

LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

Implementing Experience of the WT2: Work Together, Win Together Project



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SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUNDS (SFCG) / AUGUST 2019

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PREFACE

This report delves into the lessons learned of the WT2 project implemented in ten districts covering the Northern, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern Provinces of Sri Lanka. The selected case studies of success stories have been compiled to showcase the impact of the project on participated youth groups while lessons learned document emphasized on the implementation experience of the partners that includes positive and negative experiences, challenges and their recommendations for future activities.

The study is presented in six parts. The first part discusses the socio-political background of the country during the project implementation period. The second part gives an overview of the project. This includes the purpose, goals, objectives, beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project. The third chapter explains the project implementation experience in different districts. Here, the outputs and outcomes of the project are presented using available statistical data. The key achievements have also been analysed to understand how far this project met the intended objectives of the project. The next chapter discusses the project challenges and the mitigation measures adopted by the partner organizations to overcome the challenges. To be precise, time/project management, lack of knowledge and expertise, external challenges have been discussed in detail. The fifth chapter assesses the lessons learned of the project implementation. This chapter will certainly help improve future Search projects. The final one presents the concluding remarks of the report.

CHAPTER ONE

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT VIS-À-VIS THE PROJECT

1.1 Introduction

Sri Lanka's war ended militarily in 2009 without a formal peace process. Citizens, in particular, the traditionally underrepresented groups such as women and youth, continue to lose out on formal opportunities to participate and advocate for their interests. The current government has acted upon public commitments, such as the co-sponsorship of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 30/1 'Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka' and the development of government agencies such as the Office on Missing Persons. However, despite this commitment, the day-to-day building of social cohesion among the people is lacking and there is "no general or shared understanding of what reconciliation and peace-building should mean in Sri Lanka."¹ While the post-war era has opened up opportunities for inter-ethnic reconciliation, there has been a surge of inter-communal violence due to racial and religious extremism.

The growth of hate speech online in Sri Lanka has resulted in a range of other challenges to government and governance around social, ethnic, cultural and religious co-existence, diversity and, ultimately, to the very core of debates around how we see and organise ourselves in post-war.² The social media has rather become a platform for hate speech than creating space for dialogue on reconciliation and co-existence.

In such a context, Search was of the view that the youth have the potential to positively shape Sri Lanka's post-war trajectory. Having realized the vivacity of this potential, 'Work together, Win together' or WT2 project aimed to enable youth in particular, to engage in real discourse about reconciliation and to become the national drivers of change. To contribute to a more vibrant reconciliation process, Search implemented this project with youth and communities across the country covering ten districts in the Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

In phase I, Search together with partner organizations carried out mobilization events in ten districts with over 1000 youth. Soon after completing phase I, the incident of Easter-bombing attack completely devastated the country.

On Sunday, 21 April, six near-simultaneous suicide bombs exploded at hotels and churches across the country. More than 250 people were killed in the wave of the attacks when Sri Lanka was weeks away from marking 10 years of relative peace since the end of its brutal civil war.³ Following the Easter Sunday attacks, a public unrest instigated a violent backlash against Muslims in the North Western Province, Sri Lanka.

Amid this chaos, Search initiated the second phase of the project. It was challenging to work on positive stories of coexistence while the social media platforms were overwhelmed by hate speech. This tragic

1 J. Uyangoda, 'Post-War reconciliation in Sri Lanka: a reality check', *Peace and Reconciliation and Nation-Building, a conference organized by the Association for Social Development*, Colombo 2016

2 Sri Lanka Brief, Liking violence: A study of hate speech on Facebook in Sri Lanka, 24 September 2014 at <https://srilankabrief.org/2014/09/liking-violence-a-study-of-hate-speech-on-facebook-in-sri-lanka/> [last retrieved 03 September 2019]

3 BBC News, Sri Lanka vows 'maximum force' against anti-Muslim rioters, 14 May 2019 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48257299> [last retrieved 15 June 2019]

incident overshadowed the overall project achievements. Yet, this youth-led social media campaign became a counter-movement to the recent communal violence.

Having completed this eight months' project, an external resource person was entrusted to carry forward a study and prepare a report compiling the case studies of success stories and the lessons learned of the project implementation. In preparing this report, the primary data was collected through a partner review meeting and the interviews with selected youth groups. The project proposal was used to collect the secondary data. The sample for this study included 20 participants (four youth teams), Search staff and representatives from partner organizations in ten districts.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO WT² PROJECT

2.1 The Purpose

The WT² project aimed to enable youth, to engage in real discourse about reconciliation, empowering them to be the national drivers of change. This project targeted youth in the Northern, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern provinces to contribute to a more vibrant reconciliation process through a focus on development and dissemination of positive stories of peaceful coexistence through social media.

2.2 Theory of Change, Goals, and Objectives

The project is built on a series of cumulative steps anchored in the theory that:

If youth are provided with attractive and interesting opportunities to engage in dialogue on reconciliation, within and across divides, and they have increased awareness of reconciliation processes and how to impact them, then they will be more likely to initiate and engage in activities that promote reconciliation among the wider Sri Lankan public.

In collaboration with local partners as well as technical service providers, Search implemented an 08 month project with the overall goal to strengthen the role of youth in Sri Lanka's reconciliation process.

Objective : To empower youth to collaboratively promote reconciliation among a wider social media audience.

- **Result 1.1** : Increased understanding among target youth about the reconciliation processes in Sri Lanka.
- **Result 1.2** : Increased dissemination of positive stories of coexistence among the wider public through a youth-led social media campaign.

2.3 Target Groups and Beneficiaries

Primary Target Groups : youth - 18-25 years old - living in the North, East, Central, Western and South that will be primarily part of the mobilization activities as well as in the development of content for the social media products. The project covered 10 districts including North (Jaffna, Mannar), East (Ampara, Batticaloa), Central (Kandy, Hatton), Western (Colombo, Kalutara) and the South (Matara and Galle).

Final Beneficiaries : It is expected that the wider youth and public who engage with social media - across the country will gain a greater understanding of reconciliation through the content highlighted to develop knowledge and understanding of the need for and benefits from reconciliation. The campaign estimated to reach approximately 750, 000 youth as well as adult social media users.

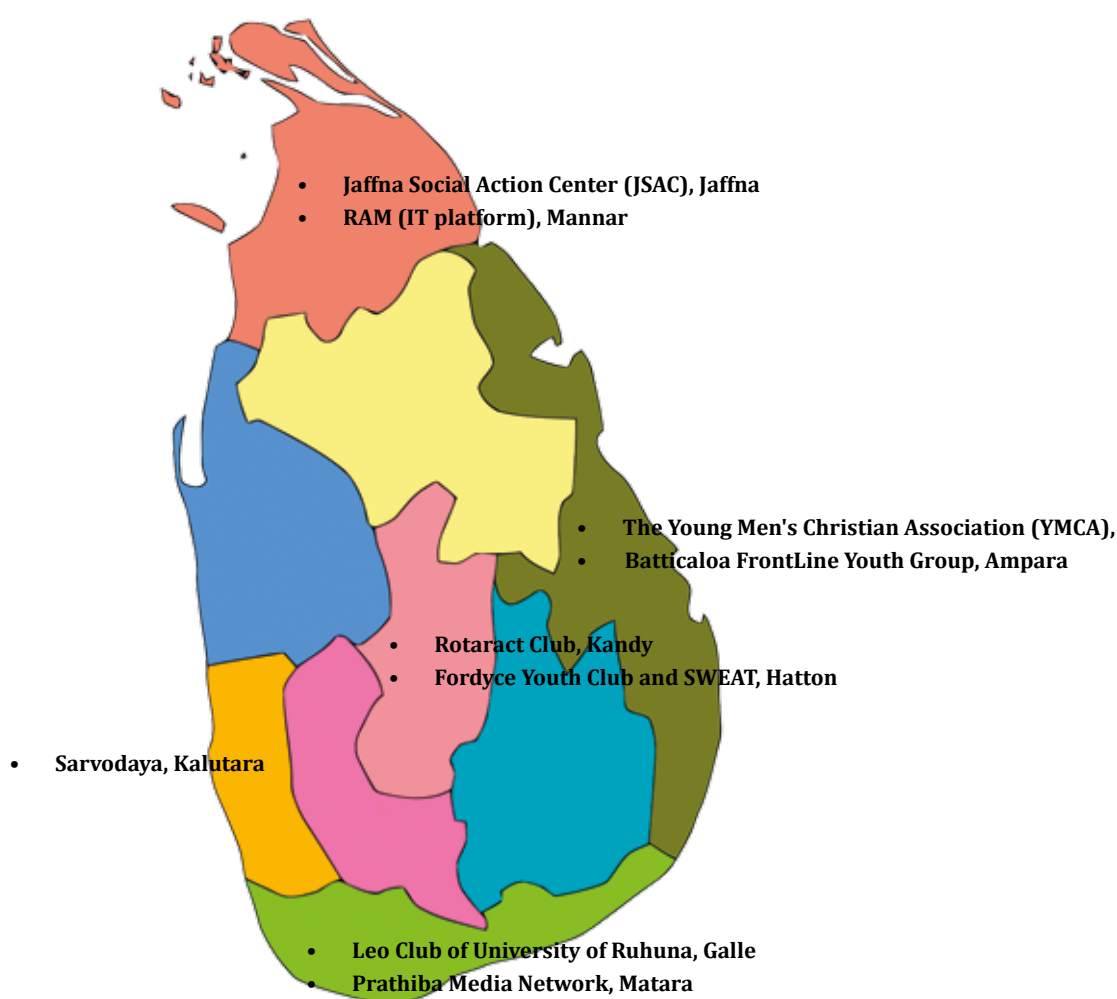
2.4 Implementers' Profile

Main Implementer:

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international peace-building organization that strives to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches; towards collaborative problem-solving. Search is working in 35 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the USA. It works with governments, civil societies, state institutions, youth, women, media organizations and other stakeholder groups to promote peace, reconciliation, tolerance and collaboration across dividing lines. Search has been working in Sri Lanka since 2011 with a long term strategy of supporting the country to move towards sustainable peace and reconciliation founded upon the principles of democracy, pluralism and a just society.

Partner Implementers:

To implement the WT² project, Search partnered with nine regional organizations having excellent capacity for peace-building and youth engagement. The organizations were entrusted to support and mobilise youth, identify venues and for logistical coordination. Search also collaborated with professional social media content developers and media persons to support the youth to fine-tune and develop their products.



The Colombo programmes were coordinated by an individual organizer as Search could provide direct assistance in organizing activities in Colombo.

CHAPTER THREE

PROCESS, PROGRESS AND RESULTS

3.1 Project Implementation

In the initial stage of the WT² project, Search staff primarily was involved in planning and material development. The preparatory activities included the development of mini activities for mobilization event, branding and advertising, production of promotional material and brainstorming workshop for the stakeholders. In the implementation stage, Search partnered with organizations in ten districts.

The WT² project was implemented in two phases: Youth mobilization event and Social media campaign. In the first phase, a one-day mobilization event combining mini-activities with learning was held in each district. The mini-activities included interactive games and challenges. To attract the youngsters to take part in this event as well as for visibility purposes, partner organizations used various effective advertising methods. Most of the organizations promoted this event through social media platforms (i.e. via Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber groups) while posters, flex banners and billboards were also widely used as promotional material. Teams were given the chance to enrol through phone calls, messages, emails and online registrations. Some of the organizations enlisted participants by sending out invitations to networks and societies in the area. Accordingly, a total of 344 youth groups covering 10 districts registered for the event.

The mobilization event was organized around four challenges;

- 1) Food tasting event: to explore culinary practices of different ethnic groups.
- 2) Historical site event: to learn about cultural/religious heritage of the area.
- 3) Event with the elderly persons (over 70): to hear stories of co-existence, folklores and historical importance of the area.
- 4) Physical challenge: outbound team building games. (tank drive, puzzles, rope walk, obstacle races etc.)

Besides, some of the districts came up with new ideas for environmental challenges such as sand art, plastic bottle collecting challenge, eco brick and PET bottle. Search agreed to incorporate them in the event considering its importance. In February all ten districts completed these activities as scheduled.

In collaboration with Leo club, University of Ruhuna, the mobilization event was organized in Galle. 24 youth groups took part in various interactive mini-activities designed to promote peace and reconciliation. For the history challenge, the participants visited two iconic places in Galle namely Black fort and Oldest tree. The historical significance of the places was explained to the participants and they were also given the challenge to find out about the history of Galle railway station by talking to people. For the food challenges, there were lots of sweet and savoury dishes; (i.e. Idly, Puri, Asmi, Kiri Aluwa etc.) in which the youngster learned about the cultural diversity of Sri Lanka. Besides, physical challenges, mini-activities and plastic bottle collecting challenge made the event vibrant.

In Matara district, the local partner, Prathiba Media network was able to organize the mobilization event with 36 youth groups. These groups completed the given challenges including physical challenge and food challenge. Thereafter, they were taken to three historically important places in the area including a Christian church, a temple and an important landmark in the area.

In Hatton district, fifty-three youth groups took part in the event. Considering the crowd and the geographical location, some of the segments were redesigned for convenience. For example, visiting historical sites did not include in this event as there were no significant sites to be found close by and the group was quite large (212 participants in total) to travel. Instead, the partner organization organized the history challenge on site. There were interactive games and activities to learn about Tamil culture, origin of the Up-country Hill Tamils and the plantation sector. Further, recognizing role models in plantation sector had added value to this challenge.

Colombo too organized a vibrant mobilization event with the participation of 18 youth groups. As historical places, the youth groups visited Pradeepa Hall and Kali Amman Kovil to learn about its significance. While most of the challenges went on similar to planned mini-activities, Colombo team made an extra effort to incorporate environmental conservation aspect in the program. Accordingly, they introduced new challenges such as ecobrick and planting trees.

In Kalutara, the mobilization event resembled the one held in Colombo as it also included environmental challenges. Apart from ecobrick and planting trees challenges, youth teams took part in a PET bottle challenge sorting garbage for recycling purposes. There were 29 teams presented for this event and they actively took part in given challenges. For the historical site event, Sarvodaya selected three significant places; Panadura Hindu Kovil, Rankoth Temple and a church. Participants also met a few elders and learned about the historical value of the area.

In Jaffna district, 25 youth teams comprised of 160 individuals took part in the event. For the historical challenge, the groups visited the Jaffna Fort, Yamuna Lake, Ancient King's palace and a monument of World War II. Youth teams learned the historical importance of their city and how it shaped the lifestyle of people. They also took selfies and posted them on Facebook.

In the Mannar mobilization event, 28 youth teams took part in various challenges. The teams visited a secluded Buddhist temple and a landmark in the area. Participants were given the challenge of collecting the plastic waste on the beach and 14KG of plastic waste was collected and handed over to the urban council on that day. The youth teams built solidarity through engaging in various team-building activities.

Kandy, Ampara and Batticaloa also conducted similar programmes in their respective areas. Kandy had 22 youth teams, Ampara had 29 and Batticaloa had 24. In Batticaloa and Ampara, to organize and host the mobilization event, the partner organizations received support from the government agents and the Sri Lankan army. Especially the physical challenge segment was conducted by the Sri Lankan army.

In total, 10 mobilization events were completed under phase 1 of the WT² project. In each district, youth who participated in the mobilization were allowed to participate again in Phase 2. Up to 10 teams were selected in each district based on; (a) composition - 5 members, of which at least 2 will be women, as well as ethnic and religious diversity based on the overall composition of the target districts; (b) willingness to travel within and across districts. (c) Active social media users (d) Skills for developing social media content. Accordingly, a total of 270 youth were shortlisted to engage in phase 2 of this initiative. Search

project coordinator together with district-based resource persons worked in finalising the teams and provided them orientation on the next phase of activities.

In the next phase of the WT² project, the youth teams were given the specific challenge of identifying individuals/communities or events that highlight positive co-existence. These could be events that took place in pre-war periods as well as current initiatives or incidents that are promoting reconciliation among previously divided communities. Once they have identified a story, the youth were asked to find out more details, the history, impact etc. of these events and to develop a concept through which they can highlight this story and present through social media. The teams were given 4-6 weeks to come up with their concept. Meantime, Search staff and social media consultant supported and mentored the youth across the country in reviewing their ideas and giving advice on improving the concept.

To select the teams for the next round, 09 creative pitching sessions were held in March. A panel of judges that include representatives from government, civil society, media persons as well as Search staff and social media consultants were invited for these sessions. The selection criteria included suitability to be made into social media product, timeframe needed, attractiveness/ uniqueness of the story. After an intensive review of stories, the best 32 ideas were selected for the proposed social media campaign. To better equip the youth teams for the social media campaign, a few capacity building workshops on script writing and video production were conducted on request.

All in all, the project activities in phase 1 and 2 were completed successfully in nine districts.

3.2 Project Outputs and Outcomes

Under the WT² project initiative, Search aimed to promote youth engagement in peace-building. In particular, it envisioned to empower youth to collaboratively promote reconciliation among a wider social media audience.

By implementing the project activities, Search achieved the following output level results;

Table1. The Overview of the Project Outputs and Outcomes

Budget line	Project Activity	Output	
		Planned	Execution
A 1.4.	Mobilization event	10 mobilization events conducted with the participation of 1000 youth representing diverse ethnicities and religions.	10 mobilization events conducted with 1124 youth representing Sinhala, Muslim, and Tamil community.
A 1.5	Selection of Youth Teams	10 teams made up of 5 team members selected for each district.	79 teams (3-15 teams per district) were selected for the phase II and 54 teams took part in pitching sessions.
A1.6	WT2 Phase 2: Team District Competitions	40 concepts/ products selected for the social media campaign.	32 video documentaries selected for the social media campaign.
A1.7	Development of social media content	40 fine-tuned products available for social media campaign	27 video documentaries and 14 stories prepared by the professionals available for the social media campaign.
A1.8	Social media campaign	WT2 social media platform is active with content produced under A 1.7, reaching to 750,000 users of social media	The campaign reached over 1 million viewers.

Table 2. Participation of Youth Groups in Phase 1 and Phase 2

District No. groups registered		Phase I: Mobilization event		Phase II: Social media campaign	
		No. groups participated	No. of teams shortlisted	No. of teams took part in the media production	
1	Colombo	36	18	04	04
2	Kalutara	32	29	12	02
3	Batticaloa	33	24	07	04
4	Ampara	44	29	10	04
5	Mannar	32	28	12	04
6	Jaffna	32	25	12	04
7	Galle	24	24	04	03
8	Matara	36	36	03	03
9	Hatton	53	53	15	04
10	Kandy	22	22	-	-
Total		344	288	79	32

3.3 Major Achievements Contributing to Goals

Over a period of eight months, Search in partnership with nine organizations across the country implemented this pilot project to strengthen the role of youth in Sri Lanka's reconciliation process. To achieve this overall goal, the WT² project was designed in a way that creates attractive and interesting opportunities to engage in dialogue on reconciliation.

In this process, instead of delivering programs confined to one framework, Search found creative ways to reach out youth. This statement is further confirmed by a participant from the Colombo program who stated:

"We felt that it was not a typical forum where people argue about reconciliation in Sri Lanka. We liked that idea of building bridges between communities in a more interactive way."

Upon which, a successful series of mobilization events were held in ten districts. When the participants took part in the events, the majority of youth said that they were not familiar with the cultures of different ethnic and religious groups due to language barriers created by the monolingual and segregated education system. At the end of the program, the same youth parted as knowledgeable, understanding and compassionate individuals who care about one another in spite of their differences. 80% of the participants expressed that this was the first time that they have taken part in such a program. Solidarity among the teams was naturally built through taking part in mini-activities and challenges. Through visiting historical places and learning about the richness of the cultural diversity in Sri Lanka, a common consensus was made to respect and accept the differences. They witnessed and heard how different cultures have co-existed in the past and how important it is to rebuild that unity. In short, WT² mobilization event created a platform for cross-cultural communication among youth thereby promoted a greater acceptance of diversity and peace.

The second phase of the project encouraged youth-led initiatives to spread positive stories of reconciliation to wider society through social media. 79 youth groups were shortlisted for this phase, out of which 32 were selected for the national event. These youth groups captured 27 powerful stories of co-existence into short films and disseminated to an audience of 1 million through social media. As a result of this media production, 160 youngsters enhanced their knowledge and expertise not only on peace and co-existence but also on scriptwriting and videography. The sample that was selected to develop case studies signified some outstanding achievements of the project. Out of the four groups that were interviewed during the evaluation, two groups have already started their second production. One participant from a Colombo youth team has started her blog. Expressing her thoughts, she stated:

"This campaign made me realize how important it is to make a voice about the things that I'm passionate about. My blog will influence my peers."

In short, this experience of what it feels like to create positive change built their confidence for life.

Throughout this process, youth groups, partner organizations, and Search staff built capacity on teams building, leadership, and time and project management. This was a wonderful learning experience for the implementers as well as for the beneficiaries. A Search staff member goes on to say in the staff evaluation:

"It enhanced my knowledge about projects that aim youth engagement. Also, it was a great opportunity to design games and challenges for the phase I in collaboration with the Colombo team and also to effectively communicate about sensitive subjects when working with youth groups"

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES ADOPTED

While project challenges are inevitable, they can be minimized through a number of strategic approaches. This project was short-term therefore the intensity of project challenges was greater than the other projects. This fact was indeed confirmed by the stakeholder feedback.

Overall, the challenges of the WT² project can be subdivided into three main sections; 1) Challenges in time/project management 2) Lack of knowledge and expertise among youth groups 3) External issues.

4.1 The challenges in time/project management:

The most debated challenge of the WT2 project was time management. Especially the partner organizations were of the view that the activities of the project had been designed in a way that was not feasible to complete promptly. In the mobilization event, most of the partners found it challenging to carry out planned activities due to the packed schedule. There were over a hundred participants who took part in these events, in some cases, over two hundred thus, the time allocated for activities was not enough to carry out the activities in the most effective way. Having identified this challenge beforehand, some of the organizations used strategies to overcome them. Some partners got the support from the staff and volunteers to coordinate the event and they were responsible to oversee the team registrations. Online registration method saved a lot of time on the mobilization day. In Jaffna, before visiting the historical sites, three-wheelers were already booked for the teams and a brief orientation regarding the program was given to drivers.

In the last stage of Phase II, Search team faced difficulties in launching the social media campaign on time as the youth teams did not submit their products upon the deadline. Search became more concerned about getting the products done on time rather than ensuring the quality of the social media campaign. As a result of which Search team could not thoroughly review the final media products. This increased the risk of copyright issues. Explaining the situation, a Search staff member stated:

"Some of the well-known social media channels were hesitant to share the products on their walls. After the first copyright issue, we were mindful to get the media products revised by the social media consultant and post them only on the We Lanka Facebook page."

Furthermore, there was a significant time gap between the mobilization event and the social media campaign hence the partner organizations found it difficult to keep the youth teams engaged throughout the project implementation. Some of the youth groups lost interest in the second phase of the project and dropped out of the program. To avoid the teams dropping out from the program, Search decided to make this round also attractive by offering incentives. The 3-4 teams that were selected at the district level received a prize of Rs 10,000, and a gift pack worth Rs10, 000/=. In addition, each team was also assigned a person for technical support based on the type of product they wished to make. After the social media campaign, Search organized a two-day residential leadership and team building workshop

where all team members from different ethnic group participated, *"This was new experience for us. We were interacted with other community's youth and gained new experience. I am very sad to leave all others from here"*- A winning team member from Hatton. On this occasion, Search rewarded the youth teams for their outstanding performances during the social media campaign. 05 teams were awarded a prize worth Rs.50, 000/= and all the participants received a participatory certificate.

In terms of project management, there were lapses in coordination. The Kandy youth team led by the Rotaract Club withdrew their teams from the second phase of the project as they did not get the permission from the headquarters to enter into a partnership with Search. A staff member from Search mentioned that the Rotaract Club highlighted the fact that they were not informed of the second phase of the project at the beginning and they found a sort of conflict of interest in taking part in phase II. To avoid such misunderstanding, Search could have thoroughly studied the organizational mandate of the partner organizations.

Halfway through the media production, the project activities lacked consistency. Some youth teams were not ready for the pitching sessions. Therefore, last-minute cancellation and difficulty to get hold of the teams became common to most districts. In short, some youth teams became unreliable and it impacted on the project outcomes. To avoid such inconvenience, partners acknowledged that they could have given instructions to youth on the expected outcomes of the project in each phase.

4.2 Lack of knowledge and expertise among the youth teams

Lack of knowledge and expertise among youth teams impacted on the quality of the social media products. Most of the youth teams had no/ little experience in videography, therefore, developing short films and video clips became challenging for the teams as well as for partner organizations. Most of the time, the youth teams relied on partner organizations in developing scripts for the social media campaign and organizations found it challenging to provide technical support to the youngsters. To help them produce quality products, some organizations went up to the extent of hiring external resource persons to conduct a session on script writing and videography. However, other organizations acknowledged that with a shortage of funding, they were unable to provide the required technical assistance to the teams.

Lack of knowledge among youth on online registration also viewed as a challenge by the organizers. Some of the youth in remote areas did not know how to register for the go challenge through online portals and registrations at the event became mandatory. To build capacity among youth groups, partners suggested a few ideas that they could have taken during the project implementation. As an answer to funding scarcity to conduct capacity building programs, partner organizations could have looked for more funding opportunities and collaborated with volunteers or professionals at a reasonable price. During the second stage of the project, partner organizations could have discussed with Search the possibility of hiring a cameraman/consultant who is willing to travel along with the teams to help them out with the media production.

4.3 External challenges

During the project implementation, mainly in the mobilization event, partner organizations faced multiple challenges including maintaining the gender balance in the youth groups. In Mannar, the organization found it difficult to mingle boys and girls in groups as their cultural practices did not encourage them from working together. Further, some girls were hesitant to wear the campaign T-shirt as they did not feel comfortable. In such occasions, organizations used alternative identification methods such as name tags, bracelets instead of T-shirts.

While the cultural practices in different areas affected the program, Easter bombing attack on 21st April hugely impacted the overall success of the project. After the attack, some of the teams refused to take part in the next phase of the project and the momentum of the project was completely disrupted by this incident. To overcome this unexpected challenge, individual meetings were held with all the partner organizations to discuss about moving forward with the production amid the crisis situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

LESSONS LEARNED OF THE PROJECT

Based on the previously discussed challenges, this chapter explains the lessons learned of the project implementation and make recommendations under 4 subsections; 1) Project design, 2) Project management, 3) Community mobilization/ building capacity of the youth teams 4) The overall lessons learned of the project.

5.1.1 LL1: Project Design

The shortcomings in project design reflected on the overall achievement of project goals. According to the findings of the partner review meeting, the following recommendations were made to improve in the project design.

5.1.2 Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- In designing the proposal, initial need assessment should happen in consultation with stakeholders to identify the potential target population and locations for the proposed project. For example; According to partner organizations in the North and the East, this project was confined to city limits and they acknowledged how important it is to select new geographical locations for future programmes.
- The project design needs to include capacity building training and orientation components for the stakeholders to articulate and understand the project goals during implementation.
- Attempts should be made to determine the feasibility of the project by developing the strategic and operational plans in consultation with partner organizations.
- The project should design in a way that creates not only attractive and interesting opportunities for youth to engage in dialogue on reconciliation but also the sustainability of the youth-led projects.

5.2.1 LL2: Project Management

Even though there was an initial agreement between Search and the partner organizations, there was no common understanding of the realistic planning that entailed defining and allocating adequate resources (human, financial and tools), setting in of manageable deadlines and monitoring and evaluation plan for the project implementation. Some organizations found it difficult to manage the workload as they did not recruit new project staff for this short-term project.

Further, there was little clarification on the people's roles and lines of communication, developing budgets, setting up appropriate controls and schedules for each activity. Most of the planning was carried out by the Search Team and the organizations got involved during the implementation stage. This had a negative outcome on the sense of ownership among the implementers. While Search played a

dynamic role in planning the activities to achieve the intended project goals, partner organization were merely involved in the execution of the project activities.

5.2.2 Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Coordination

- Clear roles and responsibilities of the implementers are needed for each component of the project.
- Ensure the project goals are clearly articulated and understood by stakeholders at the beginning of project implementation.
- Establish all partner agreements through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) prior to implementation.
- Establish a decision point for confirmation of the project and confirming or revising a timeframe that is realistic for project completion.
- Provide continuous support and maintain networking among partner organizations throughout the project implementation.

Finances

- Allocated adequate funds and other resources including staff should be in place prior to implementation.
- Having a financial forecast for unexpected expenses. (Capacity building training, purchase of equipment etc.)
- Encourage partner organizations to explore co-funding/ alternative funding opportunities for the project.

Reporting / Monitoring and Evaluation

- Request the partner organizations to submit a monthly activity report.
- Conduct partner monthly progress review meetings (Skype meetings) to share project implementation experience and monitor the progress of the project.
- Develop pre and post-tests to evaluate the knowledge and capacity of the youth teams.

5.3.1 LL3: Community Mobilization/ Building Capacity of Youth Teams

Search together with partner organizations used multiple approaches in community mobilization. For phase 1, the participants were recruited through online registration methods and civil society networks. The methods were effective yet the selection criteria of the teams had a few shortcomings. Rather than selecting groups for the second phase through mobilization event, Search could have encouraged the

participants to reapply for the second phase and thereafter shortlist the participants. Further, in phase 1, there were only four members in each team and the second round, they were asked to add another member for the team. While mobilization events carried out in ten districts had huge success, there was no direct correlation between phase 1 and 2.

Similarly, youth groups could have given a thorough orientation at the beginning so that they could have had a clear idea about what is expected from them in this project. During the partner review meeting, it was revealed that this programme lacked in youth capacity building training and follow-up meetings. The WT² project action plan could have included a capacity-building component for youth before implementing phase II to give training on videography and film making thereby produce quality media contents for the campaign.

5.3.2 Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Develop and adhere to new selection criteria and selection process for team recruitment.
- Make clear the skills and experience required for the project and focus on building the capacity of the needed skills. (E.g. Videography, scriptwriting, social media campaigning etc.)
- Look for innovative and cost-effective training methodologies for capacity building of the stakeholders such as online tutorials, online quizzes to test the knowledge and understanding of peace and reconciliation.

5.4 The Overall Lessons Learned of the Project

As the name suggests WT² project - work together, win together was able to build solidarity among different ethnic groups through friendly competitions. The mass mobilization events and youth-led social media campaign contributed to a more vibrant reconciliation process across dividing lines. This was a ground-breaking approach to get the youth involved in the transitional justice process in Sri Lanka.

Bringing the youth into one platform was an effective way of teaching them cultural diversity. In spite of their differences, the youth realized that they can find common grounds on certain issues. For example; protecting the environment was something that they all care about and they were

“Go challenge made us realize that together we can tackle anything”

willing to tackle the problem together as responsible citizens. In short, this project gave the youth an opportunity to learn about other communities, appreciate the diversity and work together as one nation.

“We found common grounds on the things that we care about in spite of our ethnic differences.”

For Search, this was a vital learning opportunity to understand the public perception about the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. Though the government has set up the transitional justice mechanisms during the post-war period, people have no general or shared understanding of what

reconciliation and peace-building should mean in Sri Lanka. In conducting field research for the social media campaign, youth in the North and the East often came across people who couldn't understand the power of reflecting on the past for the healing of memories.

"We want to forget the past and move on with our lives." – Kalmunai, Ampara.

In the Southern part of Sri Lanka, some people coexist in peace without having any knowledge of reconciliation. The youth were able to conceptualize what reconciliation means for them through first-hand experience.

Further, Search as well as partner organizations recognized the effectiveness of promoting reconciliation through documenting real stories of co-existence from different districts and bringing them into one

"There is still goodness among us. Among ten men, there is at least one good man who will always step up for injustice".
– FB comment

platform for wider dissemination. In the We Lanka Facebook page, there are 28 positive stories of peaceful coexistence. Some stories depicted peaceful coexistence during the ethnic war and some during the recent communal violence. The unheard stories of brave men and women (e.g. Story of William,

Colonel Laffeer, Lalitha Peiris) who bridge the gap between religious and ethnic differences became heard through this campaign. Without a shred of doubt, these stories gave a powerful message to its audience. However, in spite of all the positive feedback, some people still humiliated coexistence and continued to promote hate speech within the campaign.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

To enable youth to engage in real discourse about reconciliation as well as to empower them to be the national drivers of change, Search in collaboration with partner organizations implemented this eight months' project in ten districts covering Northern, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern provinces of Sri Lanka. The project was carried out in two phases namely mobilization event followed by a youth-led social media campaign. Ten mobilization events were held island-wide reaching out over 1000 youths. WT2 mobilization event created a platform for cross- cultural communication among youth thereby promoted a greater acceptance of diversity and peace.

The second phase of the project encouraged youth-led initiatives to spread positive stories of reconciliation to wider society through social media. 79 youth groups were shortlisted for this phase, out of which 32 were selected for the national event. These youth groups captured powerful stories of co-existence into short films and disseminated to a wider public through social media.

All in all, Search together with partner organizations was able to achieve the intended outcomes of the project. As a result of project activities, over a thousand youth were able to take part in an event that they have never experienced in the past and enhance their knowledge on peace and reconciliation. Through media production, 160 youngsters enhanced their knowledge and expertise not only on peace and co-existence but also on scriptwriting and videography. This experience of what it feels like to create positive change built their confidence for life.

However, in implementing the project, Search and partner organizations faced a number of challenges which can be subdivided into three; challenges in time/project management, lack of knowledge and expertise and external issues. Among the challenges, time management persisted throughout the project implementation.

Way forward, Search will continue to ensure a nationwide social media campaign backed by mainstream media that will highlight and promote the campaign. The media products will come in handy for future awareness programs of Search as well as the partner organizations. Having taken part in this process for about eight months, they were of the view that this project should continue to the next phase with a few modifications to achieve sustaining peace among the youth.

Annexure 01

IT IS A MATTER OF CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE : THE STORY OF MAWARALA VILLAGE.



A group of four youngsters from Matara district namely Buddhini (24), Ravini (21), Dhananjaya (25) and Malmi (23) registered for the go challenge with no second thoughts as none of them has ever taken part in such a program. They named their team as “fire”. On the day of the event, they took part in various games and competed against 35 teams. Dhananjaya, the team leader of the fire team expressed his experience about the program.

“Taking part in the go challenge boosted our confidence and determination to work as a team to achieve a common goal.”

Their outstanding team spirit helped them to get into the second round of the WT² project. In phase II, a new team member joined the fire team. Altogether, there were five members (3 girls and 2 boys) with a different set of skills and competencies in the team.

For this team, finding a true story for the video production wasn’t challenging because they already knew a village close by where people from Sinhalese and Tamil communities lived in peace for decades. One team member who was born in this village stated:

"There is inexplicable unity among Sinhala and Tamil people in this village. That was obvious during the times of war and 80's riots against Tamils. We didn't have to make up a story because we already had a great one. It was a matter of capturing the essence of coexistence into a short documentary."

The documentary was named after the village Mawarala as they thought that it could potentially increase the popularity of the village. Bordering Gomila and Erellawala villages, Mawarala village has been the home for both Sinhala and Tamil people. People from both communities have coexisted supporting one another for years. In spite of their differences, the majority worship Lord Buddha as well as Hindu gods. Confirming this, the village monk stated during an interview,

"Just like Sinhalese, Tamils play an equally important role in this temple. A few of them observe sil¹ with the Sinhalese community. Some Tamil families have continuously sponsored the annual Katina pikan². Likewise, Sinhalese people celebrate and sponsor the Vel festival³."

Shortly after the brief orientation with the partner organization, the team began their video production. Firstly, they visited the village to meet the potential stakeholders of the production. This included the community leaders such as Grama Seva Niladari⁴, village monk and school principal. Having conducted informal discussions with them, the team tried to approach the villagers. This wasn't easy at the beginning because they were suspicious of them loitering here and there with a camera. Once, someone had called the Police. When the Police questioned them, they explained the purpose of their visit. After hearing their intentions, the Police became very supportive. The villagers then warmly welcome the team to carry on their project.



At first, it seemed impossible to interview the villagers as they were extremely shy to talk in front of a camera. However, our team had persons with good interpersonal skills and they soon persuaded them to take part in the video production. It took about two days to shoot the documentary. In one instance, they had to cancel the shooting due to heavy rain. Recalling their experience in this production, the youth team expressed:

- 1 The word 'Sil' is a Sinhala word. It is derived from the Pali word 'Seela'. 'Pali' is the language that was spoken by the Buddha. The Buddha used the word Seela to mean good conduct or virtue.. All Buddhists try to observe Pancha Seela or the Five Precepts.
- 2 Katina Pinkama or offering of robes to Bhikkhus takes place on Vap Pasalosvaka Poya in temples throughout Sri Lanka. This notable religious ceremony called Katina Pinkama, as usual, takes place in the early hours of Vap Poya.)
- 3 The *Vel Festival* is one of the most important *festivals* of Sri Lanka's Tamil community. It celebrates the Hindu war god Skanda, also known as Lord Muruga. Colombo festivities usually take place during the last week of July. The Aadi *Vel Festival* has been held in the city for over 140 years.
- 4 A Grama Niladhari (village officer) (Sinhala: ග්‍රාම නිලධාරී) is a Sri Lankan public official appointed by the central government to carry out administrative duties in a grama niladhari division, which is a sub-unit of a divisional secretariat.

"We faced a lot of challenges during the shoot ranging from natural challenges like rain and leaches to more complicated issues such as controlling background nuisance and protecting privacy and confidentiality of the people."

To overcome the second challenge, they had to edit the videos intensely by doing so; they missed out some of the good clippings. They met a few other times to review and edit the video content and they were excited about the final product. It was then reviewed by the Search social media consultant and was approved to publish on social media.

This project enabled the team to reach their true potential in terms of leadership, teamwork and cross-cultural communication. They also improved their knowledge of video and audio editing, scriptwriting and producing video documentary. Most of all, they learned to admire multiculturalism as two of the girls in the team say:

"We have become fond of learning about the Tamil culture. We want to speak fluent Tamil. So, we have already started taking Tamil lessons. Now we are huge fans of Indian food. Inspired by the food challenge, we once made puri⁵ at home."

Mawarala video received a lot of positive feedback from social media platforms. Within three weeks, it reached 3900 views. In We Lanka FB page, the video had 473 likes, 759 shares and 1,021 comments. They also shared this video to four other famous social media platforms in Sri Lanka. This shows that their effort is been genuinely appreciated by a lot of people.

In short, the fire team has not only produced a high impact social media production for the campaign but also has given something to the villagers. As the concluding remark one stated:

"Mawarala villagers lived in harmony for years without even knowing what coexistence means. Having taken part in this video, they realized how blessed they are to live in such a community without any hustle and bustle of ethnic clashes. Everyone blended so well into the community out of acceptance. According to our understanding, that is the secret of the essence of peaceful coexistence."

5 (In Indian cooking) a small, round piece of bread made of unleavened wheat flour, deep-fried and served with meat or vegetables.

Annexure 02

EVERY HUMAN LIFE IS WORTH THE SAME AND WORTH SAVING NO MATTER WHAT : THE STORY OF A BRAVE MAN

Situated in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, Mannar town remained mostly under Sri Lankan army control during the thirty years civil war while the Tamil Tiger rebels dominated its surrounding areas and many other parts of the district. To be born and raised in such a social context was not a blessing rather a struggle for life. The lives of Joseph Nayan, Jestin Peter, Luxan and N. Puvikaran did not differ from this reality. Every day, they lived in fear of losing someone they love. A 25-year-old team member expressed :

"During the war, my family fled from Wannai to Mannar. Since then I could not meet anyone in my extended family until the war ended in 2009. Throughout my childhood, I could not travel much as I was stuck in a small city."

Recollecting the memories of the past, the youth team expressed what motivated them to join the go challenge in the first place.

"We have very little exposure to the outside world and we thought this would be a good opportunity to mingle with people from other communities."

The team registered for the go challenge through a FB post. There were twenty-seven other youth groups presented for the event. Competing with other teams not only boosted their confidence but also their capacity for cross-cultural communication. They enjoyed the company of each other and tasted great food on that day. As a team member expressed in his own words:

"What a great fusion of food! Diversity is beautiful and this applies for us as well."

In the second phase of the WT2 project, they decided to develop a video documentary for the social media campaign. Since they were part and parcel of the war, they knew how healing of memories helps them to overcome the wounds of history. In May, the youth team took part in a memorializing event for war victims organized by the people of Mannar town. During this event, they heard the name of a Sinhala person and were curious to know why Tamil people commemorate Sinhalese people. In answering their questions, a villager expressed his gratitude towards this person. *"William is not a victim. He is our hero."* This statement made them even more curious to find out about this person.

After weeks of effort, they were able to meet a victim-survivor of the incident in which William was also deceased. This was the story of William. In 1984, a public bus that was travelling from Vavuniya to Mannar was suddenly stopped and seized by the army. William was the conductor on that bus. When only the Tamil passengers were demanded to get down from the bus, he refused to do so. He did not allow any Tamil person to get down from the bus. Instead, he said:

"You cannot harm these innocent Tamil people. If you want to harm them, then you have to go through me first."

Furious by his audacity, the army shot him and then the rest of the 38 passengers. Only two people survived on that day.

With no reservation, they decided to go ahead with this story for their video documentary. The next expedition was to find credible evidence to write the script. To overcome this challenge, they decided to meet the son of William who has been living in the adjoining border village in Mannar. When the team members went to meet his son Jayalath William, they were warmly welcomed by the son. Having listened to the story in detail, they were easily able to develop a script based on a true story. Further, through him, they got to know that a writer named Kaipillay Thayaparan had already written a story of this brave man in his book, *The story of some brave men and high achievers*. As the concluding remarks of William's son, he said:

"My father used to call everyone brothers and sisters. He said we should all coexist as one nation. That was his dream."

Having collected the primary and secondary data for the script, they discussed how to present this story in the documentary. Since this was also a story of war crimes, they knew the possible risks of undertaking this project. Taking a chance, they decided to go ahead with their story for the documentary. Nevertheless, they were mindful to present only the details that were verified by the primary sources. To improve the credibility, they gave references from the aforementioned book written by Kaipillay Thayaparan. Following the "Do no harm" theory, they tried their level best to develop a story based on an unbiased representation of ideas.

Three weeks after the social media campaign, the video documentary received 28 likes and 180 shares on the We Lanka page. This video reached 9.1K views. This experience of taking part in the program allowed them to learn new skills such as scriptwriting, video editing, networking skills and interpersonal skills. As a 25-year-old team member mentioned:

"Whenever I watch a documentary, I have got the hang of analyzing its content in my subconscious mind. Now I'm a huge fan of the BBC documentary."

Further, another team member stated:

"In the mobilization event, I came into self-realization that I have good leadership skills. People listen to me, seek my opinion and let me take the lead."

Above all, the story of William taught the team that humanity exists across dividing lines. Concluding the interview, one team member who is currently employed outside Mannar goes on to say:

"If we live in isolation, we will continue to believe in myths about other cultures. These programmes are essential to break barriers and build bridges across dividing lines."

Annexure 03

AN IMPETUS TO TOUCH THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF ALL SRI LANKANS : STOP FOR A SECOND



*“You earn brotherhood –
the purest friendship, trust, and love, whatever you want to call it –
moment by moment through how you treat others.”
– Doug Cooper*

Althaf, a 22 year old young Muslim man from Anuradhapura heard about the We Lanka project through a WhatsApp message circulated from a network so-called Interfaith Colombo. He called his friend Nadun, a 23 year old Sinhalese to inform about the opportunity. Accordingly, the four stars team was formed with two other girls namely Kavindya (22) and Thilini (20). They were intrigued to take part in the go challenge. As one participant says:

“We felt that it was not a typical forum where people argue about reconciliation in Sri Lanka. We liked that idea of building bridges between communities in a more interactive way.”

On the day of the go challenge, there were seventeen other groups competed against the four stars team. The Go challenge in Colombo manifested the beauty of diversity in Sri Lanka. There was youth from different age groups, different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds. The team faced the challenges with a determination to save a spot in the next round. This event was a new experience for Althaf as he expressed that it was the first time he had to team up with girls in a competition. He acknowledged the fact that the girls can equally collaborate in achieving goals.

During the second phase, another member joined the team. They met twice to develop the script for the video production. In developing the script, they were of the view that the reconciliation has to happen in the hearts and minds of people. Before moving ahead with their production, something terrible happened. The Easter bombing attack completely shattered them in utter despair. It happened in Colombo and it affected them deeply. During this period, they neither could meet nor could discuss media production. So, they created a WhatsApp group in response to this challenging situation. In their video production, they decided to make a positive intervention to the anti-Muslim propaganda in Sri Lanka. According to Kavindya's perception,

"People were suspicious of Muslim people. We felt that it is not right to blame the entire Muslim community for the attacks carried out by a few Muslims."

Considering all these factors, they changed their topic and came up with a different storyline for the video production.

Following the discussion, they did a content analysis with the help of their friend Althaf to dig into the stories of Sri Lankan Muslims who had rendered remarkable service to the country. They found two inspiring individuals namely Mohideen Beig and Colonel Aslam Fazly Laffeer who have been adored and respected by the Sri Lankans.

Mohideen Baig (1919–1991) was a notable Sri Lankan musician known particularly for his Buddhist devotional music, which enjoys popularity to this day. He was considered as a highly influential multicultural/multi-religious figure in the country's art history. Colonel Laffeer, on the other hand, represented the military. Aslam Fazly Laffeer was a Sri Lankan Army officer and posthumous recipient of the Parama Weera Vibhushanaya⁶ (PWV). He was awarded the PWV after being killed in action during the Battle of Mullaitivu in 1996 for his actions as commanding officer of the 1st Special Forces Regiment during the Sri Lankan civil war. Colonel Laffeer played a major role in the formation and development of the Sri Lanka Army Special Forces Regiment from the original Combat Tracker Team.

The team collected the autobiographies, pictures and videos of these remarkable individuals. The next challenge was to take a powerful message to society. For this purpose, they became mindful about the language and the background music they used in the video clip. The words they used were powerful and compassionate. The music rose from low notes to high notes to release positive energy to its audience. And finally, they wanted to leave something for their audience to reflect on.

Having posted their production primarily on the We Lanka FB page, they met again to develop a plan for the social media campaign. They understood how important it is to go viral on social media to take the message across dividing lines in response to hate speech. As they discussed, they created two other pages on Facebook and boosted its video to reach more people. Further, they forwarded the video to over fifty other well-known FB page and forty other groups. They also asked their friends and family to share the video on their pages.

⁶ The Parama Weera Vibhushanaya is the highest decoration awarded by the Sri Lankan military, equivalent to the British Victoria Cross and the United States Medal of Honor.

The video was shared on other social media platforms such as YouTube, Tweeter and Instagram. *The stop for a second* video received a lot of public attention as a result of their marketing plan. In We Lanka page, the video had 533 Likes, 248 comments, 983 shares and 29K view within three weeks. In Instagram, it had 155 views and 100 on Tweeter. On YouTube, they had 209 views and 18 likes. Halfway through the public outreach program, they realized the importance of giving the message to the Muslim and Tamil communities in their language. Hence, Althaf translated the quotes into Tamil and produced a Tamil version of the video. This version was again shared among the networks such as SL Muslims, Sri Lankan Muslims and Traditional Muslims.

The feedback they received from the public is simply amazing. Nadun received a call from a Muslim person a few days after posting the video on his FB page. Recalling that moment, Nadun expressed:

"He told me that we have initiated something that the Muslims should have done. Not all Muslims are terrorists. We do love our country. I salute you for doing this video on behalf of us."

This has been a wonderful journey for every team member in the four stars team. In their words, "this was a life-changing experience." For Kavindya, this project has inspired her to become a social media influencer. At the beginning of the project, she was solely focused on her higher studies rather than being active on social media platforms. However, taking part in the campaign made her realize how important it is to make a voice about the things that she is passionate about. So, she developed her blog to influence the public. Althaf has also been on a journey of exploring different religious beliefs and practices. He has developed the habit of reading religious books. He is currently reading a Buddhist pedagogical book named "What Buddha Taught" by Reverent Walpola. The four stars team has visited a few religious places in Colombo. With Althaf, the team visited a Mosque in Maradana, Colombo and the Buddhists took him to the Ganga Rama Buddhist Temple in Colombo. They also invited him to take part in an Alms-giving program. Concluding their interview, they stated:

"For us, this is not the end of wonderful teamwork rather a beginning of a new partnership."

Annexure 04

THERE IS NO RECONCILIATION WITHOUT THE HEALING OF MEMORIES

Oluvil is a beautiful village situated in Attalaichenai division, Ampara. Paddy cultivation is the main source of income for many villagers. Not long ago, Muslim and Tamil people lived in harmony acknowledging the differences of one another. There was a common belief that they were blessed to live in such a prosperous land and one of the reasons that contributed to its prosperity was the ethnic co-existence. They spoke the same language. There was no division in the society and everyone blended well into the community.

Things began to change in 1990 when the darkness of ethnic war leapt into the lives of people. In Alim Nagar, sixteen innocent Muslims who were working in their paddy fields went missing. Later the villagers found out that they were brutally killed by the LTTE. Family members of those victimized farmers were furious and revengeful. A sudden backlash was instigated in the village to harm the Tamil people. While some Muslims armed to harm the Tamils some were armed to defend them. Tamils in the village took refuge in the village mosques and friendly Muslim houses. The backlash ended in a few days but the brotherhood was tarnished forever.

Based on this true story, four stars youth team in Kalmunai, Ampara developed their documentary for the We Lanka project. Twenty-one-year old Hamtha Banu who was born and brought up in Oluvil witnessed how this incident impact the lives of the people as she states:

"Growing up, I didn't have any connection with Tamil people even though we used to live in the same village. As a team, we thought that we have to address this issue in our documentary."

Accordingly, they got together and wrote the script for the pitching sessions. Luckily, their story got shortlisted for social media production.

The two boys in the team; M. Sajith and M.L.M Dayal made a few visits to Oluvil village to meet the villagers and gather primary data for the video. Initially, the villagers were hesitant to open up with the team. As one villager expressed *"We want to forget the past and move on with our lives."*

The team was disheartened by this comment. In consequence, they got together again to discuss the strategies to overcome the challenges. They thought that it is important to reach out to the potential stakeholders who can support them in this task. The youth societies in Oluvil maintain a good relationship with the villagers and four stars team decided to approach the youth societies to help them in collecting data.

With the help of the youth societies, the team went door to door to collect pictures for their documentaries. They made sure to meet the witnesses of the incident as they could provide reliable and accurate information to develop the documentary. Whenever somebody had an opposing view, the team

explained the importance of healing of memories. Since the team had done the background research on reconciliation, it wasn't that hard to convince the people this time. The team developed their dialogue around the idea of;

"healing doesn't mean the damage never existed, it means the damage no longer controls our lives."

The team explained how their documentary can help the villagers to heal their memories in the past. When they dusted their old albums and took them out, there were pictures of various occasions such as weddings, trips, funerals and ceremonies. There were both Tamils and Muslims in those pictures, smiling and happy. As 19- year old M. Sajith says:

"It was a moment of revelation for everyone. Villagers recalled those good old memories and we could see how genuinely happy they were."

They collected enough pictures for the documentary. Some villagers told them that they could have given them more photos yet their belongings were either destroyed or misplaced during the wartime.

The next challenge was video editing. They delegated work among themselves and time to time consulted the Search team for guidance. The team expressed their journey in this video production in the following words:

"We haven't work together in a team like this before. It was a great opportunity to learn the strengths and weakness of each team member and delegate work accordingly. The problem-solving skill was something we all improved through taking part in this video production."

The four stars video documentary about reconciliation received good feedback on social media platforms. On the We Lanka page, the video had 17k views, 44 likes and 71 shares.

Recalling their experience during phase I, they expressed that it was the first time that they had taken part in such an innovative program. Affirming the success of the mobilization event, Dayal from Kalmunai expressed his thoughts,

"If not for this inter-cultural event, we would not have understood the importance of reconciliation. Everything was new to us. Interactive games, physical activities and history challenge were very useful to improve our teamwork and leadership skills. This event also allowed us to go back to our childhood days. We all became kids. We played together, we ate together and we had so much fun together."

All in all, the four-star team felt so grateful for this initiative by the We Lanka team. During a period overwhelmed by prejudice and mistrust, they were proud to produce something worthwhile for today as well as the generation to come. As the concluding remark, team members stated:

"We were given a chance to change the mindset of the people and we did our level best."

