need.

Ensure Compliance:

Professionals working in fields such as healthcare, education, social services, and childcare have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure the safety of those they serve. Comprehensive safeguarding training ensures compliance with regulations and codes of conduct.

Empower Communities:

When community members are well-informed about safeguarding, they can contribute to creating a safer environment for everyone. Empowered communities are better equipped to prevent abuse and support victims.

Enhance Reporting:

Safeguarding training encourages individuals to report concerns without fear of reprisal. This facilitates the reporting process and helps relevant authorities take appropriate actions swiftly. By investing on this training, we were able to create a culture of safety, compassion, and responsibility within our community.

INTRODUCTION ON THE SAFEGUARDING TRAINING : GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND LEPROSY PATIENTS

ADT, along with a TLM safeguarding representative, conducted a series of safeguarding trainings for ADT staff, government officers, PHIs, midwives, doctors, and faith leaders. Staff training was held on September 16, 2023, for ADT and KKM staff involved in leprosy work, followed by a managers' session on September 21. The goal was to equip participants with knowledge and skills to prevent abuse and exploitation.

On September 22, the RDHS of Galle trained PHIs, faith leaders, and community leaders. PHIs from Colombo and Gampaha attended training on September 24–25 at the Piliyandala and Gampaha MOH offices. The sessions emphasised safeguarding principles and practical applications. Afterward, a meeting with the Gampaha MOH Chief explored collaboration in supporting leprosy-affected individuals.

On September 24, ADT and TLM led an inner well-being session in Moratuwa for those affected by leprosy. It covered safeguarding, emotional health, and coping strategies. Participants found the training valuable and committed to applying safeguarding practices. The program fostered collaboration and empowered leprosy-affected individuals to support each other and participate in awareness efforts. The initiative was a success, with RDHS officials recognising its impact on future activities.



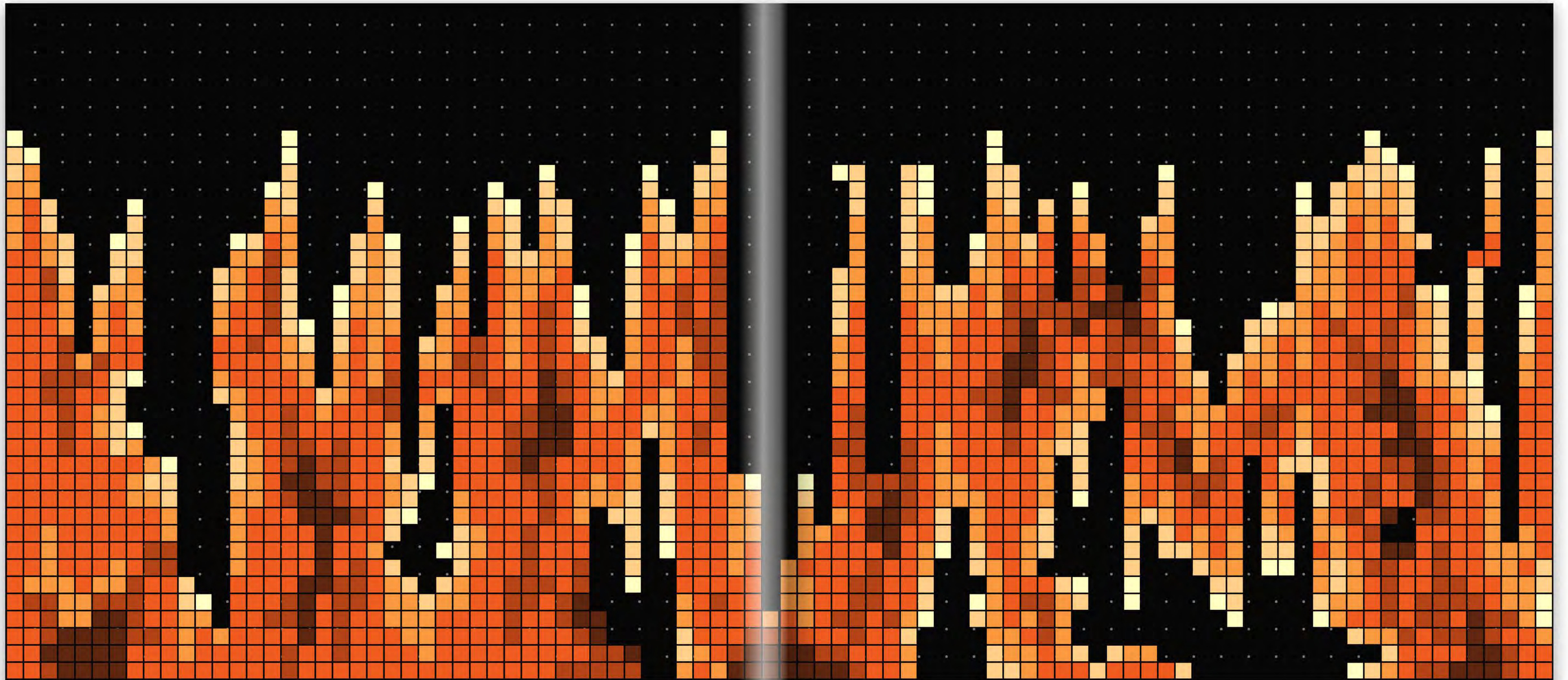
INTRODUCTION ON THE SAFEGUARDING TRAINING : LEADERS AND PASTORS

The Pastors' Fellowship Chairman meeting was held on July 7, 2023, at the YMCA, and the Pastors' Conference took place on August 11, 2023, at Jeevanadiya Faith Church, organised by the Missions Department of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. During these events, an awareness session on Safeguarding was conducted.

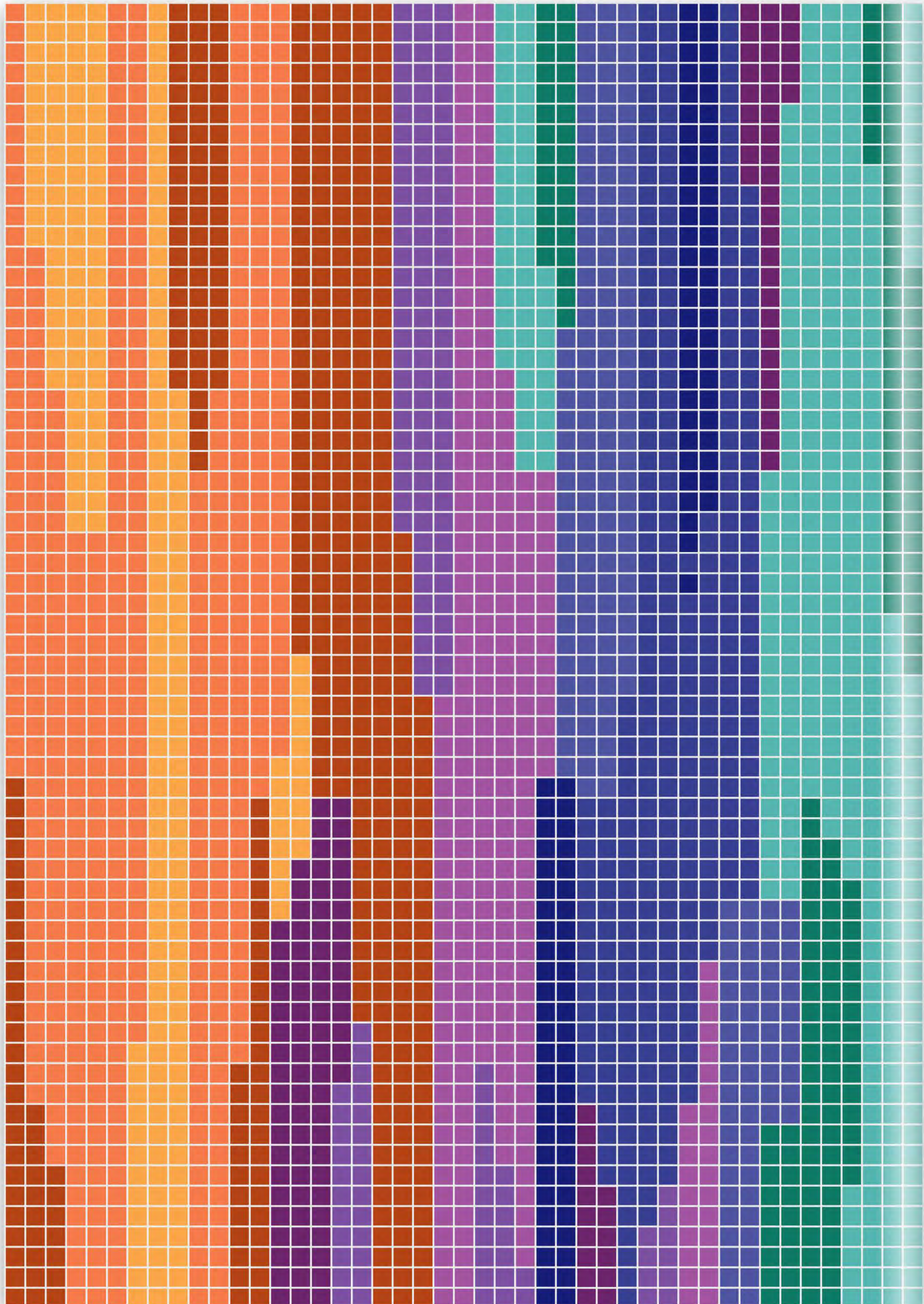
Safeguarding is essential for churches to protect members, uphold ethical leadership, and ensure legal compliance. It aligns with biblical principles of caring for the vulnerable and acknowledges that abuse can occur anywhere, including within the church. Creating a safe culture requires shifting mindsets, confronting challenges, and equipping pastors with skills to recognise and respond to risks, prevent harm, and support victims.

The training was included in the meetings to emphasise its importance. Pastors actively engaged in discussions on practical safeguarding measures and expressed gratitude to ADT for introducing these policies. They committed to raising awareness within their congregations by developing a church-specific code of conduct. ADT plans to expand these programs, providing further training for pastors and church leaders on implementing safeguarding policies tailored to their communities. The initiative was a success, reinforcing a commitment to church safety and responsibility.





**YOUTH
EVA NGELICAL
ALL IANCE**



The youth wing (YEA) of the NCEASL, seeks to equip young people with a holistic mission and leadership to impact the nation for Jesus.

To this end, the YEA serves as a platform to unite and equip youth to fully engage them to become effective Christian witnesses in our nation.



THE SCHOOL OF HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING



The School of Holistic Discipleship Training (SHDT) is the YEA's initiative to serve the mandate of creating holistic disciples and disciplers in our nation of Sri Lanka.

The YEA aims to do this by teaching a course built upon the four foundations of holistic discipleship: Economic Sufficiency, Social Peace, Individual and Cooperate Righteousness and Public Justice.

The participants for this course include pastors, youth leaders, and female leaders of various churches.

The Individual and Cooperate Righteousness, Public Justice, Social Peace and Economic Sufficiency modules are available for church leaders to study. Additional informational content, such as Bible studies and brief animated videos on each module, have been made available to each leader in all three languages so they may continue to take the message of holistic discipleship to their communities.

Over the past two years, the YEA completed 3 online batches and conducted 1 in-person training. During this time, the YEA reached 304 participants from 111 churches, including 106 pastors, 94 women leaders, and 104 youth leaders.

(However, only 195 participants from 90 churches have completed the training)

304
Participants

111
Churches

3
Online Course Batches

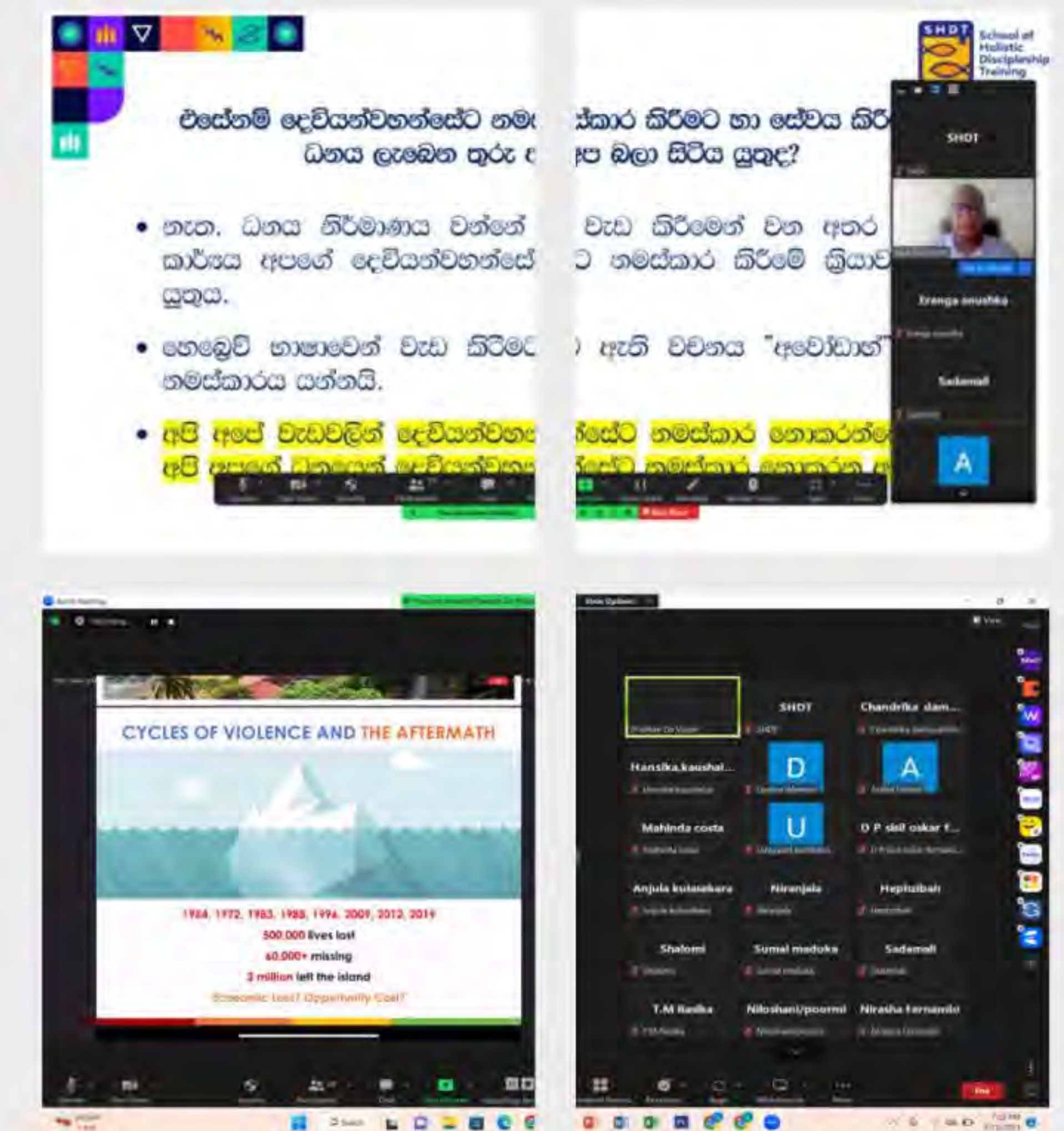
1
In-Person Training

SHDT ONLINE CLASSES

The YEA conducted 1 online batch for this course, with 28 participants from 12 churches completing it.

Over the last two years, the YEA has conducted the training online, as it was the best and most effective way to ensure that this content reaches Christian ministry workers despite the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis in Sri Lanka. However, over time, due to the large number of trainings, meetings, and other sessions held over Zoom, online exhaustion set in, making learning via online methods less and less effective. However, in November, the YEA conducted an in-person training session for SHDT.

The YEA has also distributed Bible studies in Sinhala and Tamil to each church represented here. The YEA hopes this content will be taught to their congregations and will bless them.



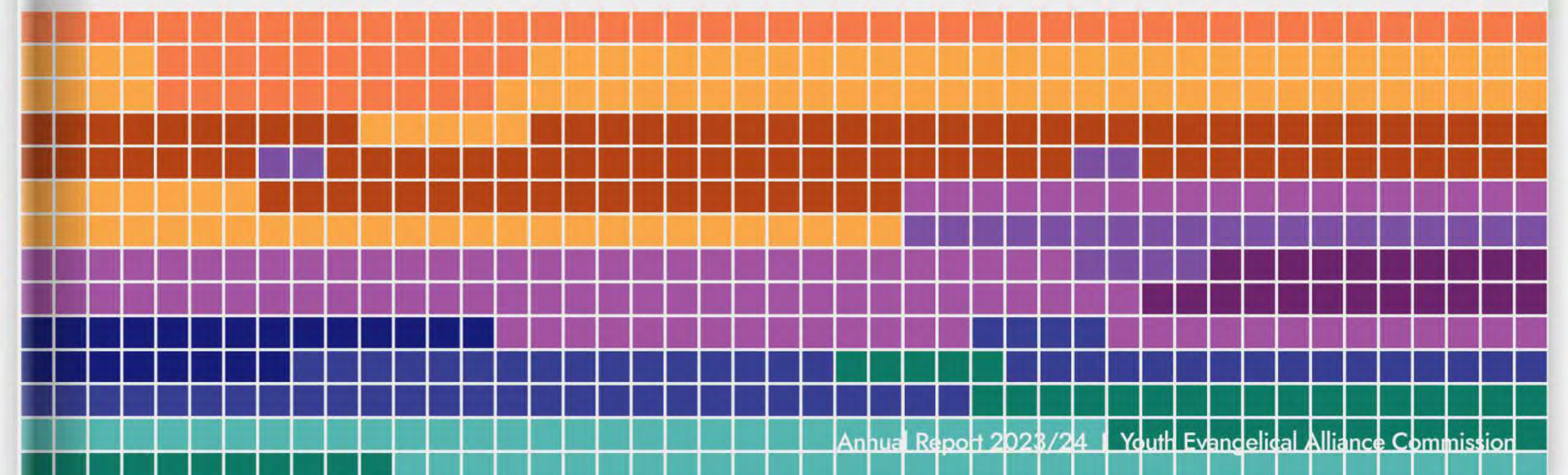


SHDT In-Person Training & Conference

The YEA chose the in-person training format because they firmly believed that pastors meeting each other in person and discussing the contents of what was being taught in real time would be the most effective way to drive home the message of holistic discipleship and their role in transforming the community around them.

A particular focus was also placed on connecting leaders from the same area so that the YEA could approach the strategy in a very area-specific and unique way.

This conference saw 62 participants in attendance, including youth leaders, women ministry leaders, and senior pastors. The YEA strives to ensure this demographic in all their programmes and that the vision we share is taken forward through every level of the church across generational and gender boundaries.



e-Learning

The e-learning website, which allows remote learning of the SHDT content, is near completion. This website will make the content available in shorter forms, featuring quizzes and pre-recorded parts of the lectures. Pastors and leaders can learn this content, which will be available in English, Sinhala, and Tamil, even through their phones.

Additionally, all the SHDT content has been further divided into smaller segments more suitable for remote learning. YEA hopes to offer facilities for participants to track their progress and test their knowledge on all subjects under SHDT through the website. This content is being translated into Sinhala and Tamil and will be operational by early 2024.

YEA PROJECT Collaborations



The YEA has also had opportunities to collaborate with other departments, such as the "Transform Sri Lanka" programme organised by the YEA.

This programme featured Reverend C. B. Samuel, who highlighted the role of young people in championing the Gospel for authentic discipleship in our nation.



Equipping

Youth Leaders

The YEA visited youth groups in Wattala and Avissawella to connect and equip them to better disciple the people in their areas.

The YEA has also conducted a 6-week training for the youth group in Avissawella, which explored the challenges of youth ministry, such as 'Their Identity in Christ' and how it is foremost in any kind of ministry or leadership. The basis of worshipping God, the complications of relationships and how to deal with them among young people, the structure of leading a youth group and how to disciple effectively; these topics were particular to the youth group for whom we worked and were taught to equip them for leading a large youth group.



The YEA initiated youth-led projects in these areas, which will be completed in 2024. These projects are meant to be ways of practically applying the learning they have received in the SHDT course and an opportunity for making a positive impact in the communities they're serving while also being led by youth so that young people truly value the community around them and build connections with those living in their area.

The YEA completed one project, which involved fixing the roof and ceiling of the local Grama Niladari's office roof in the area where Pastor Oscar, a SHDT participant, serves. The pastor had received a personal request from the Grama Niladari to fix his office roof. This project was completed in 2023 and was a greatly appreciated public service.

Youth Projects





VISITING

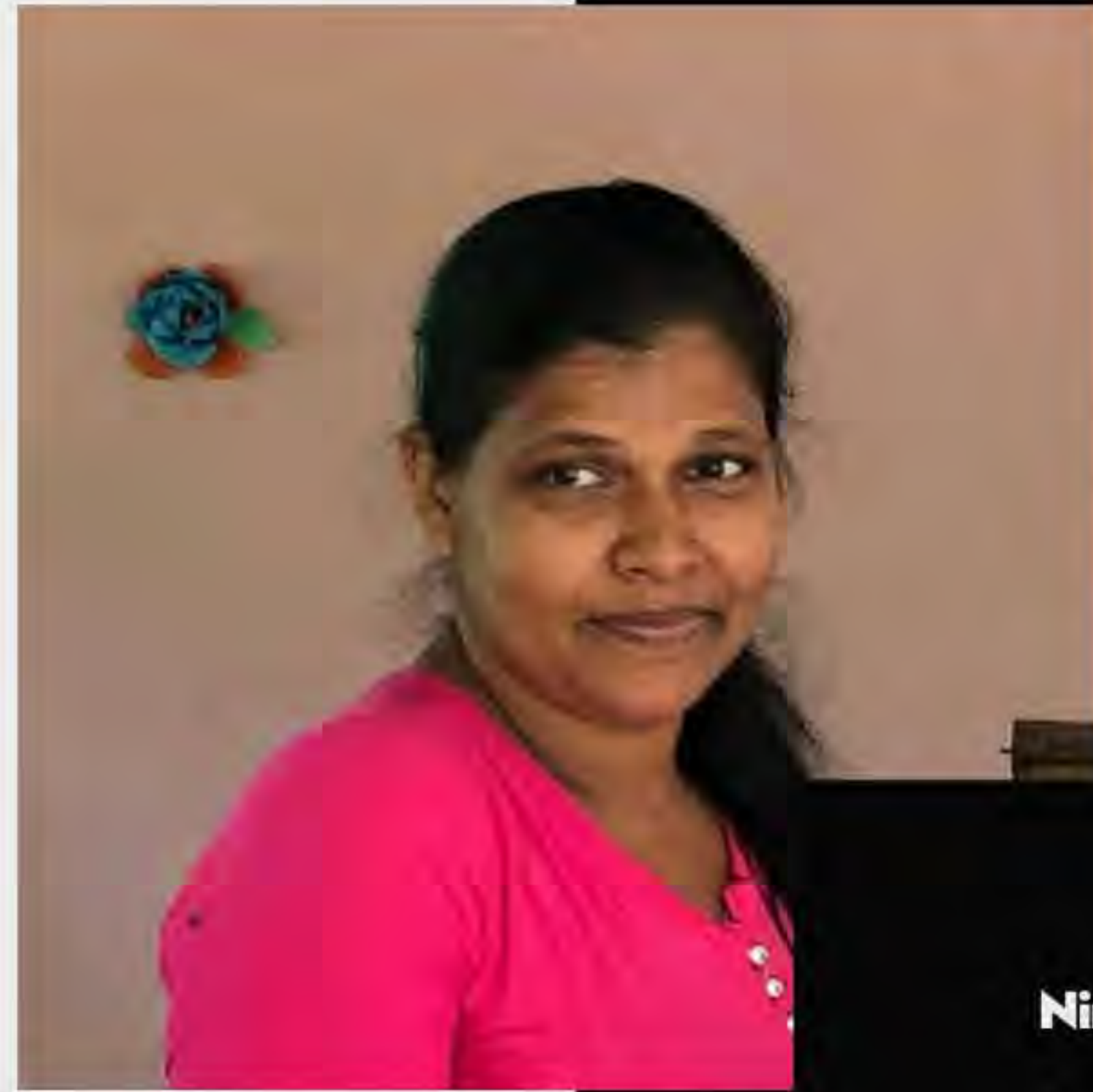
**SHDT
PARTICIPANTS
& CHURCH
PLANTERS**

The YEA also travelled to Polonnaruwa to visit church planters, their senior pastors, pastors and youth leaders who have completed the SHDT course. All those who had completed their study in the 3rd batch of the School of Holistic Discipleship Training (SHDT) were presented with certificates. The YEA spoke to them about their struggles and challenges. Some pastors had the opportunity to share their hardships with those of their congregation, including walking long distances to attend church services because of the cost or the lack of transport. However, despite these difficulties, many expressed willingness to continue in ministry, attending and hosting church services.

Further, the YEA visited the SHDT participants in Polonnaruwa and distributed our SHDT handbooks, which include the entire SHDT content in a very teachable format and are available in English, Sinhala and Tamil so that all those who have finished the course may teach their respective leadership circles the value of holistic discipleship.



TESTIMONIES



Niranjala Makes A Difference In Her Community

Niranjala attends Mahawewa AOG church. She was from a different faith but after accepting the Lord she dedicated her life to church ministry. Even though her father was against her family members attending church, Niranjala was determined and eventually succeeded in bringing her family members to God.

“After getting married, my husband and I had a successful ministry; I helped him and mainly focused on the children’s ministry. Unfortunately, five years into our marriage, we discovered that my husband had cancer, and he passed away within a few months. It was a difficult time for me. Sadly, eight months later, my father also passed away” said Niranjala, explaining the challenges she faced in early ministry. “Although I initially doubted proceeding with the ministry due to my lack of experience, my senior leadership encouraged me to continue. In the beginning I faced several challenges, with some questioning how I could pray for others when I couldn’t heal my husband with God’s help. It was discouraging, but many people encouraged and supported me to keep going”.

Niranjala’s church is located in a predominant Buddhist area. However, 12 families gather every Sunday to worship God. “I believe God has entrusted me with the opportunity to make a difference here. I want to expand the ministry and have a more significant impact in this area. Despite the challenges, I am determined to share God’s love and message to the people here”.

Niranjala has greatly benefitted from the training she received from the School of Holistic Discipleship Training. “The teachings have been practical, and I’ve learned many new things. Additionally, I’m grateful for the support from the NCEASL; it has been a great source of strength as they encourage me, provide financial assistance, visit my church and follow up on my progress. I’m excited to continue making a difference in my community through my ministry”.



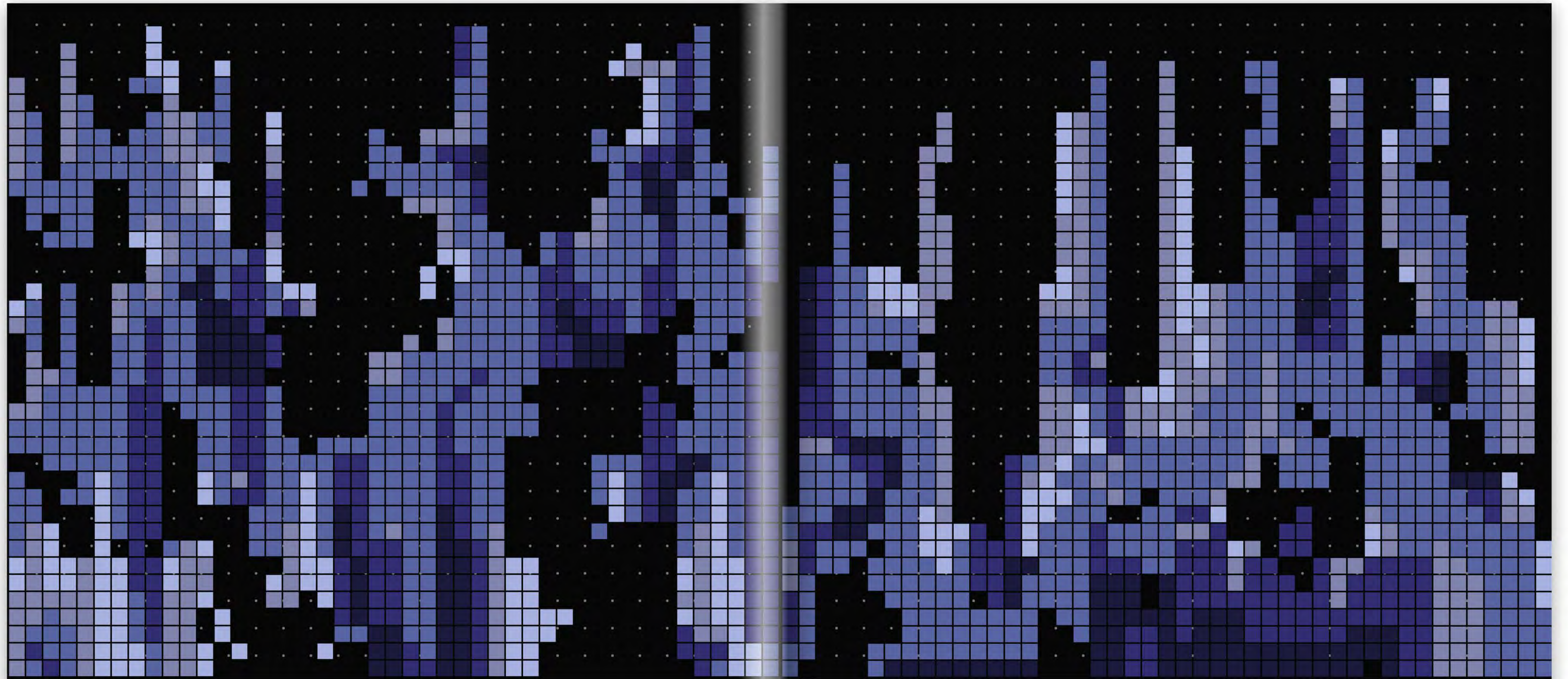
Erandha’s Incredible Journey With God

Erandha hails from Polonnaruwa. In the past Erandha had been addicted to substance and was struggling to come out of it. That’s when a friend introduced him to God; he had a strange encounter with God which changed everything for him. He even overcame his addictions and ever since then attends church every Sunday.

“I have realised that my true passion is for ministry and now I have fully committed to serving God” said Erandha. Under his pastors guidance Erandha conducts church services on Sundays, where approximately 5-6 families gather. “It’s incredible to see their dedication and commitment, as they walk 7-8 km to attend our Sunday services”.

Erandha’s wife helps him as she handles the children’s ministry and helps the children with their schoolwork after the Sunday service. “Our participation in the School Of Holistic Discipleship Training has helped to open our eyes to learn new things. The group discussions have been particularly helpful in generating new ideas. We are so grateful for the opportunity to participate in this training and the support we’ve received from the NCEASL. Their support, follow-up and encouragement has meant a lot to us”.

Erandha hopes to continue developing and improving his ministry and introduce God to more people in his area. “We want everyone to experience the same transformation and freedom we’ve found through our relationship with God.”



SANCTUARY HOUSE

SANCTUARY HOUSE



Since its launch in 2007, Sanctuary House has continued to fulfil its original mission of serving the national Church and persecuted Christians in Sri Lanka as the NCEASL retreat and training centre; it has also been a preferred venue for other institutions.

After two highly challenging years in 2020 and 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, Sanctuary House resumed hosting regular programmes in 2022.

This progress continued in 2023 as well, with Sanctuary House hosting **66 programmes with 3,790 participants over 166 days** (an increase of 53 programmes with 2,991 participants over 153 days in 2022).

Overall, our focus on our core constituency, the church-based programmes, has grown and been sustained.

RETREATS AND SERVICE TO CHRISTIANS AND THE COMMUNITY

Serving Christian Denominations and Groups

Sanctuary House continued to serve NCEASL and its members, with 82% of its programmes representing this segment. 54 training programmes and retreats were hosted over 154 days with 3,355 participants, compared to 40 programmes over 135 days with 2,226 participants in 2022.

SANCTUARY HOUSE



CHRISTIAN FAMILIES HOSTED

Sanctuary House was privileged to host three Christian leaders and their families for 2-days each at various times of the year, enabling them to spend time in personal reflection and rest.



DEPARTMENT PROGRAMMES

NCEASL departments conducted nine of their programmes at Sanctuary House.



CHURCH PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED

Several churches and institutions have conducted many programmes at Sanctuary House, namely New Harvest Fellowship, World Vision Lanka, Global Disciples' Alliance, and the Methodist Church Jampettah.



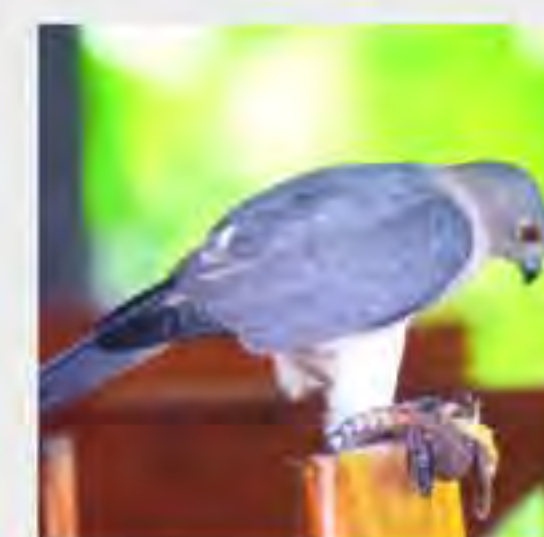
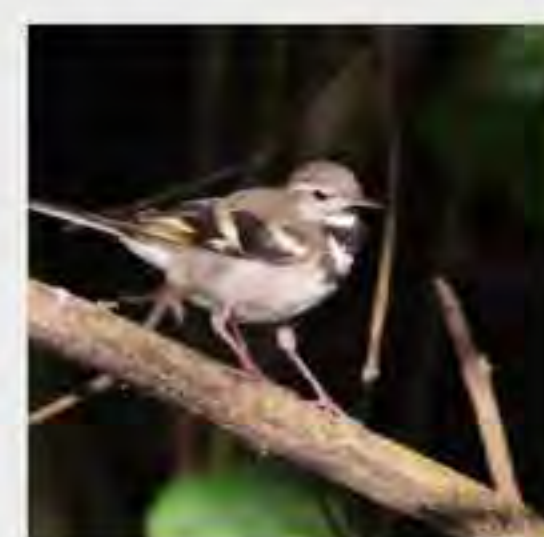
RETREAT FOR CHURCH LEADERS

In November, the Sanctuary House team designed and facilitated a 2-day retreat on 'Regaining Resilience' for 24 leaders of the Christian Reformed Church in Sri Lanka.

The lessons focused on Biblical truths and practical applications of resilience and were well-received by the participants.



HIGH



LIGHTS

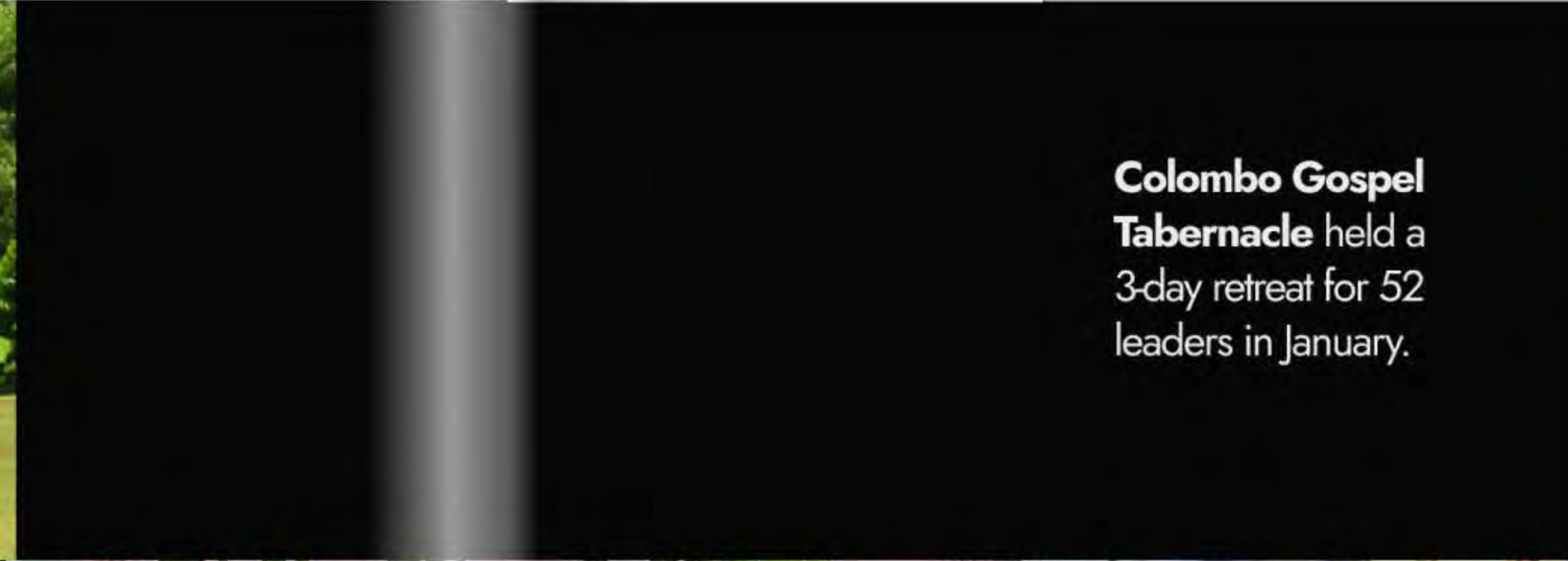


OF THE YEAR

Serving



The **Youth Empowerment programme** was held over 2-days in January for 125 participants.



Colombo Gospel Tabernacle held a 3-day retreat for 52 leaders in January.



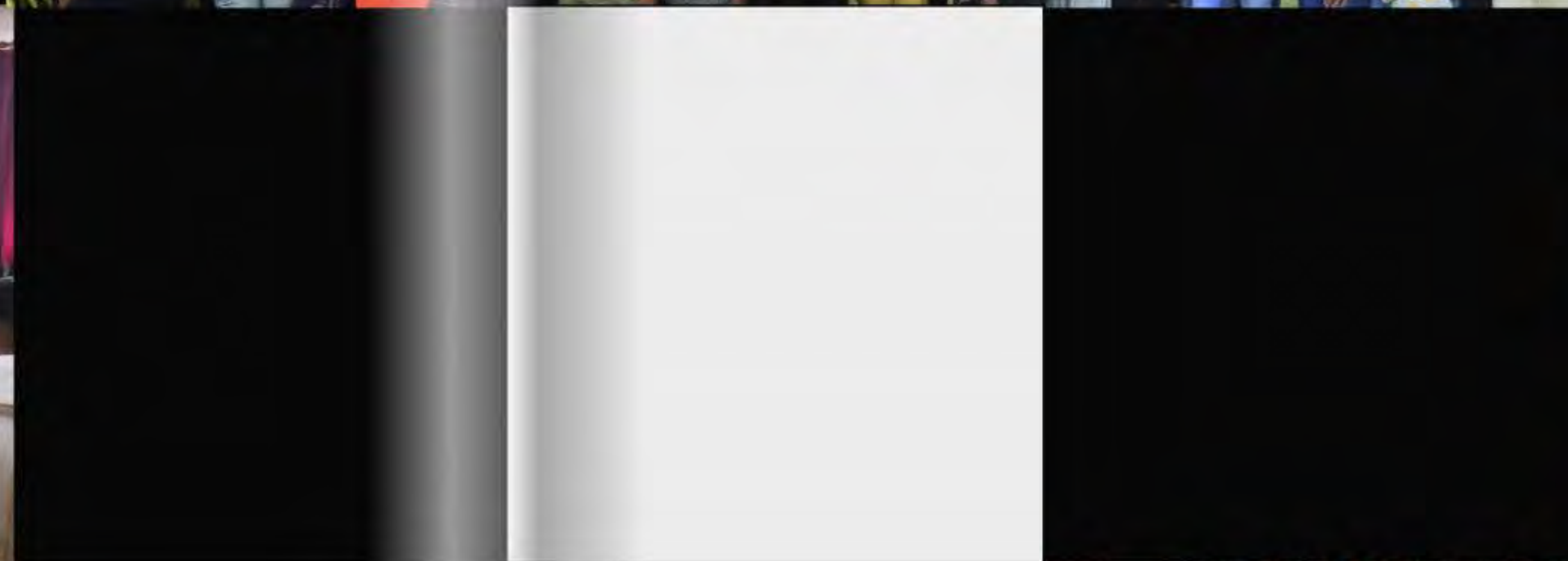
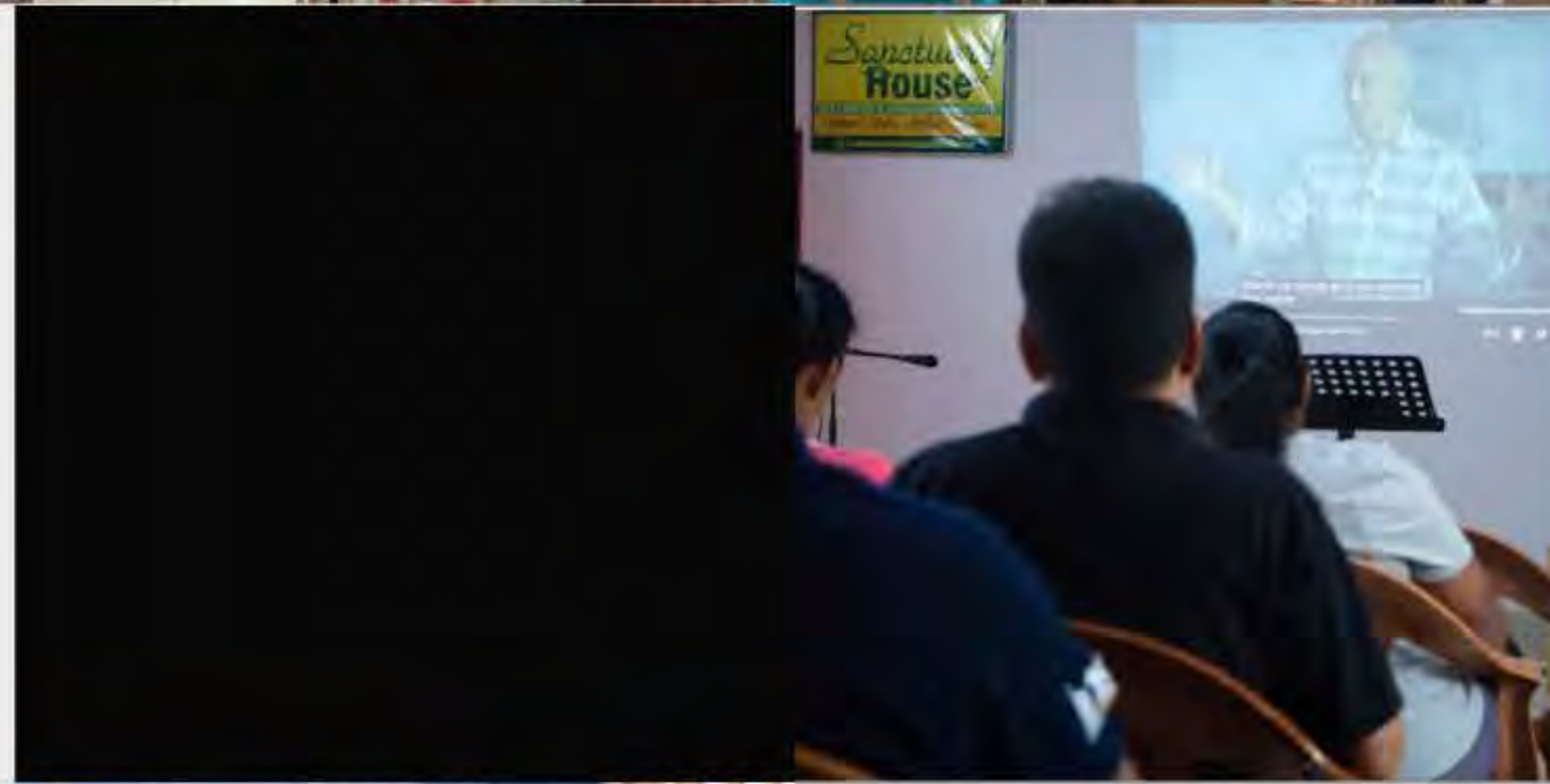
The **National Church Planters** held a 2-day gathering in January for 108 participants.



Help Kids Foundation, Kandana held a 1-day youth leadership programme for 50 participants in February.



43 **School of Church Planters** participants attended the 'Lead like Jesus' 4-day conference in June.



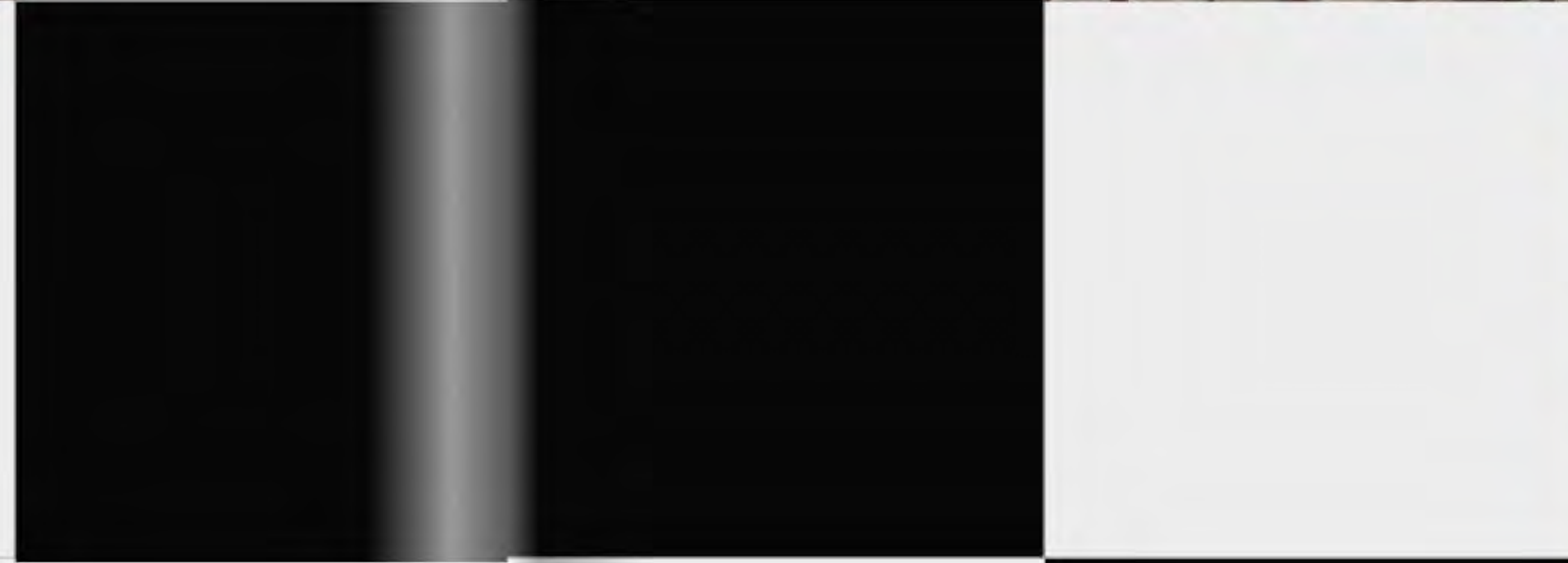
The **Ceylon Evangelical Alliance** held a 2-day and 3-day camp for its pastors in July and November, with 130 participants.



A **Women's Empowerment Seminar** was held over 2-days in March for 49 participants.



The **RLC Teachers' Camp** was held in August over 3-days for 46 teachers.



the CHURCH

Serving



Glorious Church Galkissa, conducted a 1-day youth retreat for 56 participants in September.



Christian Reformed Church, Sri Lanka, held a 2-day retreat for 24 leaders in November.



Christian Reformed Church, Wolfendhal held a 1-day church camp in July for 125 participants.



Global Sports Ministries held a 3-day discipleship training for 60 participants in October.



In December, **Bethany Life Centre, Rajagiriya** conducted a 2-day youth camp for 73 participants.



Compassion, Sri Lanka held a 2-day training programme for 73 women in December.

A 3-day youth camp was held by **Piipana Church** for 45 participants in November.



House of Prayer Colombo held a 3-day youth camp for 105 participants in October.



the CHURCH

Pastors' Retreats -

- Pastor Sumith - 2 days in August for 4 participants
- Pastor Namal - 2 days in September for 2 participants
- Dr Ajith Fernando - 2 days in November for 2 participants



Assemblies of God, Ceylon -

- Peoples' Church AG Leaders held a 3 day camp in March for 44 participants
- Assemblies of God (AOG) Mattakkuliya held a 1 day camp for 66 leaders in April
- AOG Monaragala held a 2 day camp in April for 100 participants



Bethel Church, Piliyandala Leaders' Training -

- 3 days in February for 40 participants
- 2 days in March for 32 participants

World Vision Lanka, Training programmes -

- 1 day in February for 105 participants
- 3 days in February for 81 participants
- 1 day in March for 115 participants
- 3 days in May for 65 participants
- 1 day in December for 30 participants

Global Disciples' Alliance, Church Planters Training -

- 10 days in January with 22 participants
- 5 days in February with 45 participants
- 2 days in July with 23 participants
- 2 days in August with 80 participants
- 4 days in October with 11 participants



Methodist Church, Peliyagoda Youth Leadership Programmes -

- 1 day in March for 50 participants
- 1 day in December for 34 participants

Bethel Church, Piliyandala Leaders' Training -

- 3 days in February for 40 participants
- 2 days in March for 32 participants



The 'On Fire' conference was held over 4 days in March for 80 participants.

Pastor Ruwan Wijesinghe held a 2 day leaders' camp in August for 40 participants as follow-up.

Yahath Ministries held a 3 day leadership camp for 45 participants in September.

Serving

the

CHURCH

Methodist Church, Jampettah

- 1 day women's retreat in March for 29 participants
- 2 days women's retreat in October for 50 participants
- 1 day children's programme in May for 53 participants
- 1 day youth leadership training in October for 50 participants

New Harvest Fellowship, pastors' training -

- 3 days in April for 63 participants
- 3 days in June for 78 participants
- 3 days in September for 125 participants
- A 3 day Youth Camp in December for 118 participants



Church of Ceylon, St. Matthias' Church held a family camp over 3 days in July for 75 participants.

Overcomers' Church, Nawala held a youth camp for 3 days in May for 87 participants.



Serving The COMMUNITY

Sanctuary House also believes in serving the wider community and exposing them to true Christian courtesy and hospitality. During the year under review, Sanctuary House hosted 8 programmes over 12 days with 435 participants.

Serving the Community



The Sanctuary House team designed and facilitated team development and leadership training programmes for two corporate clients, MAG International and Third Space Global.

30 nursing students from the **Institute of Technical Education, Singapore**, conducted an exposure visit in June.

Third Space Global had a team development programme for 25 participants in March.

Snap Ark Global held a leadership training for 55 participants in October.

Mines Advisory Group (MAG) International held a team development programme for 24 participants in June.

Kepungoda Senior Citizens' Society

- Annual General Meeting in April with 80 participants
- Elders' Day programme in October for 85 participants
- Christmas programme in December for 100 participants

St. Anthony's Church

Kepungoda held a leaders' training programme for 40 participants in October.



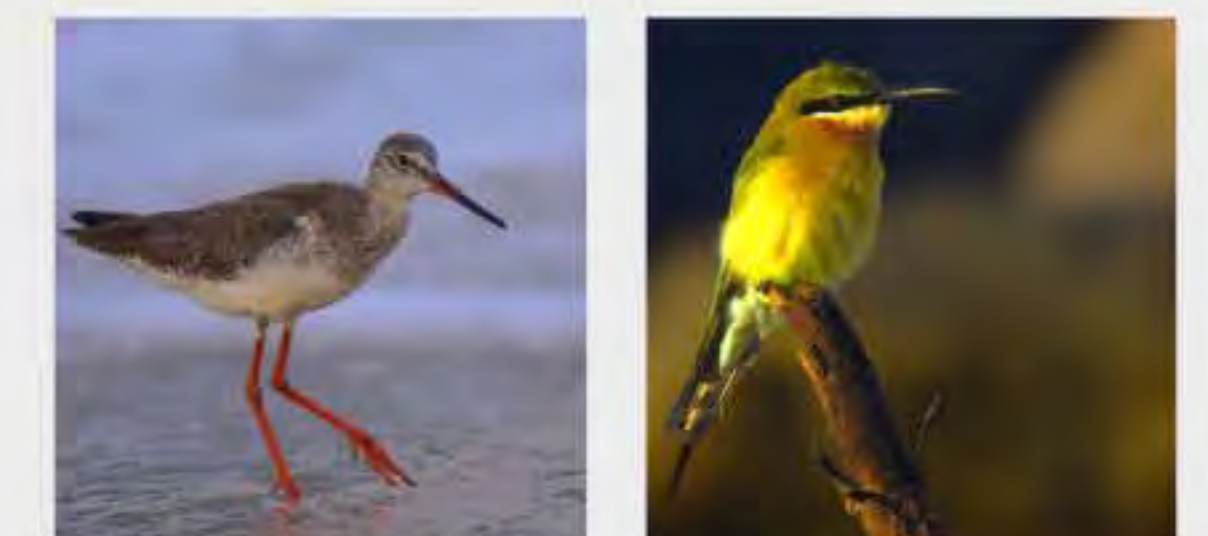


Wetland Restoration & Environmental Activities

The reforested area and wetland restoration zone within the Sanctuary House premises are flourishing.

This has resulted in over 40 resident and migrant birds and created healthy breeding areas for many species of fish and butterflies.

While providing an ideal environment for meditation and other therapeutic activities, this area also raises environmental awareness among our guests on creation care and the importance of preserving biodiversity as stewards of God's creation.



APPRECIATIONS

We thank God for blessing all our endeavours

Without God's grace and faithful provision, we could not have achieved anything recorded in this report.

We are grateful to our Partners, Donors and Friends, who generously give their resources and time. We are also thankful for the Government Authorities and other Stakeholders who cooperated and fully supported us in carrying out our programmes.

We are indebted to our Staff, who have tireless and with great dedication, passion and commitment created an impact on the communities we serve, especially during this time of crisis. We thank the Governing Council and Membership and appreciate their time, encouragement and guidance.



SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

General Secretary / CEO
Associate Secretary-General

Godfrey Yogarajah
Mahesh De Mel

HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS

Missions and Evangelism
Religious Liberty Commission
Social Justice
Relief and Development
Youth Evangelical Alliance
Sanctuary House
Administration
Finance
Human Resources

Mahesh De Mel
Mike Gabriel
Sarah Arumugam
Raghu Balachandran
Jerome Rasiah
Paul Navamani
Noel Joseph
Rajeeva Godagedara
Raghu Balachandran

REGIONAL TEAM LEADERS

Regional Manager - East
Acting Team Leader - North
Coordinator - Gampola
Coordinator - South

Jebasuthan Selvaretnam
Andrew Rajkumar
Peter Joy Johnson
Gurusingha Arachchige Manel



NATIONAL CHRISTIAN
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
SRI LANKA

Annual Report 2023/24

95 Galle Rd, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia 10350
011 5511 358 | info@nceasl.org | nceasl.org