

Let's talk to the people



COVID-19 through the people's voices in Sri Lanka



Democratic dialogue, active listening and inclusive citizen participation: creating spaces for inclusive civic participation in times of pandemic and social crisis

The objective of the project is to create spaces for inclusive civic participation during the pandemic and the socio-economic crisis that Sri Lanka is facing and to strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, and public accountability. As engaged citizens, we aim to ensure that government responses to the crisis are aligned to principles of constitutionalism and that government by exception will be restricted; misinformation and hate mongering prevented and that social solidarity will be strengthened through the positive engagement of change makers and influencers.

To achieve these objectives, the project has established an informal “civic watch” that analyses the government's rapid responses to health and economic challenges; promotes a public discussion on policy issues, documents fundamental rights violations; provides timely, fact-based information to citizens on emerging issues that impact on democratic values, constitutional principles and fundamental rights. The project also aims to conduct advocacy campaigns to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, as well as to conduct a needs assessment that enable citizens to articulate their needs, anxieties, and aspirations in the post-pandemic context.

This report and the pictures contained within – unless credited otherwise – are by Sakuna M Gamage, as a contribution towards the project. The Law and Society Trust (LST) appreciates the engagement of citizens in this project – citizens who wanted their voices to be heard. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board or the Management of LST.

Let's talk to the People: COVID-19 through the people's voices in Sri Lanka



The view of port city from Dehiwala Beach after the 1st lockdown in 2020, by Sakuna Gamage

Introduction

The world is facing multiple waves of the COVID-19 pandemic since the end of 2019. Despite vaccines being rolled out to respond to the public health crisis, new variants have emerged creating further challenges. The impacts of these new dynamics are different for every country in the world, and also every person in the different layers of its society.

The transmission pattern of the Covid virus and the immediate preventive efforts like social distancing, travel restrictions and curfew lockdowns during the last two years have caused a drastic change of people's life patterns in different ways. As well as the direct health impact by way of infections and deaths, and indirect impacts on livelihood, education, environment, governance, people's rights and other essential aspects of everyday life have been hit with long-term consequences.

Context

The first case of the COVID virus in Sri Lanka was confirmed on 27th January 2020, after a 44-year-old Chinese woman from Hubei Province in China was admitted to the National Institute of Infection Diseases. After the WHO declared Covid 19 as a pandemic, the Sri Lankan government first announced an islandwide curfew as a step to prevent the impact of the pandemic at the end of March 2020. It lasted for 52 days. In the aftermath, due to some reduction of the number of cases, the government eased most of the restrictions with the intention of holding the General Elections in August 2020, without considering prior warnings by health officials about global pandemic patterns and possible new waves.

In the first week of October, the government re-imposed some of the draconian methods to prevent the spread of pandemic with the second

wave which started from the cluster of apparel manufacturing workers in Minuwangoda and Divulapitiya.



Galle Face Beach a few days after the first lockdown concluded in 2020, by Sakuna Gamage

From the beginning of the year 2021, Sri Lanka – like many other countries - also started to focus on the vaccination rollout. In the first phase of the vaccination programme, it proved to be a slow, badly-managed process, that eventually improved as the 2nd does and booster shots were rolled out. As of the end of 2021, Sri Lanka had fully vaccinated 63 percent of the 21 million population against Coronavirus with 18.4 percent getting a third dose of Pfizer, with daily deaths of around 20 persons, as official data show.

Before the second wave of Covid 19 in Sri Lanka, warnings had been issued by the health officials, particularly with reference to the brutal second surge in the country's close neighbours, India and Nepal. Through this highly problematic situation, Sri Lanka was eager to relax its mechanisms of Covid prevention. This was through steps like re-opening the country for tourists in bio bubbles, as also with the eased restrictions on the Sinhala and Tamil New Year season and Sri Paadha season. As a result, the country again had to cope with an unprecedented spike in COVID-19 cases, with a weekly increase of over 50 percent from the mid of May 2021.



Galle Face Beach a few days after the first lockdown concluded in 2020, by Sakuna Gamage

Government officials, Media reports and ground-level reports pointed towards a health system that was stumbling under a rapidly increasing positivity rate. Health sector and healthcare workers are under increased pressure with this situation as well as many other issues that arose due to under-funding and inefficient management.

In June 2021, Sri Lanka confirmed the first community case of the Delta variant of COVID-19. From August to September 2021, amid the 'Delta-peak, almost three patients died every hour in the country, including young adults and children. The Government tried to resist the third wave through a nearly partial lockdown that lasted nearly five months. The workers on the frontline had to bear the burden of daily deaths and also hear about the infection of loved ones at home. Death became omnipresent in Sri Lanka. Whereas previously the media had published extensive details about each COVID-19 victim's identity and the lives they led, these details vanished amid the stream of deaths during the Delta-peak. So many people died that their lives could not be mourned or valued as they deserved. As of the end of 2021, according to health promotion bureau data 586,746 total cases and 14,962 deaths have been reported.



Mobile Street Food Seller in Mount Lavinia, by Sakuna Gamage

While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to both a medical emergency and considerable economic disruption, the ongoing economic crisis in Sri Lanka is much broader and longer in the making than the pandemic, with indirect impacts on certain layers of society.

These distance/phone interviews were therefore conducted to explore in-depth the impact of the pandemic on people's lives, relevant to the multiple backgrounds. A another major intention was to observe the effect of multiple government-oriented policy changes and the effectiveness of rapid implementation for the people.

Timeframe and Methodology



Fish Seller in Dehiwala Beach

These interviews were carried out during the months of May to October, 2021 after the third wave spike of the Covid 19 pandemic and the continuation of the travel restrictions and lockdown. They were done through phone calls as movement was restricted and interviewees could not be met in person.

The criteria for the selection of the interviewees focused on showcasing diverse backgrounds including the person's age, gender, religion, district or geographical location, employment and livelihood concerns. Extra attention was given to the people who have direct involvement with ongoing social, political, economic issues. Such as farmers, youth, teachers, marginalized groups, women, and children. The majority of interviews covered multiple aspects related to pandemic, exploring direct and indirect impacts.

Together, they form a tapestry of experiences from around the island, featuring the voices of Sri Lankans and they way their lives were impacted by the pandemic in very local and personal ways.

People's Stories

Interview 01

The interview was with a 38-year-old male, from the Portuguese Burgher Community, working in the Eastern Province as a Management Assistant at a tertiary educational institution. Over the past years, he was involved with minority rights activism and cultural associations among the Portuguese Burgher community in Sri Lanka



Members of Portuguese Burgher Community During a cultural performance.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

The impact on our freedom of movement is the biggest challenge. For more than a year we are not able to move around. I am working in the government sector. I used to stay in Trincomalee during the week as my home is in Valachchenai in Batticaloa. After the pandemic, I had to travel daily from home. This has increased risks and inconveniences for me.

Livelihood

The majority of Portuguese Burgher community members are carpenters or mechanics. They live on their daily wages. Some were involved with the tourism sector too. Only a few are government sector workers. Most of them have lost their income sources and job security. They faced many difficulties in purchasing food and essentials items.

During the lockdown, only a few shops were opened in the main street and it was very hard for us to buy essentials as the police and the army were stationed in the main street. During the lockdown, we had to stock food, but daily wage earners faced many difficulties because they don't have enough money.

Last year a few NGOs provided support. It came through the district secretariat but hardly any of that assistance came to Valachchenai where we live. We are also isolated from the Tamil and the Muslim community in the area. A few families are scattered, 5 families live in the Tamil area and 5 other families live in Muslim areas.

One of the local NGOs provided support at that time and whoever lives on the side of the road benefited but not the people who lived in the interior areas, far away from the main road. There are widows in our community. They did not receive any support. The community members helped each other but we cannot continue it as we are poor.

Government Support

Compared to other communities, our community got less support. The government's support mechanism was initiated by the Grama Sewaka but the Grama Niladari does not always inform us in the Valachchenai area. Our community got to know about the support from some others in the area. In some instances, when some of our community members went where the support is given, the Grama Niladari had informed them they have already distributed the subsidy and the deadline is over. The Portuguese Burgher community could not go out because of the lockdown and they did not get the information.

We have the Portuguese Burgher Union which is the only collective organization for the community. In 2020, 6 months after the pandemic hit our countries, one pack of rations was distributed but only for very few people. In

Batticaloa, the widows received a 1000 rupee package. I know the politicians gave rations to their supporters in the area.

We have no political representation from our community even in an Urban Council or Pradheshiya Sabha. We are very few, and we can't elect anybody.

Infection ratio and deaths

Previously, not a single person from the community was infected, but recently some of our community members have been infected, and in Trincomalee, with the 3rd wave in April, three of our community members died. After the lockdown eased, many local and international tourists came and the beach was full of tourists. After that Trincomalee was affected by the coronavirus and was locked down for more than a month.

Health Sector support

Three weeks ago my sister was infected and they (the health authorities) did the antigen tests only. However, they did not stick a warning notice outside the house and they did not check on the other close family members. The Government used to give ration packs for those under quarantine. but that did not happen in our case. Neighbours helped us by providing essentials during this time but after our mandatory quarantine, we had to repay them for the amount they spent on our expenses.



Notices with Health instructions in a School in Jaffna

Vaccination

Authorities started vaccinating people who were 60 years old and above. The health officials and not the military conducted the vaccinations. In our area, they did not inform us when they began rolling out the vaccine. We only got to know about the vaccinations when the other people were going for it. In some areas, they used loudspeakers to inform the people. When my parents went to get the first dose of the vaccine, they were asked to come two days later and they did so. They had been in the queue for two hours and people who came later were vaccinated before the people who came earlier. This discrimination is everywhere.

I went for the vaccination after they opened the process for people who were 30 years old and above. Vaccinations were done in the nearby school in the area populated by Tamils. I went there around 9.00 a.m. and I was there till 2.30 p.m. They gave me a form and then gave me a card, but they did not give me the vaccine. Around 3.00 pm they came and said the vaccine is over. There were politicians connected with the government, including Pillayan, who influenced the process to give the vaccine first to their supporters. The next day I went to the Muslim area for the vaccination. It was very well organized. It only took half an hour to get vaccinated. Two weeks ago I was able to get the second dose too. There is a proper procedure in many sub-areas to administer the vaccine process with the Divisional Secretariat and Grama Niladari taking the lead. But here, it did not work like other areas.

Although they said they were prioritizing people aged 60+ and front line workers, with the backing and the influence of the politicians' many underaged people were vaccinated.

Education

Education has suffered. Online education is limited to urban and rich families. Rural families with financial difficulties faced many issues. The education ministry has not done anything for the school system and the students.

At the University level, there are different initiatives for continuing the education process. Eastern University signed an agreement with Zoom to provide a free platform for the students and the university teachers. Free internet facilities are provided for the university, but for the teachers and the students at the school level, there are few facilities and limited knowledge about the technology.



Students attending a evening private class after the travel restrictions concluded

They had to spend their own money on facilities such as phones and pay the data charges. Some teachers even created and printed study kits and papers and they carried the printing and distribution costs without any support. Teachers struggled to find photocopy centers because most of them were closed due to the lockdown.

I think the government can initiate a trilingual web platform to share all the lessons for the students. The school curriculum is the same and therefore it is easy to conduct lessons. The cost will be less and it will create some relief for the students and teachers. Also, television, radio and YouTube can be used as platforms to share the content with the students. I got to know that in Portugal, the education system is conducted this way during the pandemic.

Mental Health

Even when there was no lockdown many people feared to go outside. Children and youth don't have a space to get involved with extracurricular activities. Youth became addicted to their phones and some of them have become addicted to games. Their sleep patterns and even their thinking patterns have changed. The health

sector can't handle the mental health aspects that emerged with the pandemic. The people who could help and provide guidance are also facing many difficulties.

Militarization

In the last one and half years, the army and the police were on our roads to enforce the quarantine law. They were patrolling the streets and checking people's life patterns. When some people went outside they were beaten up. I noticed groups of younger people roaming around the main road with motorcycles and when the police and army noticed them they beat them up and sent them back home. From my perspective, that should happen because of their irresponsible behaviours, acting without concerning the risk linked to the pandemic. In the interior areas, people are roaming around without concern for the lockdown. There was one incident in Eraur where the Special Task Force made a few Muslims publicly kneel because they roamed around without concern for the quarantine laws. After that incident, army officers who were involved in this incident were transferred and the army and the police don't say anything about people who are roaming around. Even if someone goes without a mask they won't say anything. Even now we are in a lockdown but I can see people are roaming around and some of them are sitting on the roadside and talking. We only go out for essential things.

Testing and medical facilities

One of my cousins is a prison officer in Kurunagala. 72 hours before he leaves for prison he had to take a PCR test. Therefore he went to the MOH and informed them of the requirement. The MoH said they won't be able to provide it within the given time. Then they asked us to go to the private hospital and they charged 9000 rupees to do the PCR test.

A month ago my father was suffering from a fever. Fearing he could be infected with Covid 19, I took him to the hospital and asked them to do an antigen test. They said if he wanted to do

the test he would have to be admitted. They also said, if he didn't want to be admitted, he should go to the MOH, take medicine and go home. The hospital was not cleaned for a long time. The wards and the toilets were very dirty. I wrote a letter and took my father back home because the dirty surrounding of the hospital could cause infection.



Chopped Heavy timber transportation through A9 road Killinochchi.

Environmental Impact

People used to collect firewood for cooking. After the LTTE was defeated no one was allowed to collect firewood and it is now regarded as illegal. Most of the firewood is used for charcoal. Sand mining is rampant, controlled by a mafia with political influence. Even recently the Government Agent was removed due to political influence. The Government Agent was involved with administering an area where land was formerly controlled by the LTTE. The land had been allocated for cattle farming and was gazette too. Some Sinhalese have bought the lands for farming with the influence of Karuna, Pillayan and Chief Minister Anuradha Yahampath. The GA was kicked off.

Domestic Violence and Drug usage

Drug use is not the business of normal people here. The army and the police are involved. Once they caught drugs from a nearby house. Then they took it to the bank to measure the weight with measures they use to measure gold and jewelry. My sister is working in the bank and she told me half of the drugs captured were taken by police for sale or their usage.

Positive Aspects

Home gardening particularly the planting of vegetables and herbs for family usage has increased among the community.

Interview 02

The interview was with a 25-year-old male from the Muslim Community, living in the hill country and working as a regional journalist.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

I graduated in December 2019 and I had a lot of hope for my future. After the pandemic, it became quite difficult for me to find a job. I am still struggling with job security and job stability. Also, many others who live in my area were daily wage workers and they all struggled with this "new normal" situation. It is difficult for them to find daily meals.

Livelihood

There are fewer people in this area involved in the plantation sector. Some of the people from this area are working in Colombo, some in the apparel industry sector and tourism, and some are working abroad. However, in the last year, many of them have lost their jobs and their sources of income due to the pandemic. Daily workers don't get work because people fear the risk of infections. People who are involved with the business face difficulties and some had to close shop. People who were in retail sales have fewer difficulties, taking other initiatives such as mobile sales.

I observed the impact on the mental health and the psychology of the people. In my village, most of the people are Muslims. They had many issues and fears regarding the cremation issue. People are afraid to do PCR for some deaths knowing that If they have been infected they have to face many constraints and the cremation issue. They should consider divisional burial practices.

Covid Infections and Deaths

With the first wave, very few cases were identified. But that increased with the second wave and the third wave has impacted a great deal. After April 2021, many people were hospitalized after being infected. By the end of April, 300 PCR tests were done in our area, and the majority of those were found to be positive. Therefore health officials isolated our village with an area lockdown.

Health Sector Support



Queues of people for vaccination in Sahasrapura Housing Complex in Colombo Image Source:TRT World

Everyone informed health officials of the deaths that occurred. Also when some infections were identified they were used to identify the 1st and 2nd contacts and evaluate the quarantine process properly. They did many tastings too. Usually, it took five days to be informed of the results.

Health officials conducted proper awareness programmes on the vaccination process too. They encouraged people to get vaccinated as soon as possible and they conducted the vaccination process well in the area. The majority of the people in my village over the age of 30 are fully vaccinated.

Government support

In my village the internal helpline was good. But they did not distribute the 10,000 rupee essential rations for the people who were under quarantine, saying it was provided only to the people who are under a 14-day quarantine. In our area, the quarantine period is under 10 days.

There are fewer Samurdhi beneficiaries in this area. but the subsidy is provided for the low-income people. They have now have started giving Rs 2000 as a subsidy too. I don't know that much about those processes and whether or not they were managed well. Political representatives also did not get involved in supporting the process in this area. But I heard one of the ministers helped the people in Kothmale and Pundalu Oya nearby areas.



Sri Lankan police Special Task Force personnel wearing a facemask stand guard at a checkpoint during a inter regional travel restrictions imposed as a preventive measure against the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus in Elephant Pass,Jaffna .

Militarization

During the second wave, security officials came and conducted a meeting with the villagers on how to be protected and the need for the collective effort to overcome the crisis. Everyone tried to understand the situation and work accordingly. There were no issues relating to minority rights except for the impact of the cremation issue. Although in my village the majority of people are Muslims, we all live harmoniously with the Sinhala and Tamil villages in the area.

Education

Online education is quite impractical for people without the financial resources and facilities needed for it and thus, the education sector has been impacted. A child who went to nursery school in 2019 is now in grade one or two. Children who are now in grade 5 were not able to get training from grade 4. Students who sat for the Ordinary Level exams have not received

the result yet. The efforts to teach online are not practical or effective. The online system itself is difficult to integrate with the educational process. Some are not participating in classes properly and there are psychological challenges they face.

These one and half years have created a huge gap in the education strata. There is no involvement in extracurricular activities or sports. The cost of online education is also high, as some areas don't have proper connectivity and other equipment facilities.

Environment

Garbage management was gazetted as an essential service and the collectors came every two days and collected it properly. There were days when they did not come because of the fear of the Covid situation.

Mental Health

I think this is an issue stemming indirectly from the pandemic. Every one mental status has been impacted. People are facing many issues with the economy and their livelihood, and when someone gets to know about incidents of death they become afraid. Everyone struggled with their life plans and is not optimistic about their prospects.

Domestic Violence, drug consumption and other issues

Consumption of alcohol and other drugs has increased. Another major issue that surfaced is mobile phone addiction.

There must be many incidents of domestic violence but most of the incidents rarely come out. I feel the media reports only 10% of the cases, and the majority of people do not file complaints.

Positive Adaptations

The increase in home gardening is positive. The limitation of numbers who may participate in weddings and funerals is positive. People had been running life-like machines and the

lockdowns provided a space for them to detach themselves from that and to focus more on family life. Also, some people started small businesses like collecting plastic and used items for recycling and making something new. Also, handicraft making and selling increased among the youth.

Other comments

We don't know when this crisis will end. but I think mainly should find a mechanism to address mental health issues. It's an important aspect and there is no one to help with this. It's a common phenomenon for the many in the country. The pandemic created common issues but most of the crucial decisions that should be made were delayed. Now they are trying, but it is like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. to close the are very delayed. The only way of overcoming the issue is if we come together to cope with it collectively.

Interview 03

The interview was with a 28-year-old Male from the Tamil Community, living in Batticaloa and working as a researcher and dramatist.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

During the pandemic, I had the option of working from home. Compared to others in my area, I did not face many financial or other difficulties. But many people around my village faced many challenges. Most of them are involved with agriculture and fisheries, while some others are daily wage workers and migrant workers. This pandemic affected them severely and their ways of earning a living. They could not go out and sell their harvest because of the lockdown. People who do not have land worked as daily wage earners and they lost their income and job security.

Government Support

More than 70% of people in my village are Samurdhi beneficiaries and this helped them during this crisis. But sometimes the subsidies did not come on time. It took more than four to five dates to be administrated in this area. In some instances, the people who administrated the subsidy asked the beneficiaries to do some work like cleaning schools and hospitals. At this time this was not a good move because of the danger of people gathering - it went against the purpose of the lockdown. There were some other issues with administrating and distributing rations. Some people were given subsidies even though they are not eligible or needed that kind of support. They were connected to powerful people.

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The form to be filled to get Rs 5000 government Subsidary for people who lost their livelihood during the lockdowns.

Image Source: Newswire.lk

Past pupils' associations in schools, sports clubs, civil society and some private companies like Dialog also helped people but these initiatives were limited. Some political parties based in the northern province also initiated some support mechanisms but these were not on a larger scale.

Law and Order

When the lockdown was first imposed, it was strictly followed. But now, under the current lockdown, many people are not properly following the restrictions and they going outside. There are some reasons for this. People go out to get the supply of essentials, mainly food items. The police and the government are not responsible and do not appear to care about enforcing the lockdown. Furthermore, given the state of the economy, and the low income of the people, they are desperate to earn something. In

this context, we are not sure whether there is a lockdown or not. In the countryside, this situation is worse.

In village areas, there are instances of hidden informants reporting violators to intelligence services agents and there were some cases where people were beaten when they were outside. It is a cruel way of imposing laws. In the post-war era in the north and east, there are many Tamils involved with the security forces and this is a familiar pattern. An example of this is the incident in Eravur where the security forces have forced a few Muslim men to kneel -down because they did not wear masks.

Health Sector Support



Student pointing a Non-Contact Body Infrared Thermometer

Image Source: The Island

The approaches of the Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) have changed over time. In the early phase of the pandemic, they were committed to the process. Now the numbers of infected people are rising, and the quarantine facilities, including the food and other facilities, are not good. However, I am very happy about the way they administrated the vaccination process. In most villages, 90% of the people aged 30 and above have been fully vaccinated.

Education

The current education system is mostly online but that is a very limited method and accessible only to people in urban areas. Only those who have a financial background can benefit from that. In the village areas, they can't afford the facilities or the knowledge of using technology.

The teachers are unfamiliar with the use of technology which is crucial for online education. I have noticed some students who do not know what a pen drive is. Internet connectivity is also very poor in the village areas in Batticaloa. If online education is continuing as the alternative way of teaching under these circumstances, teachers need support and training. Some teachers printed and distributed notes and papers among the students but the cost is high. I know that in some village areas they have to go over 30 kilometres to find a printing shop. Some individuals and civil society gave support to teachers and students but the Government and the Ministry of Education have not given proper support.

Environment

Fishermen were impacted after the Express Pearl accident. Many aquatic resources were destroyed and sea animals died. Some cases of animal deaths were reported in the coastal part of Batticaloa too. Many people from the area we're working abroad, especially in Middle Eastern countries and came back because of the spike in the pandemic. They don't have enough resources now. Some of them are involved in illegal sand mining and deforestation. These illegal activities took place before the pandemic too but now they have increased.

Misinformation

People don't have an understanding of the patterns of the pandemic and the risks. They usually listen to rumours and in some cases, it is quite difficult to make them understand the risks. The need for better awareness is always there.

Mental Health and domestic violence

Many people have the fear of death and they are affected psychologically. They cannot conduct funerals as they did in the past. Only a few people can see the body of the deceased person and this has impacted heavily on people and affected them mentally. Also, the children and youth are impacted especially by the limitations

on movement. The financial and other constraints create additional mental worries.

Drug usage also has increased mainly among 25-30-year-old young people. The security forces and the police were supporting that before the pandemic hit.

Positive Adaptations



A Farmer works in Agricultural fields in Panama, Ampara

The need for food security and people's lack of money has encouraged activities like home gardening. Everyone is trying to plant something.

Also, humanitarian activities and initiatives have increased during this time. It is a time when everyone needs support and NGOs, sports clubs, associations, religious institutions and societies are involved in giving support and I see it as a positive development.

Some youth have started making crafts and undertaking other self-employment schemes to earn money. Also, many discussions forums are created and projects related to local issues such as the environment have been initiated.

Interview 04

The interviewee was a 46-year-old female from the Sinhala Community in Anuradhapura, working as community worker and farmer.

What is your experience of the pandemic how it has changed your life patterns?

We tried our best to follow the required health measures even throughout the lockdown and most of these measures challenged our livelihoods. Most of the time I was involved with many community-related activities. In our village, this pandemic created many hurdles for those associated with community activities. We could not gather and discuss things as we used to do before the pandemic.

My father passed away in December 2019. After that things changed quickly. We could not do anything, not even hold the 3 months alms given for him.

Livelihood



*Women Farmers in Anuradhapura.
Photography by Amila Udagedara*

My husband is a farmer. We are mainly involved with rice cultivation under the tenant farming system. Because of the fear of infection and the spread of the virus the people could not join and work together. Everyone started to look at each other in a very suspicious manner because we can transmit the virus to one other.

We also used to cultivate fruits and vegetables. During this period we had a good harvest from

bananas and the other vegetables. But we had many difficulties in selling them.

We could not buy things after the second wave hit and we were constrained in getting our essentials. We managed to fulfill our food needs from home gardening. With the chemical fertilizer ban imposed a few months back, we have faced some issues in our agriculture.

Government Support

Earlier the government initiated a way to manage essentials through Co-operative (Samupakara) schemes. The mobile shops were there but those were costly. Also at the beginning, there was essentials items distribution programme. All received it last year, but it wasn't consistent. Also, we received the "Samurdhi" 5000 rupees subsidiary. Last May, we did not receive the full amount, and we found out the officials have reduced the monthly "Samurdhi" benefit that we get and only gave the balance. Also, one person received it from a family and those who did not register for it did not receive it.

Health Sector Support

The situation related to the pandemic was far better in my village and around areas till the end of the New year season. Then there were many infections reported around here too. Last month there was a death of 80 years old in Galnawa. The Health sector and officials supported well in this area. Prior bits of advice have been given and awareness programmes were conducted. There was good support from the Divisional Secretariat as well as Grama Niladaries in the area. Health officials carried out PCR and antigen tests and the home quarantine process. Last April, one of our neighbours' daughters came back to the village from Colombo and she got positive for the Covid later. Then too, health officials helped villagers to quarantine her close contacts. The Divisional Secretariat supported the essential goods and needs. Also, all the villagers supported each other in the difficult times as best they can.

Vaccination



A health official receives a dose of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine in Colombo 2021 January

Source: REUTERS photographed by Dinuka Liyanawatte

The process of vaccination was well administrated. We received the first dose last week, and next month we have to get the second dose. The elderly population of the village who are 60+ has received both doses. There was some reluctance among people about being vaccinated earlier, but later there were few awareness programmes carried out. The administration process was conducted well. They did it for 3 Grama Niladari divisions together in one Centre. Officials were able to manage social distancing and health guidelines in the centers too without any rush.

Education

This is one of the big issues facing the families in my village. After schools closed due to the pandemic, most of the education initiatives shifted into online mode. For that, we need many facilities including phones, data as well as proper coverage. Most of the families in the village don't have a phone or financial status for those. Another main issue is the connectivity coverage and signal issues. Even to get this call I had to come to a particular place that has coverage, where we have identified prior. My daughter is in Grade 5 and She is preparing for the scholarship examination. Therefore most of the time She needs the support of private classes too. For that, she also has to attend online classes. As I hear from her, online-based virtual education is quite difficult, not only in the facilitation but also there is a difficulty in staying

focused on the learnings. Some families have two to three school-age children. They all have to engage with online education. but in many cases, it's very difficult to facilitate with one phone for each kid. Also some areas I have noticed few students are trying to join through one phone.

Some students have given up and are involved with agricultural work and other jobs. Teachers who have the printing facilities have distributed printed study materials among the students as a way of overcoming the virtual education difficulties.

Mental Health

The situational pressure is there for many villages due to their economic and livelihood issues. Usually, villagers are very collective in doing things together and talking, but they didn't have that space much.

Domestic Violence

There are some cases because people are locked down in their domestic life. Drug usage is also very limited because of the security. but some are consuming alcohol. Sometimes that caused fights between husband and wife.

Environment

There were some cases related to deforestation. One of the Pradheshiya Shaba members was involved in utilizing the wood for some construction work but later villages have complained to the authorities and legal action had been taken. Some treasure hunting cases have happened.

Misinformation

After someone got to know a certain piece of news, they try to confirm with others rather than directly taking action. There are many cases related to sexual harassment even before the pandemic times. The major problem is that people don't have much awareness and no one complains. That is something that should change collectively. Family Health Officers and

Police also have been informed by some associations in the village but no one took any initiative to change these types of tendencies in the village.



Image Source: Groundviews

Positive Adaptations

The spread of home gardening is a positive adaptation. As people are staying at home most of the time they have time for that. There was no food shortage for the families in this area because of this adaptation.

Other comments

There are many issues relating to the agriculture sector due to the sudden ban of chemical fertilizer. The lack of water for farming created problems. Any support given for the improvement of agriculture and other livelihood will be very important under these circumstances.

Interview 05

The interviewee is a 42 -year-old female, with two sons, living in Kakirawa, Anuradhapura working as a daily wage worker.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

My husband and I are daily wage workers. Our eldest son has completed his school education and he was doing a vocational training course and the other one is in grade five. But with the pandemic, he could not go out for work. We

endured a huge loss of income during this period and we were mostly engaged in home gardening. We were planting beans, manioc, okra, eggplant and a few other crops. We were able to cover most of our food needs from the harvest of those crops. Other than that we did not have any income except for the “Samurdhi” allowance. The NGO “Savithri” also gave us a ration pack in the month of May. The education of my younger son was hindered as we lacked the facilities for online education.

Livelihood

Our village is remote. The villagers settled here during the war. The government has given lands for us all. No one has a big extent of land to do agriculture work on a high scale. At the present, three or four families are living in one plot of land, but many of them have adapted to home gardening, planting vegetable crops and fruits. Also, some others are involved in small self-employment schemes like sewing and selling crafts. Some others have started making bricks as the raw materials needed, like clay and suitable soil are available here. Most of the time they are selling dried bricks before they are burnt. Some others make cement bricks for orders. But it is difficult for this initiative to succeed, as it is difficult to transport and sell them under those restricted circumstances. Our livelihoods have been heavily impacted by massive income loss.

Government support

Last year we received a Samurdhi allowance of Rs. 5000 but this year they have reduced and we only received Rs 3000. However, some other Samurdhi beneficiaries received Rs 5000 which was given to low-income families. Some regional politicians influence these processes and some of their supporters got the subsidiary even though they are not eligible for it. A few families were not able to get it because the Grama Niladari and other officials have not informed them about it.

Health Sector Support

The health authorities supported us well during these times. Some people in a nearby village were infected. 4 villagers were identified as having close contact with infected people. After that, they had to be quarantined. The health officials supported them with guidelines and distributed essentials to those families. Others in the village also collectively supported them. The Divisional Secretary's office, with coordination with the Grama Niladari, helped them with Rs. 10,000 ration pack. Health officials helped to conduct PCR and Antigen tests.

Vaccination

The vaccination process also was administrated well. Up to now, 90% of people over 30+ in the village have been fully vaccinated. There were a few awareness programmes about the vaccination process in the village. Also in the vaccination centers, they administrated it well without taking much time and creating rushes. Initially, there were some misgivings about the vaccine and some tried to refuse to talk about it. But later on, with the awareness programmes that was resolved. Officials conducted the vaccination programme in the Halpitiyama School combining it for people from three Grama Niladari divisions.

Education



School Children involving with a collective observation during the interval in Pannipitiya, Colombo 2021

Education has completely shifted to the online method and this has created many difficulties.

The majority of people were not able to access it because they lacked technological facilities. The internet connectivity is very weak in this area. Most of the families in our area could not afford the data charges to access online education. Particularly the students who are sitting for the ordinary level and advanced level exams faced multiple difficulties. They could not complete the lessons they required, and they found it difficult to find books and other educational materials. None of them can access the libraries too. There was no support from the Ministry of Education and other education officials.

Mental Health

There were many mental pressures on the people during the lockdown. Most of them lost their livelihood and their children faced many difficulties with online education.

Domestic Violence



Image Source:Colombo Gazette

There was some increase in violence in particular families. This is mainly because of the pressures caused by their difficulties, including livelihood difficulties. Also, each member of a family was staying at home – more so than they did earlier.

Positive Adaptations

All the villagers were helping each other in different ways during these times. With home gardening, different families started to plant different crops. With their harvests, villages started to exchange vegetables and fruits for the things they don't have. They were re-introducing

the barter system. People were active in home gardening, trying to plant anything they can in their home garden.

Interview 06

The interviewee is a 61-year-old female from the Sinhala Community living in Anuradhapura, working as a community worker and as a cultivator.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how has it changed your life patterns?

It is a difficult time for all in my family as well as others in the village. There are many constraints on our livelihood. The financial situation of the people is not good now. There are five members in our family. My husband is a carpenter. He used to be based in Colombo and work there. But due to the lockdown, he had to return to the village in April 2020 and he lost his income. After coming back he is mainly involved with home gardening and agricultural works.

I have two sons and one daughter. All of them have married and one lives with us. I was involved with cultivating crops in the home garden. We used to sell the harvest in the Anuradhapura Market (pola) and earn a good income, but after Covid hit we don't have that opportunity and the income.

Livelihood

Many of them were trying to do new things something they can earn more. After last year's first lockdown I started a small Kola Kanda (herbal porridge) shop. I used to sell kurakkan Kanda, herbal Kanda and sago drinks in the morning. I got additional orders from the government and other office workers and I earned a fair amount of money. Nowadays that business is also a little difficult to conduct. I used to run a small spices shop - mainly selling pepper, cinnamon, Kurakkan and cardamoms. I used to make thala karalu (sesame seed rolls) and sell them. Many other women are involved with this type of small business. These all are self-initiated efforts by the women in the village.

Government Support

There was a Samurdhi loan opportunity, but otherwise, most of the support initiatives are biased towards people with political influence. Politicians only assist their supporters. It is the same as the way job opportunities are provided for those aligned to politicians. The subsidy of Rs 5000 was offered only for the people who are already Samurdhi members. Others did not receive it. Some people who received Rs 5000 under this scheme have a good income level when compared to others in the current context. Many other helpless people did not receive anything. During this period we have received Samurdhi Rs 5000 allowance twice so far. One in the year 2020 and the other last May 2021.

The other Rs 5000 subsidiary scheme was offered for low-income people. Some of our villagers also received that.

Law and order



Sanitation Worker in Wellawatte, Colombo

In general most of the people followed the regulations, but the lockdown impacted significantly on people's livelihood and income. We have many difficulties in selling our harvest as well as in buying essentials. No one cared for us. Overall, there is a sense that there was no proper plan to manage this situation and it impacted poor people at the ground level.

Health Sector Support

There was one incident where alms were given at a Bana Gedara, where many people gathered no one checked this and rules were not observed. None of the PHIs came to check on

this. We informed 1990 but no one came. There is no way that antigen tests or PCR tests could be conducted on those who participated in this. This happened 8 days back, still, no one has come to check about this.

Earlier the state-supported the isolation of people who were identified as close contacts of covid patients. Villagers helped all these people during those periods.

Vaccination

The vaccine roll-out is conducted well. It has been effectively administrated and the majority of people 30 years and over have at least received one dose so far. People over 60+ received both doses. Earlier some elderly people did not have a good attitude about being vaccinated. But there were some awareness programmes conducted by health officials.

Community Association

There were some good initiatives. before the pandemic. We were able to start a saving programme among 15 women in the village. Now we have a fair amount of savings. So during this time, we started a loan initiative through the Womens' collective, using those savings to give low-interest rates loans for some time. So far that initiative is going well and we are trying to complete another step to expand it.

Positive Adaptation

Home gardening increased during these times when we are under hardships. Govijana Sewa Adhikariya also did a programme before the pandemic last year. Also, many others started small self-employment like making crafts. Many villagers were involved with organic agriculture for some time. And so the sudden ban of chemical fertilizer did not impact them that much, particularly the mid and Small level farmers. But it became an issue for the farmers who cultivate on a mass scale and particularly for the people who cultivate rice.

The collective awareness among the villagers can take as a positive aspect during these times.

Education

The education sector has completely collapsed. My daughter's elder son is in Grade 7 in school. These days mainly their education activities are conducted online. They don't have phones and other types of equipment. Most of the time I give my phone to him but I do a lot of community activities - we also have online meetings. It is problematic when we have these clashes. We also have connectivity and signal issues and sometimes we have to go far away to get better signals. There is no proper plan or solution for the difficulties in the education sector. Last year there were some efforts by teachers to send printed note lists and notes to the students. Also, some teachers sent the worklists through Whatsapp and followed up with the students. but that too could not be continued properly. Since March 2020 students faced difficulties and there is a huge gap in their knowledge and learning. This can impact very negatively on the next generation of students. Some have given up their studies and are trying to do some kind of a job. But some are going to universities. They don't have issues. They are continuing their work properly.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence was an issue before the pandemic and lockdown too but now it has increased. There were some suicide attempts too but we collectively helped them. As well as drug and liquor consumption has increased.

Mental Health

Young people faced mental issues during this time. Family Health Officers were helping all who need guidance. Some cases of harassment have been reported and we have collected we have approached legal support.

Other comments

Government help should be available to address the related issues. Their carelessness is very disappointing, especially when it comes to the small people. They only care about the urban people and no one knows the reality at the

grassroots level. The response of the government is very problematic. All of them come to the village only at election times.

Interview 07

The interviewee is a 52 year-old female from the Sinhala Community living in Ipalogama, Anuradhapura working as a cultivator, a daily wage worker and as a community worker.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how has it changed your life patterns?

I am involved with community work in the Ipalogama area. I am the secretary of the main women's association in the area. My daughter was selected to join the university last year and the term has started now.



*A Women Farmer in Anuradhapura
Photography by Amila Udagedara 2021*

The covid pandemic has drastically impacted our area and the people. I used to undertake jobs as a daily wage worker in the village, but I lost those types of opportunities. A few in our area also got infected and They are under the current lockdown, it is a bit difficult.

Before this too, there are many hardships in our lives. But we never anticipated this kind of situation. For us, it was important to have courage. We lost most of our livelihood and the situation is not good either for our health or the economy.

Livelihood



*Women Farmers in Anuradhapura
Photography by Amila Udagedara 2021*

In our village, there are many daily wage workers. We don't have good lands and properties here. We used to live in Morawawa, Trincomalee which was considered to be a border village near the LTTE administrated area. During the war, violence in those areas increased and the government provided lands in Ipalogama and then we came and settled here in 1985. We don't have large paddy fields. If we want to grow rice, we have to do it according to the 'And he' land tenancy system. Some people in the area are working in the military but the majority of the villagers are working as daily wage workers. But now, with this situation, no one offers us work even though there are jobs to be done. There are many masons and carpenters who also rarely get work because people fear the risk of infections. People experienced a huge loss of income during this period and we don't know how long we will have to go on like this. Many of us are involved in home gardening and growing crops like vegetables and fruits. Earlier we use to sell the excess of our harvest in the weekly markets and the Sunday markets. But nowadays, with the current lockdown, we could not do that. We've lost that income too. Most of the cultivation was done organically.

Government support

There was no specific support given to us. We had some savings. That helped. Some women's organizations assisted us and we distributed a pack of rations among the members. We

purchased them with some of the financial aid we received.

Only one member from each family received the Samurdhi allowance. Some people accessed other subsidiary schemes like the Kidney Patient's Allowance and the Elderly People's Allowance. Those families who have all the beneficiaries only received one allowance.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was some kind of initiative by the politicians and representatives. One of the members initiated the distribution of a pack of essential items but after that first distribution, nothing else was conducted. Also, there were some other limited initiatives. But there were many people in need but nothing much came their way.

Health Sector Support

They helped a lot, particularly with the increase of awareness among the villages. There was one incident that happened with the arms giving ceremony at a home in the village. There was one infected person who had participated in that and it caused a mess. Many others including me had to be quarantined. 5 other families had been quarantined. Everyone helped – the health sector and Grama Niladari and the villagers assisted us to meet essential needs. We received a Rs 10,000 ration pack.

Vaccination

Vaccines have been administrated well. There was no rush or any other issues. Initially, some people did not like to get it but after the awareness programmes, they also went and took the vaccine.

Education

Education is one of the major areas which has been badly affected under the current circumstances. My daughter was selected to attend the university and most of her work is conducted online. The children who are still attending school also face multiple difficulties. The online education method is not effective for all. They don't have facilities, the right types of

equipment and financial resources to continue through that way. The network coverage is quite weak in this area. I think you can understand it as you face the disturbances while conducting this phone conversation too. Even now, I have come to a place where the coverage is better. We all commonly use this place to make phone calls.



A father dropping his daughter in to the primary School in Delft Island, Jaffna

Misinformation

There are some doubts expressed on the vaccines, but with the awareness programmes conducted by the health officials during the roll-out, those doubts were clarified.

Mental Health

I think people faced lots of mental health issues, particularly because many of the villagers lost their sources of income. As a result, they face many difficulties and are fearful. In general, people have lost their freedom of movement and they don't have spaces for the association. The younger generation is struggling to face limited prospects. They are very doubtful about the future.

Positive Adaptations

Everyone has started home gardening and cultivation. Therefore they don't face a shortage of food. Everyone helped each other, exchanging their surplus for what they did not have. Other small initiatives like craft-making and handloom production have increased. They used to sell those products too but under the lockdown, the space for that has shrunk.

Interview 08

The Interviewee is a female aged 61 from Ipalogama, Anuradhapura, working as a garment factory worker and cultivator.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how has it has changed your life patterns?

At the beginning of the pandemic, my husband's nephew (brother's son) got infected. He is working in the Navy and is based in Colombo. He was under quarantine after that. That was the first direct experience that I had of this disease.

One other thing I observed is that with the transmission of this disease is that people looked at the infected people differently. People changed the way they looked at them and did not want to interact with them. Relationship patterns have changed with the disease. Even officials were like that.

Livelihood



Fisheries Community in Karainager Island Jaffna

Living has become very difficult. We have not had enough support from the government. We have taken loans and the interest rates are very high and we are struggling to repay those. My daughter's husband bought a vehicle under the leasing method and we are struggling to pay that too. We bought it to run a small business but maintenance became difficult and we gave it to the army for hire. My son-in-law was doing construction but could not continue that under the pandemic. However, we did not face any

difficulties with our food security because of our home garden.

Government support

We received the Rs 5000 Samurdhi Beneficery allowance. There was a death due to Covid nearby and during that time they gave ration packs for Rs.10,000 for those families who were under quarantine. Even when my husband's nephew was under quarantine, we received ration packs of essential goods worth Rs.10,000. The Samurdhi officials and Grama sewaka in the region administrated the support well.

There was no support from political representatives (Parliamentarians). Only the Chairperson of the Pradeshiya Sabha helped and took care of us.

Law and order

Most of the people do not properly follow the instruction. As I see it, most people do not care. There are difficulties but all the people should take this on as a responsibility. Everyone should be bound by the guidance given. Some do not wear a mask in the village. Two deaths have been reported around here due to Covid but there is no issue about it.

Health Sector Support

There is little support from the health authorities in this area. There were many issues in raising awareness. There were two deaths around here. In one of those houses first, the young daughters were infected then the elder one got infected and died. Then PHI came and put them under quarantine. We called 1990 to take the mother to the hospital, and she passed away in the hospital. There are times even the PHIs did not respond well. The nearest hospital is in Kalawewa which is 4 km away from the village. The other hospital is in Kakirawa, 6km away.

Militarization

One of our sons is also in the army. He is in the commando force. We should appreciate their

support along with the support of the health officials. They sacrificed so much in wartime and now with this health crisis too. My son told me that many of the army people have been infected. After my son was infected I was arguing with some others who criticized him. I told him we recognize the effort and the sacrifice they have done for the people during this health crisis too. People want a secure country. This is also a part of that. It is very painful for us too.

Vaccination

The vaccination is going on and people who are 60 and over received both doses. I also received it. Two people were from Galewala and Thangalle but who live in our village. They did not give it to those two people. The person from Galewala went there and received it. but the other one, from Thangalle, is 68 years old. She could not go there and receive it. The Grama Niladari said they had to include their names in the election list but could not attend to this due to the lockdown. They should have to give the vaccine to them too because those two are also over 60+.

Some have doubts about the vaccines and refused to get them.

Education

There are over 10 to 15 children who go to school. Those who can, buy a phone and continue with online education, but the majority cannot afford it and they just while away the time. Children attend tuition classes which are also mostly conducted online nowadays. There are no online initiatives conducted through the Karabaawa school which is nearby.

Environmental issues

Our village is close to the historical Vijithapura Fort area. There is a place called Galnidhiyaya which has many archeologically valuable sites. There were some problems with treasure hunting around there. After that, there are many other issues with people suspecting each other even if someone digs to install toilet drainage

systems in the lands. This issue existed even before the pandemic. Recently 6 people were arrested, on suspicion of treasure-hunting.

But there were no particular issues with deforestation because there is no forest around the village. People get permission from the Grama Niladari before they cut a tree.

Also, there were issues with garbage collection and some villagers used to drop their garbage near here. Later the divisional secretariat started a different initiative to compost garbage and make fertilizer.

Misinformation

Some doubts and misinformation are circulating among the villagers surrounding the covid related deaths which occurred in the village.



Domestic Violence, drug consumption and other issues

There are so many issues related to drug consumption. It has increased and it is a long-term issue. There is no point in informing the police too. The Police indirectly support them. Around the village locally brewed liquor is available. When they come back home after drinking they are fighting with others in their families.

Positive Adaptations

The increase in home gardening and organic farming is positive. Even I am involved with it. We face some issues. but we are continuing with them.

Also, we used to do much community work mainly through Savithri. But we face difficulty to do so. most of the time we conduct those online now.

Other comments

The economic situation has created makes many difficulties. Living costs are very high. The price of many essentials has increased - potato, sugar, milk and many of the things have increased. We should focus on the domestic production of these items.

Interview 09

The interviewee is a 24-year-old male from the Malaiyaha Tamil community living in Deniyaya, Matara. He is looking for employment.

What is your experience of the pandemic how has it changed the life patterns?

Everyone, irrespective of their age is facing difficulties. I was working earlier but I could not continue with it. Even young people of my age who were supposed to continue with their education could not start anything in the current situation. This is the age when young people should try different things but there are many constraints and our time is just wasted.

I have a dream to have a career in radio journalism. For that, I should go to Colombo and earn something to invest in my career. Earlier I earned something through my job and saved towards that. But now I could not do that. There is no other income source.

Livelihood



A Labourer carrying plucked tea leaves in a estate in Haputhale 2017

Most of the people are working in the plantation sector. They are involved with all the aspects of the tea plantation - mostly tea plucking, transportation, administration. 90% of people are earning their livelihoods from tea. In my home my mother, father, uncles are daily wage workers. That is how we manage our lives and needs. In that sense, each day that we have lost our daily income impacts the entire family. My grandmother and grandfather are very old and need medicines. We face difficulties to manage those.

In some other households, they don't have young people and they face many difficulties. because they are old and they cannot do anything. There is no one to take care of them. Young people at least try something to manage.

Infections and Deaths

There were no covid related deaths reported but some people have got infected. They and their close contacts had to be quarantined. Most of the plantation sector workers are living in lines (small estate houses). These houses have been placed very close by within limited spaces. like small rooms. There is a place called Nawagammana - only that place has enough space between houses. In other places, there is no gap of even 10 feet between each house. In this type of situation, if someone in our neighbouring house has to quarantine, we also could not go anywhere. Right now there are around 9 houses under quarantine. I was also working in a printing shop on a part-time basis. So when all these 9 houses are under quarantine I also cannot go to work. Many others face this situation and they too lose their income.

Government support

In the latter part of 2020 when we were under lockdown the government distributed an allowance of Rs.5000 allowance. That was administrated well. Many others have helped with that including superintendents in the tea estates and pradeshiya sabha members. As I know 95% of people received that. My

grandfather received the Rs. 2000 allowance but there is another grandfather two doors next to my home who did not receive it. I asked them and they said there is a certain way of categorization according to which they administrated it. But I am not clear with the point. In our area, the Tamil community did not receive Samurdhi. We tried but we could not get it.

Law and order

Most people are following the rules but some, particularly young people, are going around. We received help from people outside the village who provided many subsidies for us. Many, such as teachers, principals, some political representatives, and friends supported us as much they could. There was no issue related to breaching quarantine laws. Everyone collected essentials and stayed at home. But mask-wearing and sanitizing are not properly followed. I saw so many people who did not take responsibility and wear a mask.

Health sector Support

In my village, they supported us very well. They are all committed. Even If someone has to be quarantined, they came every two days and check on their situation. We are appreciative of their support. In my village, they supported me well, but I don't know that much about other areas in Deniyaya. However, through social media, I saw people have appreciated them.

Vaccination

Authorities announced the vaccine programme and they gave Sinopharm. They gave it first to the people aged 60 and over. They gave it to the Trade Union members in Deniyaya on a special request. I am 24 years old and through the trade union, I requested to get the vaccine. I too have received both doses. The Divisional Secretary also supported the process. No particular issues were reported. Some people refused to be vaccinated but later others in the community guided them, made them aware and after these initiatives, most of the people took it.



A child with a mask in Sooriyawawa, Hambantota

Education

Covid has impacted a great deal on education and the standards of education have gone down to zero. My younger brother is sitting for the grade 5 scholarship examination. He had to go for online classes, but that's not effective. It's not the same as studying in a classroom. Teachers can not make the students understand in the time allotted to online classes. My brother is fed up with the online method. We can not force the children. There are very few ways to teach them or for the family to help them. Most of the students have forgotten their basic education. They have no classes, no newspapers, and they don't feel like studying for exams. Most of the students don't have phones and other facilities. Earlier I gave my phone to my brother to study. Some other students all joined with him because they don't have facilities and equipment. They have to spend a lot of money on getting the required equipment and data charges.

Two months ago teachers used to distribute study materials and exam papers among students. But now that is not happening due to the teacher's strike.

Misinformation

There is much fake news circulating about persons who are infected, who hasn't has infected others and who are not infected, They are rumours.



The Media during the Pandemic

Mental Health

Many people are living with the mentality of defeat. The youth are most affected. I was also trying many things but could not do anything. Many young people feel the same. Children can not understand what's happening. They have lost the playful, inquisitive aspects of life. My younger brother is also like that. He could not play with his friends most of the time as he is stuck at home. I think they lost the time and stage for learning by doing which is important at their age. It will create a huge gap and a vacuum in their lives.

No one supported them in this aspect of their lives. They could have benefitted from a little counselling. We received much help but not in these aspects. Also, people who can help are not able to do it as they too faced many difficulties. Many people have become addicted to social media Facebook and the What's app. They are using their mobiles morning and night. They don't know even when they are charging the battery. Some have gone to work at the tea factory and they have earned some money and have brought expensive phones. They work hard to earn and then waste their time on useless things. It's very disappointing, given their youth.

Domestic Violence, drug consumption and other issues

There are some issues. Young people have become addicted to alcohol. Even some underage children drink and have started smoking beedis.

Most of the youth and kids have become addicted to phones and mobile games. Sometimes when I called someone they don't hear. They are in a different world, far away from reality. It is becoming a growing issue. They are not keen on good things. The issue is they can not go to school too. They don't hear from anyone and feel isolated.

Positive Adaptations

There are some initiatives on compost-making and home gardening, but some could not continue with it due to the rain and weather changes. I used to breed pigeons and fish as hobbies. But now we initiate things that can earn something extra.

Militarization

Controlling the Covid situation is the responsibility of all of us. We are under lockdown now, but no one follows anything properly. If I go to Deniyaya town now, I see many people roaming around. People should follow the rules and there should also be a better mechanism to administer it through health officials and security officials. I don't know who is responsible and failing in this.

If we want to overcome the situation quickly, we have to collectively do it. But it's not happening. Recently I saw a statement from the Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, stating that the Covid pandemic is a case of health officials not a matter for the Army commander. That is true and the question is whether security officials have enough knowledge on managing the health crisis.

Other comments

It's good if there is an alternative strategy provided to overcome the depressed and defeatist mentality of the people and especially the mentality of the young generation. This will be very important. Also, the young generation needs good guidance.

Interview 10

The interviewee is a 24-year-old female from the Sinhala Community living in Deniyaya, Matara and working in a regional agriculture organization as a field officer. She is also a student.

What is your experience of the pandemic? And How it has changed the life patterns?

Before this occurred I was mainly focusing on my education but this situation has caused many difficulties. It is the same for many others who are living around my village area. I have completed my school education and am focused on agriculture. I was doing an additional course online while waiting to be admitted to a university. In my home area, we do not have connectivity. Sometimes I had to go to another house and stay with my relatives.

Livelihood

Most of the people here work in tea estates and factories. But many of them could not go to work daily. The administration in those factories had initiated a shift work system to limit the gathering of many people at work. That causes a reduction in workers' salaries. They used to get a suitable salary for daily work but now they get only paid for the hours they work in the factory.

There are many issues in the plantation sector. Most of the tea estate workers live very close together in small houses (lines). This caused the spread of the virus, and there were higher numbers of infections and many people died too. Sanitation facilities are also limited for them and one set of Line rooms share a well.

Other people who earned a daily wage by running saloons and food shops also lost their income. For instance, many members of the Tamil community people living in the area were running saloons and beauty parlour places. but with the restrictions and regulations, there is no way to continue with these activities. Also, people fear going to these places to get the service they need for fear of infections.

Government support

The Rs 5000 allowance given to the low-income families was received by most of the villagers. Also, till last May ration packs worth Rs 10,000 were given for the people who are under quarantine. But then after that most of the families did not receive it even though they had to be in quarantine. As far as I know, only one person in the village has received a Rs 2000 allowance which was given with the ongoing lockdown. There are fewer Samurdhi beneficiaries in the area.

There are some initiatives by politicians and representatives to give sanitizers and masks at the early phase of the pandemic. Also, there were some initiatives related to cases that had to be in quarantine. They were given essential goods but otherwise nothing much happened.

Health Sector Support

The first case around here was reported in February 2021. Random cases have been reported from time to time. But after the April New Year celebrations, cases have increased. There was one elderly person who died due to Covid in Deniyaya. Also, another 24-year-old person passed away yesterday. The health officials supported people well. Earlier when they identified one infected case in the area, Public Health Official (PHI) did PCR & Antigen testings for all who were identified as close contacts of the infected person. The PHIS also supported the people who have to be in quarantine with guidance, awareness and there was constant observation. Nowadays the home quarantine process is encouraged but it is a bit difficult in the Estate sector neighbourhoods because of the lack of space and facilities.

Vaccination

In April and May, they started vaccinating people over the age of 60 and above and in June they started on the people aged 30 and above. I am 24 years old but I am also fully vaccinated as a special request was made by my workplace

place. They administrated it well without any rush.

Law and order

In the first phase of the pandemic, most of the people used to follow the quarantine regulations properly. but after that, no one cared. In the town area, the police and other security officials are there to observe and control the situation. But in village areas, there was no one to check. People did not obey the quarantine laws. Even if a shop is closed in the front there is a way to sell goods and items from the backdoors. People gather In those types of places because they are tired of the monotony at home. They used to drink tea and talk (gossiping) with others. As far as I know, the security officials were not focused on enforcing the quarantine laws.

Education

There are many difficulties with online education. Given their economic status, the majority of people found it difficult to buy an android phone. The online classes are not accessible to people who have not paid the fees. If they have not paid they have to go to the bank and make the payment and with the lockdown that is difficult. They don't have the facilities for online payment. Most of them don't know about this facility. Nothing happens now with the teacher's strike. I have heard that in some areas, schools and teachers had started sending lessons by Whatsapp or printed material to guide students to study. That kind of initiative did not happen here as far as I know. Earlier there was an initiative that supported students who can not afford online education. They could go to the nearby school and collect the study materials needed to continue their studies at home. But that happened only for two days.

Domestic Violence, drug consumption and other issues

As I noticed alcohol and drug use have increased among young people. There are shops in the village areas that sell liquor between lockdowns. It has increased with this situation.

Most of the school leavers and the young crowd are addicted to this.

Positive Adaptations

Home gardening has increased and improved. Also, the production of compost and organic fertilizer in households has increased. The government is supporting it with the sudden fertilizer ban. Some young people have started small initiatives like ornamental fish farming.

Interview 11

The Interviewee is a 34 year-old male from the Sinhala community living in Bandarwela, Badulla District. Currently, He works as a Logistics Manager in a Private Company in Colombo. Therefore most of the time he lives in Colombo capital, apart from his hometown for his occupational purposes.

What is your experience of the pandemic? And How it has changed the life patterns?

I am working as a Logistics Manager in a private company in Homagama. With the pandemic, we have had many difficulties and a drop in our sales. Our regular sales were for the local market and we also initiated international trade. With this global crisis, our exports ended completely. Therefore now the Company has limited operations.

Livelihood



*Fisheries Community in Pothuvil
Photography by Chathuraga Pradeep 2021*

This situation was completely unexpected and things suddenly changed with the first lockdown in March 2020. Before that, I used to rent a place in Colombo and stay there while working. I had to spend a lot on that. I was not holding much by way of savings. I had paid Rs 75,000 as a deposit and advance for my rented place, and during the first lockdown my workplace was closed and I went back to my hometown Bandarawela. During that period the landlord cut down my 3 months rental from the deposit money, saying they cannot help with the situation which occurred.

Apart from the basic salary, my income increases with the sales that I make, but with the island-wide lockdown, there were no sales. Usually, I earned Rs 75,000 to Rs 80,000 altogether. but during this time it was less. I faced many difficulties because I have to pay some of the loans that I took earlier. In my home, currently, my mother and I are the only people who work. My mother is working as a teacher, but my father has retired. My mother has a stable source of income. That helped a lot for the other three members of the family during this period. If this affected us in this way, what would have happened to the other lower income earners and daily wage earners? We should understand that too. However, all of us have adapted to a life with low expenses and we still try to help others too as much as we can.

In my hometown, there are many tea and rubber plantation workers. This pandemic and lockdowns impacted the daily wage labourers in that sector too. The factories and companies faced a downturn in their local trade as well as in their international trade. Up to now, there has been no proper sale. Many labourers face difficulties because of wage reductions and other issues. Their lifestyles were impacted. The Bandarawela area is located in the hill areas. Public transportation is limited but available in urban areas But in some remote areas, only one or two buses ply for the entire day. People faced many difficulties accessing essentials sometimes.

Law and order

As people can not travel they face many difficulties to meet their essential needs People struggled to get their daily meals and meet their monthly expenditures as living costs are increasing. There is an imbalance between supply and demand. Today also there is a big issue with the supply and prices of fuel, milk, sugar and rice. I have a monthly income. but daily income earners are facing great difficulties. How they can educate their children?

Government Support

The government has administered some support but the problem is whether it is enough? I have asked this question from a few of my Tamil friends in the Bandarawela area, and they told me that with a count of 4 to 6 members, the support given was not enough. It lasted for about two days as they had to meet children's needs and the needs of elderly people. I know that the subsidy processes are administrated well in Bandarawela. Some issues happened in another Grama Niladari division near there due to fraud by a Grama Niladari and some have used the subsidy for other things. Overall, the process is all right but the process should be transparent. The Urban Council or other political representatives made a minimal effort to help people but some religious institutions around the area have helped.

Health Sector Support

Now I live mostly in Homagama. Most of the time the quarantine regulations and other health guidelines were followed by the people in a better way. Security officials and the health sector have done a fair job related to that. Also, they treated people well, particularly in the Diyalawa hospital and Bandarawela Hospital. Some elderly people who can not move were treated at home. After Covid started to spread through clusters, they helped a lot with the isolation and quarantine processes. Particularly the MOH officials and the PHIs helped with their constant observations and guidance.

Vaccination

Regarding the first phase of the vaccination process, the MOH focused on the Colombo and western provinces. They only started the immunization process in Bandarawela recently. My father is 63 years old my mother is 60 years old now. Now in this area too, covid is spreading fast. I think the vaccination process should be speeded- up in Bandarawela and remote areas too.

Education

The online teaching method is disappointing and is a very limited solution to address the issues that occurred in the education sector. Online technology is something that is still developing in our country and it is very limited. These methods are invented and used by many developed countries but our country is still a developing country. We have many difficulties. Internet coverage is limited. The majority of people can not afford expensive devices like android phones. Most families are used to providing books and other needs which their children require to study, but meeting the costs online is quite difficult for them.

The value of online education is limited. School education is broader – giving children a chance to interact with others, play sports, work collectively, and make friends. There are many other values that children should absorb from education. Through online teaching, education has been narrowed down simply to the curriculum. There are many things which children missed. They don't have practical knowledge. Values should be taught by creating a better school system. Most of the student who faces Advanced Level exams face a lot of pressure because of all the delays they faced due to the pandemic and lockdowns. They are struggling to advance their prospect. It is the same with the University students who have just been admitted to the university and those who are waiting to get admission.

I think it is very important to vaccinate the school children and to re-open the schools

shortly. At least it will create some opportunity to overcome the issues they face.

Environment



Colombo Municipal Council sanitation workers collecting the Garbage in Slave Islands

As I observed in the Homagama area there are some issues with the garbage recycling process. In this pandemic situation obviously, there are practical difficulties in managing garbage recycling. Everyone is trying to blame the Urban Council or the people who are involved with cleaning and garbage management as that is their job and responsibility. However, the people also have a responsibility. To manage their garbage at home properly. This is something that could further improve if people change their attitudes and behaviour. Everyone talks about how beautiful foreign countries are but individually no one works to keep the country clean with their contributions. Most of the people have tried to throw their garbage bags in the isolated areas in suburbs. Even during the lockdown, this happens often. When it comes to garbage management, initiatives should be taken to better administer this. Deforestation also happens like this.

The mentality of the people has changed during these times. People are under immense pressure and no one is in a situation to think about others. People are focused on their benefit and they are careless about things that affect society.

Misinformation

It's a right of the people to have proper information but in Sri Lanka, valid information is disclosed at the incorrect place and or at incorrect times. This is more visible since this pandemic started. If people know the actual situation they can respond appropriately. Some of the information circulated through social media is very problematic. It can lead people down the wrong path. Traditional and electronic media are also like that. Even before the pandemic, the media was biased. People have started to see things through lenses coloured by their biases.

If we take Bandarawela, in some areas people only watch government-owned TV channels. People who follow those channels are trained to see the wider society through that lens. There are many other aspects that they miss. They go in the wrong direction with those biases. Consequently, there is no balance. We saw this during the pandemic time too. For instance, last March some TV channels popularized propaganda for an unscientific "miracle tonic" that would cure Covid. It was called "Dhammika Paniya". Some people believed those stories.

The media should be ethical and balance their reports and the Government should also be responsible on these matters. Recently the media reported a fuel oil shortage and people started to form queues to fill their fuel tanks. But the actual scenario was different. It's the same with the ongoing issue of sugar, milk powder. Different channels are saying different things to their political advantage. People are suffering as a result of this misinformation. The media should be responsible and provide the right information at the right time. This should be the case with social media too. The existing laws and regulations should be upgraded to control Social Media too, without breaching the freedom of expression on political issues.



A small shop in rural Hambantota

Mental Health

I also faced mental pressures. When the country was first locked down as a short-term measure, on a personal level I was happy. Before the Covid pandemic, I was always busy with my job. I was not able to stay at home with my family. So I thought at least I got time for that. But after some time, things became quite difficult. Income losses, livelihood issues and many other issues surfaced and that happiness was like a short-term illusion.

In those days the lockdown was eased for some set times for people to buy essentials. Sometimes, during that period, my office from Colombo had not transferred my salary. So I faced difficulties in managing the financial aspects of my life and it made me think constantly about my future. I won't be able to go home due to the lockdown because under these circumstances we have to work based on shifts. Therefore I have to be in my office in Colombo. Even if I got a chance to go home, it was risky because I could infect my parents and others and put them in danger. Now the way to meet friends is by calling them but mobile phones are not a proper alternative. There is a fear of death and it makes people very doubtful. I hope things become better soon.

Domestic Violence, drug consumption and other issues

I haven't observed this but I have heard from my friends about different issues. Many people have anger issues because of the limitations on

their movements. Some others use liquor and drugs. There is suspicion between family members, especially between husband and wife. There was a different balance earlier but the pandemic shifted that dynamic.

Militarization

I am neutral on this issue. We expect the military to be responsible for the security of the country. Now we don't have a bigger security threat and so I see the use of military persons for Covid management as a good thing. However, they should give priority to the health sector's recommendations and demands. They should function as a supportive mechanism to implement those recommendations from the health sector. We saw now the vaccination process was completely administrated by the security forces, mainly the army. if this is the case, they should give priority to the doctors and medical officials who are in Army. That support is crucial because now the health sector is also under immense pressure. But if the security forces go beyond that and work in a very forceful militarized manner, that would be very problematic for freedom and human rights. I also think it's not a good thing to force someone to get vaccinated.

Positive Adaptations

At the local level, some positive things have happened to the environment, particularly concerning air pollution. Also, people worked collectively to help each other. Some realized that there were problems in their life patterns, such as wasteful expenditure. Most people adopted simple life patterns.

But in other aspects, many other things are disappointing. In some instances, the government used this as an opportunity to hide their mistakes. An example is the Easter Sunday case and there are many other issues too. Many youths are trying to leave the country but this is not good for the future. The brain drain has become a huge issue for our country. We should all work collectively for a better future.



Saarawita Vendor in Galle Face Green.

Interview 12

The interviewee is a 26 year-old male from the Sinhala Community, living in Dankotuwa and working in a NGO in Colombo

What is your experience of the pandemic? And how it has changed your life patterns?

This situation is new for me. I never thought our life patterns will be changed like this. While working I am pursuing my postgraduate studies. I never thought I will have to peruse it completely online. However, there are multiple lessons this situation is teaching us. Before this, we were running behind multiple goals to live a better life. If I take myself, with my family pushing me, after I graduated I was looking for a better job and ways to maximize my income by adding more skills and qualifications. That's what our society has trained us. We always follow this circle and never thought out of the circle. but this pandemic lay the ground for us to stay and look around at what was we were doing. This related to politics, economic,

environmental and many other concerns. It reminded us of those concerns. But yes, the way we were trained to live, there are many difficulties facing us - particularly with the economy and the economic system. We won't receive anything for free. We must opt to adapt and do the things as in normal life within this new normality. We assume this will fade away within one or two years. but many things will be missing. We know we lost most of our beloveds due to viruses. We can not expect the world will be the same as 2019 before all this occurred. Also, the usage of technology has expanded more than we expected.

People think about what kind of a situation we are living in and the effect on their livelihood. Tourism, small businesses, daily wage works are affected.

Livelihood

In the Dankotuwa area mostly people are involved in making clay bricks. It's one of the domestic industries that have existed for a long time.. Also, there are some industrial zones for the porcelain and the apparel industry. Many work in those industries. and most of them have to stay at home in this situation. Some of the companies have reduced their salary some of the workers receive only half their salary. Many others involved with the fisheries industry and doing small and medium level business are also affected. Also many daily wage workers like masons, carpenters have lost their income. I know some of them struggle to fulfill their food needs. I know some of them have to use jackfruit and breadfruit as their main meal. They are in a very difficult situation but still, I have not noticed any suicides or that kind of reaction.

Government support

People were expecting that support - like in a welfare state. In this area, many are doing foreign jobs mainly in Italy. Those families receive some income through banks. There is no official documentation on that. Some of those family relatives also received the Rs.5000 subsidiary even though they have a better

income source. Also, some others who used to get that money under those listed name but now did better businesses they took the money even though they do not need it, because of the corruption by government officials. . Not all of them but some of them. In the first phase of subsidy distribution government also tried to give it to many people. but that changed during the year with the lack of funds. Now many have lost jobs. Some of them have children to feed and even they are not under any subsidiary schemes like Samurdhi. They don't have savings. Some have to pay loans which they took to build houses. They suffer a lot without any support.

Law and order

One of my uncles is farming. Once ,he had worn his mask in an incorrect way. The police have fined him Rs.5000 and filed a court case too. There can be some mistake with the way he wore a mas,, but fining Rs.5000 is a big amount for them. They could use it for the food needed by their family for at least for two-three weeks. Sometimes, the police impose the law in this type of very unfair manner .No one cares about the wrongdoings of politicians or powerful people, but they hit the poor people.

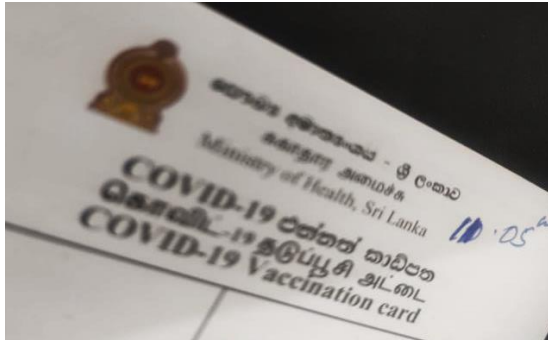
In general, there are many people on the roads nowadays. Many things have become essential activities. People are also trying to do something and earn even under the lockdown due to their families' lack of food security. Some are also involving with illegal alcohol selling. Most of the police officials have been infected with covid. Majority of them are under quarantine. There is not that much manpower for the police to observe the situation. Most of them are fed up with the situation now.

Militarization

I think with the current situation country needs their support. But getting the support of military officials for all administrative matters is not a good sign. That can go on a different path. Regarding the pandemic, it's unprecedented and we did not have any plan. But for the administrative work, there are government

sectors and administrative specialists. They should plan and they should decide what to do. Also, administrative officials should be more efficient. Otherwise people will get used to believing that using security forces is a better option to manage administration.

Health Sector Support



The Covid 19 Vaccination Card issued by Sri Lankan Health officials

Health officials tried to do their best and to do what they can do in the situation. There are issues of lack of resources in the sector and also now the pandemic was there closer to two years. Still there is no proper plan or mechanism to see and do things for the long run at the national level. Today, I went to get vaccinated. There was a huge rush in the centre. No one follows social distancing. That's risky for the further transmission of the virus among people. People were trying to get the vaccination and no one was there to properly manage the situation. Also some health officials are taking leave citing fake reasons. At this point, they all have a big responsibility. I think everyone should have a heart and conscience and work to overcome this. We can not judge people because from their side they may have to face a hard time.

Vaccination

Most of the people who are over 60 and over 30 have been vaccinated. but still, there are many to be vaccinated who are under 30. Earlier, there was a slight delay for giving the second dose for some of 60+ people. That's a planning issue. If someone got vaccinated today there will be a plan that after so many days they would be given the second dose. Also, for the first round

many people received Sinopharm and then Pfizer. The planning should be better.

Education

In regards to these people who have money and other privileges, they have facilities to educate their children. but for the poor people they suffer and children have to run kites. Most of them don't have a phone and also have no money to spend on data charges. No shops have open to recharge. They don't know how to recharge through e payments. They don't have facilities. Also lack communication among teachers and children. Also, the Teacher's wage issue is there. If one teacher wants to connect with 40 students by calls that also have to spend from their pocket. They also face many difficulties under the circumstances. Also some people have broken phones and there are no places to repair them. Also, the majority of teachers and students don't have the technical knowledge needed for this. Even parents don't know some simple matters. sometimes they give up. There will be two three-year gaps in the education field. I don't know what kind of consequences will emerge in the future.



Environment

There are not many issues related to that as I know, The fisheries communities in Negambo and costs faced multiple constraints after the express pearl ship incident and with the impact of it. but now most of are going to fisheries activities. Even weather pattern changes are there on this side now with the monsoon rain. They can not sell as usual. They have to follow

quarantine rules. Sand and Clay mining issues usually exist here for few decades.

Misinformation

Nothing occurred related to that. Not that many issues related to minority communities, but there are some related to the Islamic community in Negambo, with people saying they are dirty and not following the rule.

Mental Health

Particularly the elderly people are under immense pressure. Usually when there is any kind of issue they use to go to the temple or church or any other religious places and do prayers. Under these circumstances, they could not be involved with the temple or church. They have to do it at home. They are stuck at home for the long term now and their lifestyle has become very monotonous.

Domestic Violence, Drug consumption

There could be issues. But I have not particularly notice that. People are under immense pressure. These types of issues occur because of it.

Usually, in this area, people used to consume a lot of alcohol and drugs. Drug consumption has not particularly increased because of the fewer supplies.

Positive Adaptations

Home gardening has increased. It is a good thing. If people could continue this for the long term, even after the pandemic, that will be better.

Interview 13

The interviewee was a male, 54 years of age from the Indigenous Community, living in Dambana. He is a government school teacher working in Dambana. He is also an Author. He was the first member selected to a University from the indigenous Community in Dambana.



Indigenous Community in Dambana

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

We are not in a state of stress like in the urban society. After the Vedda people came out of the jungle, they had to give up Chena farming and join the activities of societies around us. They were involved with the tourism industry and daily wage work. They sold some things they could find in the jungle to tourists. Some people made a living selling handicrafts like necklaces they make from natural items. We eat our food in a very simple way with things around us. We have a natural and simple diet. We did not come to the level of stress seen in urban areas. Life is lived with very simple ways. If I found something, I ate that. If I could not find anything, I would be hungry. At the same time, I have a very resilient mentally. For us, there is no such thing as a complete loss of things like other societies. We have most of the simple needs in our village.

The situation in Dambana Indigenous Village

About 150 PCR tests were done last week and 144 were reported to be positive. Another 100 PCR tests have been done today. The virus has been found in the body. There have been three deaths so far, including Uruwarige Heen Manika, the wife of the leader Uruwarige Wannila Aththo in last week.

Were there any practices followed by the community with indigenous medicine?

There was nothing special about it. Most of the time I saw it hanging Kohomaba Athu (Neem Leaves) in many houses. Most of them used to drink kottamalli. Apart from that, I did not see anything special that we changed among ourselves. Our people were not in a great panic. Deaths have happened very recently.

The situation on the imposition of quarantine laws

Then there is no such problem because our village does not have a strong connection with the city. We can manage everything with the resources around the village.

Health sector support

Since there was no problem from the beginning, there was not much intervention. After several reports were received yesterday, there was more attention. Guidance and support were given by doctors and other health officials.

Vaccination program

There was a slight delay in giving the second dose of the vaccine. The one that could have been taken three days ago was received only yesterday. Besides, it was done at a good level. Except for those who have other health issues, Like everyone else, they willingly went and got vaccinated.

Government subsidies

We received those properly. There are a lot of outsiders; people who have a big idea about us also provide much support.



A garage worker in Nallur, Jaffna resuming work after the travel restriction lifted

Impact on the field of education

The worst problem came from that side. Our children do not use any of the distance learning methods. Our teachers do not know that. We do not have those resources needed for online education. The children do not use those and don't know how to use them. We tried to conduct it by distributing notes and papers through their parents. After a while, I took a got those back through mom and dad for examine. Besides that, we didn't have the background to go online. The kids aren't too far away either. For that reason, it was possible to connect with them. Teachers who are far away from the village could not do it. They tried to send the question papers to the children by talking on the phone as much as possible. But it failed. I think there was no special intervention even from the government and the Ministry of Education. There was no special intervention except for things that were common to all. Also, some of the older students have married during these times started a new chapter of their lives.

False information

Things like that did not happen because our people are not people who take this situation seriously. They are people who only care about

today. Only now are they thinking about the future to some extent.

Mental health

It's a bigger problem than the disease. It's a social problem, but it's very different in our indigenous community, especially because of simple living. It's a big difference overall. The effect of this is something that will last for a long time. Even the things that have come up as a solution to this are far from going to the countryside, including Dambana. Parents can adapt it to the generation that has an understanding of it. It can be done. But there is no understanding of education in rural areas. There is no understanding of new tools. This has a severe impact on the rural poor and even more than the tribal story. The next generation was moving away from nature and humanity more and more with other changes in the world. There is a big reason to double or triple it the human side of children. This will need an extra effort.

Deployment of security forces for civil administration

It would not have been a problem in our area. In Dambana, however, such additional interventions are minimal. On the other hand, the government or the private sector is more specialized in our community and everyone helps us very close to us.

Community adaptation

There is a tendency to do more home gardening and farming.

Some extra Comments

In urban areas, there was a lack of time for family members, parents and children. We did not have such a situation. No matter what we did, everyone in the community was in a place where we could come home in the evening. The understanding of the importance of simple lifestyles has increased. Otherwise, when there was a problem, there was a group of people who went to the nearby shops and discussed things.

Because those situations were gone, those things had to be done at home. There are some good things. There are good things in some areas. There are a lot of other side effects with the complexities of the economic pattern we are used to in outer society. If the world was where we are today, we would not have so many problems when Covid hit.

Interview 14

The interviewee was a female, 55 years of age from the Ceylon African Community, living in Syrambiyadi, Puttalam. She is a folk musician by the profession.



The members of Ceylon African community while performing their folk musical act.

What is your experience of the pandemic and how it has changed your life patterns?

The living conditions of our community were shaped by doing something scattered and living with what we earned from them. For example, we participated in various cultural activities, concerts with our own Kfir Manja music. It is also one of our additional income sources. We were not like those who perform on a large scale. We did not have a source of income to save a lot from it. Sometimes there were doing a lot of shows and sometimes none. It was different. It was as if we were stuck in one place with the pandemic. Some artists received pension schemes through government intervention, but we received very little, and in such a background we had a lot of trouble with Corona. This was a situation of no one expected.

Now some work in shops and others work for daily wages. They are in a lot of trouble with this lockdown situation. The economy and income have gone down on all fronts. There are many obstacles. Also, our children were all stuck. It took a lot of effort for the future education of the children but it all came to a halt. I also have three children. The first child has completed his schooling. The second child is involved with advanced-level studies. Another one is in grade 6. there were many obstacles in the way of online education, especially with the increase in the cost. The cost of mobile data increased and in some areas, the connectivity is very weak. Also, lack of other facilitations like mobile phones and types of equipment is the other issue. There are about 22 Ceylon-African families in the community in Sirambiadi. There are about 7 or 8 families in other cities. Some of them are people who work in garments.

Quarantine law and the implementation of the lockdown.

There was no special problem. The inability to work, the loss of income and other problems were the main problems. They gave rice, brought rice, there was such help. There was no caste or religious difference. The temple members gave to the church members, the church members gave to the temple people. At the early phase of the pandemic, everyone helped. Now it is very difficult. Farming is less. Carpenters work is less. Hire work is less.

Government relief

We also received relief from the government. We received everything that was given in the same way as others.

Until now, our Ceylon African community has not been infected that much. But recently it has increased. Last week someone working for Cargills in Negombo got infected and is still being quarantined in Negombo. Even in the village there are cases. But it is less in the surrounding areas. There is another 15-year-old girl who was infected recently. So far no deaths within the community.

Support received from the health sector



The Support of the Health officials in a Vaccination Centre in Kandy.

The support we need from the health sector is maximized, especially during quarantine at home. Also, there was very good support through vaccination. Most people over the age of 30 have received the first dose. Other people may have received the second dose. There was no particular problem. They have well conducted the support awareness and the management of the major health needs.

Education

The breakdown in the education sector has had a significant impact on children in particular. Even in my family, my second child is currently studying for A / L in the Commerce stream this year. The lack of solutions to the problems is one of the reasons for the breakdown in education. The ones that came online have also stopped. In addition, the necessary lessons have been exchanged and worked. The youngest child is in the 6th year. Even if he has a need, it is not possible to provide two such mobile phones. They have to manage the same phone for online education but there are sometimes time clashes with their timetables. In such cases, one could not be able to join the classes.

Mental health condition

More or less everyone has problems in this regard. But now they are managing and everyone is working as hard as they can. Most of the children have stress and anger issues even sometimes my children face that. Also, there is an increase in drug use, especially among the

youth. But there is not much understanding about the exact situation.

Domestic violence

It seems to me that this is not a big problem. More than usual, everyone is at home. trying to do things collectively.

Positive tendencies

There is a significant increase in home gardening. Everyone is accustomed to growing chillies or any kind of vegetables and herbal plants. The reason for that is they are at home and because of the space. it helps them to ease economic problems and food security problems to an extent.

Militarization and quarantine law

It was not a big problem. A lot of awareness was done. In the beginning, security forces also distributed mouth masks and sanitizers. Everyone understands the situation and follows the quarantine law.

Misinformation

In the beginning, when there was the disease there were some problems based on social media. Things like this happen today. But we got clearer about covid from those who know about those.

Environmental issues



Shelters in an estate in Monaragala.

I did not see such things as environmental damage. Since there are more coconut estates in Sirambiadi. there is no way things like

deforestation can happen in this area. but in some areas, the wild elephant issue is there. Due to that, in dry seasons the crop damage has increased so much.

Additional comments

Everyone has a lot of economic and educational problems. We lost our musical activities and extra income. There was nothing special about the community. There were times when some political parties came looking for our details. but I think we all should collectively cope with these hard times. That's the only way to overcome the pandemic and other issues.

Interview 15

The interviewee was a male, 30 years of age from Palmadulla, Rathnapura. He is working in administration and Human Resource Management in a private hospital in Colombo

What is your experience of the pandemic? And how it has changed the life patterns?

I am working in the administrative sector in a private hospital. With the crucial contribution of the sector under the pandemic situation, my experience is completely different.

Usually, I had a very busy professional life even before the pandemic. With the pandemic, most of the normal life patterns got changed. Lockdown, curfew and some other methods have been used to control the situation. With this many of the people who work at the executive level had to follow distance working methods. They got much time to spend at home, at the first phase of the pandemic they all were enjoyed the space they got to be with their family members. but this situation is quite different for me as a health sector-related worker. Usually, before the pandemic, I used to go home on weekends and days. but things became more complex and busy in the sector with the pandemic. The higher responsibility came to the health sector workers for controlling the situation. It was broadening day by day with the enlargement of the pandemic.

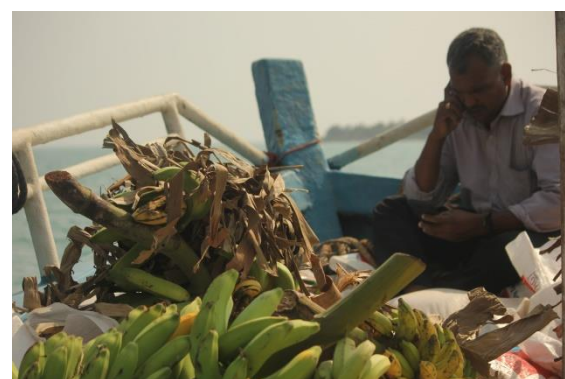
Most of the time I had to stay at hospital as a part of my family. Even the risk was a bit higher because most of the time we have to work with the people. My wife is a lawyer and she lost most of her income due to the inability to continue Court procedures under these circumstances. Most of the time she had to stay at home but I had my income so things were not difficult in that respect. But with the increasing busyness, the distance from my family was broadened. Usually, I used to have 3 or 4 days off, but that was limited. Most of the time the relationship with my wife and the family had to be maintained distantly over the phone. Most of the other social interactions were limited to cyberspace. Related to my work in the hospital, I had to constantly find dynamic solutions to face new issues.

Law and order

I had a different observation related to this. Since March 2020 I had to report to the hospital for work, even during the lockdowns. In the 1st lockdown in March 2020 people were very unfamiliar with the measures. The police and security were very strict on controlling the situation and even the people had an immense fear of things that were happening around them. Particularly with the information that they received related to the situation in Sri Lanka and around the Globe. Everything was closed. The essentials were only given to Forces, Health Sector & Pharmacy. While going home in Ratnapura and while going to work in Colombo I have seen this. There were not many vehicles on the road. There were only the vehicles related to tri forces, police and Health Sector. Also, police were constantly patrolling and observing the people's actions. but when it comes to the second lockdown things became to change. When it came to the food supply, even within the hospital we also faced many constraints in the first lockdown, because we had not stored food items. Mainly The suppliers could not continue with their supply chains. With the second lockdown, the meaning of essentials had been reinterpreted and broadened. Everything has become essential. Each company claimed to

be providing different categories of essentials. Except for wedding halls and beauty parlours, many other things became essentials. Also, vehicle sales and communication-related things have become essential. Also when it comes to the current situation many other things have become essentials except a few things. There are many people and vehicles are on the road nowadays. Yesterday after work, I was walking to Borella from Narahenpita to go to my residence. I observed that 60% of the vehicles which were passing me had stickers labelling them as essentials service. The police and other security officials know that even if they stopped those people and questioned them, they would say something a reasonable to justify their movement. Police are also fed up with that and they are not checking anything. During the second lockdown, they checked the vehicles related to the health sector too. But now no one is checking. Only they check if a SI, OIC or other higher officials are observing it. Otherwise, nothing is restricted under the current lockdown, because the police are also fed up.

Also, some other people are going out during the lockdowns now because of the impact on their livelihood and income. They are not caring about arrests; however, they are trying to do something to earn something.



Delft island Jaffna

Livelihood

In my village shops have enough income because of the demand. If someone wants something to buy they inform the shop through

the phone and they collect those goods later. Otherwise, shop owners have different mechanisms to deliver those by three wheels or motorbikes. But there is a shortage of food essentials. Also, most people have adapted to home gardening. That supply has increased towards the market. Also, most of the shops and small shops have increased. Also, people who are working in the government sector have to report for work at least for two days in the week. Also, they receive a salary. Some private sector works stations also like that. But daily workers like mobile food sellers have to face difficulty to sustain their livelihood. Now it has been over one and half years. I assume they have also adapted to do something in some way under these difficulties. Also somehow other workers like masons and carpenters have some work now - more than they did earlier. The holders standard of living of those daily wage workers, and small business holders has dropped down. However, they have adapted to the situation in different ways.

Health Sector's Support

Private hospitals don't accept 65+ people who have been infected with Covid 19. That's because there is a high probability that their situation could turn into a critical status. Private hospitals don't suppose to take that risk. Therefore they admit Covid patients under 65. Some people called me and checked the status of admitting beloved members of their family over 65 in the hospitals. Most of them are my friends. They were saying there is not enough room in government hospitals. I helped admit some of them to our hospital. One of them was 72 years old and the other one is 76 years old. Once I tried to admit 86 year old person but that did not work. With the spread of this pandemic, I felt that both the ends of the health sector did not prioritise the elderly population. Also now people think if they have vaccinated the risk is over, no need to furthermore caring about the pandemic. Also now most of the infected people have to go through the home quarantine process. Also at the early phase of this pandemic if someone has been infected the

contact tracing has been done very intensively. Those who were identified as close contactors also had to go through the quarantine process. Also, people took this very seriously. But now it's not like that. Even some of those who have identified as infectors roam around in society. But overall the Health officials have made a great effort to control the situation. Even without caring about the risk they have with the virus. In the private sector patients have to pay for the service. Both the ends of the health sector sacrificed a lot to cope with the situation.

Vaccination

The government has prioritized the vaccination process as the only way to overcome the risk of this pandemic. But now the lockdown is not an effective way to control the situation. Earlier the vaccination process had many difficulties. But now it is processing in a better way.



Children are cycling to the school in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka

Education and Mental Health

The daily lifestyle of the people has been changed dramatically with the pandemic. If we take the Children who are in schooling age cannot go to the schools. Most of the time, they used to stay at home, involved with online education. On the one hand, they have more love from their parents and family members. But on the other habd, school-age children need to associate with peer groups. That aspect is completely missing. Sports, aesthetics and many other collective activities are also impossible to conduct. The method of online teaching is quite different and it has increased the pressure on students. In the past, the syllabus and curricula were the causes for increasing the stress. Now

the method of teaching also adds additional pressures and stresses. In addition, the majority of the low-income families could not access and afford the equipment and network connections. The data charges are quite high. These dynamics of education are reshaping the social stratification.

Also when it comes to virtual education students are becoming more backward than when they experienced classroom-based education. When teaching in a classroom, the teachers has a of different methods to interact and get the involvement of the students. Online platforms are limiting that. The space to do things freely and learn things has shrunk with this change in the education sector. Educational life has multiple chapters. Each chapter helps students to learn and understand things. But now they only have the chapter of the lesson online.

Interview 16

The interviewee was a 37-year-old female from the Tamil Community in Jaffna, working as a Women's Development officer in the Northern Province

What is your experience of the pandemic and how has it changed your life patterns?

It has changed most of our earlier life patterns, on a family and personal level as well as on a professional level. My aunty was living with me for the last one and a half years. She was around 70 years old, but last month she passed away of COVID. After she was infected we had to admit her to a hospital. We checked with the Jaffna Hospital and it was impossible because of the overcrowded with many patients. Then we had to take her to a private hospital. So after two days, she passed away. Usually in Tamil Hindu culture, there are traditional rituals we followed in funerals. We could not do any for her because she died of COVID, most of our relatives could not attend. The loss of my aunty has heavily impacted us psychologically.

Otherwise, in Jaffna, poor people are suffering a lot. Most of the people who were doing daily

wage work have faced multiple difficulties. Some people suffer to borrow Rs 100. Some families just ate one meal a day because of the poverty level they are facing. The government conducted some relief schemes, but that is not enough with the current living cost in the country.

Livelihood



Fishing Boat in Unnichai Baticaloa

Those in the formal sector have a monthly income and can fulfill their essential needs. Informal sectors like fisheries and agriculture face difficulties to sell their harvest. because of the lockdown and lack of space for it. It's quite a loss for them with the amount they are investing.

In the post-war period, Jaffna had a growing tourism industry in certain areas, that has shrunk to zero. There were mainly three types of tourists - local tourists from the South, diaspora tourism and foreigners. That base has been limited. January to April this year there was an increase of local tourism but after the Third spike at the end of the April that has completely stopped. Most of these small level businesses had a lot of income through tourism but now they have lost that income.

Law and order

The over-involvement of the military is not satisfactory among the people in Jaffna. Even for health-related work and other administrative work, they are present. One of the doctors said some people did not want to get the vaccine, because of the military involvement in the process.

Except for the first lockdown last year, all the time people did not keenly follow the travel restrictions and lockdown. Most of the time they were travelling for work, no social distancing. Some people did not care about wearing masks, and sanitization. I am under quarantine now, but if I like I can go to town or outside. No one is there to follow up about it. I understand the risk of the scenario and my responsibility therefore I am not going anywhere. Domestic violence and violence against women has increased. Online-based bullying and harassment have also increased.

Education

Lower-income families suffer to fulfill the basic requirement for online education. People in the Ariyalai area which is near to DC office also got a lot of support from the NGO sector for equipment, data charges, tuition fees. Those students were able to continue online education without any difficulties. In another area that was recently resettled, an organization supported teachers to print some notes which was distributed among students. In Karainagar, one of the school principals said the teacher has the facilities and they were willing to deliver online classes but students and families face a lack of facilities like smartphones. Grades 4 and 5 unofficially conducted classes in school hence they have to face the scholarship exam.

Government Support

Some families who were under quarantine complained they did not receive essential support. Some of the ration packs and goods are of lower quality, while the quantity was not enough even for a week.

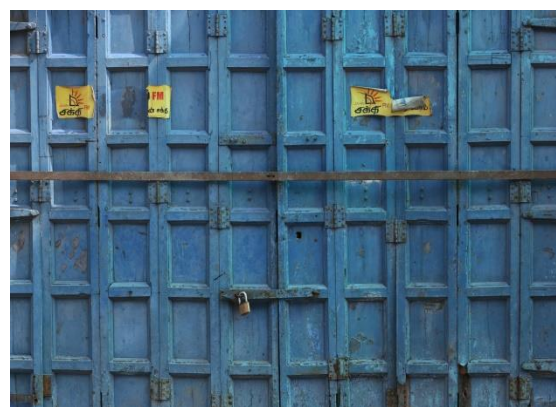
The Rs. 5000 initiative is one of the most needed relief initiatives but it's still problematic whether this amount is enough to manage the essential expenditure under these economic circumstances.

In most of the areas, they offer it as cash. Most of the time a 5000 rupee note. There were some problems for the rural people to change that

note into easy cash for their essential purchasing during the lockdowns.

When the officials started to distribute Rs. 5000 allowance they considered the Family Card system which was started in the wartime period under the military for subsidiary distribution. It includes all the details about the family members and GS uses it as a way to collect information about the people in certain GS divisions. Because of this, people who still did not have permanent residence addresses did not get the benefit of Rs. 5000 allowances even if they have multiple difficulties.

Within the process, there were many issues. Particularly with the political influences, exclusion of the eligible and most needed people. There have been many complaints have been made. Many they distributed this through inviting the beneficiaries to GS office or other selected community places which are possible to maintain social distancing.



Closed Shop in a Isolated Area in Jaffna Town due to Covid expansion

Health Sector Support

They are doing a great job. Several times I went to Jaffna teaching hospital, they were supporting people a lot. Even the managing process was quite appreciable. This is a situation where we all realized the importance of the free health system. If we go to a private hospital the cost is quite high. Majority of people who don't have a good economic background unable to afford that. Even compared to private hospitals, government hospitals are providing a very

efficient service. They have advanced facilities as well as good experts. I am happy and appreciate their service during this time.

Vaccination

One reason for it is the shortage of vaccines and the other main issue is many people don't have a good attitude about getting the vaccine. It's still going on for all the age groups over +18.

Misinformation

There is a better flow for getting awareness on COVID and other certain initiatives. Some rumours circulated through social media creating misunderstandings among the people. As an example, there was news about death that occurred after the vaccination which created massive disbelief among the people.

Mental Health

It is a broadening issue day by day due and nobody properly recognizes this. There is no mechanism to identify and support them. The situation is very similar to the post-war period. Nobody has given attention to it.

During this period due to the limitation of movement, lockdown, deaths of beloved family members, economic situation, poverty, over usage of online platforms people face many psychological issues. like stress and depression. On another side, the people who have been psychologically affected think only that happens to bad people and bad people only require support to overcome issues. In our tradition there are some myths, and they don't like to openly talk about those psychological issues. Northern Health Department introduced a hotline to inform about these types of needs.

Also, some other NGOs introduced a hotline service and counselling service for the people.

Domestic Violence

There are many issues related to that. but because of the lockdown no one openly talks about those even it happened at home. Also usually when there is a problem they used to go to temples and religious places to pray and overcome the burdens. That also could not do during this time.

Positive adaptation

Usually in Jaffna, home gardening is a common practice. during these times it has increased. With the jobs and occupations family members did not have enough time to be together talk and discuss things, but this limitation of movement created a better space for that.

Youth have initiated online discussions about some issues like environment protection, women empowerment. That is a good continuous process, to get aware and find the solutions from the community on certain issues.

Other Comments

This is a crisis, but we have to however face this. That's the only way to overcome it.



Members of Spinal Cord injury Association in Uyirilai, Northern Province during a meeting about impact of the pandemic on their members .