SAFE Foundation

EMPOWERING CSOS TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SRI LANKA (ECCT)

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Fiscal Year 2024, (October 2023 – September 2024)

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SAFE FOUNDATION

Annual Progress Report: Fiscal Year 2024

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Empowering Civil Society Organizations to Combat Human Trafficking in Sri Lanka

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I. ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECCT	Empowering CSOs to Combat Human Trafficking in Sri Lanka
EDO	Economic Development Officer
EOI	Expression of Interest
FEDO	Foreign Employment Development Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GND	Grama Niladari Division (Village level administrative unit)
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
KII	Key Informant Interview
MWF	Migrant Worker Forums
NUPAS	Non-US Organization Pre-Award Survey
OECRP	Organization of Environment and Children Rights Preservation
PMLT	Program Learning and Management Team
PMN	Prathiba Media Network
RAHAMA	Recovery and Humanitarian Action Management Agency
SAMADANA/M	Seemasahitha Samadana Samithiya
SHG	Self-Help Groups
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SM	Safe Migration
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual progress report includes the results of FY24 of the project 'Empowering CSOs to Combat Human Trafficking in Sri Lanka (ECCT)'. The time period it covers is from October 01, 2023, to September 30, 2024. The report includes the various achievements of the project with regard to its outcomes, outputs, and activities during the reporting period.

The ECCT project continued to be implemented with a coalition of four partner organizations, namely, SAMADANA/M, OECRP, PMN, and RAHAMA. SAFE Foundation leads the coalition directly implementing the project in four of the twelve target districts. The coalition partners cover the remainder with each implementing the project in two districts.

The third year of the project focused on strengthening the structures put in place by the project in the first two years. The key structures include the network of 120 CSOs through which the project established Migrant Worker Societies (MWSs) mostly deriving from SHGs of the partner CSOs. The other important structure is the District/ Divisional Anti-Trafficking and Migration Forums set up in target districts and DS divisions. Much capacity building and networking have been undertaken to work in and through both the above structures in order to reach migrant communities and vulnerable groups of people with regard to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration. The project has also emphasized a lot of advocacy and lobbying to make positive changes in support services and institutions that are in place for the well being of migrant workers and those who are vulnerable to trafficking and also for victims of trafficking.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Key achievements during the fiscal year 2024 (FY24) include the following:

120 partner CSOs have signed MOUs for FY24. These CSOs were from SAFE regions, namely North-Western and SAFE North-Central regions, and from partner organization's target districts. The signing of MOUs was completed during the first three-quarters of the project. The project established 118 new MWSs at village level through the networks and SHGs of the above CSOs. By the end of the FY23 a total of 459 Migrant Workers' Societies have been established in the target 12 districts under the ECCT project.

A total of 62 District and Divisional Anti-Trafficking Forum meetings were held during FY24. About100% of these forums included the representation of the members from MWS and CSOs. In addition, 1147 government officers, most of them being members of District and Divisional Anti-Trafficking forums, have been given trainings on TIP and safe migration enhancing their skills and potential contribution they can make to combat TIP and deliver services to migrant populations.

A total of 2,820 persons have been trained in the prevention of human trafficking during the reporting period and an additional 718 first responders have been trained on victim identification. The project has trained 99 journalists on TIP and safe migration. Further, the project trained 212 youth on soft skills/ life skills aiding in combatting human trafficking and promoting safe migration. In addition to this, a total of 40,019 people has been reached through awareness activities of the project.

2. OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Country level changes in context:

The Political Situation:
The year 2024 will be a memorable year in the history of Sri Lanka with the most notable turn of events being the 2024 Presidential Election and its resulting implications. It can also be looked at as a point where the progression of multiple incidences in the past years and their effects climaxed at a national political level.

By 2019 beginning Sri Lanka was seemingly experiencing political and economic stability compared to the previous years. But after the Easter bombings this changed drastically, while the prevailing government became unpopular leading to the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in the latter part of 2019. His rise to power and fame was short lived as the aftermath of COVID19 related lockdowns, restrictions on movement, loss of foreign income due to many migrant workers returning back to the country, drastic decline in exports and trade, the government's decision to ban inorganic fertilizer etc., led to a rapid and unavoidable shrinking of the economy with the country's foreign reserves plummeting. Despite measures to stop the decline of the economy, the country plunged into bankruptcy resulting in dire shortages of essential goods, the most notable of it being fuel for domestic consumption and for industries. This turn of events left the people raging against the government breaking way into mass protests that finally let to the dismantling of the Rajapaksa government in 2022, mid-way into the presidential term of Mr. Gotabaya. Thereafter, the new president Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe, appointed through a parliamentary vote, served the rest of the presidential term and made notable progress towards stabilizing the economy securing the IMF loan scheme. At the end of his term in September 2024, the mistrust towards previous regimes in the past years and decades, and anger at what had become of the country, the people voted differently, choosing the NPP leader Mr. Anura Dissanayake as the country's president. This is the first time Sri Lanka has elected a left-leaning president. Thus, it seems that Sri Lanka's political landscape is migrating to previously unexplored territory as preparations for the General Elections are underway and people of the country striving to vote for governments who would not repeat the grave errors of the past but who could actually carve a better future for all people.

The Economic Situation of the Country:
The economy of the country did not undergo any drastic changes in 2024. The IMF mission summarized the macroeconomic development of the country after concluding a mission in the first week of August 2024 saying that "The economic reform program implemented by the Sri Lankan authorities is yielding commendable outcomes. The recovery continues with real GDP posting three consecutive quarters of expansion, and growth accelerating to 5.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2024. Inflation remains contained below the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's (CBSL) 5 percent target and domestic borrowing rates have declined. Gross international reserves increased by US$1.2 billion during the first half of 2024 and reached US$5.6 billion. Fiscal revenue collections increased during the same period. Going forward, these improvements need to translate into better living conditions for all of Sri Lanka's people."[1]

According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's press release in September 2024, the mission chief noted that 'Headline inflation, as measured by the year-on-year (Y-o-Y) change in the Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI, 2021=100)1 entered into negative territory, recording a deflation of 0.5% in September 2024, for the first time since September 2015.' It further concluded, 'the realized quarterly average headline inflation for Q3-2024 is in line with the Central Bank's inflation projections. Looking forward, headline inflation is expected to remain notably below the 5% target in

[1] https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/08/02/pr24298-sri-lanka-imf-staff-concludes-visit

the forthcoming months, while deflation could continue for a few months, driven by changes to administratively determined prices and easing of supply conditions. Nevertheless, over the medium term, inflation is expected to gradually align with and remain around the target level, aided by appropriate policy measures.'[2] Thus, on a macroeconomic level, the economy of the country as a whole appears to be on a promising path to a solid and stable recovery.

Although the overall recovery and subsequent performance of the economy are commendable, even monumental, as admitted by the IMF Senior Mission Chief Mr. Peter Breuer saying "With Sri Lanka's *knife-edged recovery* at a critical juncture, sustaining the reform momentum and ensuring timely implementation of all program commitments are critical to cementing the hard-won economic progress to date and put the economy on a firm footing", the middle income and low income families still find it difficult to make ends meet. This is mainly due to the income of families has not increased in comparison to the increase in prices of food and other essential goods since the hyperinflation of goods occurred in 2022. There have been many promises of wage increases by the previous government and also by the new administration but they are yet to materialize. Thus, the drive to increase income is clearly obvious among all groups of people, especially the lower income families. This is still the main reason for high numbers of internal and external migration for employment among the people of Sri Lanka. Indeed, they are eagerly waiting until *the '(economic) improvements above translate into better living conditions for all people'* as highlighted by Mr. Peter Breuer.

TIP and Safe Labour Migration

As per the 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sri Lanka by the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, the country continues to be graded under Tier 2. The report stressed that 'the Government of Sri Lanka does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Sri Lanka remained in Tier 2.'[3] The reasons cited as the positive efforts were, among others, increasing convictions of labor traffickers and identifying and providing services to more trafficking victims and making policy changes to strengthen victim care, and reporting more victims participated in criminal justice proceedings.

However, the report stressed the need for the government to be more committed to increasing its efforts in combating Trafficking in Persons stating 'However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated and prosecuted fewer trafficking cases, and sentences for convicted traffickers remained lenient, which undercut efforts to hold traffickers accountable, weakened deterrence, created potential security and safety concerns for victims, and was not equal to the seriousness of the crime. The government appeared unwilling or unable to hold allegedly complicit officials accountable for trafficking, even suspected cases of child sex trafficking. The government did not cooperate with foreign law enforcement on trafficking cases despite many such cases involving migrant workers abroad. The government also referred fewer trafficking victims to services, and officials did not report ordering restitution for or providing compensation to trafficking victims.' It is really important to note that the report highlights the importance of cooperating with foreign law enforcement regarding cases involving migrant workers abroad, as Sri Lanka only has a handful of BLAs with countries that workers migrate to.

The year 2024 also continued to show high numbers of people migrating overseas for work. As per the Workers' Remittances and labour migration bulletin 2024, the total workers' remittances during

[2] https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/press/pr/press_20240930_inflation_in_september_2024_ccpi_e.pdf

[3] https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/sri-lanka/

the first half of 2024 amounted to USD 3,144 million. Inflow of workers' remittances recorded a monthly average of USD 536 million during the second quarter of 2024, compared to a monthly average of USD 470 million in the second quarter of 2023. This is a trend that the government welcomes as it is a key contributor to the economy.

Total departures for foreign employment amounted to 149,810 during the first half of 2024 recording a monthly average of 24,968.[4] At the end of the year 2023, Total departures for foreign employment amounted to 297,656 with a monthly average of 24,805.[5] Thus, the number of people migrating to work overseas has not declined but retained the same trend compared to the previous year.

In addition to this, there are many who migrate within the country for work as well. This is common for people from rural areas and especially from the estate areas. There is not a lot of data available regarding the statistics of internal migration numbers and their breakdown. However, an overview of complaints and reports that the ECCT project comes across and from sources such as news media suggest that significant numbers of people fall victim to internal trafficking as well.

3. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The ECCT project has completed three years of its five-year project period.

The first year mostly included preparatory work such as staff recruitment and laying the basic framework needed for the project. During the second year of the project, most of the coalition partners established the MWSs and strengthened the SHGs to make the grassroots level networks of the project function to achieve the purpose of the project. A lot of capacity building efforts were taken to build the capacity of SAFE staff, coalition partner staff, and also the capacity of MWSs/ SHGs leaders and members. During the second year, the project also connected very closely with relevant stakeholders of the government that were deemed important for successfully combatting TIP in Sri Lanka and promoting safe migration. This formed the viable network for the project to meet its intended objectives. Important stakeholders include,

- a wide network of CSOs who are networked through SAFE and its four coalition partners in all 12 districts where the project is being implemented
- wide spectrum of government officers, departments, and administrators from the target districts, at provincial and national levels
- youth, journalists, and personnel connected to media
- representatives from related private sector entities

The project received favorable responses from all the above stakeholders which helped to make notable progress towards the objectives of the ECCT project. This pattern continued through the third year as well. The project is seen by many as a timely and effective activity in a context where there is a high level of migration of people in and out of the country.

The ECCT project continues to be implemented by the SAFE Foundation and coalition partners together with their civil society partner network. As the project completes its third year all organizations focus more on laying a more solid foundation for successful advocacy and higher-level engagement for sustainable, positive changes with regard to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration within their target area and their spheres of influence.

[4] https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/statistics/workers_remittances_and_labour_migration_bulletin_2024_q2_e.pdf
[5] https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/statistics/workers_remittances_and_labour_migration_bulletin_2023_q4_e.pdf

4. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The ECCT project's results that have been achieved in FY24 under each of the five key outcomes are described in this section. The following section is organized as per the revised indicators of the project which were adopted during FY24.

The outcomes are organized under the relevant three sub-purposes of the project. Each Sub purpose includes one or more outcomes. The outcomes include one or more outputs. The results are described against the outcome indicators (OCI) of the ECCT results framework. The outputs are assessed by specific output Indicators (OPI). The achievement results during the fiscal year 2024 are included in Annex 01 as a summary table.

SUB-PURPOSE 1: EXPANDED CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE BY PROMOTING CITIZEN AND GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

OUTCOME 1: STRENGTHENED CSOS' INSTITUTIONAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY TO COMBAT TIP AND PROMOTE SAFE MIGRATION.

(OCI 1.1 - # of MOUs signed between partner CSOs and ECCT coalition in place with roles and responsibilities clearly defined)

During FY 24 a total of 120 MOUs were signed thus the total number of CSOs functioning in the coalition is 120. The target for the year was also 120 under this indicator. Coalition partners of the ECCT project started their annual contracts a few months later than the fiscal year thus the signing of MOUs with their respective CSOs occurred in the second and third quarters of FY24. The signing of all the above 120 MOUs was completed by the third quarter of FY24.

The MOUs define the needs to be performed by the CSOs under the project. Field staff monitor their performance against the content of the MoUs and the CSOs report to the coalition partners and SAFE regions on a monthly basis on their achievements against expectations.

A notable achievement of working with such a large CSO network in all the districts of the ECCT project is that they tend to also reach additional groups of people and communities located in GNs, DSs, and even in districts that the project is not working in as they share the knowledge and awareness acquired by the project everywhere they work. Most CSOs work in additional GNs under other projects and development activities they have. The CSO coalition not only increases the reach of the project but also provides cross-organization learning to others and ECCT coalition partners.

Output 1.1: Increased technical capacity of civil society partners to prevent TIP, promote safe migration and victim identification

(OPI 1.1.1 # of people trained in the prevention of human trafficking (PS 5.3-15)
OPI 1.1.2: # of first responders trained on victim identification (PS 5.1-28)

The total number of people trained in the prevention of human trafficking in FY24 is 2,820 individuals. The annual target for this activity was 1,600 individuals. The people trained in the third and fourth quarters (989 and 1153 respectively) were higher than first planned thus the total achievement is higher than planned.

Similarly, the total number of first responders trained in victim identification is 718. This is slightly above the planned number of the year which is 200 as during the fourth quarter partners and regions trained 377 individuals on victim identification. Training CSO staff to make aware community-level leaders and leaders of SHGs and MWSs has a very high impact as they are the ones who are most likely to encounter victims of trafficking on a regular basis.

The groups of people trained include,

- CSO staff
- MWS/ SHG leaders
- Youth leaders
- Leaders from the estate communities
- Government staff, especially those who are members of the District/ Divisional Anti-trafficking and Migration Forums which include officers such as Divisional Secretaries, Probation Officers, Child Rights Promotion Officers, Women Development Officers, Counsellors, SLBFE officers, Labour Department Officers, Grama Niladharis, FEDOs, Samurdhi Officers, Economic Development Officers, Youth Officers and Career Guidance Officers

These training sessions aimed to enhance awareness and understanding of safe migration practices and the role each of these important stakeholders can play in the prevention of human trafficking and identifying victims of trafficking, those who are vulnerable to being trafficked, and referring the identified victims to the needed support services. The training programs on human trafficking and safe migration led to significant knowledge improvements among forum members as reported by partners and regions comparing the pre-and post-evaluations to assess the increase in knowledge levels of the participants. These results highlight the effectiveness of the training in enhancing the participants' awareness and understanding, especially for those from the government departments and institutions as the sustainability of the project relies heavily on an informed government mechanism.

Output 1.2: CSOs and coalition partners have received capacity building support to improve organizational performance
(**OPI 1.2.1**- Percent of USG assisted organizations with improved performance (CBLD-9)**,**
OPI 1.2.2 # of CSOs that follow through Organizational Development Action Plans (ODAP))

The total number of CSOs who have followed through with their organizational development plans is 52. The CSO visits were conducted by a team that is coordinated by the Senior Organizational Development Officer at SAFE national office. The CSOs are evaluated for their performance regarding record keeping, governance, financial systems in place and financial management, program management, human resource management, external networking, and resource management, active participation in ECCT-related activities – especially the District/ Divisional Anti-Trafficking and migration forums, formation of SHGs/ MWSs and their management and their own initiations for capacity enhancement and organizational development.



CSO visit to follow up on ODAP hosted by SAMADANA/M

Output 1.3: Formation and strengthening of village SHGs and MWSs to combat TIP and promote safe migration
OPI 1.3.1 # of MWSs established in target DS and GN divisions

The total number of MWSs established during FY24 is 118. Most of these MWSs were established in the first and fourth quarters. RAHAMA established 43 migrant worker societies in Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts during the fourth quarter. The formation or reactivation of MWSs was carried out with the guidance of FEDO and GN of each GN division. The MWSs are monitored and their



MWS newly formed by RAHAMA

capacity is built through the CSO partner network. Often times the MWSs refer the victims' cases they encounter and other issues they face regarding TIP and migration are referred to the partners.

Formation of the Migrant Worker Cooperative Society and Bank:

The notable achievement during the year was the formation of the MW Coop Bank by the SAFE Foundation. This is a cooperative society registered under the Cooperative Department. It is established to include returnees and aspiring migrants as its members to provide them with a variety of services. The key aims of this society among others is to,

- To provide security to the member's various pre- and post-immigration activities
- To intervene in activities necessary to stop human trafficking,
- Supporting members to achieve overseas ambitions and goals and give collaborative support to them for successful reintegration



Migrant Worker Cooperative Bank

Affiliated to this society is the Migrant Worker Cooperative Society and Bank which is a financial institution established by its members to reach higher levels of financial management. The principle behind the establishment of the above two entities is the sustainable development of migrant communities in target areas and at a broader scale, throughout the country.

MW Cooperative Banks were opened in Rambewa, Thirappane, and NP-East DS divisions in the Anuradhapura district on 25th of July, 2024 to provide sustainable economic support to the district migrant workers (MW). The aims of establishing a Coop Bank are to raise awareness about the migration cycle, educate migrant workers on safe and effective travel for work, enhance the economic stability among the migrant workers by encouraging savings habits, and provide guidance on professional training. These banks play a vital role in protecting migrant workers from exploitation and trafficking, ensuring their financial security, and safeguarding their rights.

On September 4, 2024, a training program was held for MWS leaders to enhance action plans aimed at ensuring the sustainability of migrant workers. A total of 34 members participated, including 30 females and 4 males. The training mainly focused on MW Coop Bank. The training also addressed the challenges faced over the past months in operating and working within the bank, while also improving the awareness of cooperative principles such as the global cooperative movement, cooperative identity, the six core values, and the four ethical principles. Participants learned about the historical development of cooperative businesses and became familiar with these principles. They also identified potential future issues and developed strategies to address them, including plans for the next two years focused on helping migrant workers save money and achieve their goals.



Training program for MWS leaders, Anuradhapura



Receiving the membership of the MW Coop Bank



OUTCOME 2: SENSITIZED, INFORMED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND ENHANCED COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS AND CSOS TO ADDRESS TIP AND PROMOTE SAFE MIGRATION.

(**OCI 2.1** - # of multi-stakeholder joint government-CSO forums functioning at national, provincial, district, and divisional levels enhanced collaboration between stakeholders and CSOs to address TIP and promote safe migration.)

The total number of multi-stakeholder joint government-CSO forums functioning at national, provincial, district, and divisional levels is 19. The number is only reported if the forums meet at least two times a year.

The establishment and functioning of multi-stakeholder joint government-CSO forums at various administrative levels (national, provincial, district, and divisional) have significantly enhanced collaboration between stakeholders and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Output 2.1 - Newly established /or reactivated intra-governmental cooperation mechanisms in the form of Divisional / District Anti-TIP and/or Migration Forums with clearly defined guiding documents.
(OPI 2.1.1 # of TIP and safe migration forum meetings held,
OPI 2.1.2 # of government officers trained on TIP and safe migration)

The total number of forum meetings held during FY24 is 62. There is relatively an even distribution of the meetings throughout the year. These forums serve as pivotal platforms for addressing Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and promoting safe migration through coordinated efforts and shared responsibilities according to the observation of the coalition partners and SAFE staff. District forums play a crucial role in operationalizing national and provincial policies at the grassroots level. They foster closer cooperation between district administrations, community leaders, MWS, local CSOs, and grassroots organizations working directly with vulnerable populations. Through these forums, issues specific to each district can be identified and addressed where the relevant officers pertaining

Divisional Anti-Trafficking and Migration Forum, Puthukudiyiruppu

to the responsibilities are present. This helps interventions to be more responsive to the immediate.

The total number of government officers trained on TIP and safe migration is 1147 persons most of them being members of the forums. Many partners emphasized the need to sensitize and train government officers who are a part of the forums as the sustainability of the forums is directly dependent on the ownership of government officers responsible for organizing forums. It was encouraging to see some District and Divisional secretariats requesting training for their officers as they realize the need for knowledge transfer regarding the subject.
Some of the trainings conducted are indicated below.

- 23 front-line Government officers trained by RAHAMA in case management. This capacity building aimed to provide knowledge and conceptual understanding of victim identification, case management cycle, challenges in case management, and possible solutions for identified challenges.
- 200 participants, including 125 females and 75 males, who were government officers were included in the Capacity Building Training organized by SAFE-NC region. Additionally, a capacity-building training session was conducted for Divisional Counseling Officers in Anuradhapura, targeting officers from both Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa districts.
- A total of 592 government officers have been trained, enhancing their knowledge of human trafficking and safe migration practices in three training programs. The programs effectively sensitized government officers on human trafficking and safe migration, allowing them to better identify issues at the ground level.

As representatives in district and divisional forums, these officers now have a clearer understanding of the forums' effectiveness and importance. They mentioned being better equipped to identify the causes and trends of unsafe migration and human trafficking in their respective working areas, which they can now discuss in quarterly forum meetings. Officers, such as Child Rights Officers, Women Development Officers, Probation Officers, Counseling Officers, Foreign Employment Development Officers, and Early Childhood Development Officers, are actively involved in field-level activities and have a deeper understanding of how issues in their areas contribute to trafficking and unsafe migration.

National Consultation with Provincial Councils to Combat Human Trafficking and Promote Safe Migration

On December 22nd and 23rd, 2023 SAFE Foundation, in close collaboration with the North Central Provincial Council, successfully conducted a national consultation with Chief Secretaries and Secretaries to the Ministries of provincial councils. As a result of the national consultation, SAFE submitted a set of recommendations to each participant in writing. Through the consultation, in which 22 high level officials from 8 provinces out of 9 provinces across the country, pledged to come up with a strategic plan in response to the recommendations. During this event, the SAFE Foundation put forward 14 advocacy initiatives that will contribute to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration in the country.

Output 2.2 – Migrant worker society and CSO representation at the Divisional and District Anti-TIP / Migration Forums is ensured

(OPI 2.2.1 Percentage of Divisional and District Anti-TIP / migration forums that included the representation of Migrant worker societies and CSO members)

Out of the forum meetings held during the year, about 100% included the participation of the Migrant worker societies and CSO members. This is encouraging to see as MWS members and the CSO staff are able to directly liaise with relevant government officers regarding the issues they face. It also contributes to building the relationship with them and the duty bearers are also encouraged to perform their duties in a responsible manner.

SUB PURPOSE 2: SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY BUILDING AND NETWORKING SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE ACTIONS AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS

OUTCOME 3: SENSITIVE AND EFFECTIVE MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO COMBAT TIP AND PROMOTE SAFE MIGRATION.

(OCI 3.1. # of electronic or print or social media content published through ECCT intervention, related to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration)

The total number of electronic or print or social media content published related to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration during the reporting period is 145. This included mediums such as,

- Social media posts
- Print material
- Videos
- Audios
- Banners
- Bill Boards

RAHAMA put Billboards were placed in an identified location by the Government system to provide awareness of Human trafficking. banners were also printed and distributed to the district secretariat and divisional secretariat for public awareness.

SAFE-NW region created different print and social media materials and published them as part of the ECCT intervention aimed at combatting trafficking in persons (TIP) and promoting safe migration. These included stickers, posters, leaflets (in both Sinhala and Tamil), an awareness video, and Facebook posts. The content provided an introduction to human trafficking, the legal framework for trafficking victims, and information on service institutions dealing with trafficking and migration issues. Additionally, as part of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons event on July 30th, seven billboards were installed at district and divisional secretariat office premises in the Puttalam and Kurunegala district to further raise awareness. (Please refer to Annex 03)







Banner at the Puttalam district Secretary's office premises

Output 3.1- Increased awareness and information on safe migration, TIP and redress mechanisms through media campaigns.
OPI 3.1.1 # of people received awareness on TIP, safe migration and victim identification

The total number of people reached through awareness during the year is 35,082. The number of people reached (approximate in some instances such as mass media communication methods) is given below.

- Social Media reach – 26286
- Print materials – 7990
- People reached through in-person awareness activities – 654
- In addition, the total number of banner and billboards distributed are 152 which may have made more people aware in addition to the above.

In person awareness activities consisted of methods such as street dramas and small group awareness sessions.


Street drama events were conducted in Puthukudiyiruppu and Maritimepattu divisions

SAFE-NC conducted five awareness sessions during the last quarter on child trafficking were conducted in Saliyapura, Galnewa, Paniyankadawala M.V., Rathmale M.V., and NAITA in Anuradhapura, attended by 48 children and youth. These sessions served as consultations to assess

the current level of child trafficking among the participants, utilizing various strategies such as creating risk maps and engaging in group discussions. Following this assessment, discussions were held to enhance participants' understanding of child trafficking.



Awareness Sessions for Children and Youth conducted in Anuradhapura

In Anuradhapura, during the Zonal Education Sports Meet, a significant awareness campaign was launched to highlight the critical issue of combating child trafficking in sports. Various strategies were employed to engage participants and attendees, including the use of number tags worn by athletes, certificates awarded to winners, and informative display boards. These materials prominently featured the message, "Let's Act Against Child Trafficking," reinforcing the campaign's objectives. Additionally, students actively participated by making a pledge against child trafficking in sports, demonstrating their commitment to promoting safety and protection for all young athletes.



Awareness related activities at the Zonal Education Meet, Anuradhapura, 2024

This comprehensive approach not only raised awareness but also fostered a sense of responsibility among participants, encouraging them to advocate for the well-being of their peers and contribute to the fight against human trafficking.

Another key initiative in Polonnaruwa has been the leaflet campaign conducted by the Sunila Women and Children Development Foundation. This campaign disseminates crucial information and contact details for the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), providing resources for individuals seeking safe migration options. To date, the campaign has successfully reached several key institutions, including the Youth Service Council, Technical College, Vocational Training Authority (VTA), and Manampitiya Police. This outreach is vital, as it not only informs the community about available support services but also encourages dialogue around the risks of human trafficking. The Foundation's goal is to expand this campaign to cover the entire Polonnaruwa district, enhancing awareness and access to resources across a broader audience. By increasing outreach efforts, the Foundation aims to empower more individuals with the knowledge needed to make safe migration choices, ultimately contributing to the fight against human trafficking in the region.



Leaflet including all crucial details and contact details important to aspiring migrants and their families

Provincial Legal Clinics and Career Fair

SAFE received invitations from both Chief Secretaries of the Northern Province and the Southern Province to contribute to a career Fair and a legal clinic respectively on Feb 20-21, 2024, and Feb 10, 2024, on anti-human trafficking and promoting safe migration. From February 20 to 21, SAFE and RAHAMA established a stall and help desk in the career fair organized by the Northern Province Chief Secretariat and educated a larger audience especially youth and aspirant migrants in Jaffna. Also, on February 10, SAFE established a stall with the collaboration of the Prathiba Media Network and conducted legal support among other legal services organized by the Southern Province Chief Secretariat at Nilwala Gangabada Udyanaya, Matara. This is an achievement that resulted from SAFE conducting a national consultation with Chief Secretaries across the country in December seeking collaboration at the provincial level to combat human trafficking and promote safe migration.

Commemoration of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2024

SAFE organized the commemoration of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on August 08, 2024. This was done with the collaboration of the Department of Immigration and Emigration at their auditorium. The event strengthened stakeholder collaboration and positioned the SAFE Foundation on the frontline in the fight against Human Trafficking. An art competition was organized before the event and 100 selected paintings were exhibited on August 7, 2024, and the final event was held on Aug 8, 2024, combined with an awarding segment in collaboration with the Department of Immigration and Emigration with the participation of 320 artists. Through the event, SAFE and its partners were able to connect with many stakeholders at the national level.

Output 3.2 - Increased capacity of journalists to report on and support TIP prevention and promote safe migration.

The total number of journalists trained under the project during the reporting period is 99 individuals.

PMN reported covering 60 journalists through two training programs. The 02 capacity building training programs for journalists focused on ethical reporting, case recording, and immediate

response and reporting to prompt government attention. A major change observed after conducting these programs is that these trained journalists were seen actively working to identify victims of TIP and irregular migration and provide relevant information about them. The feedback received by those who took part in the trainings indicated that it was the first time they had been informed about this kind of social issue and in this depth. They admitted to being able to identify human trafficking and human smuggling two different criminal offenses after the training they received through the programs.



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■ කඹුරුපිටිය-පී.එල්. ජයවර්ධන

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'Mawbima' newspaper clipping about the training for journalists in Matara district

Output 3.3 - Increased capacity of youth to conduct media outreach and awareness activities to support TIP prevention.
OPI 3.3.1 # of youth trained in soft skills/life skills through USG assisted programs (Youth 1)

A total of 212 youth were trained in soft skills during the third quarter.

Two youth training programs were conducted in the Kurunegala and Puttalam districts during the third quarter by the SAFE-NW region. These programs were aimed at empowering the target youth group to combat human trafficking and promote safe migration by enhancing their understanding and knowledge of social media content creation. The training included introducing new media tools, capacity building on social media activities, and improving skills for designing visual flyers. A total of 33 youth members were trained on using social media to promote safe migration. After the training, the trained youth actively engaged in creating posts and videos addressing human trafficking issues and promoting safe migration. In addition to this, PMN and OECRP also conducted youth training sessions in the second quarter.

SAFE – NC launched a program in August 2022, to engage 50 youth communities. Initially, 20 young individuals participated, but by early 2024, active membership had dropped to just 10, with only 4 actively engaging in project related activities. To expand membership, the Youth Club for Media (YCM) was established. YCM aims to conduct training sessions on leadership and journalism, with a new focus on addressing human trafficking through online platforms. SAFE-NW's initiative seeks to empower youth with essential skills while raising awareness about critical social issues.

This training program focuses on photography, videography, and editing for our Youth Media Group (YCM), initiated at the request of Mr. Kasturi Arachchi, the Chief Government Journalist of Polonnaruwa. It is part of the ECCT project against human trafficking conducted by the SAFE Foundation. In response to the request, the Government Information Department agreed to conduct a two-day training session for our youth group.





Youth participants in the program

This session took place at the District Secretariat Auditorium on July 19-20, 2024, under the patronage of the Polonnaruwa District Secretariat.

OUTCOME 4: EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND STRONGER POLICY FRAMEWORK TO COMBAT TIP AND PROMOTE SAFE MIGRATION WITH ACTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION.

OCI 4.1: # of laws, policies, strategies, and standard operating procedures adopted and/ or implemented with USG assistance.

During the reporting period, a very important milestone could be achieved Through the efforts of the ECCT project.
The National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) is the apex body that coordinates anti-human trafficking efforts in Sri Lanka. Since its inception in 2010, the NAHTTF did not receive a budgetary allocation from the government for its function. To overcome this gap SAFE engaged in an advocacy initiative by submitting a letter to the Finance Ministry's Budget Division highlighting to matter on October 19, 2023. SAFE made a press release regarding this on October 25, 2023 (Please refer to Annex 03). SAFE also highlighted the following points which can be covered under the budgetary allocation which will contribute significantly to advancing the impact of the ECCT project. They are,

1) Establishing and maintaining shelters for victims of human trafficking (VOT)
2) Active coordination and strengthening of district and divisional anti-trafficking forums and

As a result of this advocacy initiative the Government of Sri Lanka has allocated a provision of LKR 2.5 million has been allocated for NATTF from the National Budget 2024.

Advocacy Initiatives

The ECCT project has advocated for many changes with regard to structural amendments and practices within many systems to improve the safe migration of Sri Lankan people and combatting human trafficking in the country. The ECCT project first made these advocacy initiatives public, communicating them to relevant stakeholders at the highest level during the commemoration of the World Day Against Trafficking in 2023. In addition to this SAFE also organized a National Consultation with Provincial Councils to Combat Human Trafficking and Promote Safe Migration December 2023 where the same advocacy initiatives were communicated to Provincial Chief Secretaries. These initiatives included,

(1) Incorporating the subject of human trafficking and safe migration into the training agenda for the officials who receive new appointments through the Provincial Training Units by making available a resource pool for TIP and safe migration;
(2) Introducing a program for upskilling and recognition of prior learning (RPL) for aspirant migrants and returnee migrants as per the demands of the local and international job market;

(3) Allocation of provincial funds to relevant institutions that work with migrant returnees and integration of aspirant migrants into awareness-raising events;
(4) Request to advocate with the National Institute of Education to incorporate the subject of human trafficking and safe migration into the school curriculum;
(5) Request to conduct quarterly stakeholder forums at the provincial level according to the national labor migration policy;
(6) Request to conduct capacity-building programs for Early Childhood Development Officers, Probation Officers, and Officers working in Children's Homes, etc.;
(7) Sensitization program for health officials on identifying victims of trafficking and referral mechanisms;
(8) Introducing victim protection protocol to the tourism sector and women and child welfare sectors and;
(9) Incorporating human trafficking and smuggling and safe migration activities into the Provincial Council's Annual Action Plan. In addition to the recommendations proposed by the SAFE, participants had also made proposals as a result of the national consultations
(10) Awareness raising on human trafficking and safe migration through Cooperative Movement and Youth Affaire Unit, through the departments and units.
(11) Establishing a unit to share data for aspirant migrant workers and implementing the law on Victim Service Umbrella immediately;
(12) Awareness raising for the O/L and A/L students on seeking foreign jobs through diverse volunteer organizations under all the Provincial Ministry and the Rural Development Societies that strongly work at the grassroots level;
(13) Making provision for discussion on human trafficking and safe migration subject at least half an hour during every training by the Training Unit at the provincial council
(14) Advocacy for reviewing the structure of the Board of Directors of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and alternative mechanisms to the existing system

SAFE has consistently been collaborating with relevant government stakeholders to implement the above initiatives. During the fourth quarter of FY24 SAFE organized a series of meetings and discussions, which were also attended by consultants, to prioritize certain advocacy points taking into consideration the limited time the project has to achieve advocacy goals.

Thus, four advocacy initiatives were put together and finalized out of the above list and prioritized to be pursued during the fourth and fifth years of the project. They are,

Advocacy Priority 1: Review the existing plans and introduce an integrated mechanism for holistic Family Development Plans for migrant workers

Advocacy Priority 2: Issuance of Circulars to Regularize District/Divisional Anti-Human Trafficking and Migration Forums

Advocacy Priority 3: Enforcement of Existing policies to regulate job advertisements through digital media

Advocacy Priority 4: National level migration related data integrated/interlinked

At present SAFE and partner organizations have discussed the basic data and other input needed for advocating for the above changes and making strategic plans on how to achieve them within the timeframe of the project.

Programs Aiding the Advocacy Initiatives

OECRP Conducted advocacy meetings with politicians of local and provincial governments in the Kegalle and Rathnapura districts have trained a total of 54 politicians through two programs focused on addressing TIP and migrant issues and policy implementation. Among them, 27 were women participants and 27 were men. This program was implemented with the following objectives.

- To create awareness among local and provincial representatives regarding the prevention of human trafficking and safe migration, and to advocate for the inclusion of these issues in development plans.
- To draw the attention of national-level representatives to human trafficking and migration issues, thereby raising a voice in the provincial political process for controlling human trafficking and promoting safe migration.



Kegalle (Left) and Rathnapura (right) district politicians' program

Themes such as Prevention of human trafficking, and Promotion of Safe Migration Supporting affected communities were emphasized during the meetings.

The specific topics included in the meetings were:
- What is human trafficking?
- The international legal framework concerning human trafficking
- Concepts related to trafficking crimes
- Differences between human trafficking and human smuggling
- The compilation of anti-trafficking laws and other regulations
- Human trafficking and safe labor migration
- The legal framework relevant to labor migration
- The migration process in Sri Lanka
- Importance of identifying and recognizing victims

Accordingly, through the programs 26 politicians from Rathnapura and 28 politicians from Kegalle were successfully engaged. Conducting this program during the elections will have more impact as there is more openness for change.

Similarly, two programs have been conducted to hold advocacy meetings with religious leaders in the Kegalle and Rathnapura districts to address TIP and migrant issues, resulting in training for a total of 68 religious leaders. Currently, the project is focusing on four main religious groups in the Rathnapura and Kegalle districts which include Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.



Figure 1Kegalle (left) and Rathnapura (right) religious leaders' meetings

Through this program, it is expected that religious leaders, who are closely engaged with their communities, will raise awareness and create opportunities for controlling human trafficking and promoting safe migration.

Output 4.1 - Information database for of TIP and safe migration established including information of at-risk communities and individuals and existing support services of GoSL and CSOs

OPI 4.1.1 # of studies or reports or surveys or research conducted informing policy discussions on TIP or safe migration

Two research studies were completed during FY24 related to human trafficking and safe migration.

One of the studies 'Mapping and data collection on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and safe migration in Sri Lanka' was conducted by LIFE Consultancy. The findings of this study were presented during the trafficking day event held at the Department of Immigration and Emigration. The report contains important recommendations that the ECCT project will take into account during the planning for the next year of the project.

SUB PURPOSE 3: INCREASE CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT FOR MORE INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRATIC AND ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

OUTCOME 5: EFFECTIVE REDRESS MECHANISM FOR VICTIM PROTECTION SERVICES ESTABLISHED

OCI 5.1 - A victim-centered case management system governed by Protocol on TIP Victim Identification and Referral of the ECCT activity is in place

SAFE is in the process of developing and finalizing a system that aids case management of victims. Once the system is optimal and functioning the results will be included under this section.

Output 5.1 - Victims identified through CSO networks, TIP migration forums, and other channels are referred to relevant stakeholders for assistance and protection services

OPI 5.1.1 # of TIP victims referred for protection services (PS 5.1-29)

A total of 256 TIP victims have been referred to protection services during the reporting period. The awareness sessions and capacity building have helped CSOs and other grassroots level

organizations to identify and refer victims to support services.

OPI 5.1.2 # of victims of human trafficking receiving services (medical, repatriation, legal, transportation, etc.). (PS. 5.1-25)

22 victims of human trafficking have received services through the ECCT project.

OPI 5.1.3 # of victims of irregular migration receiving services (medical, repatriation, legal, transportation, etc.)
03 victims of irregular migration have received services through the ECCT project.

5. INTEGRATION OF CROSS CUTTING THEMES

Inclusion
CSOs for the coalition were selected based on their ethnic, cultural, gender, and economic diversity. These divisions vary economically, geographically, and culturally. Ethnically and culturally, the communities include Muslim, Tamil, and Sinhala populations, each with distinct cultural practices.
In conclusion, ensuring that project benefits are delivered equitably.

The inclusion of the LGBTQI community was ensured during project implementation. CSOs that engage in this topic were not discriminated in any way. One selected CSO from Anuradhapura district addresses marginalized groups, especially the rights of the LGBTQI community in Anuradhapura and Puttalam districts. In addition to this, there are other CSOs who work with LGBTQI groups who, along with the above CSO received capacity development. These CSOs were proactively led to apply for new funding allowing them to make their donor portfolios stronger.

Disability
Out of 20 CSOs supported by RAHAMA, three are working especially among disabled persons. Strengthening these 3 organizations supports the services provided to disabled persons.

A CSO working on the rights and welfare of disabled communities from Anuradhapura named Sahana Association for the Disabled was selected as a partner CSO on the ECCT project in FY23. ECCT project builds their capacity to apply for more grants and to develop their organization.

Youth
All partners and regions of the ECCT project put a lot of emphasis on building youth forums that will empower youth to take more leadership roles and be proactively engaged in the ECCT project.
The project partners have prioritized training youth within the project to be involved in the work of combatting human trafficking and promoting safe migration. Partners organize youth into forums to effectively network them for collective action.

Gender considerations
One of the key criteria for selecting Civil Society Organizations is equal gender representation. The SAFE Foundation encourages all Civil Society Organizations to develop and adopt gender policies, and most have incorporated these into their organizational policies. CSOs that represent women and/ or led by women were strongly considered to be included in the project. There were 05 CSOs selected which are led by women who have been selected to be included in the project by the SAFE regions.

For SHG and MWS participants, both female and male members are encouraged to participate, although females predominantly represent these groups. Awareness programs included topics related to gender-specific vulnerabilities in trafficking, such as victims, MWS members, and lack of

economic opportunities for women.

Out of 20 CSO partners of RAHAMA, five are women's organizations. All CSOs including these were supported to expand their network and sustain their services. The majority of the victims who received support are women. Case discussions and interviews are handled comfortably so that they are open up to discuss their actual challenges.

In addition, all partners of the ECCT project have maintained gender balance in the activities of the project making sure, as far as possible, to include an equal number of women or more in all instances.

Conflict Sensitive Approach
All partner and SAFE region staff are sensitized to be sensitive to conflict and have been careful to select beneficiaries from multiculturally diverse groups, ensuring activities for CSO members, such as training and workshops, meet their language and religious requirements. Activities were conducted in both Sinhala and Tamil to avoid potential ethnic bias and emotional conflicts. SAFE and all partners highly considered the language, behavior, and attitudes of communities when engaging with Self-help Groups.

6. CHALLENGES AND KEY LESSONS

CHALLENGES

Presidential Elections
Due to the holding of the presidential election in the country during this quarter, the implementation of the programs and activities carried out together with the government stakeholders has been severely affected. From July to September, the country was preparing for a presidential election, making it difficult to gather government officials and other stakeholders for these meetings. There was notably minimal support from the government stakeholders working in several DS Divisions to hold District/Divisional Anti-Trafficking and Migration forums within the stipulated period.

District/ Divisional Anti-trafficking Forums

- There is still a lack of proactive participation among responsible individuals to conduct forum meetings. The forums often have to be motivated by partner and/ or SAFE's support to function. Further, there were no effective mechanisms for reporting meeting minutes and records, which is a responsibility primarily handled by the Foreign Employment Development Officer. More follow is needed to get the required documentation.
- There were instances where forums, which require the number of front-line government officers at divisional and district levels, were postponed due to competing priorities, especially during the time of preparing for the elections. The strikes of unions of different categories of government staff members also became a challenge and planned activities had to be postponed.
- Another concern is the separate announcement issued by the District Secretariats for Migration Forums and some FEDOs are unwilling to work together. Thus, there is a risk of creating two types of Anti-Trafficking & Migration Forums.

Migrant Worker's Societies

- Due to the absence of a proper plan identified by the activity to keep SHGs' and MWSs' active participation. Questions are constantly being raised by the partner CSOs about the sustainability of these small groups in the future.

- Challenges also arose with CSO contributions to project activities. CSOs also have concerns about the sustainability of migrant workers' societies and self-help groups. These groups depend heavily on material and other benefits. There is perceived difficulty in functioning without such support.
- Due to distance and accessibility conducting MWS meetings and related programs in villages situated in plantations under different estate management can also be challenging.

Awareness and Training
Despite efforts, there remains a gap in awareness and training among some community members and officials.

Coordination
Ensuring effective coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies and CSOs, has been challenging. The efficiency of project activities and the impact of the project also get hindered due to this.

Staff Turnover
Due to the resignation of key project staff from time to time, both at SAFE national and, in some partners, work gets hindered as it takes time to find new staff and even more time for them to learn about the work.

Victim referrals and related tasks
Within the victim referral mechanism, it is not possible to provide full support to the concerned victims, as the project implementors are a third party has to face many restrictions since there is no legal authority for them or a smooth method of follow-up mechanism related to the referred victim complaints at the project level. This includes the partners as well as the SHGs and MWS leadership. This is augmented when social stigma/hesitation and cultural norms may prevent victims from seeking help or reporting trafficking incidents.

KEY LESSONS

- Since the project is implemented jointly with many responsible parties of the government, the support of the government stakeholders is constantly needed to achieve the final goal of the project.
- When planning the project for the upcoming year, it's essential to consider the suggested activities - outlined in divisional forums.
- Physical monitoring of the project is crucial for identifying the success and impact of project activities. It is essential to establish mechanisms or tools for collecting data continuously. Field visits also underscored the need for staff to follow guideline documents consistently.
- The impact of training programs revealed the importance of assessing how training influences efforts to prevent TIP and promote safe migration. Follow-up on training program impacts is now a priority. Field visits revealed that some SHG and MWS groups lacked proper documentation, such as participant details, meeting minutes, and attendance sheets. We encouraged these groups to maintain accurate records.
- CSO Staff emphasized to communities that ECCT project activities are based on a rights-based approach, which may reduce expectations of financial benefits.
- There were many challenges experienced during project implementation, especially last year, due to a lack of knowledge among CSO partners regarding TIP and safe migration. Thus, follow-up programs to refresh and retain technical knowledge are necessary.
- A one-size-fits-all strategy often fails; localized interventions that consider cultural and socio-economic factors are more effective. This is clearly seen in activities such as conducting community meetings and social mobilization.

- In order to sustain the SHGs and MWSs established in parallel with the project, it is necessary to discard the concept of dependency mentality in the community and it is essential to have a proper plan and arrangement for the continuation of SHGs and MWSs.
- The activity should provide a clear guideline to CSOs regarding the activity, such as through consultative meetings. Conducting online meetings with CSOs before starting a new milestone, to clarify the activities and deliverables is helpful for everyone to be on the same page.

Project Management

- Early initiation of the process of finalizing the contract for FY2025 is necessary to make sure the work of the project is not delayed. Since next year's partner contract will be drawn after an RFA process, SAFE is already making arrangements to initiate the process.

- SAFE will give more attention to managing the data of the project in suitable archives to make sure that they are readily available for use when needed. This will be important to manage the data that the project is generating.

7. REPORT ON MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The first quarter of FY24 consisted of both SAFE regions (SAFE North-Western and SAFE North-Central) and ECCT partners planning and finalizing activities for the third year of the project.

In general partners and SAFE regions hold weekly and monthly staff meetings to discuss project progress, identify gaps, and impact of project activities. Field visits to CSOs, MWS, and SHG members were conducted by the Senior M&E officer and other project staff. These visits helped assess the sustainability and functioning of SHG and MWS activities and gauge the impact of the ECCT project. The visits also helped to identify the different challenges that are faced by these groups at the grassroots level.

Revision of Indicators and AMELP

Revision of the indicators of the activity and the subsequent revision of the AMELP document is in its final steps. The PIRS sheets have been developed according to the revised indicators. The final draft of the revised AEMLP has been submitted for the approval of USAID.

SAFE staffing and administration:

Amplified by staff turnover considerable challenges still exist in recruiting higher level staff with the designated qualifications for the activity.

By the end of Q3, FY24 notable staff positions remained vacant yet by the end of the 4th quarter below staff positions have been filled.

- Communications Manager
- Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
- Organizational Development Manager
- Project Manager

Initially SAFE and IDEA have sought the services of Paltra, a consultancy firm, to give recommendations for recruitment and retention strategy at SAFE to become competitive in recruiting higher level staff. Paltra has given their recommendations and SAFE will include them in

the recruitment and retention strategy of the organization.

Partner Focal Points:
SAFE also allocated focal points per each partner organization for effective, efficient communication. The focal points were instrumental in the contract award process to the partners. Most of the communication was done through the partners in the exchange of documents, and arranging of meetings and visits to partners.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The ECCT project is implemented as a coalition of partner organizations. SAFE Foundation is the lead. The coalition comprises of four other partner organizations. The provinces and the districts where the coalition partners implement the ECCT project are depicted below.

TABLE 1: PROJECT LOCATIONS OF THE COALITION PARTNERS

Partner	Province	Districts
SAFE	North-Central	Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa,
	North-West	Puttalam, Kurunegala
SAMADANA	Central	Kandy, Nuwara-Eliya
OECRP	Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura and Kegalle
PMN	South	Matara, Hambanthota
RAHAMA	North	Mullaitivu, Vavuniya
Total		**12 districts**

The above four partners were pre-approved by USAID for their first year. They joined the project in its second year i.e. FY23 where all four organizations work in partnership to collaborate and coordinate project activity implementation and reporting. The partners were awarded sub-awards for another year during the first and second quarters of FY24. At the end of these contracts, SAFE will be calling for RFA to select partners for the fourth year of the project. At the time of reporting the RFA process is underway.

Partner staff reported challenges with regard to allocating adequate time for CSO, MWS, and SHG visits due to the large amount of work associated with milestone schedules. Yet, it is encouraging to see the partners, including staff at SAFE regions, giving more and more emphasis to field level monitoring and follow up as the activity is approaching its fourth year of implementation.

PARTNER CSOs

Each organization partners with 20 CSOs across their given districts (10 for each district) through whom the partners implement the activity at the grassroots. These partner CSOs have been selected according to pre-determined criteria and MoUs have been signed with them on implementing the activity in line with its objectives. Thus, a significant amount of training, capacity building, and development of organizational capacity has taken place in order for the CSOs to be able to contribute effectively and efficiently to the project.

There are considerable challenges relayed by the CSOs to partners, especially with regard to retaining the MWSs. Traditionally, one of the key components that keep the grassroots level organizations actively engaged is the supply of input and assistance to income generation. SAFE and partners are exploring ways to overcome this challenge in the future and make sure that the impact of the activity is sustained as much as possible.

MANAGEMENT OF GRANTS

SAFE submitted its annual implementation plan during on October 01, 2023, for approval. Subsequently, the budget was provisionally approved thus SAFE committed to funding obligations of the planned activities, with minimum possible spending.

Organization of Environment and Children Rights Preservation (OECRP)

OECRP was one of the four organizations that signed the agreement to become a coalition partner in the first year of the project and thus launched project activities in the first year itself. The partner agreement was signed on August 24, 2022. OECRP target areas include estate sector communities as well. They are working to make sure that risk groups are well identified, their needs are well noted and suitable implementation methods are undertaken to effectively reach them with project benefits.

Seemasahitha Samadana Samithiya (SAMADANA/M)

The SAMADANA agreement was signed on the 22nd of September 2022. They started to implement project activities in FY23.

Prathiba Media Network (PMN) and Recovery and Humanitarian Action Management Agency (RAHAMA)

Both agreements were signed in the first quarter of FY23. They thus initiated their project activities in FY23.

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

MEL training session:

A two-day training on monitoring, evaluation, and learning was conducted for staff from all partners and SAFE regions on the 25th and 26th of April in Kandy. The purpose of the training was to develop partners' own monitoring and lesson learn mechanisms, and introduce the cloud database through which partners can access various templates, formats, and other important documents.

Program Management and Learning Team

There were three PMLT meetings held in FY24. They were

- Meeting held in Kandy in March
- Meeting held in Matara in July
- Meeting held in Vavuniya September

All the meetings included a field visit which facilitated cross organizational learning. PMLT meetings have served as key meetings to update about the progress of each partner, learn from the best practices of other implementing partners, and be updated about crucial project related information and developments.

ECCT Project Annual Planning Workshop

A planning workshop was organized by MSI-IDEA for planning the next year of the project. This was held in the Granbell Hotel in Colombo in August and was attended by all key staff of SAFE national, SAFE regions, and coalition partners. This was a 03-day workshop where the participants activity shared their experiences and planned activities for the next year.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Project expenditures through Quarter 01 of FY24 totaled in LKR.
Additional details are given in the below table.

TABLE 3. FINANCIAL REPORT – Fiscal Year 2023

A	B	C	D	E	F	F= (C+D+E+F)	G= (A-F)
Award Total	**Total Expenditure (End of FY23'and Beginning of 24)**	**Total Expenditure (end of FY23' FY24/Q1)**	**Total Expenditure (FY 24/Q2)**	**Total Expenditure (FY 24/Q3)**	**Total Expenditure (FY 24/Q4)**	**Cumulative Expenditure (up to the end of FY 24/Q4)**	**Award Balance (end of FY 24/Q4)**
Total USAID Contribution: LKR 785,700,800 (USD 3,928,504)	LKR 312,720,384	LKR 43,325,618	LKR 60,779,422	LKR 82,433,888	LKR 108,525,173	LKR 607,784,485	LKR 177,916,315
Cost Share Amount: LKR 25,844,200 (USD129,221)	LKR 12,014,206	LKR 32,771,690.80	-	-	-	LKR 44,785,897	LKR (18,941,696.80)
Total Estimated Amount (TEA): LKR 811,545,000 USD 4,057,725	LKR 324,734,590	LKR 76,097,309.10	LKR 60,779,422.26	LKR 82,433,888.28	LKR 108,525,172.68	LKR 652,570,382.07	LKR 158,974,618.20

Note: Exchange rate 200 as per the beginning of the project.

8. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST INDICATORS

Fiscal Year 2024 (October 01, 2023 – September 30, 2024)

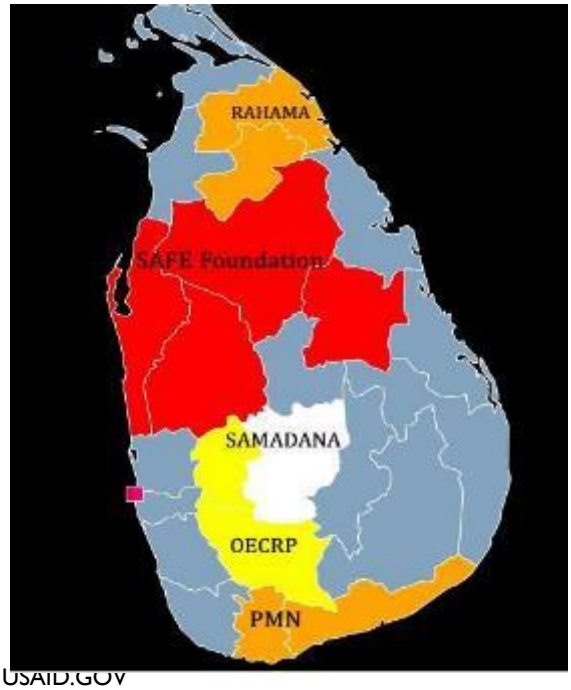
CODE /SAFE	Activity	Annual Target FY 2024	Progress Q1 Oct - Dec 2024	Progress Q2 Jan - Mar 2024	Progress Q3 April - June 2024	Progress Q4 July – Sept 2024	Total
OCI 1.1	# of MOUs signed between partner CSOs and ECCT coalition in place with roles and responsibilities clearly defined.	120	39	39	42	-	120
OPI 1.1.1	# of people trained in prevention of human trafficking (PS 5.3-15)	1600	225	453	989	1153	2820
OPI 1.1.2	# of first responders trained on victim identification (PS 5.1-28)	200	-	39	302	377	718
OPI 1.2.1	Percent of USG assisted organizations with improved performance (CBLD-9)	75%	-	-	-	-	-
OPI 1.2.2	# of CSOs that follow through Organizational Improvement Plans (OIP)	120	-		-	52	52
OPI 1.3.1	# of MWSs established in target DS and GN divisions	249	43	-	1	74	118
OCI 2.1	# of multi-stakeholder joint government - CSO forums functioning at	60	-	-	18	01	19

	national, provincial, district, and divisional levels						
OPI 2.1.1	# of Divisional / District Anti-TIP and/or Migration Forums meetings held	50	16	10	18	18	62
OPI 2.1.2	# of government officers trained on TIP and safe migration	1000	-	158	397	592	1147
OPI 2.2.1	Percentage of Divisional and District Anti-TIP / migration forum meetings that included the representation of Migrant worker societies and CSO members	100%	-	55	100%	100%	100%
OCI 3.1	# electronic or print or social media content published through ECCT intervention, related to combatting TIP and promoting safe migration	80	6	15	Post–33 Print-01 Billboard -02 Total-36	Post-57 Print-8 Video-15 Audio-6 Banner- 2 Total-88 -	145
OPI 3.1.1	# of people received awareness on TIP, safe migration and victim identification	8000	-	491	Social media reach - 3042 Peoples aware – 1404 Total-4446	Social Media reach-26286 Print materials- 7990 In person aware-654 Banner & Billboard distribution-	Social media reach - 29328 Peoples aware – 2549 Print materials- 7990 Banner Billboard distribution-

						152 Total-35082	152 40, 019
OPI 3.2.1	# of journalists trained on TIP prevention and promote safe migration.	220	-	-	99	-	99
OPI 3.3.1	# of youth trained in soft skills/life skills through USG assisted programs (Youth 1)	500	-	115	97	-	212
OCI 4.1	# of laws, policies, strategies and standard operating procedures adopted and / or implemented with USG assistance.	2	-	-	-	-	-
OPI 4.1.1	# of studies or reports or surveys or research conducted informing policy discussions on TIP or safe migration	4	-	-	-	02	02
OCI 5.1	A victim-centered case management system governed by Protocol on TIP Victim Identification and Referral of the ECCT project is in place	2	-	-	-	-	-
OPI	# of TIP victims	800	-	119	94		

5.1.1	referred for protection services (PS 5.1-29)					43	256
OPI 5.1.2	Number of victims of human trafficking receiving services (medical, repatriation, legal, transportation, etc.). (PS. 5.1-25)	20	-	-	-	15	15
OPI 5.1.3	# of victims of irregular migration receiving services (medical, repatriation, legal, transportation, etc.)	10	-	-	-	03	03

ANNEX 2: PARTNER PROJECT LOCATIONS



Map depicting ECCT districts and partner organizations

SAMADANA - Central province (Kandy, Nuwara-Eliya)

Prathiba Media Network (PMN) - Southern p rovince (Matara, Hambantota)

SAFE Foundation - North Central and North Western provinces (Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam, Kurunegala)

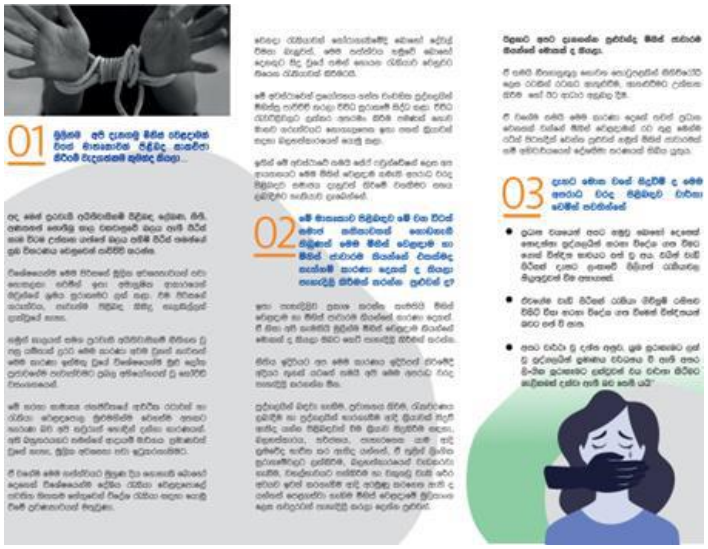
Organization of Environment and Children Rights Preservation (OECRP) - Sabaragamuwa province (Ratnapura and Kegalle)

Recovery and Humanitarian Action Management Agency (RAHAMA) - Northern province (Mullaitivu, Vavuniya)

ANNEX 3: ELECTRONIC OR PRINT OR SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT PUBLISHED THROUGH ECCT INTERVENTION










දැනුවත් වෙමු !
එරෙහි වෙමු !
නැගී සිටිමු !





ANNEX 4: SUCCESS STORIES

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

A FRIEND IN NEED

How Kayanisha's Commitment Transformed a Migrant Worker's Journey

"I believe we can help our community, especially in times of difficulty, and it brings me great joy to do so. When I think about Banu's story, I feel so proud because I was able to support her in overcoming a challenging situation," said S. Kayanisha.

The Humanitarian Brotherhood Foundation (HBF) is one of the civil society organizations working in Puttalam District under the ECCT project. HBF operates in five Grama Niladhari Divisions (GNDs) within the Kalpitiya Divisional Secretariat. As part of the project, HBF has established 10 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and five Migrant Workers' Societies (MWS). Through community awareness and other activities, HBF has helped its SHGs and MWS identify issues related to human trafficking, human smuggling, and safe migration. Today, HBF is well-known within the community for providing crucial guidance on safe migration, helping to prepare necessary documents and other related support. SHG and MWS members, with HBF's backing, have played a significant role in supporting migrant workers and their families.



The photo was taken during the SHG monthly meeting.

S. Kayanisha, an active member of the 'Jesmin' SHG in Mandalakuda GND, is one such example of how these groups make a difference. The Jesmin SHG comprises 15 members from various ethnic backgrounds (Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim), including returnee migrant workers and family members of those still employed abroad. The group was established on October 14, 2024, with the close collaboration of HBF, and Kayanisha serves as the vice president. Kayanisha is 34 years old. She is a returnee migrant worker who spent years working in Qatar and Saudi Arabia as a housemaid. With the income from her work, she managed to build her own home and now runs a small self-employment business. Fluent in Arabic, Kayanisha has earned a reputation in her village for advising women on how to migrate safely, manage workplace challenges, and return to Sri Lanka with financial stability.

Three months ago, S. Kayanisha heard about a woman from her village, Banu, who was facing difficulties while working in Saudi Arabia. Banu, a 33-years old woman, had migrated to Saudi Arabia for employment but fell ill soon after arriving. Following medical tests, it was revealed that she was pregnant. This news was a devastating situation for her as she could no longer continue working. Language barriers compounded her difficulties in communicating with her employer. Banu's mother sought help from S. Kayanisha, who promptly contacted Banu's employer. She explained Banu's situation and requested that steps be taken for Banu's safe return to Sri Lanka. Initially, the employer was reluctant, but with S. Kayanisha's persistent communication, they agreed to facilitate Banu's return by preparing the necessary documents and visa.

After Banu's return to Sri Lanka, it was discovered that she had migrated on a visit visa through a sub-agent without registering with the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau. She had also not received any pre-departure training, lacked language skills, and did not have a valid medical report. As a result, Banu faced significant difficulties abroad. Kayanisha advised Banu and her family about the dangers of migrating without proper documentation and training.

Now, Banu has joined the 'Jesmin' SHG and actively participates in its activities. The SHG operates a loan and savings system, where each member engages in self-employment activities to support their families financially. The group also discusses migration-related issues, providing advice on safe migration and addressing problems faced by migrant workers. The SHG collaborates with HBF on various initiatives, offering opportunities for women in the community, especially Muslim women, who previously had limited engagement with society. Kayanisha's support was crucial in resolving Banu's situation, and her role as a community leader and advocate for safe migration has inspired others. As she wisely says, "If we can help one person, we bring happiness to an entire family." Without her intervention, Banu's family would have faced significant challenges in securing her return to Sri Lanka. Kayanisha's language skills and experience proved invaluable in resolving the issue.



S.Kayanisha- SHG member
Her story serves as a reminder that even a small act of support can make a huge difference and that working together as a team is the essence of the SHG model.

RESCUED FROM EXPLOITATION

The story of Leela being freed from being blackmailed

Leela[6], is a 31-year-old single mother. She returned to Sri Lanka from Dubai on April 27, 2024. While she was abroad, she formed a brief acquaintance with a 58-year-old Sri Lankan man who offered her assistance. About a month after her return, he came to Sri Lanka and proposed to her. But Leela declined his proposal. Following her rejection, he returned to Dubai. But the man started to blackmail Leela claiming he had inappropriate photos taken during her time there. He had given her alcohol mixed with drugs, which led to the situation where he has been able to obtain intimate pictures of Leela. The man had even gone to the extent of creating a fake Facebook account in her name, sharing these images online. This violation caused Leela immense distress, making it increasingly difficult for her to continue living in her village.

Leela got to know that she was able to get help regarding the matter from the SAFE Foundation. Thus, she reported her situation to the SAFE Foundation, who assisted her in filing a complaint with the Children and Women Bureau, the CID, and the Kebithigollawa Police Station, Anuradhapura district. The Cyber Crime Unit was also notified and they began their own investigation. As a result of the interventions by these institutes, the man stopped sharing pictures of Leela and blackmailing her.

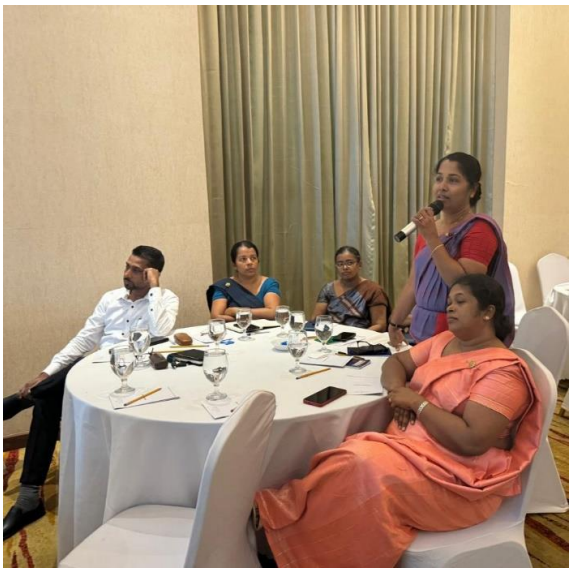
However, another man from the area where Leela was living learned about the situation and also began to blackmail her, He used the images that had been posted online before. This sad turn of events made Leela so desperate she attempted to take her own life. After the second incident, she sought assistance from SAFE again. With further support from SAFE, she was able to overcome the situation and elude the harassment of the man. Leela said that she now feels empowered to deal with problems that may come her way without resorting to self-harm.

[6] *Real name and photo withheld for anonymity*

A STEP FORWARD IN COLLABORATING WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Empowering Government Officers in Kurunegala to Combat Human Trafficking and Ensure Safe Migration





SAFE Foundation organized a training on human trafficking and safe migration for 31 government officers, including six Divisional Secretaries and 25 executive-grade officers from the Kurunegala District Secretariat. The program was held on September 29, 2024, at the EPITOM Hotel in Kurunegala. This training was organized at the request of the Kurunegala District Secretary, R.M.R. Rathnayaka, who highlighted the importance of addressing this issue.

"Human trafficking and unsafe migration are urgent concerns that affect our entire community. Many people end up in risky situations, unaware of the dangers and suffering because of their lack of knowledge. SAFE Foundation is doing essential work to address this issue across Sri Lanka. As government officers, we have an important responsibility to prevent these problems in our district. I am committed to supporting this initiative and handling these challenges at all levels," stated the District Secretary, who also mentioned that it was an opportunity to learn about this topic through the SAFE Foundation's training programs.

The ECCT NW region with 10 civil society organizations in Kurunegala and operates in eight Divisional Secretariat divisions, namely; Ganewaththa, Wariyapola, Ibbagamuwa, Kurunegala, Kobeigane, Rasnayakapura, Rideegama, and Bamunakotuwa. In close collaboration with the Kurunegala District Secretary's office, the SAFE Foundation has organized several training programs for divisional-level officers, forum members, district Secretary office coordinators, and economic development officers, especially in the Rideegama Divisional Secretariat. The district office recognized the need to provide government officers with the necessary knowledge of human trafficking, safe migration, and services to assist victims and their families.

Kurunegala district hosts a significant number of foreign employment agencies. According to the SLBFE website, this number is 205 registered agencies. There are many issues of illegal and irregular migration within

the district. So far, 183 cases related to trafficking and migration have been identified in the district, mostly involving irregular migration.

The executive-grade officers trained in this program are those who play a key role in decision-making at the district level, and their improved understanding of these issues will enable them to better serve their communities. By recognizing their roles and responsibilities, these officers are now better equipped to help prevent human trafficking and support safe migration efforts. Through this training, the officers are empowered to engage in fieldwork, support district and divisional level migration and anti-trafficking forums, and make decisions that positively impact their communities. Their commitment to addressing these issues marks a significant achievement in the project's success, strengthening collaboration between government officers.



The partnership between the SAFE Foundation and the Kurunegala District Secretariat shows the importance of working together to address critical issues related to TIP and safe migration.

RESTORED DIGNITY AND SAFETY

The Journey of a Brave Survivor

This story is one that really highlights the critical importance of having robust awareness mechanisms and support systems in place for migrant workers and those who are vulnerable to being trafficked or exploited. The courageous action of this young woman, coupled with the effective supportive response of the SAFE Foundation and SLBFE, demonstrate the power of collaboration and the fruitfulness of timely interventions. It underscores the ongoing effort within the ECCT project to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals and ensure that justice is served.

Shalika[7] is a 25-year-old young lady from Dehiwala. In February 2024 she embarked on a journey to Dubai, filled with hopes of providing a better life for her family. She had secured employment as a domestic worker through local agents, trusting that this opportunity would bring financial stability. However, her experience soon turned into a nightmare.

In her employer's home, she found herself subjected to continuous harassment by the elderly master of the house. Isolated and far from home, Shalika felt trapped in a situation where her safety was at constant risk. But despite the overwhelming fear and power stacked against her, she exhibited remarkable courage.
Shalika, discreetly recorded the abuse she was subjected to. She resorted to such action because everyone who she turned to was passing to blame on her and she had no means of vindicating herself. She did not have evidences to prove the matter. Her determination to seek justice and find a way out led her to use the video as evidence. Leveraging the awareness mechanisms promoted by the SAFE Foundation, she managed to send the video to the SAFE Call Center. The SAFE Call Center has been established as part of SAFE's ongoing efforts to protect vulnerable migrant workers and Trafficking Victims wherever they are and whenever they reach for help.

Upon receiving her distress call and video evidence, the call center staff immediately sprang into action. Realizing the severity of the situation, they collaborated with related key government focal points and in parallel coordinated with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE). The SLBFE, fully engaged in the urgency of the matter, initiated swift negotiations with both the local and foreign agents responsible for her employment. The combined efforts of the SAFE Foundation and SLBFE resulted in a rapid and successful response. Within months, arrangements were made for Shalika safe return to Sri Lanka. On August 29, 2024, she finally arrived back in her homeland, freed from the abusive environment that she had to endure. Her return marked not just an escape from suffering and making the physical journey back to her country but also signified a victory in reclaiming her dignity and freedom. The SAFE Call Center continues to link her to psychosocial support, enabling her to heal from her traumatic experience and rebuild her life.

[7] *Real name and photo withheld for anonymity*

VICTIM OF INTERNAL TRAFFICKING

How Sumanasiri overcame the injustices that he was facing

This is an encouraging report of assistance given to a person who was being exploited through the awareness raising carried out by the ECCT project. Due to the linkages made through the project, the victim was successfully identified and directed to the correct legal path helping him to regain his rights.

The name of the person involved in this incident is Sumanasiri. He lives in Poddana GN division in the Colonna Divisional Secretariat of Rathnapura District. This is how he described his situation to us.
"I am 74 years old and have been working in a Jewelry shop for nine years. I was paid Rs. 5000 (LKR) for three months. Since then, I have been paid Rs. 6000 (LKR) per month. I worked in this particular shop for nine years. Although I let them know that the amount I receive is not adequate, they kept telling me that they would increase the salary in the future, yet they never did. They were lying to me. They just kept on giving me false promises. Thereafter, I found out that they had laid me back from my job without any prior notice or payment. I am not able to go to another job. I used to work from 8.00 am till 5.30 pm every day. I did not know what to do after all that happened to me. It was during this time that I took part in an awareness session held in our village about trafficking and safe migration. Through this session, I met Mr. Saman who was working at the village level for this program. I told him about the problem I had and he directed me to the OECRP staff person.

Mr. Saman summarized the matter as follows. "When we look at the issue of Sumanasiri we see that he has been employed to a job and he has been exploited of his labour through trickery for years without paying him a reasonable salary. With the technical support of the SAFE Foundation, we managed to direct Sumanasiri to pursue legal action to get justice for the wrongs he has suffered. At present, he has been re-hired for the job and the reason why they have promised him a suitable salary for his work is because he took legal action regarding this injustice. The reason we were able to resolve this matter with success is due to the guidance and the technical knowledge given to us by OECRP and SAFE Foundation."

COMBINING CREATIVITY, COMMITMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Bawlana MWS's Sticker Campaign



Bawlana Migrant Worker Society (MWS) of Pathahewaheta Praja Shakthi, has always been at the forefront of community support and empowerment. With rising concerns about human trafficking, especially among vulnerable populations preparing for migration, the organization recognized the urgent need for awareness and for taking prevention initiatives. In early 2024, the team at Bawlana MWS had brainstorming sessions on innovative strategies to combat human trafficking in their area. As a result, they decided to embark on a sticker campaign, inspired by the idea that a simple message can have a large impact.

The stickers they designed featured eye-catching designs and simple yet powerful messages about the risks of human trafficking, the importance of safe migration, and how to seek help when in need. The stickers were strategically placed in areas that would have a high number of people engagement such as markets, bus stations, and community centers. To amplify the campaign's impact, the MWS organized workshops and informational sessions in public places. These sessions drew large crowds and initiated meaningful conversations about the realities of human trafficking and the importance of awareness.



The response to the sticker campaign was overwhelming. Community members began discussing the issues openly, and many felt empowered to report suspicious activities. Local authorities noticed an uptick in reports and inquiries related to trafficking, hinting the campaign was making a notable difference. In collaboration with the CSO, Bawlana MWS also established a helpline for individuals seeking guidance about safe migration practices. The initiative not only raised awareness but also created a support network for those in need. As the campaign progressed, the MWS saw the potential for long-term impact. They expanded their initiatives to include training programs for youth, focusing on life skills, awareness about trafficking, and understanding the rights they are entitled to. The sticker campaign became a symbol of hope, resilience, and community unity against human trafficking. Bawlana MWS's sticker campaign was more than just an awareness initiative; it was a catalyst for change. By combining creativity, and community engagement, they effectively addressed the pressing issue of human trafficking and

the way for safer migration practices. The story of this MWS serves as a reminder of the power of grassroots movements in transforming lives and protecting vulnerable communities from human trafficking and promoting safe migration.

INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY

The Positive Impact of Community Service through the Empowerment of Local CSOs

This success story reveals the positive impact of community service through the empowerment of local civil society organizations and the resulting noticeable change in community mobilization through the capacity of civil society organizations that operate locally but are not given much attention.

'Ruhunu Sisila' Social Services Organization is an organization that was registered in the year 2001 with the intention of carrying out social service work Matara district. This CSO is an organization that has created a group of nearly 6000 beneficiaries through various projects in Matara district as well as other districts since 2001. This organization operated with the help of various non-governmental organizations operating at the national and international levels. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2019, the operation of the organization had stopped for about two years without being able to fund any project.



Ms. Thilaka Weerakoon, President of the Ruhunu Sisila Social Services Organization

During such a period Prathiba Media Network (PMN) invited civil society organizations to implement the ECCT project in Matara and Hambantota districts. This organization was selected considering their capacity and through this project, we were able to bring this organization which was inactive for almost two years to the operational level. Through this project, it has been possible to create a beneficiary group of nearly three hundred families and this organization has now been able to carry out various activities among these families together with various other organizations. Accordingly, the story of one key positive impact obtained from those sacrifices is written below in Ms. Thilaka Weerakoon's own words. She is the President of the Ruhunu Sisila Social Services Organization.



"It has been 25 years since our organization was established. We haven't had a project lately. It was during such a period that we started the ECCT project together with PMN. So, now we are successfully implementing this project by establishing 10 SHGs and 05 MWSs in five GN Divisions of Dikwella DS Division of Matara district. Actually, our organization got a large number of members with this project and a large number of members joined us. So, through this project, all the communities who have joined us were able to become aware of how to go abroad properly from the point of making the passport. However, after some time has passed since the project started, we realized that we cannot always

talk about TIP and Safe Migration in these groups, and at that time, we understood that the majority of women who are in our SHGs and MWSs are hoping to start small self-employment overcome the challenges of the economic recession hoping to provide for their families.

Ruhunu Sisila organization is an organization that has been established with the aim of empowering women. That is, our organization works to empower women in all aspects of economic, social, cultural, educational, and political. So, at a time when we are looking for a necessary mobilization method for the economic empowerment of the women at the village level who are together with us through this project, we were able to get the necessary financial contribution from the People's Bank. As a result, with the full intervention of our organization and with the support of Dikwella and People's Bank Regional Office of Matara, around 380 women who are very actively involved with our small groups were able to get a loan of Rs. 50,000 (LKR) each as self-employment assistance. Many different microfinance institutions came into the village and exploited many people including women. We wanted to prevent our women from losing their money through being deceived by these companies. They also charge our women high interest rates. In particular, women in our committees have informed us of many such incidents during the SHGs and MWS meetings.

So, actually, through this loan program, it has been possible to prevent our community from falling into such fraudulent institutions by providing proper understanding and awareness. Actually, it can be said that this is a big victory that we got indirectly through this (ECCT) project.
Many of our women have successfully started gardening and self-employment through these concessional loans. In particular, it should be mentioned that our organization made the necessary interventions through this project to properly provide the basic awareness and training needed to start all those businesses according to their needs. There, the FEDOs of Dikwella Divisional Secretariat provided great support to us by coordinating the necessary resources.
We recently got a very special win through this loan program. That is, after the implementation of this loan program by the People's Bank, an analysis was conducted throughout Sri Lanka regarding its effectiveness. As a result of that analysis, among the five villages where the ECCT project was implemented by our organization to provide this loan aid, our brave women of Urugamuwa GN Division were able to win the award for the best entrepreneurial village, which included 100% successful debt repayment.

This award is a great honor and a big win for our organization as well. Prathiba Media Network also gets a lot of respect for all the support they give. They are the ones who gave us the necessary strength and guidance to carry out the mobilization process of community empowerment beyond educating the community through this project. So, the other special thing that needs to be said at the same time is that the People's Bank has now agreed to give us the same opportunity to our other CSOs that are implementing this ECCT project in the Southern Province together with PMN. I see this as a really great opportunity for us in the ECCT project. This ECCT project was a great strength to build our organization which was inactive for a long time again in a very strong way, making a big development in terms of capacity within the organization and directing the journey of Ruhunu Sisila organization to a new path through the continuous participation of a large community".

