

Country in focus: Sri Lanka

With a population of slightly more than 21 million, Sri Lanka is a constitutional multiparty republic. In May 2009, after two decades of civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the government announced the military defeat of the LTTE. A large number of civilians were displaced during the war as a result of forced removals and flight from conflict areas. Many people have been forced to leave their homes and support networks, and have been both psychologically and materially affected. Emergency regulations have been in force for most of the past three decades, undermining progress towards human rights protection. The high level of disharmony among ethnic groups is due to the unstable relationships between ethnic groups and the mistrust caused by the conflict. The need for non-violent conflict resolution remains palpable.

Despite the relatively high voter turn-out that is usually seen, political patronage is a dominant pattern in Sri Lankan politics. Party-switching is common, indicating that the quest for power is more paramount than ideology or political perseverance. Through the years, as ethnicity became increasingly politicised, the ‘one person, one vote’ system – that has no provision for safeguarding of minorities – has allowed the majority ethnic group to out-vote minority groups and interests. “Majoritarianism” has become the rule.

Representation of women in elected political bodies is also extremely low. Women constitute less than six percent of parliament, for example. One major reason was the low number of nominations given to women by the major political parties. Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia without a quota for women at the local government level.

The 18th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution passed in 2010. It removed a presidential two-term limit and granted more power over appointments to the police, judiciary, public service

and electoral commissions. While opposition and rights groups criticize the measure as weakening checks and balances – and thus undermines the principles of constitutional democracy – the government argues that the constitutional change is justified to give the President time to build Sri Lanka’s economy in the post-war period.

Violence against women is a serious problem in Sri Lanka and the problem remains under-reported due to the associated social stigma. According to latest statistics, at least 60 percent of Sri Lankan women have experienced domestic violence.

Poverty in Sri Lanka, specifically rural poverty, continues to be a growing problem despite Sri Lanka being an exceptional country in relation to life expectancy of its people, literacy rates and other social indicators, which often surpass those of other countries in the South Asia region.

Sri Lanka is prone to frequent natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, landslides, droughts and coastal erosion, with increasing losses of life and property. The devastation caused by the Tsunami in 2004 took Sri Lanka by surprise, and was an acute warning that the country is also vulnerable to low-frequency, high impact events with extensive damage and consequences.



How we and our partners work

Diakonia Sri Lanka’s programme has been conceptualised to support civil society engagement in promoting democracy (including women’s representation) and good governance. It aims to counter over-centralisation and majoritarianism, by protecting human rights (including women’s rights) and opening spaces for the participation of women and men in development as steps towards a vision of managing underlying conflicts through peaceful means.

Diakonia in Sri Lanka works towards the achievement of a healthy democracy in the country based on good governance,

observance of human rights, peaceful co-existence and a sound and equitably shared economic status

In order to achieve its goal, together with partners, Diakonia helps to strengthen civil society and puts a focus on empowerment of marginalised communities, mobilising them into groups to create a safe and unified voice. Alongside our partners, Diakonia is involved at various levels in supporting women to achieve the same rights opportunity as men, and promote peaceful co-existence through livelihood programmes. We and our partners promote and strengthen national level organisations to either deepen or develop democracy in structural terms.

The Diakonia programme in Sri Lanka focuses on three strategies: strengthening civil society's capacity to engage in the promotion of democracy; promotion and protection of human rights; and supporting socio-economic justice.

Diakonia's partners are involved with the rights-holders at various levels – individual, family, community and national levels. Most partners work with to help facilitate the strengthening of these community based structures. The enabling strategy of promoting basic conditions in order to prevent violence means conflict transformation and trauma healing in the post-conflict scenario and the promotion of sustainable structures

Diakonia's partner organisations mainly strategise together on the following shared activity areas:

- Empowering marginalised groups, facilitating the formation of community groups to create a voice for themselves;
- Promoting and defending human rights, gender awareness and equal rights for men and women, challenging gender-biased sociopolitical and religious norms and practices;
- Strengthening community-based structures for augmenting local democracy.
- Contributing to the psychosocial recovery of people traumatised by the conflict;
- Advocating and awareness-raising about voters' rights and democratic governance, campaigning to increase the space for women and youth participation and reporting achievements in this area.
- Working on disaster preparedness, following the principles of "do no harm".

Diakonia plays a bridging role between partners, both within and between country programmes, ensuring that local ownership of specific initiatives is not compromised. It takes an active role in facilitating partners' capacity building and also provides a platform for partners to meet, discuss coordinate and exchange ideas.

Most of the Diakonia partners in Sri Lanka have their head offices in the east of the country or in Colombo, although their work and networks extend throughout Sri Lanka. Target groups include marginalised and vulnerable communities living in rural areas, women, rights-holders, duty-bearers, civil society and individual citizens.

Country partners

Location	Partner
Batticaloa	Professional Psychological Counselling Centre (PPCC)
Batticaloa	Eastern Human and Economic Development (EHED)
Kandy	Women's Development Centre (WDC)
Kandy	Samadana/m
Akkaraipattu	Social Welfare Organisation Ampara District (SWOAD)
Akkaraipattu	Al Quraish Social Development Society (AL-Quraish)
Akkaraipattu	NGO Consortium Ampara District
Akkaraipattu	Social Organisations Networking for Development (SOND)
Colombo	Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA)
Colombo	Centre for Performing Arts (CPArts)
Colombo	Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)
Colombo	Centre for the Study of Human Rights (CSHR)
Batticaloa	Eastern Self Reliant Community Awakening Organisation (ESCO)
Colombo	Institute of Human Rights (IHR)
Colombo	Lanka Youth Organisations Network (LYON)
Colombo	Law and Trust (LST)
Colombo	People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL)
Muratuwa	Sarvodya Legal Services Movement (SLSM)
Colombo	South Asia Partnership – Sri Lanka (SAP-SRI)
Dehiwela	Survivors Associated
Colombo	Women in Need (WIN)
Jaffna	Council of NGOs Jaffna
Colombo	Muslim Women's Research & Action Forum (MWRAF)
Colombo	International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)
Akkaraipattu	Akkaraipattu Women Association (AWA)
Batticaloa	Suriya Women's Development Centre (SWDC)
Viluthu	Community Development Foundation

Contact details

Country Manager:

Frank Stephen
 No.10A Ampitiya Road
 Kandy 20000, Sri Lanka
 Phone: +94 (0)81 220 01 14/ 447 37 98
 Fax: +94 (0)81 447 26 40
 E-mail: diakonia@diakonia-srilanka.org

Colombo Office

Postal address/ visiting address:
 80/41/1 Layards Road
 Colombo 05, Sri Lanka
 Phone: +94 (0)11 250 24 50
 Fax: +94 (0)11 551 72 91

Batticaloa Office

Postal address/ visiting address:
 No.6, SinnaUppodai Road
 Batticaloa 30000, Sri Lanka
 Phone: +94 (0)65 222 51 51
 Fax: +94 (0)65 222 51 51

About Diakonia

Diakonia is a Christian development organisation working together with local partners for a sustainable change for the most vulnerable people in the world.

We support more than 400 partner organisations in over 30 countries – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Diakonia believes in a 'strategy for change', which focuses on socially sustainable development. We believe that our partners can solve problems and identify opportunities by adopting a holistic, rights-based approach.