

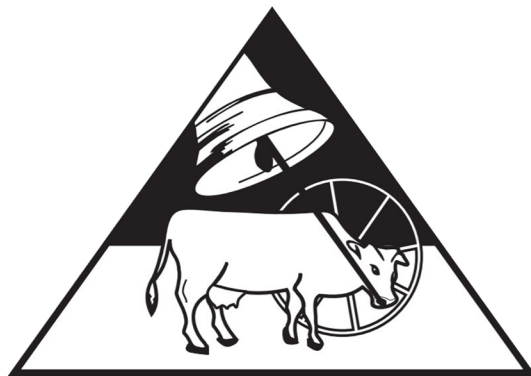


Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organisations when Responding to Unforeseen or Sudden Violence

(April 2023)

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LAW & SOCIETY TRUST
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List of Abbreviations

ADB - Asian Development Bank

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

INGO - International Non-Government Organisation

DS - District Secretariat

LST – Law and Society Trust

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

DO – Development Officer

PTA – Prevention of Terrorism Act

ATA – Anti-Terrorism Act

Executive summary

While there has been much research and literature written regarding CSOs in Sri Lanka, research specific to challenges CSOs faced when responding to unforeseen or sudden violence appears to be scarce if conducted at all. This meant that the researchers for this report did not have previous data or literature to draw from for this very specific topic. This, however, provided the research team with a 'blank slate' to conceptualise and conduct the research.

The research team chose to conduct an island-wide survey on CSOs, rather than a few sample districts or provinces, to gather more accurate data. It was only through an island-wide survey would we have been able to identify that Batticaloa has the most CSO engagement and Polonnaruwa the least. However, for brevity and better visual representation, five districts have been highlighted in this report. Apart from Batticaloa, four districts were selected as they were among the focus areas of the umbrella project. The selected districts are also representative of majority and minority ethnic groups, and cuts across the north, south, east and west of the island.

The research explores various challenges faced by CSOs when responding to unforeseen violence, about specific areas such as external issues, for example, local and ministerial level government and the communities CSOs work with, and internal issues such as the lack of resources. This data was collected via a survey and displayed in graphs for analysis. The report also has a qualitative research component which was conducted to explore the quantitative data findings in more detail, as well as to understand the perspective of the state on CSOs; all of which was centred around activities conducted on unforeseen violence.

This report includes a detailed description of the methodology with the challenges the research team faced in defining 'CSOs' and 'unforeseen violence', and how they were overcome, quantitative research findings and analysis, as well as qualitative data which provides deeper insight into the baseline survey.

Introduction and overview

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are largely organisations, formal or informal, that are formed by civilians, the public that is not part of the state, to provide some form of functional need in society. However, there are varying definitions of CSOs that either include or exclude certain groups, or functions of these organisations.

For instance, the definition provided below excludes trade unions:

Civil society organisations can take many forms, such as charities, advocacy groups, community organisations, faith-based groups, and professional associations. They work to promote social change and create a more just and equitable society by engaging in a range of activities, including advocacy, public education, research, service provision, and mobilizing citizens for collective action (ADB, 2022).

Whereas the following definition of a CSOs includes trade unions:

“Civil society organisations – non-governmental groups such as trade unions, employers’ associations and other social groups– allow citizens to take an active part in setting the political agenda. For an aspiring EU member country, a vibrant civil society contributes to fulfilling the conditions for EU membership” (European Commission)

Another aspect considered when attempting to define CSOs for this research was whether to include international organisations that are the international development arm of foreign states. CSOs often rely on donations and volunteer support to carry out their mission and contribute to the common good. Many CSOs in Sri Lanka receive funding from larger international aid agencies and governments, the latter of which leaves moot the question of whether some of these organisations are truly ‘non-government’ (Goonatilake, 2006). Alternatively, the dialectic relationship between governments (their actions and policies) and official donors has an impact on the effectiveness of a particular CSO (OECD, 2009). It was, for this reason, we excluded foreign government organisations or foreign missions such as USAID; however, it must be noted that some of the organisations that participated in the survey received funding from foreign government missions.

Given these particular complexities in how CSOs function, defining CSOs was the first challenge we faced when embarking on this research. One other criterion we grappled with was whether to include international non-governmental organisations (INGO). Ultimately, we decided to follow the United Nations’ definition of CSOs:

“A civil society organization (CSO) or non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, civil society organisations (CSOs) perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens’ concerns to Governments, monitor policies, and encourage political participation at the community level” (UN, n.d.)

However, many INGOs we reached out to declined to participate in the research stating that INGOs were not civil society organisations, while a handful did participate in the research. While this did not necessarily skew the data we collected, it is interesting to note that there is no universally accepted definition of a CSO. The only drawback this had on the research is that we did not reach the potential number of responses we expected. Additionally, several definitions of a CSO included trade unions, whereas the UN definition – the definition we chose to follow – did not include unions. While unions were excluded from the data, we reached out to CSOs that work with unions and on labour rights issues, such as with the apparel industry.

Once the research team settled on a definition of CSOs at the outset of this research, it was important to understand the history of these organisations in Sri Lanka and the scope of the work carried out. The presence of CSO in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the country's colonial past. These early CSOs were Christian missions, such as the Ceylon Bible Society established in 1812, and the Christian Literature Society of Ceylon established in 1853. These CSOs gave rise to other faith-based CSOs such as Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim civil society organisations (ADB, 2013) (Jayasinghe, 2007). CSOs played an important role during the civil war in Sri Lanka, as well as in the aftermath of the tsunami.

As for the scope of the work carried out by CSOs, they appear to have a wide range of mandates, from providing humanitarian assistance to advocating for policy changes. They work on issues such as women's rights, environmental protection, peacebuilding, education, and poverty reduction. CSOs also serve as a bridge between communities and the government, and they work to hold the government accountable for its policies and actions.

The scope of this research was, however, limited to the challenges faced by CSOs responding to unforeseen or sudden violence, with particular interest in marginalised communities such as women and girls. Defining unforeseen violence proved to be an incredible challenge. We have discussed this challenge in detail in the methodology of this report, but feel the need to reiterate here that we are fully aware that the term 'unforeseen violence' can be interpreted in many ways. Similarly, 'sudden violence' can encapsulate natural disasters, and so while we did consider natural disasters in this research, we only reached out to CSOs that worked on supporting people affected by these events, and not fauna and flora – even though the long-term environmental impacts can and will affect the human population eventually. On the environment, we also considered man-made environmental disasters such as the Meethotamulla garbage landslide. More about this is included in the methodology.

Given careful consideration of the definitions and what we were able to accomplish within a few months of research, this report aims to provide an overview of civil society organisations in Sri Lanka. It will examine the history and development of CSOs in the country, their organisational structures and funding sources, and their impact on society. The report will also analyse the challenges faced by CSOs in Sri Lanka, including government restrictions on their activities and limited access to resources.

Methodology

Given that CSOs are numerous and widespread in Sri Lanka, it was necessary to conduct quantitative research to capture accurate data. There were quite a few challenges we came across and we returned to the drawing board more than once, but after fine-tuning the process, we were satisfied with the results of this study. Given that it is a national survey and managed to get over 150 responses, we believe the data collected is a fair snapshot of CSOs and how CSOs function in Sri Lanka.

Qualitative research was conducted after the quantitative data was completed, more as a complement to the quantitative data and a means of verifying data we received that appeared odd at first glance.

Database

The first stage of this project was to create a database of CSOs in Sri Lanka. While the NGO Secretariat has an expansive list, not all NGOs and CSOs are registered with the Secretariat. Some NGOs are listed as companies in Sri Lanka, largely to avoid state scrutiny, or are grassroots organisations that are not formal or are religious entities. Additionally, the NGO Secretariat listing has not been updated, we found several of the NGOs on the

listing were defunct after we ran our own background check. Therefore, to expand our list and include grassroots organisations as well as religious CSOs we decided to write to all the organisations in our recently created database and request contact information of the grassroots organisations they work with. With the introduction of these grassroots and religious organisations to the database, we intended to email the questionnaire to the entire group.

However, the response to our initial email/letter was poor, to say the least. We received a response from one organisation, and a few others reached out for clarifications but most organisations did not respond. We were of course fully aware that these organisations had no obligation to respond to our request, the database remains as is with about 200 organisations listed.

It is, however, important to note that when identifying the CSOs the research team conducted background searches on each of the organisations. This was done to find out if they were functional, where they were located and most importantly if they worked on issues relating to unforeseen violence - at least within a broad definition of the term.

Another important note is that most organisations working specifically with the LGBT community did not provide contact details on their website or social media. Since the survey was conducted over phone calls (where the interns were trained on how to explain each question and provided with translations of the survey so that the same descriptive words were even if the survey was conducted in Sinhala or Tamil - to ensure uniformity of the data collected), direct messaging of these organisations over social media platforms was not an option. Therefore, the data on the LGBT community may not be accurate, but also only a handful of organisations were found to be working on LGBT issues exclusively.

Research parameters

When developing the questionnaire our intention was to get an understanding of specific regions where there is a concentration of CSOs and areas where there was a paucity of them. What main areas of work do CSOs focus on and what areas need more work? And of course, the central focus of this research - the challenges CSOs face when responding to unforeseen violence.

Firstly, we identified a specific period for this research - 2009 to 2022. We decided to study organisations working in the post-war context since this would be more relevant to present-day activities by CSOs. We then carried out intensive desk research to identify major events of violence that occurred during these 13 years. Once we identified and tabulated all the major incidents of violence, we proceeded to categorise them as unforeseen and foreseen.

As mentioned previously, defining unforeseen violence proved to be an enormous challenge. Some of the questions we asked ourselves during this research were - Is violence ever unforeseen? What types of violence can be considered unforeseen? And what forms of unforeseen violence are specific to marginalised groups, such as women and girls, people with disabilities, etc.

For example, the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka could be considered 'unforeseen' to the public, but state officials were aware of the heinous plan days ahead of the attacks. Therefore, would unforeseen in this context include only the public or both the public and the state? If it were the latter, it is almost impossible to pinpoint acts of violence that were unknown beforehand. With regards to attacks on the Muslim community following the Easter bombings, many Muslims feared and were expecting attacks, given the recent history of anti-Muslim violence that has occurred almost annually. Perhaps, unforeseen violence could be in terms of attacks on individual Muslims. While many Muslims feared violence and were hypervigilant, they did not know what forms any attack on them would take. Such as how doctor Shafi Shihabdeen was falsely accused of sterilising hundreds of

Sinhalese women, or attacks on women who wore the hijab or niqab.

Similarly, with regard to the attacks on the Gotagogama protesters, whether by military or civilians, the protesters were fully aware of the high possibility of attacks. Many came prepared to be tear-gassed, and messages were shared on social media on how a protester could protect themselves from tear-gas attacks and how to navigate a situation where a riot breaks out. Therefore, the anticipation of attacks could be seen as foreseen or predictable violence and may not suit this research. Another aspect to consider was environment-related unforeseen or sudden violence. One example of this was the Meethotamulla garbage dump landslide. On one hand, it can be considered state violence against the population surrounding the garbage dump. It can also be considered 'unforeseen' or 'sudden' in that the extent of the disaster was never foreseen or if anticipated it was not known when exactly the garbage dump would collapse. Further investigation would need to be carried out with interviews with the residents and the urban development authority as well as the Colombo Municipal Council, however, given our limited time for research, we were unable to investigate each potential incident of post-war violence to confirm whether it fits within the scope of the research.

Another example of nature or environment-related violence by the state that impacted the population is the fertilizer ban of May 2021. Not only did it affect the farmers, but the entire population by engendering a food crisis (Rasheed & Kuruwita, 2022) (Gupta, 2022) (Parkin & Ratnaweera, 2022) (Jayasinghe & Ghoshal, 2022). Whether this was unforeseen or sudden is debatable, as according to some the fertilizer ban could have been successful if it was implemented differently, the government 'botching it up' is what led to the crisis (Young, 2022) (Mendis, 2021).

While contending with this crucial aspect of the project, we were able to identify very few incidents of violence that could be considered unforeseen. These included incidents of violence such as the murder of Khuram Shaikh a British Red Cross worker and the gang rape of his partner in a resort in Tangalle. Therefore, unforeseen violence would include those murdered or raped, that did not involve threats prior to the crime. Another area worth mentioning is abuse on social media, doxing and other forms of unforeseen violence that can have a grave impact on an individual. Given that these were very narrow examples, we eventually decided to leave the interpretation of unforeseen violence to the survey respondents. We did, however, provide a few examples in the questionnaire so that the respondents would have some idea as to how they may consider 'unforeseen' violence. We felt this would help us understand what various CSOs consider 'unforeseen violence', and learn from CSOs in case there were incidents of unforeseen violence that had not occurred to us while designing the survey due to our own biases or limited knowledge.

Questionnaire

The next step was to develop the survey. We intended to limit the number of questions as we did not want respondents to renege on their commitment to complete the survey due to time constraints – as we understood they are not obliged to fill out the survey, were not receiving any form of compensation for their time, and had their own projects to prioritise. We wanted to ensure a high response rate which meant that a limited number of questions were essential.

This, of course, posed another challenge to us, as we had to limit ourselves to a few questions. We narrowed down areas of interest that were central to this research, and ultimately, we had a total of 19 questions in the survey.

Once the questionnaire was developed, we conducted a pilot run on Google Forms after reaching out to a few NGOs. We did not receive any negative feedback and we did not notice any major issues in the data collection process or in the data collected.

Random sampling

Given that the database of 200 organisations were a mix of those found on the NGO Secretariat listing, our networks, and largely NGOs found via Google searches, we consider this research random sampling.

When it came to disseminating the survey, we decided against reaching out to our networks and the 200 organisations in the database via email or even via the postal service, given that we did not receive responses when we reached out over email previously. It was essential to call up each organisation and gather their responses over the phone to ensure a high response rate.

In order to do this, we reached out to the University of Colombo, the University of Peradeniya and the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology to recruit undergraduate students for a paid internship to make the call and collect the data from CSOs.

We were able to hire a total of 20 interns and held two workshops to familiarise them with the survey. During the workshop, we explained what the research was about, and what type of information we expected. We went through each of the questions in the survey, followed by a question and answer session. Each of the 20 interns was provided with a list of 10 CSOs from the database to contact. They were also provided with a pre-paid SIM card to make the calls.

Issues faced by the interns

- The interns made the calls in December of 2022, this posed a problem because most CSOs usually are busy during this time of the year as they work on closing projects. Many would also close early due to the seasonal holidays. This was the case with some of the organisations the interns reached out to.
- Organisations being defunct despite having an online presence, organisations requesting for the survey to be emailed to them but not responding even after repeated follow up calls.
- A number of international NGOs declined to respond to the survey saying they were not CSOs despite working closely with local communities
- Contact numbers listed on their websites or social media were invalid

To overcome these issues, the research team requested that the interns inform them as soon as possible when they encountered problems, especially when they did not receive a response from a CSO. When the interns reached out to us, we carried out further Google searches to find CSOs to replace the ones they could not reach or declined to respond. It must be iterated here that this process included a quick background search to confirm if the organisation is likely to work on unforeseen violence - again to ensure a high response rate. During these Google searches, there were a number of organisations that were eliminated because they did not have the right criteria. An example would be an organisation working specifically on mangroves or sustainable energy. Some organisations working with people were also eliminated. These included organisations providing meals to the needy - as this clearly did not fall into the category of unforeseen or sudden violence.

New or replacement CSOs were not difficult to find given that there are a large number of CSOs in Sri Lanka. What was time-consuming however was the background research.

Ultimately there were about 45 replacement organisations provided to the interns, bringing the total number of organisations contacted to 245. We had a total of 158 respondents from the 245. And once incorrect or duplicate organisations were removed, we had a total of 153 organisations to study.

Tabulating the data

The data presented in the Analysis section of this report includes the complete datasets we collected. We have provided another dimension to the research by looking at specific districts that were of interest against questions of what areas of unforeseen violence the CSOs work on, as well as if they receive state support, and the number of projects conducted in a year, to name a few.

The districts selected for the analysis included Batticaloa given that it had a significantly higher number of CSO activity. Jaffna, Mannar, Galle and Kurunegala were of particular importance to the research, but also provide a fair cross-section of CSO presence and work, in the north, west, east and south of the country.

Qualitative data

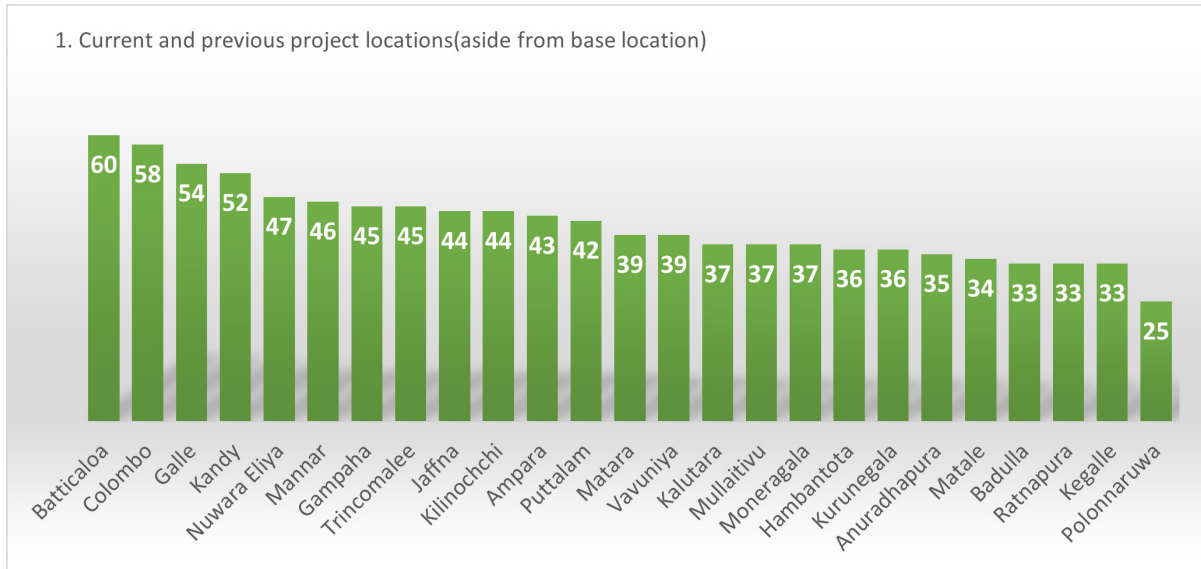
Once the quantitative data was complete, we conducted the qualitative data as a complement to the quantitative data. Mostly in terms of clarification or finding additional data on specific questions. For example, we noticed an increased interest in Batticaloa by CSOs and were thus prompted to conduct interviews with a group of individuals employed at CSOs in Batticaloa to find out more about how they function and why there is an increased interest in Batticaloa. We also spoke to the DS in Batticaloa to find out how the state perceives CSOs.

During these interviews, we found that there is a close and almost symbiotic relationship between the state and CSOs in Batticaloa. CSOs work very closely with the NGO Secretariat representative based in the DS office. To follow up we reached out to the NGO Secretariat and to NGO Secretariat representatives based in other districts we were researching, as well as Polonnaruwa where CSO interest was very low.

We were also interested in finding out more about why there was an increased interest in Batticaloa by CSOs, and how or why CSOs and the DS offices work together relatively well which is not seen anywhere else in the country. To understand the history of CSOs in Batticaloa we conducted desk research and interviewed Sarala Emmanuel from Suriya Women's Development Foundation. This was important in understanding the various factors that contribute to why a particular district has a high frequency of CSOs and some do not.

Quantitative data analysis

1. Current and previous project locations (aside from the base location)

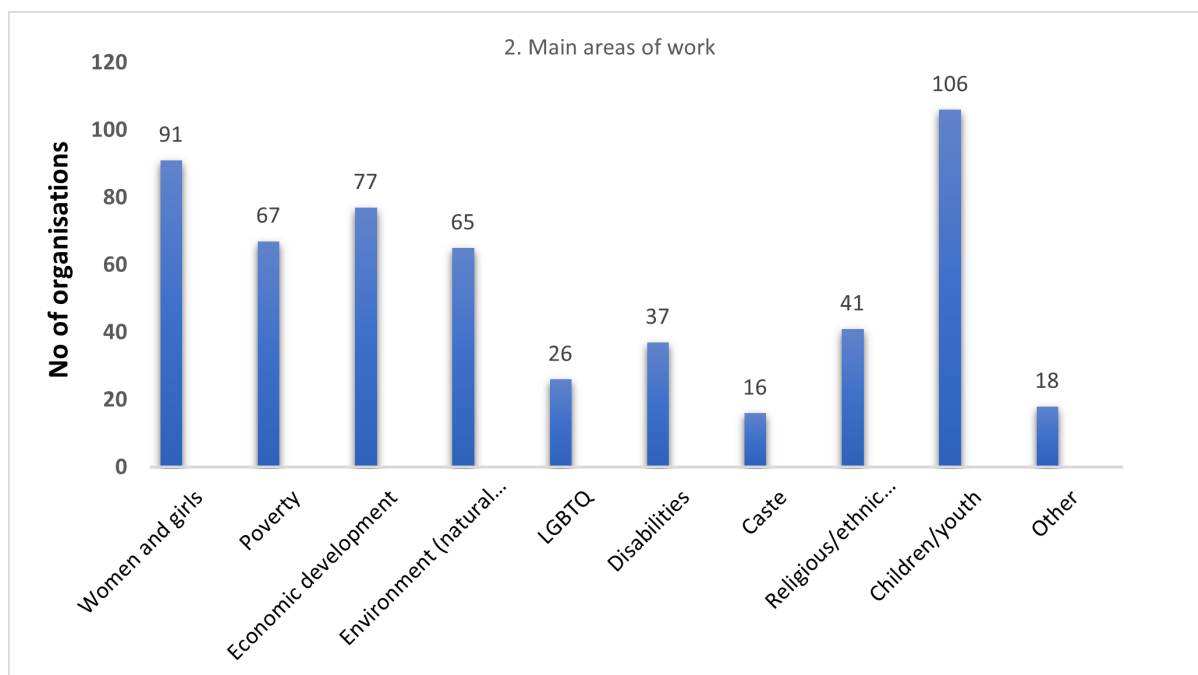


Based on the survey responses, most organisations worked in the Batticaloa district, with a count of 60 out of the 153 respondents. Polonnaruwa district had the least number of organisations carrying out projects in the district at 25.

Twenty respondents stated that their organisations worked in all 25 districts. Therefore, when visualising the data, we added these 20 respondents to each of the district categories. It is however interesting to note that 20 organisations work in all the district, and a majority work on awareness projects; with a few working solely on awareness projects. The next most common areas for the specific 20 respondents were relief work, followed by research reports.

Most projects carried out in Batticaloa were on women and girls and poverty. Most of the projects carried out in Polonnaruwa covered women and girls, poverty, economic development, and the environment (natural and man-made disasters).

2. Main areas of work

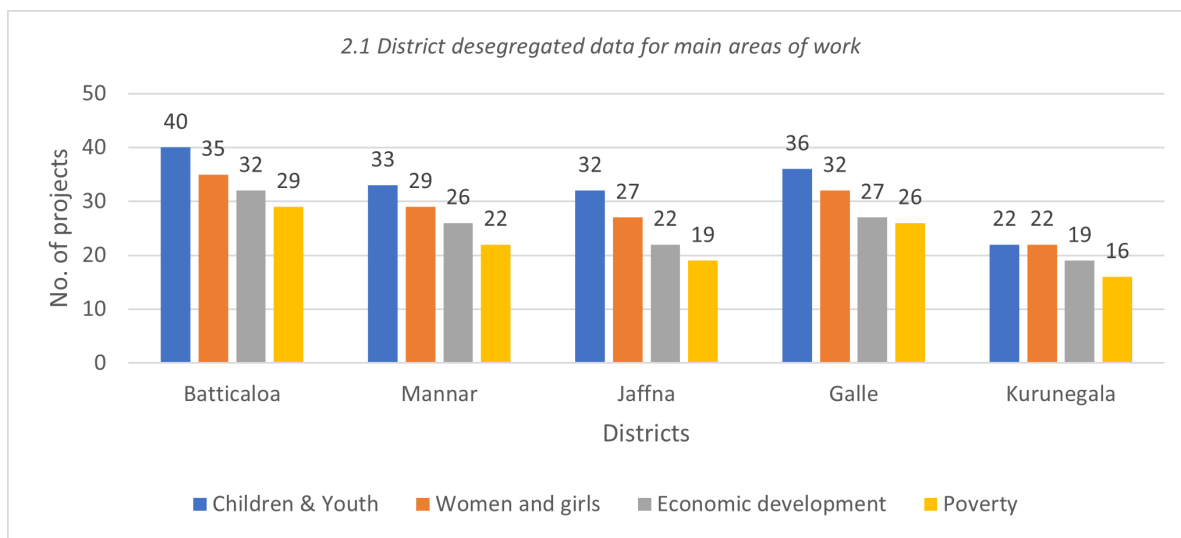


A few aspects to bear in mind when reading data presented in graph 2 (Main areas of work) is that each area of work is not isolated. They may intersect with other areas but this graph shows the overall attention each area of work receives when all 153 CSOs are studied. For example, a single CSO may work with women and girls in poverty; in which case they would tick women and girls, and poverty among the options in the survey. Another CSO may work with women and girls with disabilities, and tick both options as well. Our research isolates these options to identify which areas regardless of intersections, receive the most attention.

Another important aspect to remember is the difference between 'economic development' and 'poverty' with regard to how they have been isolated for this research. Economic development refers to helping a community – which in some cases may not necessarily fall below the poverty line. Poverty refers to issues relating to individuals or a group living below the poverty line.

It is also worth noting, that CSOs that selected 'other' further indicated that they worked on areas of sudden or unforeseen violence relating to disappeared people, journalists and media employees, and medical/health issues.

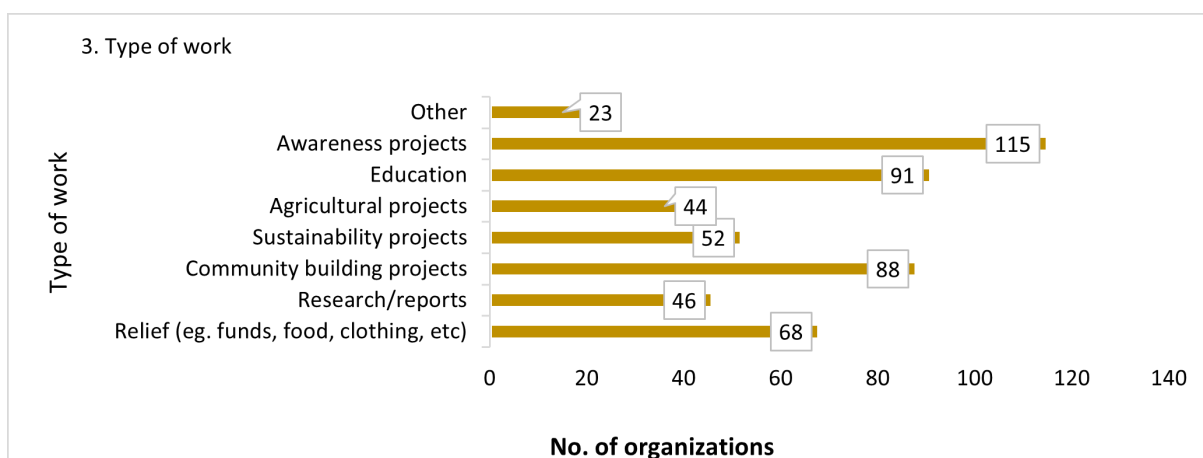
2.1 Following graph shows the district-desegregated data for the reported main areas of work (Districts: Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Galle, Kurunegala)



According to **Graph No. 2**, children and youth, women and girls, economic development and poverty were the dominant areas of work consecutively. **Graph no.1** revealed that the greatest number of projects are carried out in Batticaloa and while Polonnaruwa received the least attention. The graph above (**graph 2.1**) presents an overview of the data based on areas of work desegregated under the highlighted districts; Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Galle, Kurunegala¹.

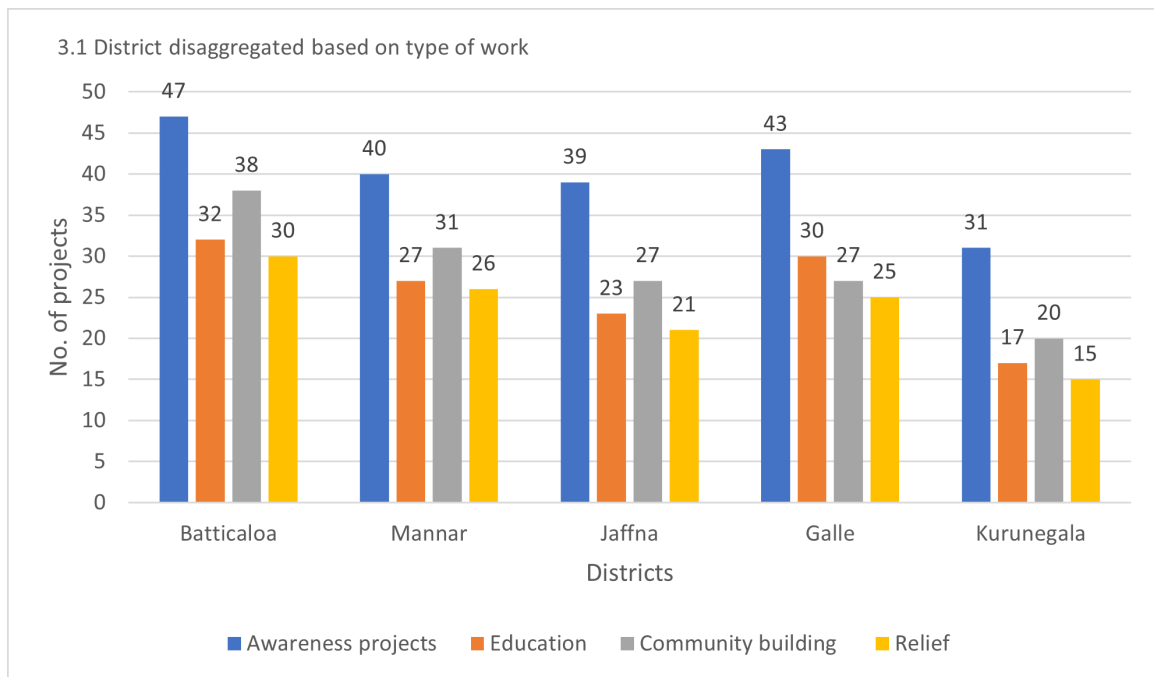
Based on the results, it can be seen that even across these various districts focus areas of work retain a certain pattern. Children and youth are prioritised in each of the districts, with only an equal amount of attention given to women and girls in Kurunegala. ‘Women and girls’ however is the next highest area of priority area across the districts. Poverty features the lowest across the districts, this could be a potential area for CSOs to explore as Sri Lanka navigates the 2022 economic crisis.

3. Types of work covered by organisations



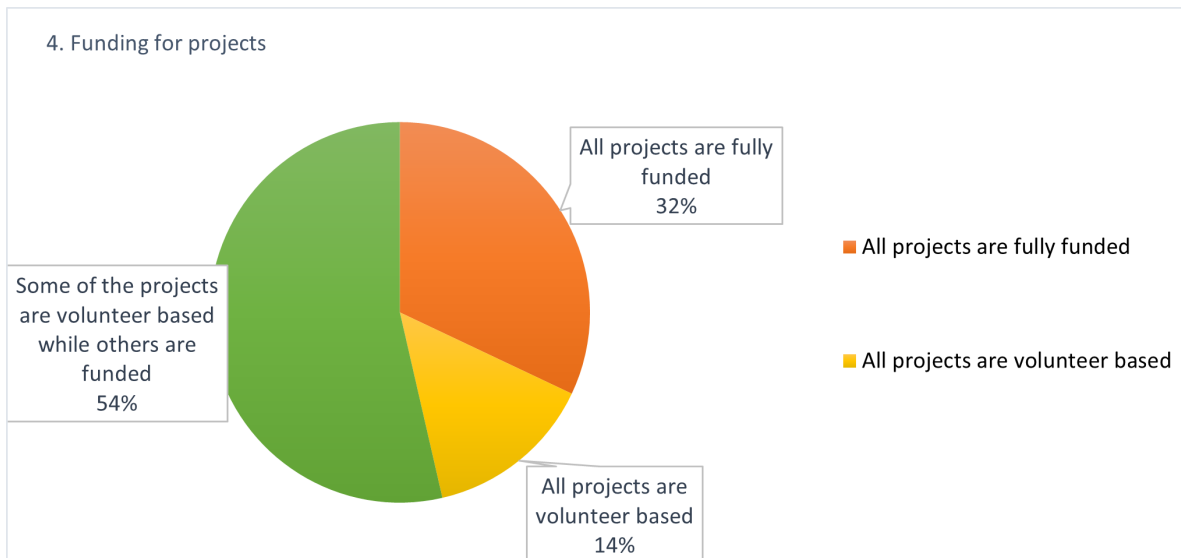
Based on this data, most of the organisations are engaged in awareness projects. This is followed by education and community building projects. A minority of 4% are engaged in “other” types of work. Those that selected ‘other’ as an option provided examples such as counselling, social mobilization, legal aid and other support services

3.1 District disaggregated type of work



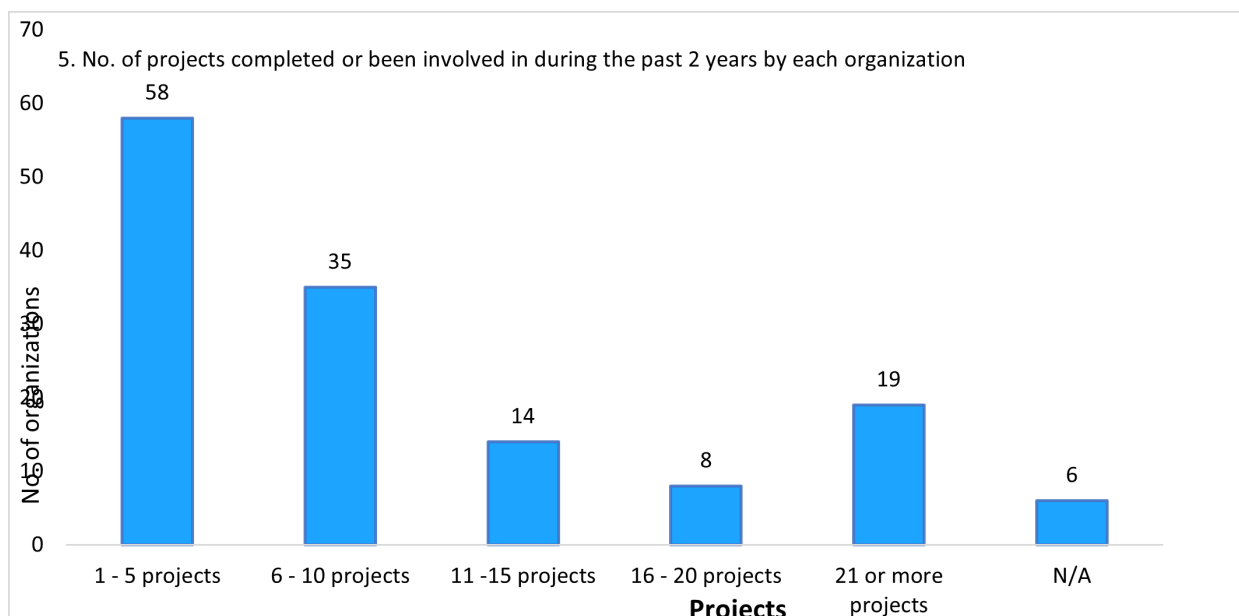
Graph 3.1 is the district disaggregated data of the type of work CSOs do in these districts. Here again, the island-wide data pattern in the five selected districts as well. The only difference is that Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna and Kurunegala give second priority to community building while Galle shows marginally more interest in education. However, these differences are not significant given the project count.

4. Have you received funding for these projects or are they unfunded/volunteer work?



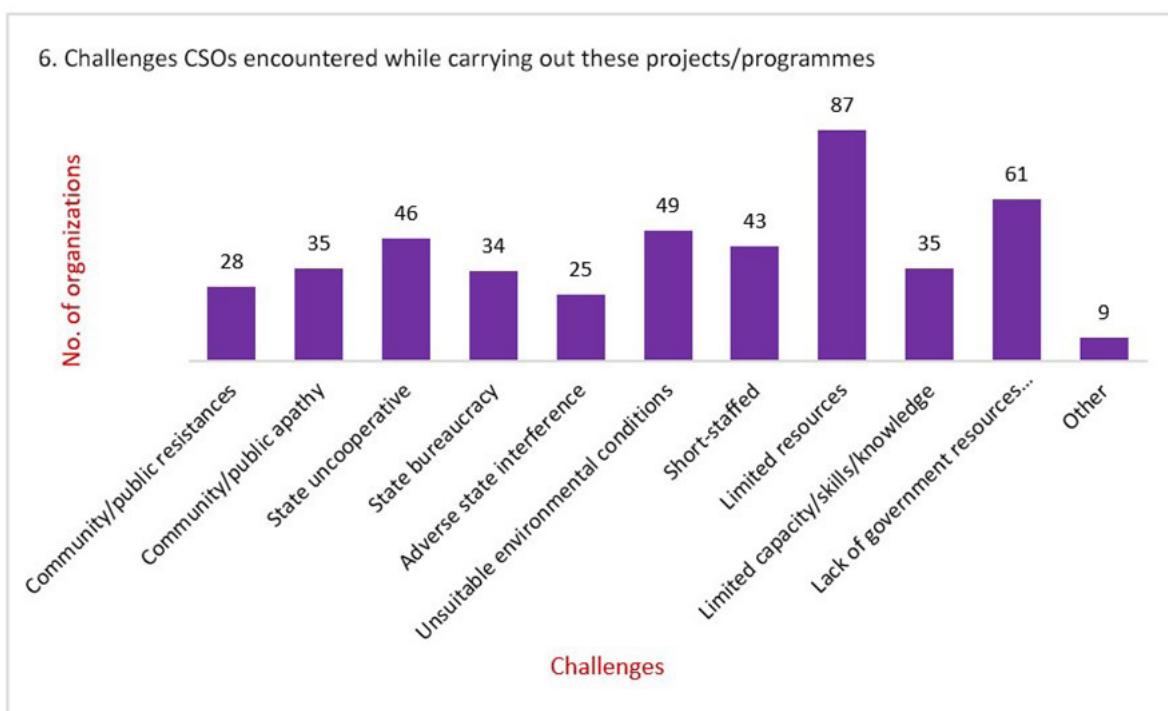
As per responses, 54% of projects were volunteer based with the rest of the projects funded. Only a minority of 14% of the projects are volunteer based. Participants were given the option to select ‘other’ and include aspects not captured in the question. Under “other” methods the following was included, profits from counselling services used to fund ground-level projects, and funds collected from the public by performing in street dramas used for projects. Some CSOs that are the corporate social responsibility arm of large businesses stated they are fully funded by their parent corporation.

5. How many projects has your organisation completed or been involved in during the past 2 years?



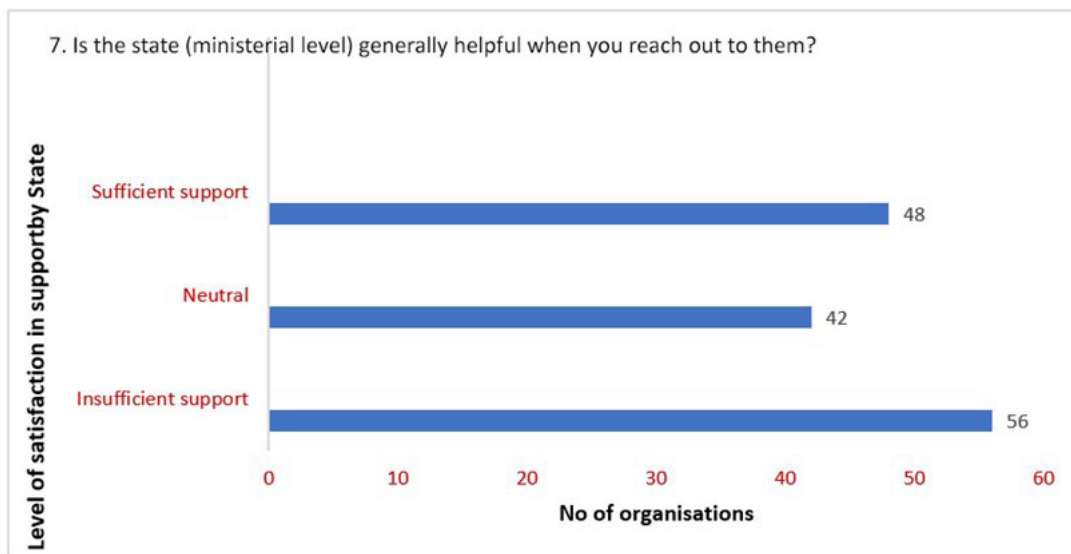
This graph reveals the capacity of CSOs to run projects. A staggering majority carry out a few projects, 1 to 5, within two years. While 19 organisations were able to carry out 21 or more projects within two years. Some CSOs that marked category of 21 and over projects, elaborated stating these were short projects such as providing relief. Those that responded non-applicable, claimed that they could not carry out any projects during the past two years (2020 and 2021) due to several reasons such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. What are the challenges you have faced while carrying out these projects/programmes?



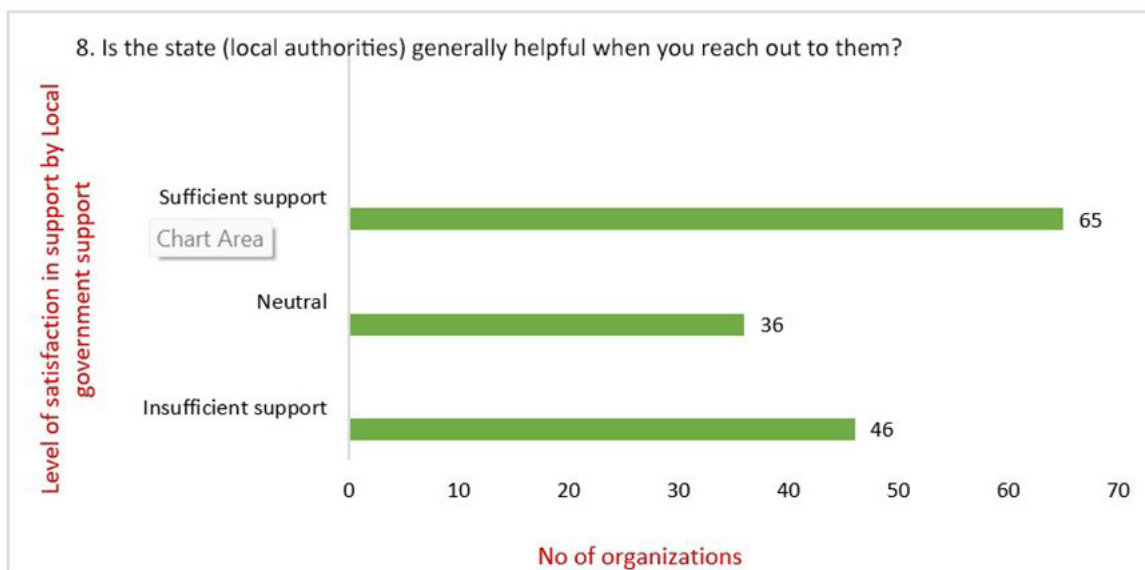
According to survey responses, limited resources are the most common challenge faced by a majority of 87 organisations. The COVID-199 pandemic, political instability, military interventions etc. were categorised as other challenges for projects. Comparatively, adverse state interference was seen as a challenge by very few organisations.

7. Is the state (ministerial level) generally helpful when you reach out to them?



Closer to 33% of respondents indicated that they always had state or ministry-level support for their projects, while approximately 38% indicated insufficient support. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents were neutral. However, it must be noted here, that while we understood ‘ministerial’ level to mean ministries, we later found that some respondents interpreted it to mean the provincial councils.

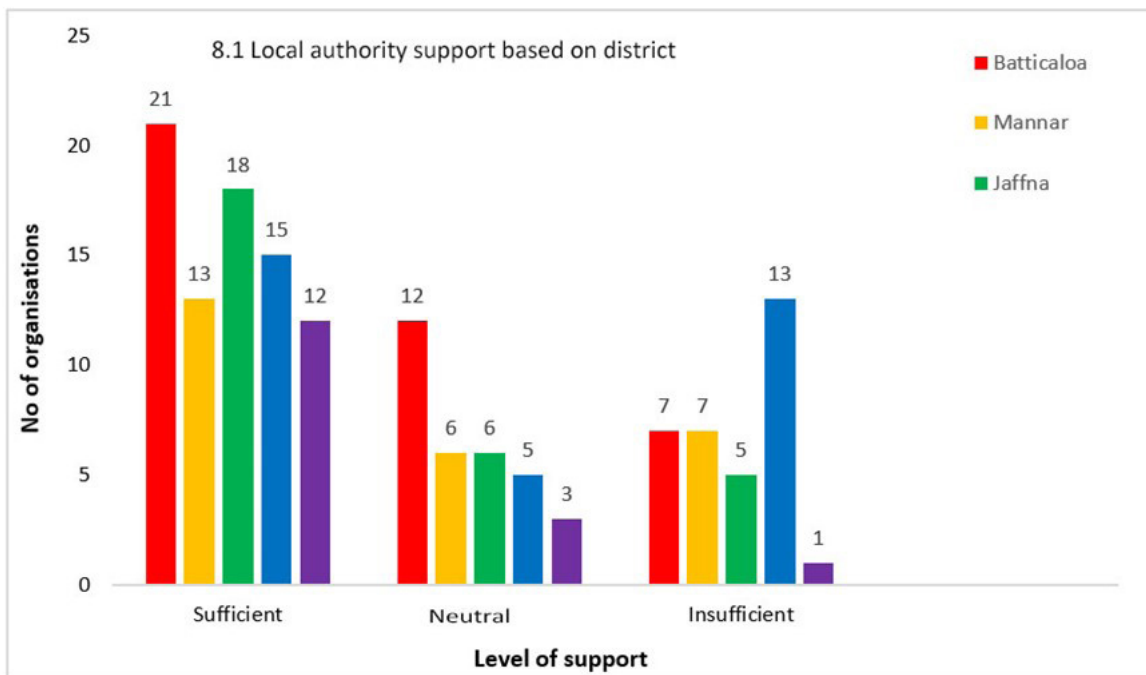
8. Is the state (local authorities) generally helpful when you reach out to them?



Most CSOs stated that the local government is supportive of their work. Thirty-six organisations were neutral, while 46 stated they were not supportive.

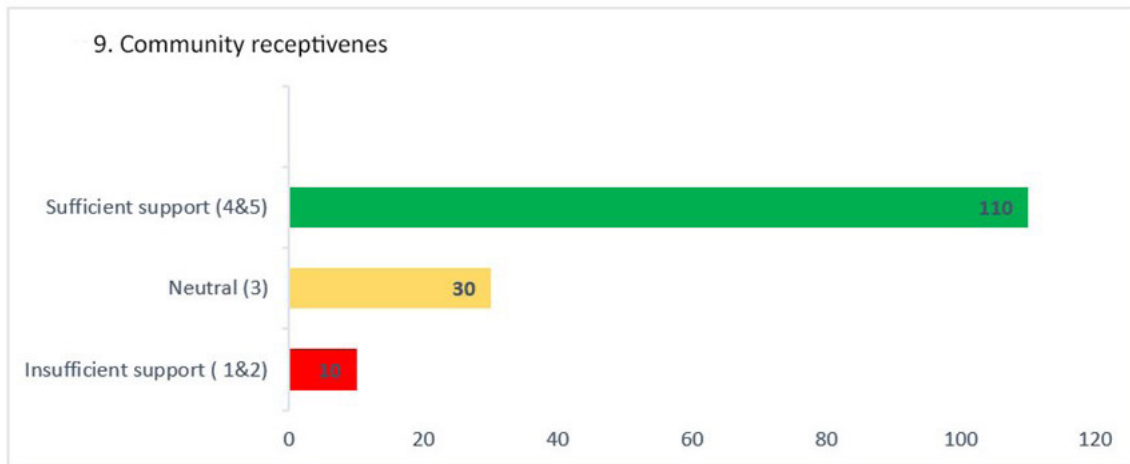
Below is the district desegregated data for responses received regarding local government support. Highlighted districts; Batticaloa, Mannar, Jaffna, Galle, Kurunegala.

8.1 Local authority support based on district



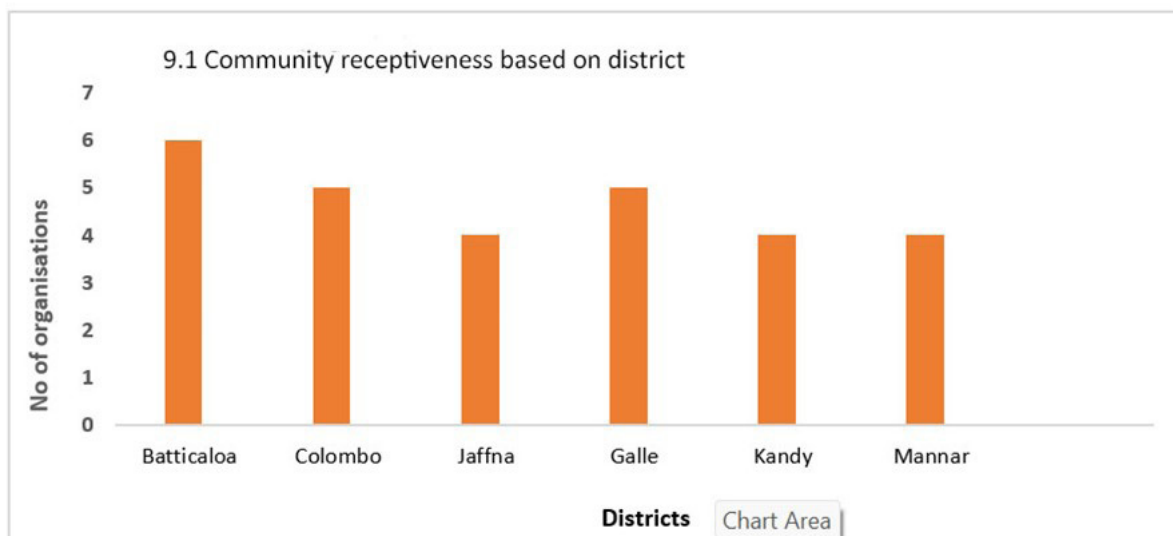
According to the graph, local government authorities in Batticaloa are very supportive of CSOs in the region. Galle has an almost equal number of CSOs that stated the local government support was sufficient and insufficient. It would be interesting to see what areas of work each category of respondents work in, we can then find out if the local government is more supportive towards particular subject-based projects, or if the local government support is arbitrary.

9. Would you say the public or communities you work with are generally receptive when you reach out to them?



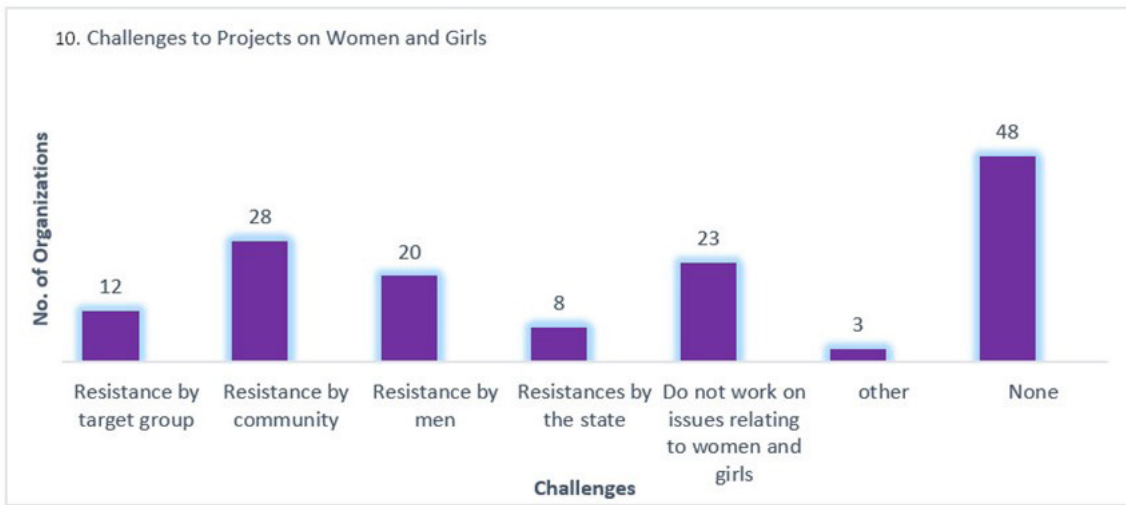
Seventy-three percent of the participants (110 CSOs) stated that the communities are always receptive to projects and showed enough support. However, about 7% (10 CSOs) of the respondents indicated that the community was not receptive to these projects.

9.1 Community receptiveness based on district



It appears CSOs in the Jaffna and Kandy districts have faced a few challenges with the communities when carrying out their projects. Here again, it would be interesting to see what areas of work the communities are not receptive to, or if other issues require further investigation.

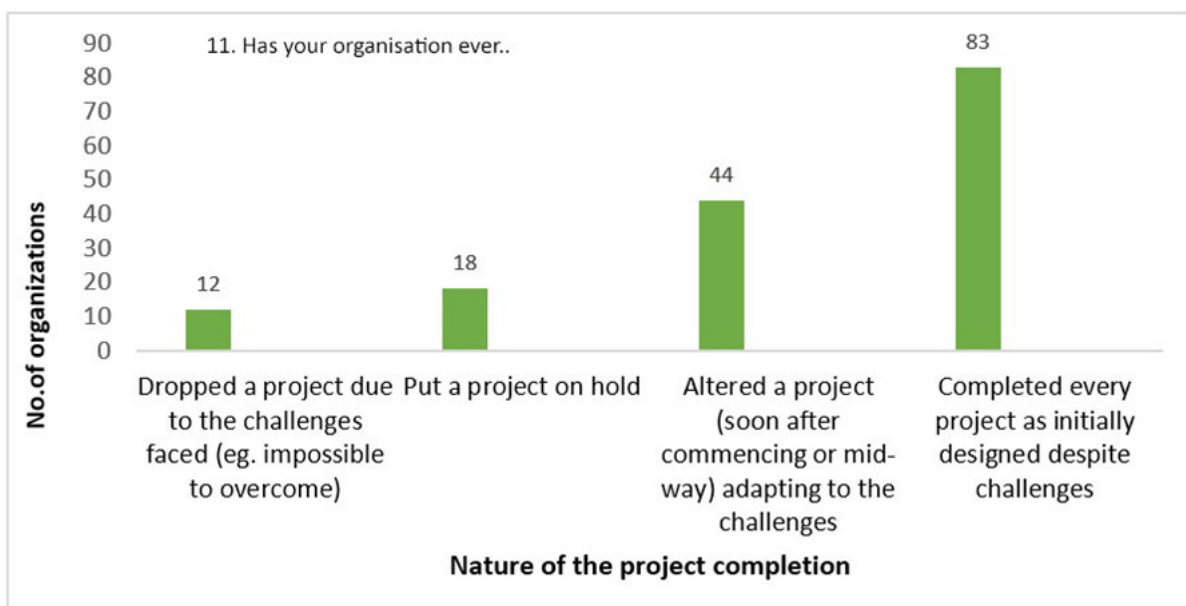
10. If you work on issues relating to women and girls, what are the challenges experienced when carrying out projects/programs specifically designed for them, if any?



Survey responses revealed that about an average of 28 organisations consider resistance by the community their biggest challenge when conducting projects relating to women and girls. Forty-eight organisations responded indicating that they do not recognise any challenges in work related to women and girls.

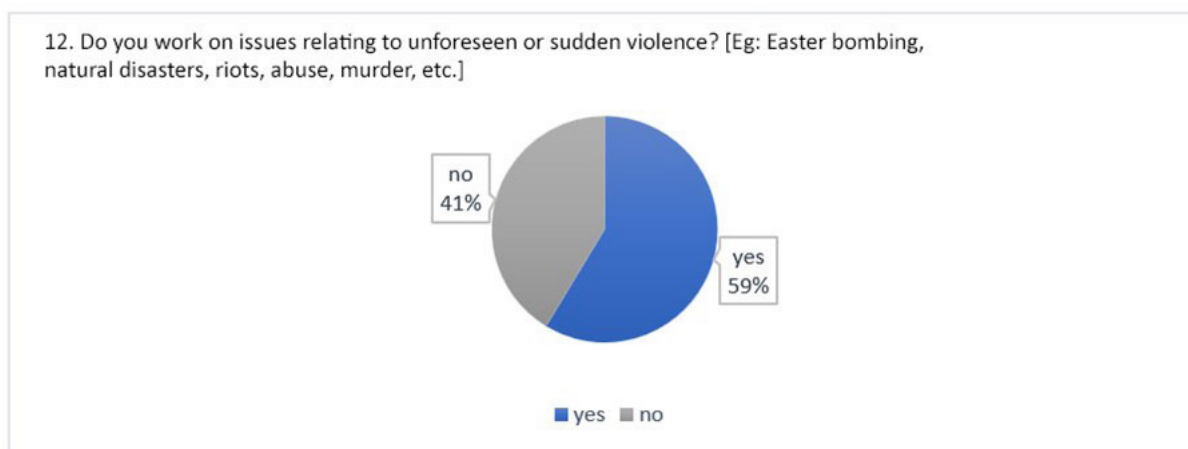
Moreover, 3 organisations have mentioned other challenges, such as women’s inability to participate in programmes as they have family responsibilities to prioritize.

11. Has your organisation ever... (Completion of projects)



Most organisations stated they have always been able to complete every project they carried out exactly as designed even when met with challenges. We are wary of this high response, however, given that organisations interviewed for the qualitative research stated that the pandemic and lack of fuel greatly affected their ability to fulfil their projects either within the specified timeframe or had to alter projects. Nevertheless, only a small minority of organisations stated they had to completely drop projects. Therefore, overall, CSOs in Sri Lanka rarely drop projects.

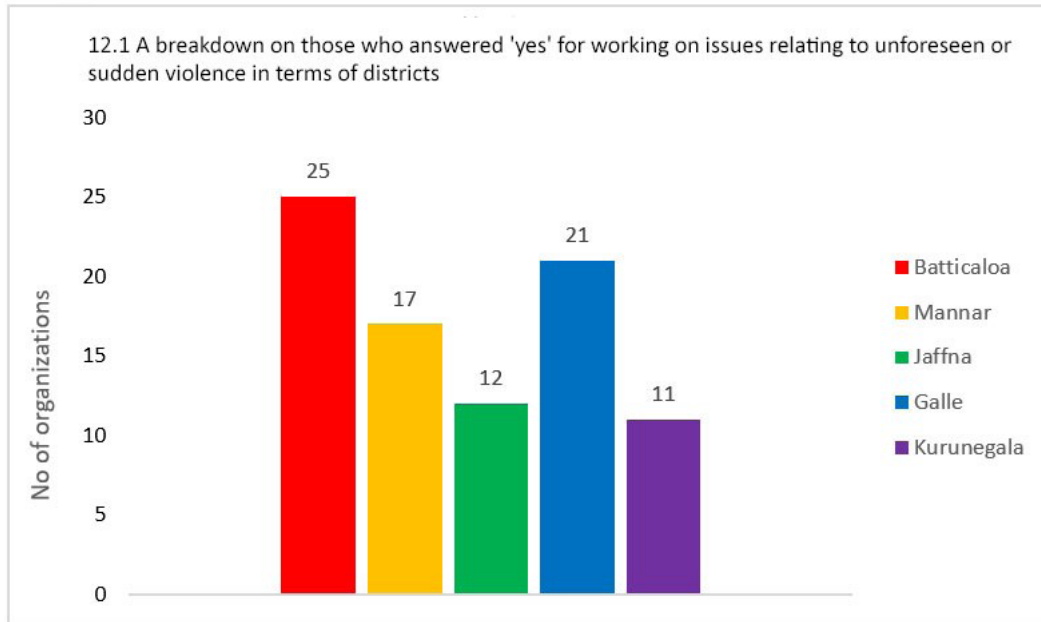
12. Do you work on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence? [Eg: Easter bombing, natural disasters, riots, abuse, murder, etc.]



59% (n = 88) of the organisations responded that their work involves responding to unforeseen or sudden violence, while 41% (n =62) stated that they do not respond to such conditions. These responses were particularly interesting given that the research team had carried out a brief assessment of each CSOs' work before eliminating a CSO due to them clearly not working on unforeseen or sudden violence, or including CSOs in the research pool for working on unforeseen violence. While a few examples were provided to help CSOs assess if they do work on issues relating to unforeseen violence, just a little under half the respondents did not consider their work or even part of it, relating to unforeseen violence.

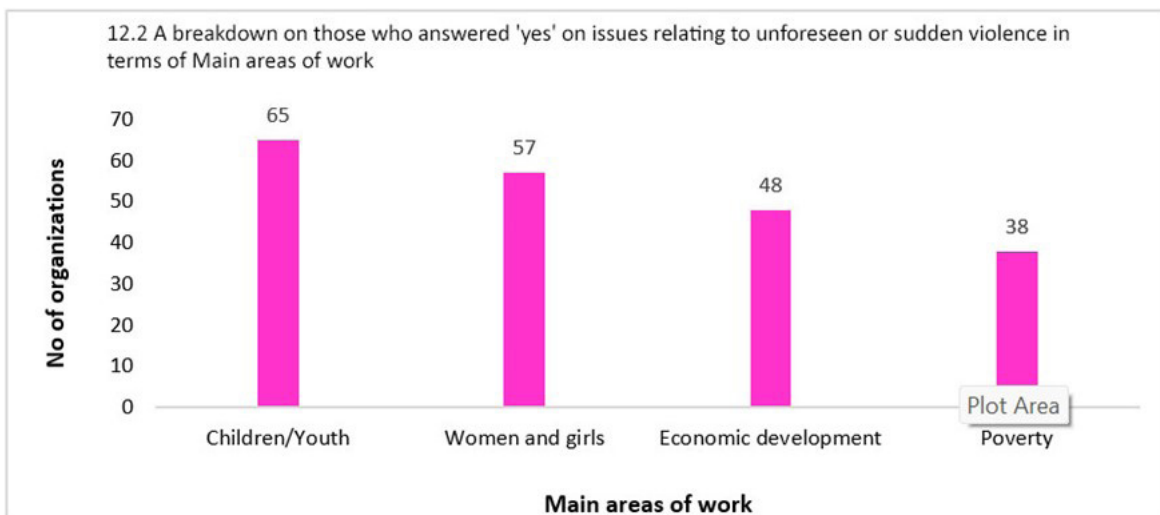
It was important to pose the question of unforeseen violence directly to the survey respondents to understand how CSOs view their own work, and additionally to evaluate our definitions of unforeseen violence as well.

12. 1A Breakdown of those who answered ‘yes’ for working on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence in terms of districts



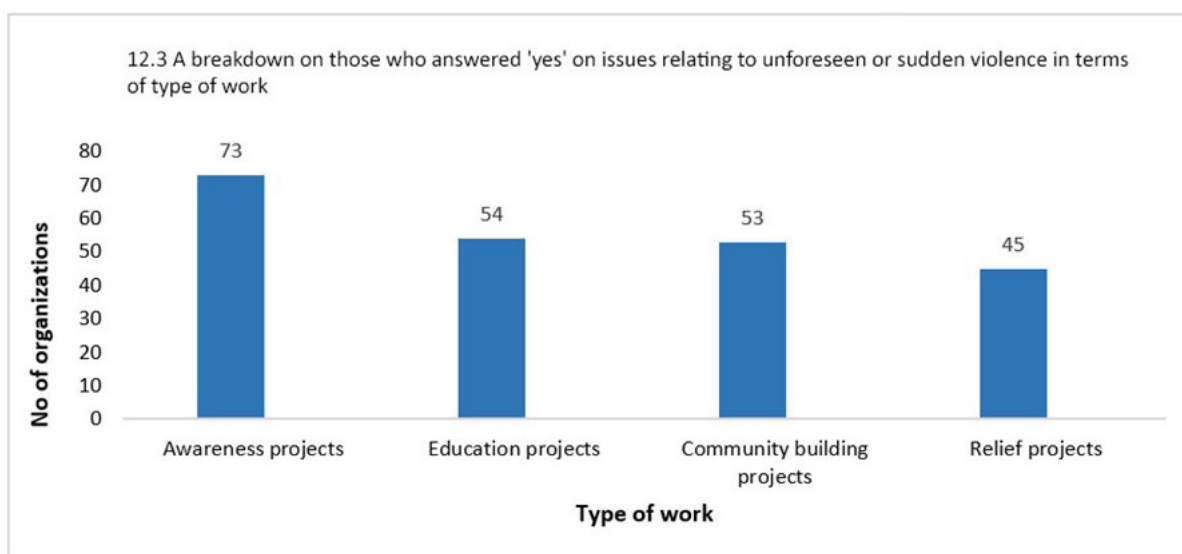
Looking specifically at the five districts that are the focus of this research, of the 59% of the total respondents that responded ‘yes’ to working on issues relating to unforeseen violence, we found that most of the projects relating to unforeseen violence are carried out in the Batticaloa district. This is followed by the Galle district and then the Mannar district. The least among the five districts were Jaffna and Kurunegala districts.

12. 2A Breakdown of those who answered ‘yes’ on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence in terms of Main areas of work



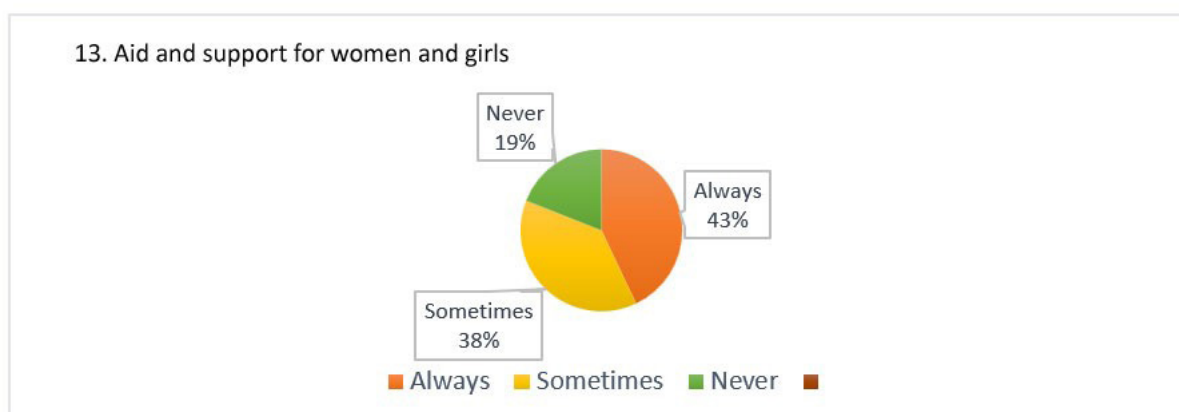
Once again, taking specifically the 59% that responded that they do work on unforeseen violence, we compared the data with data collected for 'main areas of work' carried out. This revealed that of the organisations that work on unforeseen violence, most work on issues relating to children and youth, followed by women and girls, economic development and finally poverty consecutively.

12. 3A Breakdown of those who answered 'yes' on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence in terms of type of work



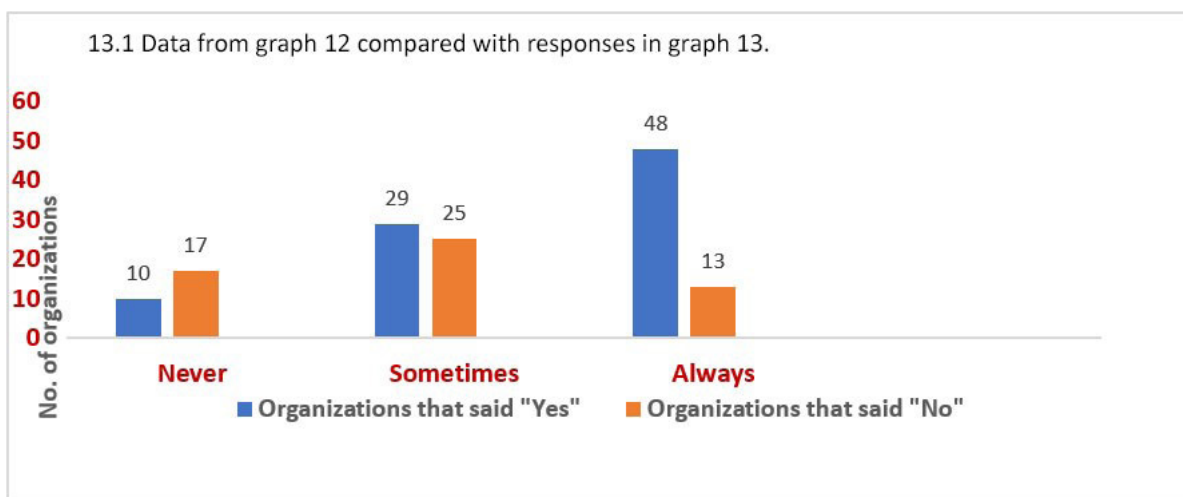
Among the 59% (n=90.3) that indicated that they work on issues relating to unforeseen violence, most worked in awareness projects, these include projects such as creating awareness about the difference between a hijab and niqab or burqa, during the temporary burqa ban in Sri Lanka. Other types of work included education projects, community building projects and relief projects, all of which had a similar average frequency.

13. Have the projects/programs relating to unforeseen or sudden violence involved assisting/aiding women or girl children even though these groups were not a main target when designing the project/program?



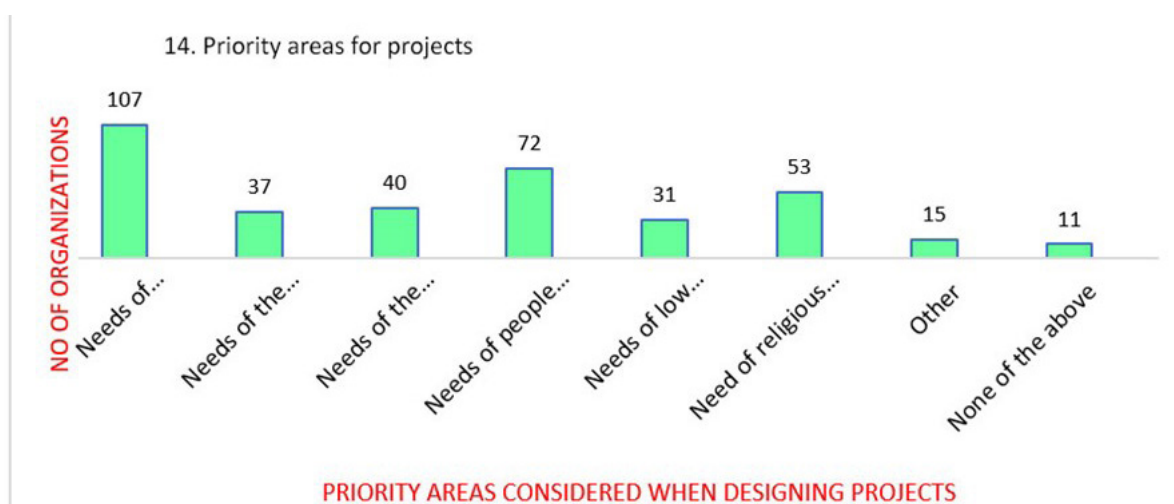
Forty- three percent of the respondents said they always provide support to women and girls during unforeseen or sudden violence, and 38% said it would be the case sometimes. Nineteen percent of the respondents said they have never been involved in assisting/aiding women and girl children during such projects/programs.

13. 1 Data from graph 12 (those who responded Yes or No to working on issues relating to unforeseen violence) compared with responses in graph 13.



Among the respondents that answered yes to working on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence, 48 CSOs said their work always involves aiding or assisting women and girls when responding to unforeseen violence even if women and girls were not the main target group of their project or programme.

14. Which of the following are always considered or is a priority when designing projects/ program



According to the responses, a majority of 107 organisations have mentioned that they prioritise the needs of women and girl children when designing their projects. The next most prioritised area is needs of people with disabilities.

Qualitative data analysis

NGOs in Batticaloa

Certain questions in the survey required follow up in order to find out more or for clarifications. We were able to interview a number of organisations in Batticaloa and explore sections of the survey in greater detail. The interview probed into details which included

- General introduction and areas of scope of the CSOs.
- Nature of the projects of these CSOs
- Their focus on women, children, the elderly, and the LGBT community
- Challenges the CSOs face when they work on unforeseen violence
- State intervention/support for the activities of the CSOs

Interestingly, most of the CSOs we interviewed contended that they work on issues related to women and girls in different ways. Such works included legally assisting women who are affected by domestic violence, sexual harassment, poverty, assisting those who were deprived of being financially independent or getting proper education, and helping women who are active in social works and political campaigns. A CSO stated that they specifically focus on Muslim women. They work with wives and mothers of those who were detained after the Easter attacks and women who are affected by the MMDA. Other than that, some CSOs work on issues related to social harmony and co-existence. They facilitate inter-religious dialogues and events. Almost all the CSOs maintain a connection with the LGBT community. They invite the LGBT community to their discussions. Some CSOs specifically focus on disaster relief as Batticaloa is situated on the coast of the lagoon which is affected annually by monsoon floods. The interviewees stated that all of them engaged in relief activities (either as organizations or individual members in their capacity) during the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

It was interesting to note that, the interviewees who represented different CSOs stated that they do not only work in their organizational capacity but rather offered volunteer services through the expertise and network they built from these respective CSOs. They also stated that the CSOs they belong to, welcome, and support their voluntary works as long as they do not conflict with the organizations' ethics and activities.

One organisation stated that they do a fair bit of voluntary work, such as counselling. "If a woman struggles in Quazi court, we offer to accompany the woman and give counselling services whenever needed." A representative from another organisation gave an example of how they do voluntary work, "let's say a disaster has taken place, we will gather in a place which will be offered by one of our organisations and discuss the immediate responses we need to take. And then, we will separate the work among ourselves and start working on it. In disaster responses, we do not wait until someone gives us funds. For example, if there was heavy rain and a nearby village is flooded, we will volunteer ourselves to raise funds among the wealthy people of the village and buy supplies and distribute them. We do not wait until our organisations instruct us to do so.

Drawing on the recent events, one organisation spoke about how they helped the community during the curfews and the lack of fuel in 2022 as an example "as a response to the economic crisis, we collected a handful of rice from every household and made kanji and shared the kanji in that village. We were able to share the kanji in the nearby villages too. If people cannot afford rice, they will give us vegetables that they grew in their backyards."

Speaking specifically about how they helped women when the economic crisis erupted one representative stated: "During the economic crisis, we made sure women got fuel like men do. There were many cases where

women were harassed and denied fuel at filling stations. We immediately set up a meeting with people including coordinators of the Human Rights Commission, filling station owners, police, the DS and other public officials, and requested a separate line for women. We also requested to assign a lady police officer at every filling station. If there were not many women and mostly men at the filling station, we organised the line in such a way that there was one woman before two men. We also requested the police and filling station owners to prioritize pregnant women and women coming with children”

Another organisation offered how they navigated incidents during the Easter bombing: “We made sure Muslim shops in the town which were prone to attacks by goons are protected. Because there was tension among Muslims and other communities immediately after the attacks. There were street fights and brawls. We discussed this situation. We welcomed Christian reverends to our meeting. Some meetings happened in the churches too. The reverends came to the forefront. It was powerful because they are from the victimized community. Many Muslim men were also ready to help us but they feared for their safety. Many Muslim men wanted to donate their blood during this time. But they were afraid to come out fearing repercussions. So, we requested the police and the priesthood to protect them. The police gave them protection to come to the hospital and donate the blood.”

These interventions show that the members of the CSOs are independent to work among themselves for common purposes and they have created a system to coordinate among themselves. These members have umbrella organizations for various purposes and they are well-informed about the abilities of each member and CSOs. This has enabled them to quickly coordinate among themselves to respond to sudden situations.

Other than focusing on women’s affairs, the CSOs work together on issues related to the elderly and LGBT community too. The interviewees contended that it is important to include all sections of the society especially the marginalised communities into the fold of their projects to produce a better outcome. They also stated that focusing specifically on marginalised communities such as women, children, the elderly, and LGBT communities helps them find more projects for their organizations.

At the same time, one organisation spoke about how prioritising sections of the community without proper assessment can result in certain sections being left out. Elaborating, they stated: “Elderly people suffered a lot during the pandemic and economic crisis. Special monthly payments for them were stopped. They had no way to reach us. We tried to reach them and helped with the necessary supplies. Also, the GA officials instructed us to prioritize the elderly and disabled people during the distribution of dry ration supplies. Therefore, the children were left out of those reliefs.”

Speaking about Muslim women, one CSO responded: “Women who claimed maintenance faced many issues during the economic crisis. Men got away during the economic crisis saying their livelihoods were affected. We helped some women to receive their maintenance through the help of the GS and influential people from the village. Some men obeyed the quazi court order and gave due funds.” This is interesting as it highlights the need to use influence in times of crisis to ensure the vulnerable are supported. Better state mechanisms and an actual will to help must be shared by government authorities such as the police and local government.

With regards to people with disabilities, another organisation stated: “People with disabilities are suffering a lot these days. Since the health crisis is still prevailing, they are in difficulty finding medicines. Those who have synthetic body parts need constant care regarding those items. They are not properly provided in the hospitals. As a result, they suffer wounds and infections. Also, people with other difficulties become disabled these days. For example, without proper medicines diabetic patients suffer from blindness. We have seen some cases around here too”. All other participants agreed that this was a growing concern now as the economic crisis unfolds.

With regards to the LGBT community, “LGBT people are very active now. They are acting as a group. Even

though society still hesitates to accept them, our organisations are very supportive towards them. Their group is not registered here yet, but they are very organised. We invite them to our meetings, discussions, and work shops. The LGBT youths participate in our workshops. They also invite us to their meetings. We put up street dramas together. We also help them individually. There are few cases around Batticaloa where the parents of gay couples did not accept their affairs. We talk with the families and make sure the couples are in a safer environment.” Our difficulty in reaching out to more LGBT communities may have also been because many of these groups are informal and not registered. One of the benefits of registering as a formal organisation is that these organisations will be able to access funding and other assistance. However, we are aware of the dangers this poses as well.

CSOs face many challenges both by the community and the state. Target groups also were hostile towards the CSOs. For example, a CSO stated that not all Muslim women welcomed their campaign regarding MMDA. “They resisted saying this was not needed by the community. Therefore, they avoided participating in our workshops and urged others not to participate.” However, the situation has changed over time.

One interviewee stated: “Generally, the communities were hostile before. They viewed us as people who work for foreign currency and cancelled us. During the MMDA campaigns, this is the main allegation that was flung at us. But now we see a difference. People are welcoming us because they see the real impact we have made. Even Muslim men are now supportive of our MMDA campaigns. The situation has changed that much”.

With regards to pushback from the state, a CSO shared: “Earlier, the government officials did not support our work. They are sceptical of our background. But now they are very friendly. They openly discuss issues with us. They express their concerns when we implement our projects. They invite us to meetings on a monthly basis too”.

Speaking of the relationship with local government officials one CSO described how they work with the local government, “the DS offices invite the registered NGOs for the annual meeting at the beginning of the year. They ask us to submit a concept note on our work in this meeting. Nowadays, only the NGOs that have funds and projects in hand (hence they can submit the concept notes) are invited. NGOs which did not receive funds for the year are not invited even though they are ready to work voluntarily and have attractive and necessary projects. Also, the unregistered networks too are not invited. We all think this is disadvantageous, exclusive, and discriminatory.

Another stated, “Mostly, the NGOs who send concept notes do work that goes beyond the concept notes. They just provide a basic framework for the DS offices. Sometimes the DS offices question us on the activities, that we go beyond the concept note and discourage us. Also, it is impossible to send a concept note because we expect to work on unforeseen issues too. In that case, the concept notes restrict us. Therefore, some organisations do not send concept notes to the DS officers and work on their own. It has caused the zoning out of NGOs from the networks.

The government officials plan their activities based on the concept notes they receive from the CSOs. Even though the government is not totally dependent on the activities of the CSOs, there are advantages for the government sector to continuously monitor the projects of the CSOs and plan its projects accordingly. It entails allocating funds for different purposes rather than pooling in the same place where CSOs have targeted. It is safe to assume that government sector officials do not plan the projects for citizens after they received concept notes from the CSOs, rather they modify their activities to be in line with the projects of the CSOs to prevent uneven funding.

One respondent stated referring to the government officials in the DS divisions and GS divisions: “We just need their approval. We do not want them to do our work, but they expect us to do their work [others in the FGD agreed]. Nowadays, they mention our organisations in their meetings and recognize our work. When people

come with their issues to them, they refer us to do that. In some cases, they approach us for a deeper understanding of people who come to them with issues. Because mostly the NGOs treat each case separately and we have separate case files for each of our activities. Government officials sometimes ask us for specific information. Also, we are long-term activists and workers unlike those who get transfers from time to time which makes them dependent on us. We requested them not to have double-entries and duplicates.”

This interviewee raises an important point as to why government officials must rely on the expertise of the CSOs who work at the grassroots level. Also, the interviewee makes a point about how transfers of local government authorities affect the smooth functioning of the DS and how it has led to the dependency of local government authorities on the NGOs.

A CSO stated, “When there is a transfer and a new person is assigned, the NGOs meet them in groups and we introduce ourselves. Transfers do not happen frequently but when they do occur, we have to restart our process. We explain our work and explain what we expect from them. It is difficult for us because, just as we train a government official and they become very familiar with how things work here, they get transferred, and we have to go through the same process again”. With regards to the training, we asked them to elaborate on what training they provide government officials, they said such training includes an introduction to concepts like GBV, child rights, reporting and proposal writing. It is interesting to note that government officials obtain training from CSOs.

Another interviewee said, “The Women Development Officers and other staff should do the monitoring related to the development projects and report them to the Additional DS. Most of these officials rely on us. They ask us for specific details and progress regarding those projects (since some projects are funded by NGOs and are monitored by government officials). They call us and ask for information and progress. They heavily rely on us when it comes to reporting to their higher officials.”

Adding to this one CSO shared, “There are regular meetings in the DS office called ‘District Development Meetings’ (Coordination meeting). All the government officials in the region are called for that but not us. We asked about it and they said that it is not in their circular to invite NGOs to this meeting. I want to take this opportunity to say that if we are invited to the meeting, we can meet all the officials of all the departments and discuss all these issues with them. They do not invite us simply to make sure the meeting does not go beyond their agenda.”

Following this, a question was posed whether ministries such as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health, support the cause and activities of the CSOs. The interviewees took it to mean provincial ministers and politicians. An interviewee answered, “We have five MPs here. There is no use with them. They only come when they need attention. They are not supportive of our work. It is easier for us to have an appointment with the ministries in Colombo (ministries of the central government) and talk to them about our issues. But our local MPs are not helpful.” This clarified what levels of government authority were more willing to work with CSOs.

The interviewees find it to be more helpful to work with provincial authorities as they are closer and more connected to local affairs than the authorities from the central government. The roadblock can be identified in the lack of communication between the provincial authorities and politicians with the CSOs. If there is a mechanism to connect provincial authorities and politicians with the CSOs, that would be beneficial to the CSOs to work effectively among the communities.

The interviewees were asked about the resources being used in the projects they implement. The question focused on the separation of the resources of both CSOs and the state. The need to identify this fact arose from the coordination and certain dependency of the state in implementing projects with the CSOs.

About the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, one interviewee shared, “We became tech-savvy. We conducted Zoom meetings. Our coordination became strong. For example, if I have to work in a different division away from my home, I will call one of us [based there] to do the work. It happens at the GBV desk in general hospitals too. There were started in 2004 by Dr Raneesan- a psychiatrist. It is a network among health workers to work on GBV issues. It is active in Kattankudy, Manmunai and Eravur divisions”. The interviewee invited us to look up the website of a government programme called Mithuru Piyasa for more information.

On challenges faced, others added “We had issues with transport. We could not travel to places due to the fuel crisis and lack of public transport. During the crisis, the GA called us to change the concept notes in two days to handle the crisis. Most of the donors denied our requests saying it is a man-made disaster.”

Another interviewee spoke about how they were unable to alter their projects despite the need at hand, and were compelled to complete their projects as initially designed, “We received the fund for sanitization project to build toilets for the beneficiaries. The GA asked us to alter the concept note to face the food crisis but our British donor denied our request. So, we made toilets for the people who did not have meals on their plates.”

To conclude, one CSO added, “We also had issues with inflation. We received the funds and project plans. But we could not achieve the target. The prices went up. Our hands are tied. Salaries are not changed but the prices went high. We could not switch to other jobs because we cannot leave like that.”

NGO District Coordinators

An NGO district coordinator is generally assigned to every district secretariat (DS) of the country. A coordinator represents the National Secretariat of Non-Governmental Organizations at the district level. They should monitor the work of district level NGOs and get their fullest support for the development of the country. They are expected to refer to the head office for decision making regarding NGO issues.

We approached many DS offices to understand the coordination from the government regarding NGOs. We chose DS offices based in the districts which had the most and the least registered NGOs and each sample was from Tamil and Sinhala speaking majorities. Batticaloa, Puttalam- Wanathavilluva, Polonnaruwa and Akurana responded to our calls and generously provided information on their work.

First, we approached the Batticaloa DS office. The Development officers (DO) of the Disaster Management section responded to our invitation and gave their time and information. The DO's stated that they maintain regular contact with NGOs in their region in order to help them organise their work better. The DOs of Disaster Management explained their key functions, from creating awareness among the public about the disasters to organising relief work in their regions. They also explained how they coordinate with NGOs whose development projects involve disaster management. The DS officers also keep tabs on the spending of funds of NGOs. If the DS offices were not granted enough funds, they coordinate with NGOs in prioritizing the projects which are crucial for the public by seeking financial assistance. The NGOs make sure such work fall within their mandate.

The coordination between NGOs and DS offices is planned annually by conducting a meeting at the beginning of the year. The DS offices require action plans from NGOs and plan accordingly to avoid repetitions and confusion. If the NGOs change their action plans, they are required to inform the DS offices immediately in order for them to organise their development projects and funding.

However, there appears to be no necessity in assigning a separate individual to coordinate and report to the higher officials regarding the work of NGOs in DS offices where there are hardly any NGOs active. For example, all the DO's of the Puttalam-Wanathavilluwa DS office coordinate with NGOs in their region. If an NGO approaches the DS office with a project related to women, the DO of the Women Empowerment branch is connected with the said NGO. The DO of the Akurana DS office stated that if and when the necessity arises to appoint an NGO coordinator, they can communicate with the District Secretary and appoint a person for the NGO coordinator post, but as it stands the position remains unfilled.

The Polonnaruwa DS office stated that the comprehensive list of NGOs working in the Polonnaruwa region is maintained by Grama Sevekas as the NGOs working in that region focus on rural development. In such cases, the DS offices play the role of a supervisor. The NGOs approach DS offices for data on the beneficiaries and approval to implement their projects. The DS offices also provide manpower to implement the projects of NGOs when required. The DS offices require monthly reports from NGOs regarding their development and implementation of the projects and arising issues.

During the economic crisis, the DS offices sought assistance from NGOs for immediate crisis response. Some NGOs provided funding for crisis response. Some NGOs whose work did not fall into such a category to offer crisis response offered manpower. NGOs that could not offer funds, offered counselling and consultancy voluntarily. They visited the places and people affected by extreme poverty, and provided assistance. For example, some women who work in such NGOs stated that they visited houses and collected rice and other cereals and made porridge outdoors and distributed it to the people who were suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

These instances show that NGOs and DS offices maintain satisfactory coordination to serve the public. The interdependency of NGOs and DS offices is beneficial when it comes to coordination. However, from our observations, it appeared that the DS offices were heavily dependent on NGOs.

Analysis

The foundation of this research was based on five key questions – which influenced the formulation of questions in the survey and the question posed during the qualitative research. While the quantitative and qualitative research sections of this report explore these questions in detail, in this section we provide a summary of the research findings that respond to the key questions for a snapshot of the information shared in the previous chapters.

1. What role do civil society organizations play in addressing violent incidents? At the local level? At the national level? How are they currently addressing these issues?

Firstly, there appears to be a difference in how CSO work when based in a region and how CSOs work when carrying out projects or campaigns on a national level. Response on a local level is more direct and CSOs tend to work closely with the communities, whereas on a national level most often CSOs appear to work on awareness projects or campaigns. On a local level response to unforeseen violence is good at least in districts where mechanisms have been set in place, due to a history of sudden violence. This can be replicated in districts where sudden violence may not be as frequent. That said, even in districts with sound mechanisms in place to respond to sudden violence, better coordination is important. During the qualitative research, we were informed that even within marginalised groups there appears to be a hierarchy. CSO staff in the focus group discussion mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic, priority was given to certain marginalised groups (e.g., women and girls) and other marginalised groups, such as the elderly were inadvertently side-lined.

As for national-level CSOs, only 20 organisations responded to the survey. Of those that responded, some have regional offices. Ones with regional offices have a good rapport with the local authorities and the local communities and function much like other locally based CSOs.

Organisations that are not based in a certain area but do aid work or research reports following an incident of sudden violence or a disaster depend on contacts, which may not be reliable, or can make the process lengthy. If there are regional-level networks of NGOs, these groups could reach out to the regional networks for assistance.

2. How should CSOs respond to sudden and unforeseen incidents of violence? How should those responses be structured?

Incidents such as the Easter Sunday attacks, were unforeseen to the CSOs, however, the backlash towards the Muslim community was immediately anticipated. How this violence would manifest and to what degree was unknown. On a national level when certain groups carried out awareness projects – for instance with the niqab ban on emergency regulations– various issued social media posts educating the public on the difference between the hijab and the niqab. This was done to curtail harassment of Muslim women.

Similarly, awareness campaigns were carried out when the state declared that COVID-19 victims would be cremated; burying was not an option despite being acceptable and carried out in other parts of the world. This was viewed as maliciously discriminatory against the Muslim community. Here too, social media campaigns were carried out to promote the views of medical experts who confirmed that the burial of COVID-19 victims was acceptable.

On a regional or local level, some of the CSOs we spoke to said they were on alert for ethnic tension since the Easter bombings. Since they had a long and trusted relationship with the people in the regions they worked in, they were able to identify situations that could potentially erupt into violence and defuse the situation.

Another example of local-level aid work, some of the CSOs we interviewed stated that as they were not able to receive funding to assist those who were in dire straits during the COVID-19 lockdowns, they reached out to the wealthy residents in the area for donations to help those in need. This was only possible due to the trust the donors had in the CSO members and the credibility they had gained after years of working with the communities.

3. What factors influence a situation from turning violent? What factors enable a situation to be handled peacefully?

Disinformation is false information disseminated with the intention to mislead, this includes propaganda by the state or other political agendas. In Sri Lanka, disinformation has been used to incite violence, especially with regard to ethnic or religious issues. For example, in 2018, after a false claim that a Muslim shop owner had laced their dinner order with sterilisation pills, the shop was burned down by a group of Sinhalese men. A video recording of the shop owner admitting albeit under duress to adding sterilization pills to the food was circulated on social media (Sunday Observer, 2018), and before long riots broke out in Ampara resulting in several other Muslim-owned restaurants, a mosque and over a dozen buses were set ablaze. Following the incident, the state as well as many other prominent individuals, released statements to notify the public that sterilization pills are a myth. Firstly, the Government Analyst debunked the claims that sterilization pills were added to the meal (Jayawardana, 2018), next Director General of Health Services Dr Anil Jasinghe issued a statement indicating that sterilization pills are fictitious (Daily Mirror, 2018), in a joint statement UN Resident Coordinator and WHO Representative in Sri Lanka, Dr Razia Pendse, and UNFPA Representative in Sri Lanka, Ms Ritsu Nacken, confirmed the same (UNFPA, 2018), and a group of over 200 Sri Lankan doctors asserted that sterilization pills do not exist (The Sunday Times, 2018).

However, this had little to no effect on the public as once again in 2020 following the Easter bombings, claims were made on social media that Muslim-owned retail giant NOLIMIT was attempting to sterilise Sinhalese women by applying a sterilization substance in women's undergarments sold in their stores. Regardless of hundreds of experts debunking the myth, it can be described as a latent rumour conveniently summoned when ethnic violence relating to Muslims breaks out.

Many incidents of anti-Muslim violence that occurred after the Easter bombings in 2020, were also the result of disinformation. While the Muslim community expected to be targeted following the Easter bombings, how these attacks would manifest was unknown, or unforeseen. In a particularly malicious incident of disinformation, false claims were made against a Muslim gynaecologist, Dr Shafi Shihabdeen in a Sinhala newspaper that the doctor had conducted multiple tubal ligations on Sinhalese women without their consent. This of course added fuel to the already growing anger towards the Muslim community (Wijedasa, 2022).

Another incident of disinformation also relating to anti-Muslim violence, is the burying of Muslims who succumbed to the COVID-19 virus during the pandemic. The state insisted on cremating Muslims rather than burying the bodies despite many experts and established international organisations stating burying victims of COVID-19 was feasible (Al-Dawoody & Finegan, 2020) (Carmen & Tegal, 2021).

Disinformation is a growing problem in Sri Lanka and undoubtedly needs to be tackled however, as Gehan Gunatilleke states countering disinformation, especially by the state is complex, and private media can also be complicit at times. He further stated: "Empowering civil society and independent journalism and protecting these sectors from bad-faith regulatory agendas, remain crucial. Ultimately, countering disinformation in Sri Lanka must become a project of resistance, rather than regulation" (2021).

With regard to the second part of the factors that enable a situation to be handled peacefully, from our qualitative research, we gathered that the factors that can spark violence and the factors that can defuse a situation are

not standard, they depend greatly on the type of situation, the region, and the history of communal violence or tension, among others.

Here again, in instances where members of a CSO were able to defuse a situation was because they were well-known and trusted in the region. Given that these members were long-time activists who are from the region and have worked in the area for several decades, and built a strong relationship with the community, they were able to talk to the parties involved and ensure the situation did not escalate.

While these individuals have been instrumental in defusing situations that could lead to violence, a larger group assigned to undertake such tasks may also be helpful. This is because an individual will only be able to conduct such negotiations to a limited capacity; it is burdensome for an individual, and in all the cases, these individuals conducted such negotiations or problem-solving outside of their paid work from the CSOs at which they were employed. These individuals have a deep sense of responsibility to the community and are often overworked while handling paid work and voluntary community work that they feel obliged to carry out, but are also well suited to take on these issues given their familiarity with the community, problem-solving skills and expertise.

4. What are the major roadblocks in effective CSO response to sudden/unforeseen incidents of violence?

According to the quantitative data, one of the most common roadblocks faced by CSOs across the island includes a lack of resources. This can range from technical resources to staff with particular expertise.

Lack of state resources and/or supportive mechanisms was the second most common challenge faced by CSOs. Therefore, while CSOs work well with the local authorities, the latter needs to be better equipped and enhanced with better support mechanisms to assist CSOs when responding to unforeseen violence. Another common challenge faced by CSOs is that they are short-staffed and have been stretched thin or unable to respond to violence as they would have wanted to.

Given that this research was conducted soon after the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the CSOs stated roadblocks to completing projects included the lack of fuel and curfew. The lack of fuel can be disregarded as it is not a common occurrence in times of crisis. The curfew, introduced via emergency regulation, however, is a common occurrence. Curfews were enforced after the Aluthgama riots in 2014, the Digana riots in 2018, the Easter bombings in 2019, and during the political crisis in 2021, to name a few.

If not for the state of emergency and the issue of curfew, CSOs would be able to access people in need of aid. Alternatively, state sources have indicated that a curfew is necessary as a quick means to prevent a situation from escalating. However, there have been instances where the military and or the police have been party to the violent subject on a particular group, as with reports from the Digana riots 2018 (LST 2020).

5. How can structural reforms support the role of CSOs in responding to incidents of violence?

Seeing as how the DS office Disaster Management works well with CSOs in Batticaloa in responding to violence cutting across natural disasters to communal violence, structural mechanisms are already established. What would be necessary is to replicate this relationship in other regions. As the research revealed, in other districts such as in Polonnaruwa the DS office, especially the NGO unit does not function.

Immediate response aside, it would be helpful to have electronic systems/programmes in place to avert bureaucracy and paper required when CSOs report to the DS office at the start of the year, or when new DS officers are appointed and CSOs are required to brief them on their work. If their work is digitised, with software programmes to clearly indicate types of work, projects and so on, and in which regions of the district – past and present, it could save CSOs tedious hours spent on paperwork.

Recommendations

Given how well CSOs in Batticaloa function, particularly with the DS, it is worth CSOs having a strong relationship with the district secretariat; possibly via the NGO secretariat. According to our national-level research findings, most CSOs found DS offices to be very helpful, only a small minority faced issues when working with the DS. Each DS office has a Disaster Preparedness unit, which CSOs can engage with to mitigate or respond to sudden violence.

- The DS holds information that would be beneficial to the CSOs, especially when responding to unforeseen violence, such as mapping of populated areas.
- According to the regional data, a vast majority of CSOs have not faced any adverse issues when working with the local authorities such as the DS offices in the region. However, it is important to note here that this may be subject to certain areas of work. During the peer group consultation of the research findings, one NGO working specifically on LGBT issues stated that they faced strong opposition from a local authority officer. They also stated they conduct their work, while not directly indicating that their work primarily involves the LGBT community.

Coordination between CSOs in a region. Possibly a regional network for CSOs, to ensure CSOs are not working in silos.

- This will help ensure that there is no repetition of work and that aid is distributed fairly
- CSOs working on similar issues in particular regions can work together and yield better results.
- This could also allow for the transfer of knowledge, for example between national-level NGOs and grassroots CSOs, and vice versa.
- Many CSOs staff stated that they also do volunteer work that falls out of their official programmes/projects. These include sudden incidents or situations (eg disasters, a spark of ethnic potential ethnic violence) that cannot be left unaddressed. If there is better coordination among CSOs within a region, the burden of addressing these issues can be shared among the large CSOs network.
- A known regional network of CSOs, will have credibility when seeking donations after a disaster. It will ensure that donations or aid are distributed fairly.
- Shared knowledge on how to identify potential violence. For example, how to identify ethnic tension that can lead to violence – such as riots, and how to defuse the situation. As mentioned by a CSO in Batticaloa, they were able to identify and mitigate circumstances.
- For disaster/violence preparedness regional networks can study and evaluate areas where violence has previously occurred (especially regional hot spots for violence). We recommend that the evaluation is carried out every two years. This could simply include feedback or information by CSOs based on their experiences or knowledge gathered while working in the field.

- Carry out vulnerability assessments (rather than focusing solely on marginalized communities pivot to focus on the most vulnerable – this would be broader than the confines of marginalized groups and will take into consideration class differences as well as people/families located in areas that make them vulnerable in certain situations or can affect how they do or do not receive aid). The focus on vulnerable groups must also take into consideration intersections of vulnerability and/or marginalisation. For example, following the Digana riots of 2018, a bag-making factory owned by a Muslim family was attacked. Those who were most affected by this were the Sinhalese mothers employed at the bag factory, who lost their means of income overnight and were unable to support their families (LST, 2020), they also had no access or even claims to state compensation or support in the aftermath of the riots. Desperate to continue having a means of income, they used their own savings to roughly reconstruct the small factory.

Regional shelters for survivors of gender-based violence, marginalized group, and groups victimized by violence such as particular communities under threat. While the pandemic and lockdowns are not frequent occurrences, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns there were many reports of increased cases of domestic violence (UNFPA, 2020) (Fernando, 2021). Domestic violence however can be considered sudden or unforeseen violence and is therefore relevant to the research even in the absence of a pandemic.

CSOs should have a strong relationship with government agents (administrative divisions, local and provincial authorities). This can be achieved via the NGO secretariat, which has an assigned office in each DS island-wide. Currently, the NGO officers are absent in certain districts that have weak links between the CSOs and the DS. This structural issue will have to be rectified via the state to ensure an NGO officer is placed in every DS office and that they actively work with the CSOs in each region.

CSO coordination with the NGO secretariat

- Maintaining a virtual database of progress reports and annual plans of all NGOs including NGOs at district and divisional level for better coordination among the NGOs and CSOs.

According to Circular No: 8 issued by the Ministry of Public Security dated 22.12.2022, “all voluntary social services organizations, NGOs and INGOs registered in the national level should submit their Action Plans and Progress Reports to the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations. The head office will direct the respective district NGO coordinators to monitor/ supervise the progress of district-level activities of the annual plans.”

- At the same time, the NGO secretariat can obtain action plans and progress reports of divisional-level NGOs and CSOs and maintain a database of the projects conducted island-wide by the NGOs. This can help track the projects and find issues related to over-funding, underfunding, and coordinating and communicating among the national and divisional level CSOs.
- This may also help the NGO secretariat to assist the government in policy-making and development to better utilise the funds and tax money to serve the people.

- Based on the database, the NGO secretariat can connect the divisional and national level CSOs which work on the same/related issues and projects.
- Further, the NGO secretariat can advise both CSOs and the government on the un-touched areas which need development.

Forming District Co-ordinating committees

Circular No. RAD/99/01 dated 26 February, 1999 released by the Presidential Secretariat states that “A district Co-Ordinating Committee for NGO shall be established in each district. This committee will consist of the following officers,

- . District Secretary/ Government Agent- Chairman
- . Head of District Planning Secretariat- Member
- . Provincial Secretary in charge of social services- Member
- . A representative of the Chief Secretary of the Province- Member
- . A Social Services Officer nominated by the Chief Secretary- Member

- Even though it was pointed out in the interviews, surveys, and phone calls that there are committees at the district level, it appears that the committee officers listed above do not participate in the meetings. We have not heard of the involvement of provincial secretaries in matters related to social services. Therefore, to bridge the gap and ensure better involvement by state-level stakeholders, we recommend mandatory active participation of relevant provincial council members in activities relating to CSOs.
- This could potentially ensure provincial councils focus on the areas that are lacking in development, or lacking in attention by the central and local governments as well as CSOs. Provincial councils can make suggestions to CSOs to focus on specific areas which need development.
- Involving the Provincial Councils in this matter is helpful especially when it comes to dealing with unforeseen violence. Provincial Councils are provided with the police powers through the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

In the Ninth Schedule to the Constitution LIST I (Provincial Council List), Appendix 1 (Law and Order) gives police power to the provincial councils except for the powers of (a) national defence; (b) national security; and (c) the use of any armed forces or any other forces under the control of the government of Sri Lanka in aid of the civil power.²

- **If CSOs have better coordination and communication with the provincial councils, unforeseen violence can be dealt with in ways such as:**
 - CSOs working against unforeseen violence can influence the policy-making related to police powers.
 - Knowledge and technical exchange among CSOs and the police
 - Local government representatives should also be included in the district co-ordinating committees.
- **Coordination among the CSOs and the provincial authorities as well as local government authorities about the development projects and other activities related to social services will increase the transparency and accountability of the usage of the funds.**
- **NGO coordinators should be able to maintain ties with Pradheshiya Sabha (local government bodies) and GS (administrative division) to maintain the database of the projects that are being conducted in their respective regions. NGO coordinators are the primary tools of coordination among CSOs and government agents.**

Countering Disinformation

- **The network of CSO can actively work on dispelling disinformation, especially given their strong relationship with the communities they work with in the region.**
- **They could also work with regional journalist to counter fake news.**

Policy Framework

The suggested policy framework is based on a three-pronged approach.

- Disaster preparedness
- Response
- Long-term/follow up

Disaster Preparedness

The core feature of disaster preparedness is understanding that mitigating and preventing the impacts of a disaster will help in ensuring the damage caused by the disaster is at a minimal. There are two objectives when strengthening preparedness: (a) increasing the capacity to predict, monitor, and be prepared to reduce damage or address potential threats, and (b) strengthening preparedness to respond in an emergency and to assist those who have been adversely affected (UN/IDSR & UN/OCHA, 2008).

According to Alexander (2015), the following are the goals of emergency planning in disaster preparedness: (a) Maintenance of public safety (b) Limitation of damage (to property and infrastructure) (c) Protection of the vulnerable (population and social institutions) (d) Efficient use of life-saving resources (Tyubee, 2020).

Legislative Framework

The legislation should:

- (a) Act as a guide and indicate which activities can be implemented under what conditions
- (b) Strongly establish who has overall responsibility in a disaster, depending on what type of violence occurs
- (c) Explicitly indicate the role of key ministries, national and international organizations and civil society actors in preparedness and response to avoid confusion, replication of work, and/or the neglect of certain vulnerable groups.
- (d) Clearly establish decentralized mechanisms and encourage community participation – where feasible.
- (e) Identify the source of funding and other resources required for preparedness including an established overall national budget for building preparedness capacities for disasters and outlining how additional emergency disaster funds might be allocated in the face of a major disaster
- (f) Outline a monitoring and enforcement regime that requires entities responsible for building a preparedness capacity to report back on their work, and should set targets for accountability within the system.

Framework for regional networks

The following table (1) (Tyubee, 2020), can be used as a guide by regional networks.

Disaster Preparedness: Approaches and Frameworks, Table 1 Institutional framework for developing a national disaster preparedness capacity

Elements	Issues to be addressed
1. Composition	Which entities (including non-governmental bodies) are responsible for disaster preparedness at the local, subregional, and national levels? Is this clearly reflected in their mandates, work plans, and staff job descriptions
2. Roles and responsibilities	Which entities are responsible for the various task and outcomes considered essential to building preparedness capacity? How are different elements expected to relate to each other so that they operate in a cohesive and coordinated manner?
3. Progress agreements on interagency protocol	Are arrangements in place to facilitate consistent coordination and communication between different entities with responsibilities for preparedness? Have these been written down and are they agreed upon both by all organisations concerned, and by both senior managers and field staff?
4. Protocols regarding external assistance	Have rules and procedures for requestion and receiving non-governmental organisations (NGO) assistance, private donations, and international, or regional assistance, if required, been agreed upon and approved in advance?
5. Civil-military relations	Does the system specify under what conditions military assets can be deployed in a disaster situation?
6. Strengthening capacities	What arrangements are in place to build and maintain preparedness and response capacity, and does this cover capacity building at all levels?

Source: Compiled from UN/ISDR & UN/OCHA (2008)

Response

Immediate response

- The immediate response should follow the disaster preparedness outline but must be flexible in order to respond to situations that are unforeseen or unpredictable.
- Vulnerable groups must be assessed according to each unique outbreak of violence.

Aftermath response

- Distribution of monetary compensation to affected people must be issued fairly and promptly. According to LST's Digana report (2020), many affected people experienced prolonged delays in receiving monetary compensation and were unable to rebuild homes after they were torched during the riots. Compensation is often mailed to the affected persons via the postal service. The postal service is however interrupted due to curfews, strikes and long public holidays. Therefore, new systems for distribution are required.
- Follow-up with affected persons is essential. This is to ensure they have received their state-issued compensation, ensure they are healthy mentally and physically, and assess how reparations can be carried out in case the violence was motivated by racism or religious disagreements.

Long-term/follow up

Long-term follow up can be carried out by CSOs working specifically on issues relating to disasters or violence such as race/religion or politically motivated riots. It would be helpful if this is included in such CSOs' mandate. Organisations involved in research work would be ideal for conducting research into how communities cope and if they are able to emerge from an outbreak of violence. These research reports could inform what more needs to be done for a particular community and ensure state and CSOs are able to assist. These reports can also be used to adapt the disaster preparedness framework, to changes in communities and functions of stakeholders (e.g., changes to legislation, changes to emergency regulations, changes to PTA/ATA, changes to ministries, possible implementation of the 13th amendment to the constitution, etc).

Conclusion

Given that the research was conducted island-wide, we have been able to gather information on how CSOs function in each district on day-to-day activities as well as with a specific focus on the challenges they face when responding to unforeseen violence. We were particularly interested in Batticaloa which appears to have the highest degree of CSO engagement, and Polonnaruwa which had the least. This reveals that CSOs cannot and do not function in the same way across the island, and most districts have unique challenges due to various reasons.

However, given the short time frame for this research, we were not able to explore the challenges CSOs faced in each district in detail. This would certainly be an interesting area to explore further. From the little we were able to gather, it was clear that each district has its own political traditions that influence CSO engagement, but this too is shaped by events that occurred in particular districts throughout history. For instance, the CSO engagement in Batticaloa can be traced back to the Mahaweli Development Programme that was established in the 1960s. The civil war and the 2004 tsunami also played a major role in increasing CSO engagement in the Batticaloa district. While these were major events and reasons for CSOs to enter the region and grow, it must also be noted that CSOs such as religion-based organisations such as the Young Men's Christian Association, and political CSOs such as the Suriya Mal Movement, were established during the colonial era. Therefore, Sri Lanka itself has a very long history with CSOs.

It is for this reason that it is also particularly interesting that some regions have very low CSO engagement. In the qualitative research, some of the CSOs interviewed mentioned that the community was hostile towards NGOs in the past, due to their projects running on foreign funding (Devotta, 2005). While this sentiment may have changed in Batticaloa, it is prevalent in other regions of the island. This too can have an impact on how CSOs function in various regions. Taking all of this into consideration, this research is a good springboard for further research.

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Annex I: Survey Questionnaire

Challenges Faced by CSOs in Sri Lanka When Responding to Unforeseen/Sudden Violence

I. When was your organisation established?

*Required

II. If you have a head office or any form of physical office, in which district is it based?

(If you do not have a physical office you may respond: N/A)

Survey Questions

Please note that the responses will only be shared anonymously if at all. No information you share will be attributed to your organisation by name or any other means by which your organisation will be easily identifiable.

*Required

1. Select the district/s you have previously and are currently carrying out projects/programs/fieldwork in (aside from the base location)

Tick all that apply.

Colombo	Gampaha	Kalutara	Kandy	Matale
Nuwara Eliya	Galle	Matara	Hambantota	Jaffna
Killinochchi	Mannar	Vavuniya	Mullaitivu	Batticaloa
Ampara	Trincomalee	Kurunegala	Puttalam	Anuradhapura
Polonnaruwa	Badulla	Moneragala	Ratnapura	Kegalle
All of the above				

2. What are the main areas of your work? Issues relating to:

Tick all that apply.

Women and girls

Poverty

Economic development

Environment (natural and man-made disasters)

LGBTQ

Disabilities

Caste

Religious/ethnic minority issues

Children/youth

Other:

3. What type of work does your organisation do?

Tick all that apply.

- Relief (eg. funds, food, clothing, etc)
- Research/reports
- Community building projects
- Sustainability projects
- Agricultural projects
- Education
- Awareness projects
- Other:

4. Have you received funding for these projects or are they unfunded/volunteer work?

Tick all that apply.

- All projects are 100% funded
- All projects are volunteer based
- Some of the projects are volunteer based while others are funded
- Other:

5. How many projects has your organisation completed or been involved in during the past 2 years?

Mark only one

- 1 - 5 projects
- 6 - 10 projects
- 11 -15 projects
- 16 - 20 projects
- 21 or more projects
- Other:

6. What proportion of these projects are less than one month in duration?

Mark only one oval.

- 25% or less
- Between 26% - 50%
- Between 51% 75%
- 76% or more

7. What proportion of these projects are between one month to six months in duration?

Mark only one oval.

- 25% or less
- Between 26% - 50%
- Between 51% 75%
- 76% or more

8. What proportion of these projects are between six months to one year induration?

Mark only one oval.

- 25% or less
- Between 26% - 50%
- Between 51% - 75%
- 76% or more

9. What proportion of these projects are over one year in duration?

Mark only one oval.

- 25% or less
- Between 26% - 50%
- Between 51% - 75%
- 76% or more

10. What are the challenges you have faced while carrying out these projects/programmes?

Tick all that apply.

- Community/public resistance
- Community/public apathy
- State uncooperative
- State bureaucracy
- Adverse state interference
- Unsuitable environmental conditions
- Short-staffed
- Limited resources
- Limited capacity/skills/knowledge
- Lack of government resources and/or supportive mechanisms
- Other:

11. Is the state (ministerial level) generally helpful when you reach out to them?

Mark only one oval.

- Never
- Always

12. Is the state (local authorities) generally helpful when you reach out to them?

Mark only one oval.

- Never
- Always

13. Would you say the public or communities you work with are generally receptive when you reach out to them?

Mark only one oval.

- Never
- Always

14. If you work on issues relating to women and girls, what are the challenges experienced when carrying out projects/programs specifically designed for them, if any?

Mark only one oval.

- Resistance by target group
- Resistance by community
- Resistance by men
- Resistances by the state
- Do not work on issues relating to women and girls
- Other:

15. Has your organisation ever:

Tick all that apply.

- Dropped a project due to the challenges faced (eg. impossible to overcome)
- Put a project on hold
- Altered a project (soon after commencing or mid-way) adapting to the challenges
- Completed every project as initially designed despite challenges
- Other:

16. Do you work on issues relating to unforeseen or sudden violence? [Eg: Easter bombing, natural disasters, riots, rape, murder, etc.]

*Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

17. If you answered “Yes” to the question above, could you please list a few examples from the past 5 years? Please mention in point form as 1, 2, 3

18. Have the projects/programs relating to unforeseen or sudden violence involved assisting/aiding women or girl children even though these groups were not a main target when designing the project/program?

Mark only one oval.

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

19. Which of the following are always considered or is a priority when designing projects/programs?
Tick all that apply.

- Needs of Women and girl children
- Needs of the LGBTQ community
- Needs of the elderly
- Needs of people with disabilities
- Needs of low caste communities
- Need of religious and/or ethnic minorities
- Other:

19.1 Would you be open to being contacted for a more in-depth interview as an extension of this research? If interested please provide your name (this will not be shared with anyone and any information provided will be anonymised)

19.2 Please provide the name of your organisation (names will not be published in the final report)

19.3 Please provide a phone number if you are willing to be contacted for an interview

19.4 Please provide your email address



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