# Reaching out and touching lives

DEVELOPMENT COUNSEL AND PRACTICE

**PROGRESS**
REPORT 2024

FOR A BETTER LIFE

COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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*CDS is a national non-governmental organization registered under the companies' ordinance in 1978 and recognized as an approved charity by an act of the Sri Lankan parliament (vide gazette No. 15 of December 1978). Registration no.1978/A/49. New re-registration no.GA295*

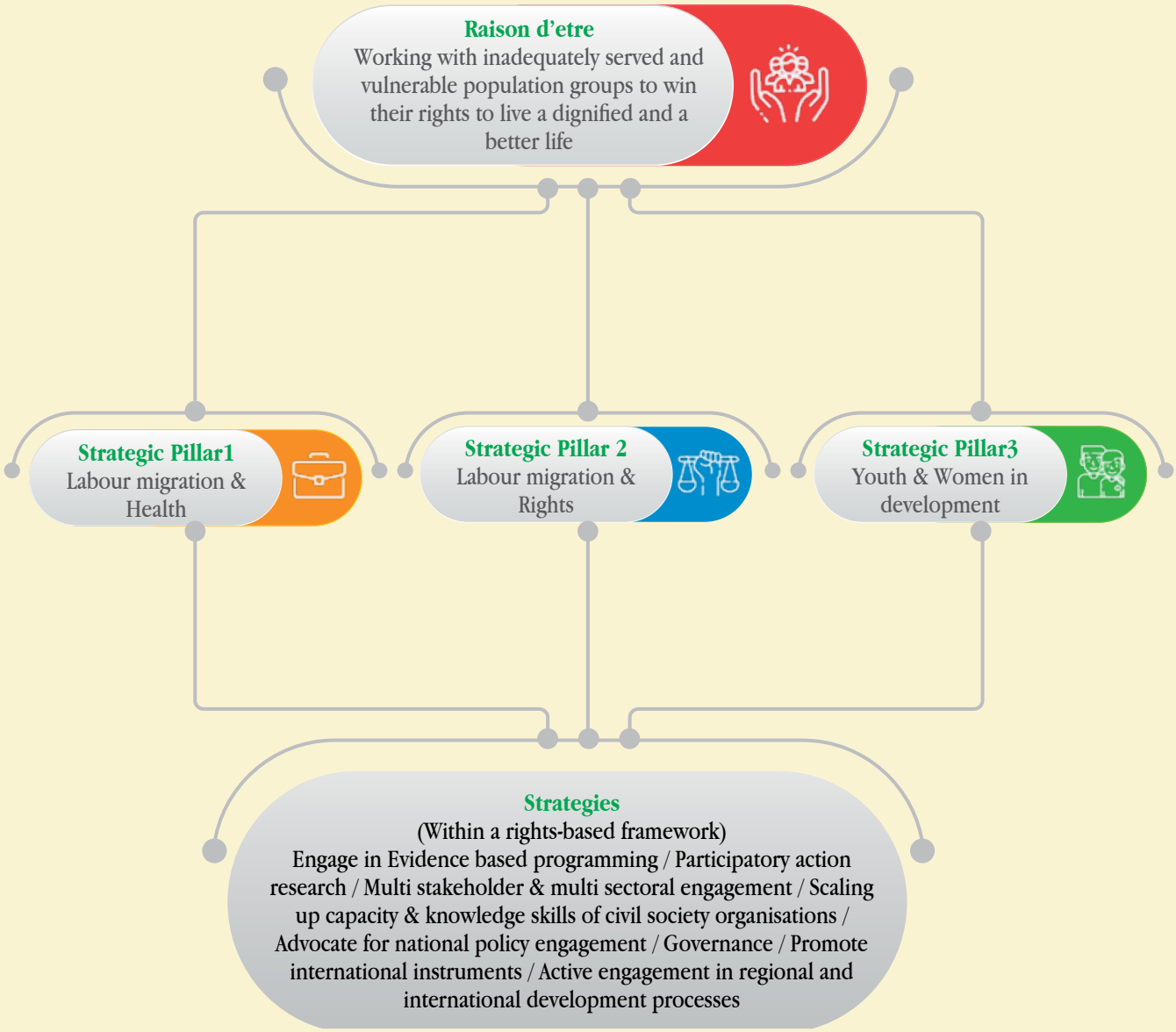
## Mission

*For a better life* - bringing together people from all segments of society especially vulnerable, at-risk, and inadequately served population groups irrespective of cultural, religious, ethnic, gender or sexual orientation to be represented and respected as equal citizens in society through a movement that participates in the belief and practice of human rights, health rights, and integrated social development through national and international cooperation.

## Key Objectives

- To increase the capacity of individuals, families, and communities toward self-worth and independence through an understanding and respect for individual and collective rights and thereby achieve holistic development.
- To support the strengthening of peer organizations through technical service provision in achieving capacity building and advocacy initiatives among stakeholders.
- To ensure effectiveness, accountability, transparency, and sustainability in all our efforts through a strengthened organisational framework.
- To build partnerships with key stakeholders, stakeholder institutions, multilateral agencies, donors, and the private sector to establish strong and lasting bonds.

# CDS Strategic Focus



# Operational Footprint

**Communities we engage with**

Youth. Sex Workers. MSMs. Low-Skilled Migrant Workers. PLHIVs, Factory Workers. Women who are socially and economically vulnerable and challenged in society

**Their issues**

Vulnerable. Discriminated. Stigmatised. Shamed. Abused. Distressed. Detained. Deprived. Underserved. Marginalised. Deceived.

**Knowledge, we give**

HIV & AIDS. SRH. STDs. GBV. Labour Trafficking. Gender. Safe Labour Migration. Mental health. Human smuggling. Social Ills, Entrepreneurship, and Skills Development

Health Rights. Labour Rights. Protection. Equality. Empowerment. Legal Assistance. Psychosocial Support. Community leadership

Our delivery framework

Capacity Enhancement & Development. Policy Influencing. Advocacy & Lobbying. Activism. Behaviour Change. Behaviour change and Development Communication. Evidence-based participatory action research

Our key stakeholders

NGOs. CBOs. GROs. Government ministries. Local Government Authorities. Government & Private Institutions. Direct & Indirect Beneficiaries. Donor community. Multilateral agencies. International partners. Subregional and international networking.

# Acknowledgments

This report covers two years of project activities – 2023 and 2024. 2024 was an election year for Sri Lanka where both the presidential election and the general election were held in September and November, respectively.

The elections brought in new political leadership with Anura Kumara Dissanayake contesting the National People Power (NPP) from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) won a landslide victory in the presidential poll. As was expected his party swept the general election with a two-thirds majority winning 159 of the 225 seats in parliament.

This election victory was a result of the political turmoil, and people's uprising – the Aragalaya in 2022, the economic collapse in 2023, the widespread corruption and impunity, and the callous disregard for law and order in the country.

We acknowledge the efforts of the interim government and the president who brought some stability to the country with the assistance of the IMF. This report provides a summary account of what we managed to achieve and the impact we managed to achieve under very trying circumstances.

We are proud to report that despite the funding restrictions and instability in the country, we successfully worked in 12 districts in 2024 and 12 districts in 2023 and brought about horizontal and vertical gains in our projects. One of our new project initiatives, which received funding from the Global Initiative focused on generating awareness and advocating for the growing concern of maritime human smuggling (MHS). This project spanned over two years and was implemented in two coastal districts where MHS was a significant and concerning issue.

At a very appropriate moment, we received funds from Give2Asia for a project we had written to support and uplift poverty-stricken women in breaking free from their economic hardships by engaging in micro-enterprise projects through their creative efforts.

In 2024 we realised the importance of addressing migration health with our experience in sexual and reproductive health and HIV & AIDS. We conducted online research with our CSO partners in other labour-sending countries to develop an advocacy and training tool on tuberculosis, realising the impact the disease has on low-skilled workers. We received very positive support from the national TB control unit, their director, and a team of medical professionals. The outcome of this was the development of a training tool for civil society organisations to conduct TB awareness and prevention programs in their districts and communities.

CDS with the Life Integrators Coalition (LIC) was invited to engage in a dialogue with the LGBTQI networks on migration. We conducted a national workshop in Colombo with this community. We shared the mobility restrictions, recruitment restrictions, including stigma and discrimination, and detention and deportation concerns, as the laws in destination countries are vague and do not support the LGBTQI community in any way. We aim to actively engage with this community, their networks, and unions to influence policy and laws at the national level under the new regime.

**Andrew Samuel**
*Executive Director*

# Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ADD | Abu Dhabi Dialogue |
| AIDS | cquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| CARAM | Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility |
| CBO | Community-Based Organisation |
| CDS | Community Development Services |
| CHRCD | Center for Human Rights & Community Development |
| CoD | Country of Destination |
| CoO | Country of Origin |
| CP | Colombo Process |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CSW | Commercial Sex Worker |
| DS | Divisional Secretariat |
| DU | Drug User |
| ESCO | Eastern Self-reliant Community Awakening Organisation |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| FPAR | Feminist Participatory Action Research |
| FSW | Female Sex Worker |
| FTZ | Free Trade Zone |
| GAATW | Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| GCM | Global Compact on Migration |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GOALS | Governance of Labour Migration in South and South East Asia |
| GI | Global Initiatives |
| GRO | Grassroots Organisation |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| IDI | In-depth Interview |
| IDWD | International Domestic Workers Day |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| IMD | International Migrants Day |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| IOM | International Organisation of Migration |
| ISP | Inadequately Served Population/people |
| ITUC | International Trade Union Confederation |
| LGBTIQ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer |
| LIC | Life Integrators Coalition |
| LKR | Lankan Rupee |
| MDC | Migrant Development Circle |
| MFA | Migrant Forum in Asia |
| MEL | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MHS | Maritime Human Smuggling |
| MSM | Men having sex with men |
| MW | Migrant Worker |
| NCD | Noncommunicable Disease |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| NPTCCD | National Program for Tuberculosis Control and Chest Diseases |
| NSACP | National STD & AIDS Control Programme |
| PDF | Praja Diviya Foundation |
| PDO | Pre-departure Orientation |
| PLHIV | Persons living with HIV |
| PRNA | Participatory Rural Needs Assessment |
| RCF | Robert Carr Fund |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| SDF | Saviya Development Foundation |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SLBFE | Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment |
| STD | Sexually Transmitted Disease |
| SRH | Sexual Reproductive Health |
| TAWG | Thematic Area Working Group |
| TB | Tuberculosis |
| TG | Transgender |
| TOC | Transnational Organised Crime |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| UHC | Universal Health Coverage |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| WAD | World AIDS Day |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WMW | Woman Migrant Worker |
| NAITA | National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority, |
| VTA | Vocational Training Authority, |
| NYSC | National Youth Services Council, |
| TVEC | Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission, |
| NIE | National Institute of Education |

# Contents


**Communities reached in 2024** 10

**Living in hope** 12-13

**Program highlights** 14

**Youth initiatives** 15

Reaching out to youth peer leaders on HIV and AIDS knowledge 15

Knowledge workshop for youth peer leaders on peer counseling 16

Training Youth Peer Leaders on Safe Migration 17

Educating prospective migrant men through technical colleges on HIV and TB prevention 18

**Communities reached** 19

**Working with LGBTQI communities** 21

**Civil society organisations and network strengthening** 23

Comprehensive knowledge workshop for CBOs in the National TB/HIV network in the Central Province 23

Expanding the knowledge of TB to the Life Integrators Coalition network 24

**Advocacy initiatives in 2024** 25

1. Election manifestos, promises, and protecting migrant worker rights 25

2. World AIDS Day 25

3. International Migrants Day 28

**Partnering with the corporate sector** 29

**Our SDG engagement** 30

**Our engagement in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)** 32

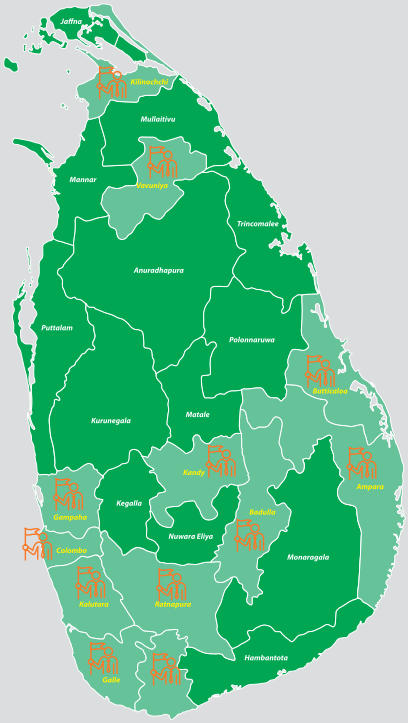
**Partnerships for Success** 33

# Communities reached in 2024

**1486**
Communities reached

**10**
Government officers

**41**
GBO's/GRO's




**799**
**727**
Men
Women

Kalutara, Colombo
Galle, Kilinochchi,Batticaloa
Kandy, Ampara, Matara, Vavuniya
Badulla, Ratnapura, Gampaha
Districts Covered

# Progress Report 2024

# Living in hope

One can assume that 2024 was a turnaround year for Sri Lanka, as the interim president, the multilateral agencies, and other friendly nations came together to rescue a country that went bankrupt in 2022. Some economic pundits and political opponents of the interim government and president said that the IMF essentially led the rescue or bailout on its terms and that the government had little to do to ensure the turnaround.

Nevertheless, the country is back on the road to recovery. We no longer spend valuable productive time on the streets and in queues to get our essential commodities. Food and commodity inflation, which almost hit three digits, has been brought down. Poverty, which affected a quarter of the population, is steadily declining. Unemployment rose because of the closure of small and mid-size businesses. There was also an exodus of youth and professionals leaving the country in search of greener pastures as there was little hope of prosperity at home.

With the turnaround, there is an urgent need to strengthen the health and education sectors in the country and provide real solutions to skilled labour that was otherwise only rhetoric by successive governments.

## National elections

In 2022, the nation witnessed widespread protests calling for systemic change, which ultimately led to the ousting of an elected president. These protests were fueled by significant dissatisfaction with the country's governance, culminating in its bankruptcy. As the elections approached, some of the established parties did not expect that the voters would remember the events of 2022.

As the electoral season approached, many established political parties miscalculated the collective memory of the electorate, underestimating the impact of the tumultuous events of 2022. They clung to the belief that their traditional voter base would remain loyal, despite the chaos that had unfolded. However, their gamble backfired spectacularly, leading to a significant loss in support at the polls. Disillusioned by years of inadequate governance, voters made a decisive choice to break away from the status quo, marking a pivotal shift in the political landscape. The interim government period concluded with the presidential elections held in September 2024. The established political parties struggled to unite and secure a significant portion of the vote. Some parties were unable to field a responsible candidate for the presidential election.

However, the NPP, led by their charismatic leader, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, effectively communicated their key messages to the voters with three essential promises: to eradicate corruption at all levels, to restore law and order, and to reduce waste in government. These commitments resonated strongly with the electorate, ultimately leading to Dissanayake's election as president.

It was only natural to expect the NPP to win the general election held in November with a two-thirds majority by fielding inexperienced political candidates, many of whom were sworn in as members of parliament for the very first time. This election was also significant for the NPP as it featured a higher number of women candidates who successfully won their constituencies, representing the party in parliament.

## Regional conflicts

Elsewhere in the world, the Russia- Ukraine war continued and intensified with no signs of a negotiated ceasefire. The Israel-Palestine war also shows no signs of ending soon. Both these wars continue to have an impact on the global economy and, more importantly, on the lives of people living in the war zones and these territories.

Wars often affect people in many ways. Loss of lives, displacement, loss of well-being, community, and livelihoods. There is a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty. Rebuilding hope and reconciliation has never been easy.

Many people affected by the war live in refugee camps under severe humanitarian conditions as they must battle

health concerns and rely on relief agencies for their uncertain survival, not even certain where their next meal will come from. Children and the elderly are the most vulnerable as the scars that will be left behind cannot be erased.

As development and humanitarian practitioners, we hope these wars will take a positive turn toward sustainable peace in 2025

## Global development

Traditional funders to the south, the European Union, and USAID are cutting their funding in big numbers. The US elections have already given the global south indicators that its funding will be very selective, it will make available limited funding for climate issues, and it will have limited funding available for global health. Elected President Donald Trump is withdrawing the US membership from the WHO. It is said that 15% of the WHO budget comes from the US. The Global South requires funds for many diseases' control or prevention, such as HIV, TB, and child immunization. We witnessed the period during the COVID-19 pandemic, and our nations certainly need funds to manage future pandemics.

These are worrying trends and worrying times for the global south. We in the global south will need to look at alternative support to keep our health in check. It would be good to approach BRICKS to support health programs and the health agenda.

By far the US is the Western world's biggest donor — with $64.7 billion in official development assistance, or ODA, in 2023 compared to second-highest Germany's $37.9 billion — the U.S. is now leading the global foreign aid system into uncharted territory. (Devex)

Climate change is a persistent issue that we can no longer ignore. The United States has already withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, making it unlikely that the country will actively address or fund the climate challenges we face today. With COP30 approaching in Brazil, expectations are low for the US to take an engaging role. Instead, it is anticipated that member states of the Paris Agreement will step up and make strong commitments to tackle the escalating climate concerns.

## A need to change the funding approach

Local NGOs and civil society groups continue to depend on donor funding for the impactful work they carry out within their communities. These vital programs contribute to the national interest.

Recently, USAID has focused on gaining a better understanding of and providing support to local organisations directly. We are optimistic that the new US administration will recognise the value of this approach and hold local organizations accountable for the funds they receive.

International donors could better cater to local needs by offering their expertise and funding aligned with national priorities rather than insisting that applicants conform to the donors' requirements or funding models.

As local NGOs and community-based organisations that operate either independently or as part of networks, we feel that our combined strength and commitment to tackling significant national socio-political and socioeconomic development challenges will undoubtedly yield greater results through innovation and sustainability, as this approach aligns with a national strategy and community values.

We urge international donors to bring this topic into discussions within the NGO community. It is important to implement changes that will lead to a more effective funding model, one that achieves equitable outcomes, supports the cause, and ensures the sustainability of the organizations involved.

# Program Highlights

In 2024, CDS, despite funding restrictions, continued its ambitious journey, reaching out to diverse communities across the nation to implement transformative programs that sought to profoundly improve lives and advocate for the rights of the underserved, marginalised, and vulnerable populations.

Throughout the year, our efforts in working with youth were marked by active engagement with enthusiastic youth from various backgrounds. This included technical college students navigating their career paths, university attendees exploring academic aspirations, energetic estate youth seeking social change, vibrant members of dynamic youth clubs, and students from an eclectic mix of educational institutions.

A key focus of our initiatives was the empowerment of LGBTQI communities. We dedicated significant resources to equipping these individuals with vital knowledge about their rights and informing them of their entitlements regarding mobility and access to essential services. Our commitment extended to bolstering the capabilities of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), which are essential in creating grassroots networks within local and village settings. These organisations play a critical role in educating their communities on pressing issues, providing a vital link to resources and support.

In our quest for meaningful societal change, we actively collaborated with policymakers at both the district and national levels, working in tandem with our extensive network of partners. This collaboration was particularly focused on addressing critical issues such as the enhancement of health services and the safeguarding of rights for migrant workers and their families, ensuring they receive the protection and support they deserve.

Together, we forged robust partnerships aimed at delivering vital resources and programs to those who needed them most. This collaborative approach not only amplified our impact but also ensured that our initiatives reached the most vulnerable populations, fostering a stronger, more equitable society for future generations.

# 1. Youth Initiatives

In the AIDS response, we must understand and respect the sexuality of young people. We cannot only address their sexual orientation. Their sexual behaviours must be understood and addressed (Community Development Services).

## 1.1 Reaching out to youth peer leaders on HIV and AIDS knowledge

In July 2024, CDS hosted an enlightening knowledge workshop for 31 enthusiastic youth peer leaders at the Horana Divisional Secretariat auditorium. This impactful event was made possible with the support of the Youth Services Officer from the Divisional Secretariat, who played a crucial role in its coordination.

The workshop's primary goal was to empower young minds with essential knowledge about HIV and AIDS, focusing particularly on the unique risks that these diseases pose within the migrant worker community. Engaging discussions illuminated the various behaviours and lifestyle patterns that can contribute to the transmission of HIV in destination countries.

Participants hailed from a rich tapestry of backgrounds, including students from schools and universities, dedicated estate workers, and passionate members of youth societies. Their diverse experiences and perspectives enriched the dialogue, creating a vibrant atmosphere of learning and collaboration. Throughout the workshop, there was a spirit of awareness and advocacy as attendees equipped themselves with the knowledge needed to make a positive impact in their communities.

We received the assistance of Dr. Kokilanthi Dharmarathne, consultant physician of the STD clinic in Kalutara, who provided the youth with knowledge on STDs. A PLHIV speaker was invited to share his experience of living with the disease. CDS staff conducted the sessions on HIV and migration together with the Youth Services officer Mr. Chandana Jayakody.

## 1.2 Knowledge workshop for youth peer leaders on peer counseling

In response to the alarming rise in youth suicides across the nation, CDS launched a vital initiative aimed at empowering young individuals. An interactive workshop was organised to train a select group of youth peer leaders, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to provide invaluable guidance and support to their fellow peers.

The workshop's primary goal was to cultivate a network of empathetic listeners who could reach out to friends grappling with psychosocial challenges such as overwhelming stress, crippling anxiety, and deep-seated depression. These peer leaders would not only offer a compassionate ear but also direct their peers toward essential counseling services, ensuring that help and understanding are just a conversation away. Together, they strive to create a haven where vulnerability can be shared and healing can begin.

The workshop was conducted in August 2024, for which a diverse group of young people was recruited from technical colleges, universities, schools, youth clubs, and estates. The program was held at the Horana Divisional Secretariat. A total of 29 participants attended this training. The resource persons were trained and qualified Counselling Officers of the Horana DS Division, Ms. M.C.B Jayathilaka and Ms. D.M Sunethra Kumari.

## 1.3 Training Youth Peer Leaders on Safe Migration

Amidst the rising tide of individuals seeking better opportunities through visit visas, the alarming increase in human trafficking, cyber trafficking, and human smuggling—exacerbated by a severe economic crisis—prompted CDS to launch this vital initiative. This program aimed to enlighten young people about the perils of unsafe migration and the often-overlooked dangers inherent in taking risky, irregular routes.

The primary goal of the workshop was to arm these young individuals with a deep understanding of the specific threats that migrant workers encounter when they seek employment abroad. Participants were encouraged to disseminate this knowledge among their peers, advocating for the importance of securing jobs through ethical means and navigating their migration journeys via safe and legal pathways. This education was crucial in helping them evade the treacherous traps of debt bondage, forced labour, human trafficking, and the looming threat of detention and deportation.

CDS staff conducted the sessions on safe migration, elaborating the current trends in recruitment, human trafficking and human smuggling, and the numerous cyber scams in recruitment.

CDS also elaborated in its sessions on the visit visa scams that migrants take, bypassing regular channels, and the dangers of such travel. Visit visa travel is promoted by recruiters, their intermediaries, and even in-service migrant workers.

Ms. Sundari Thennakoon, Senior Manager, Western Province, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) was invited to speak on the responsibilities of the Bureau.

## 1.4 Educating prospective migrant men through technical colleges on HIV and TB prevention

One of the key projects initiated by CDS involved creating a detailed training guide and manual focused on Tuberculosis and its effects on migration and migrant workers.

CDS engaged with regional civil society organizations in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan to gain insights into tuberculosis from the perspective of migrant workers.

These insights were incorporated into the development of the trainer's guides and presentation materials.

CDS also collaborated with the National Program for Tuberculosis Control and Chest Diseases (NPTCCD) to obtain essential technical guidance during the creation of the literature.

Many young people attending technical colleges aim to migrate for employment after completing their respective skill programs and courses. However, their understanding of sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV and Tuberculosis, is often minimal. It is mandatory that workers undergo a rigorous medical examination through designated medical testing centers. These centers do not provide the necessary environment to prepare workers for the HIV and TB tests. Both HIV and TB are diseases that discriminate against workers if they are found to be infected.

To address this gap, CDS launched several awareness-raising programs in technical colleges to educate students about HIV and TB.

Besides the knowledge on HIV and TB, the workshops addressed the behaviours in destination countries that could lead to infection. The laws about these diseases were also discussed, as most destination countries in the Middle East deport persons with these diseases and don't provide any medical support and referral support while in service.

The goal was to empower these young people to prevent these diseases and access necessary services on time.

The workshops were able to educate a total of 132 technical college students. CDS partnered with 3 CSOs in the Life Integrators Coalition network, namely, Mithuru Mithuro Sansadaya from the Gampaha district, Federation of Institutions for Rural Management (FIRM) from the Vavuniya district, and the Human and Natural Resource Development Foundation (HNRDF) in the Galle District.

The sessions were conducted by both CSO staff as well as by inviting medical professionals from the National TB and National HIV Control Programs and Public Health Inspectors in their respective districts.

## Communities reached

| Organization | Date of program | Place the program was held | Number reached | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | Total |
| Mithuru Mithuro Sansadaya | 22.11.2024 | Sri Lanka Youth Training Center (KOREAN TECH), Sapugaskanda, Colombo | 30<br>26 | 15<br>20 | 45<br>46 |
| HNRDF | 04.12.2024 | Vocational Training Center, Youth Service Council, Akmeemana, Galle | 36 | 05 | 41 |
| FIRM | 06.12.2024 | Sri Lanka German Technical Institute - Kilinochchi | | | |
| Total | | | 92 | 40 | 132 |

revention & Advocacy on Migrant's
/ Issues, Enhancing Access to Health
ervices and Promoting HIV Positive
Migrant's Rights in Asia

# 2. Working with LGBTQI communities

If civil society does not assert itself and pressure policymakers to recognise the LGBTQI community, we will only be doing lip service to them. In the AIDS response, we cannot leave anyone behind *(Community Development Services).*

A significant number of individuals identifying as LGBTQI embark on journeys across borders in pursuit of employment opportunities. Yet, these brave migrants often find themselves grappling with a multitude of unique challenges that remain largely overlooked. In many cases, both their home and host countries lack the legal protections necessary to safeguard their identities and rights.

Faced with the harsh reality of stigma and discrimination, they often encounter bias from immigration officials and indifference from potential employers. In dire situations, the revelation of their sexual orientation or gender identity may lead to detention or deportation. Furthermore, numerous labour-receiving nations have yet to implement policies supporting LGBTQI workers, exacerbating their vulnerability.

In response to these pressing concerns, the Community Development Services (CDS) has joined forces with the Abhimana Workers Union, an organisation dedicated to representing transgender and queer workers. Together, they organised an empowering workshop aimed at HIV prevention for LGBTQI migrant workers, shedding light on the myriad challenges associated with employment migration, particularly in the Middle East. The workshop was meticulously tailored to address the specific needs of this community, ensuring that participants could engage fully with the topics at hand.

The sessions illuminated a range of critical issues, including:

- The heightened risk that LGBTQI individuals face when it comes to contracting HIV is often exacerbated by a lack of access to essential health resources.
- A comprehensive understanding of HIV self-testing, as well as preventive measures such as PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), along with guidance on how to access STI-related services in Sri Lanka.
- An exploration of transgender policies and legal frameworks in host countries is crucial for ensuring the safety and rights of LGBTQI migrants.
- A candid discussion on the challenges faced by transgender individuals during medical examinations, highlighting the need for sensitivity and awareness in these settings.
- Insights into accessing health services and necessary hormones post-migration, ensuring that individuals can maintain their well-being and identity.
- An examination of the hurdles LGBTQI communities encounter after relocating for work, providing a platform for sharing experiences and strategies for resilience.

This workshop not only fostered awareness and understanding but also empowered participants to navigate their journeys with greater confidence and knowledge. The workshop was held in December at the Mandarina Hotel Colombo. Dr. Sathya Herath from the NSACP, Ms. Radika Gunaratne, Executive Director Parivartan, and Mr. Thenu Ranketh, Executive Director, Venasa, participated as resource persons and offered their knowledge and experience to the group. A total of 28 participants from the LGBTQI community attended the program from the districts of Kandy, Colombo, Rathnapura, Gampaha, Batticaloa, Galle, Kalutara, and Anuradhapura.

# 3.Civil society organisations and network strengthening

As much as one needs funds for programs, the sustainability lies in the knowledge and investment made to community organisations on the ground. They are the champions of causes. Their efforts must always be recognised (Community Development Services).

Since its founding, CDS has dedicated itself to empowering community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across the entire island. We passionately believe that local voices are crucial—they possess the deepest understanding of their communities' needs and are best equipped to address them effectively, even when project funding comes to an end. This approach guarantees long-lasting impact and sustainability. By enhancing the skills and capabilities of our civil society partners, we enable them not only to integrate newfound knowledge into their everyday operations but also to craft compelling project proposals, seek out funding opportunities, and ultimately achieve self-sufficiency.

In 2021, CDS took a significant step forward by establishing the Life Integrators Coalition (LIC), a collaborative network formed alongside 23 diverse civil society organisations spanning 13 districts. This coalition strives to respond to the pressing needs and defend the rights of marginalised, underserved, and vulnerable populations throughout the country.

These dedicated organisations are on the front lines, tackling vital issues such as HIV awareness, child rights advocacy, women's empowerment initiatives, labour migration support, agricultural development, and entrepreneurship programs. Together, they are making strides toward a more equitable and just society.

## 3.1 Comprehensive knowledge workshop for CBOs in the National TB/HIV network in the Central Province

In November 2024, CDS, in collaboration with YMMA Kandy, organized a capacity-building program for 23 nongovernmental and community-based organisations. These organisations have formed a network to combat HIV and TB in the Central Province.

The program aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of these organisations to effectively integrate TB and HIV into their ongoing work, particularly in reaching out to migrants and their families. Medical professionals from the government Chest Clinic Kandy provided technical knowledge on TB, while the STD Clinic Kandy offered expertise on HIV.

## 3.2 Expanding the knowledge of TB to the Life Integrators Coalition network

CDS formed a network of TU and CSO partners in 2021 to advocate for the health and human rights of marginalized and vulnerable communities. The network has 23 partners representing 13 districts. CDS developed a training module on TB in relation to labor migration. CDS worked in close collaboration with the NPTCCD to verify the technical accuracy of the module. Once the module was finalized, CDS printed copies of the module in the Sinhala and Tamil languages and made it available for the national workshop.

The objective of the national workshop was to enable LIC network partners to integrate TB into their ongoing work and especially to reach migrant workers and their families with this knowledge so that they can prevent becoming infected with the disease and, if infected, access timely treatment and care services. The workshop was held in January 2025 at the Center for Banking Studies in Colombo as part of our projected activities for 2024. It was a one-day comprehensive workshop with 18 member organizations from the LIC network participating and learning from the knowledge workshop.

The technical knowledge on TB was provided by the medical team from the National Program for Tuberculosis Control and Chest Diseases (NPTCCD) in Colombo. The session on migration and the risk of contracting TB to migrant workers was conducted by resource persons from CDS.

# 4. Advocacy Initiatives in 2024

## 4.1 Elections and a manifesto to protect migrant workers

As Sri Lanka approached the pivotal moment of its presidential elections, Community Development Services (CDS) issued a compelling statement to all candidates vying for office. This declaration underscored the crucial significance of labour migration, highlighting not only its implications for voting rights and remittances but, more profoundly, for the protection of migrant rights.

The statement cast a glaring spotlight on the alarming reality that recruiters and their intermediaries often flout ethical recruitment practices, leading many migrants into the harrowing traps of forced labour and conditions akin to modern-day slavery in foreign lands. With a passionate tone, the CDS called upon the presidential hopefuls to confront the pressing issues of forced labour, human trafficking, and the insidious plight of debt bondage—all while addressing the plight of those caught in the turmoil of undocumented migration, arbitrary detention, and deportation without due process.

Moreover, the statement urged candidates to tackle the pervasive threats of labour outsourcing and the emerging wave of cyber scams targeting vulnerable workers. It was a clarion call for political aspirants to not only recognize but actively champion the rights of migrants, ensuring that policies are crafted to promote safe and humane labour practices. The message was clear: safeguarding the dignity and rights of migrants must be at the forefront of their campaigns.

CDS developed an advocacy statement commemorating World AIDS Day (WAD) and delivered it to relevant

## 4.2 WAD advocacy statement

stakeholders via electronic media and email databases. The statement made the following recommendations to national and subnational authorities supporting migrant workers and their vulnerabilities, as they are left behind in the AIDS response in Sri Lanka. Migration-related HIV and STI infections continue to remain high in new infection numbers every year. This is because Sri Lanka is a leading labour-sending country, averaging around 250,000-300,000 migrant worker departures every year.

Another concerning trend is that large numbers of workers opt to travel by visit visa, hoping they will get employment in the destination country and then convert the visa to a work visa. This practice is followed because recruiters charge high recruitment fees and the self-imposed regulatory practices imposed by the government on women workers.

1. To include HIV prevention, STI, and sexual and reproductive health knowledge more comprehensively in pre-departure training programs for migrant workers.

2. Allocate more funding for HIV prevention, testing, and health programs targeted at migrant workers and their families.

3. Offer a comprehensive free health package for returnee migrants to identify NCDs and other infectious diseases such as TB and HIV

4. Regulate GAMCA medical testing centers to ensure ethical medical testing practices are followed and they practice regulatory guidelines of the Health Ministry

5. Streamline referrals of HIV-positive cases identified by GAMCA clinics to the National HIV program.

6. Advocate with other South Asian countries for PLHIV migrants' right to work with labour-receiving countries by lobbying through the Colombo Process.

7. Make strong policy actions to minimise stigma and discrimination in the workplace and other health-seeking settings in the country.

## 4.3 Video with a message for World AIDS Day (WAD)

CDS, together with LIC partners - YMMA from the Kandy District, SWOAD from the Ampara district, and ESCO from the Batticaloa district created an advocacy video. The video highlighted migrant workers' health rights with a special focus on HIV. It also used this year's WAD theme – 'Take the rights path'. The video strongly advocated for more funding, better policies, and programs for migrant workers, targeted at policymakers. The video was widely shared among LIC network partners' social media and websites and was sent to policymakers such as the director of the National STD/AIDS Control Program (NSACP) and the director of the National TB Control Program.
Comment from Mr. Nikaril Kanth. Senior Assistant Secretary Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment

*'It is a timely and very important initiative you did. We should work on this also and have to advocate on a wide range. I agree with you that awareness and pre-departure orientation should include preventive measures of HIV. Regarding screening. We cannot do it only for migrant returnees. It will be discriminatory, If they wish to do it voluntarily, we have to support them, we can explore the opportunity for Jobs for HIV-positive persons. However, we have to go a long way.'*

## 4.4 World AIDS Day awareness and petition signing campaign

CDS collaborated with 3 CSOs in the Life Integrators Coalition (LIC), SWOAD Ampara, ESCO Batticaloa, and SAMADANA, in the Kandy district to carry out the WAD campaign.

The objective of this initiative was to educate migrant communities about HIV through peer leaders who had previously received training on the topic during a house-to-house campaign. While educating the communities, the team also gathered signatures for a petition urging the government and the Ministry of Health to improve programs, policies, and funding for HIV-related interventions and health services of migrants. The campaign successfully collected 1,291 signatures from migrants, their families, and their communities. These signatures, along with the petition, were then presented to local policymakers, including the Regional Director of Health Services, STD/AIDS clinics, and the District Secretaries.

- The District Secretary Batticaloa stated that she would support the formation a District Migration Forum soon.

- The Kalmunai Regional Director of Health Services stated that she will take the necessary steps to carry out awareness-raising activities at the village level with the officials in charge of the HIV/AIDS unit.

- The Kandy STD clinic consultant doctor requested the CBO partner to organize migrant workers to conduct some mobile clinics for voluntary HIV testing.

### Campaign details

| Organization | Date of campaign | Numbers reached /petition signed | Area's campaign was conducted |
|---|---|---|---|
| ESCO, Batticaloa | 13.12.2024 | 407 | Koralaipattu, Mamnunai North, Eravurpattu, Eravur Town, Oddamavadi, Koralaipattu Central, Manmunai West Divisions & Kachcheri Batticaloa |
| SWOAD, Ampara | 16.12.2024 | 500 | Alayadivembu, Sammanthurai, Karaithivu, Kalmunai, Irakkamam |
| SAMADANA, Kandy | 04.12.2024 | 384 | Mahaiyawa, Suduhumpola, Gampola, Harispathuwa, Mapanawathura |

## Handing over petition to policymakers

# 5.0. International Migrants Day

Community Development Services (CDS) has initiated an evidence-based advocacy statement directed at the new National People's Power (NPP) government regarding concerns and issues related to labour migration that previous governments have not fully addressed. This statement is titled **"A New Social Contract for the Labour Migration Discourse in Sri Lanka"** highlights both ongoing issues and newly emerging concerns.

The information was obtained through a 10-point electronic questionnaire sent to selected civil society organisations that have spent many years of servicing and working for the rights and privileges of migrant workers and their communities in their respective districts and who have made significant contributions to national consultations and national policy.

CDS also approached 10-12 migrant experts in the country serving as researchers, journalists, former UN employees, academic institutions, and policy influencers. CDS analysed and expanded on the responses received and developed a detailed statement to commemorate International Migrants Day 2024. The statement covered new migration trends, remittance flows, decent work, worker rights, and wages. It also covered expectations from the new government in embassy and consulate support and labour sections, skilling workers to meet international labour demands.

The statement also addressed and made some important recommendations on national policies, protecting and upholding migrant rights, the SLBFE Act, ratifying important and related international conventions, addressing sustainable development goals, and complying with the Global Compact for Migration (GCM).

The statement was delivered to the Hon. Minister, Deputy Minister, Ministry Secretary, Chairman SLBFE, and the IOM with the hope of renewing and reviving constructive discussions on migration and how we could collectively move forward.

The statement calls for the new government, its responsible ministry, and its responsible institutions to address the following:

- Implement the national policy on labour migration
- Review the national migration health policy
- Review and activate the sub-policy on return and reintegration
- Ensure migrant rights are always upheld and protected
- Ensure regulated recruitment practices are maintained and practiced by the PRAs and their intermediaries
- Address the civil society and trade union recommendations given to the government on the proposed amendments to the SLBFE Act.
- To ratify and implement international conventions
    - o Migration for Employment Convention – C97
    - o Migrant Workers Supplementary Provisions Convention – C143
    - o Private Employment Agencies Convention – C181
    - o Domestic Workers Convention – C189
    - o Violence and Harassment Convention C190
- Address the sustainable development goals and the global compact on migration

# 6.0. Corporate partnerships

CDS was approached by Synopsys Sri Lanka a leading international mobile software company in Colombo to help distribute laptops to deserving underprivileged young students. CDS was able to donate four laptops to deserving beneficiaries.

### 1. Deneth Hasaranga Perera

Deneth is an 18-year-old student at Henegama National School, studying for his G.C.E Advanced Level Examination in the Math stream. He lives with his mother and younger sister, as his parents are separated. The family relies on his mother's income as a social worker, facing many hardships.

Despite these challenges, Deneth is a bright student, achieving 7 'A's and 1 'B' in his G.C.E Ordinary Level Examination. He took a web development course using a borrowed laptop, as his family could not afford one. He aims to enter the University of Moratuwa after his Advanced Level exams. Currently, he is using a laptop donated by Community Development Services (CDS) for his studies and web development work. To help support his family, he plans to start an online business and pursue web development after completing his Advanced Levels.

### 2. Vashika Sulakshani Alahakoon

Vashika, a 23-year-old student at Sri Jayewardenepura University, is in her third year of a Bachelor's Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice. She lives in Thudugala, Dodangoda, with her family, including two brothers. With her father unwell, her elder brother supports the family financially, making it difficult for Vashika to complete her assignments without personal access to a computer. Additionally, she struggles with an autoimmune disorder that often prevents her from attending lectures due to low hemoglobin levels. Vashika is grateful to Community Development Services for providing her with a laptop to aid her studies. She aspires to become a lawyer or a university lecturer.

### 3. Shareena Sithumini

Sithumini, a 19-year-old student from Sahaspura, Borella, is preparing for her G.C.E. Advanced Level Examination while living with her mother and younger sister, relying on her mother's income as a domestic worker after her father's departure. As the head prefect of her school and active in church social work, she is a bright student. The laptop donated by Community Development Services significantly aids her studies, and she plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business Management after her exams, for which she is very grateful.

### 4. Dilshan Himasha

Dilshan, a 3rd-year medical student at the University of Colombo, is 23 years old and lives in Mattakkuliya with his family. He has two older siblings and a younger brother. His father, an Uber driver, supports the entire family on his income.

Due to financial constraints, Dilshan could not afford a computer, which hindered his studies and research assignments. However, after receiving a donated laptop from Community Development Services, he can now continue his studies and pursue his goal of becoming a doctor. Dilshan is very grateful for this support, which his family could not have otherwise managed.

# Our SDG engagement

At a very qualitative level, CDS has contributed to advocating for the following SDGs through its funding sources and working with civil society partners,multistakeholder and multisectoral response, and regional engagement with CSO networks.

| SDG | Description | Status |
|---|---|---|
| SDG1 | Ending poverty | Proposed |
| SDG2 | Ending hunger | Proposed |
| SDG3 | Healthy lives | Current |
| SDG4 | Quality education | Current |
| SDG5 | Gender equality | Current |
| SDG8 | Productive employment | Current |
| SDG10 | Reduce inequality among countries | Current |
| SDG13 | Climate change | Proposed |
| SDG16 | Peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and inclusive institutions | Current |

The general perception among CSOs in Sri Lanka is that they don't necessarily engage with the SDG framework, as not many of them working on the ground are familiar with Sri Lanka's strategy for the 17 Goals. There is also this perception that the SDG focal point could engage with CSOs more collectively to achieve the 2030 targets.

The absence of this and the perception that it is driven as a top-down strategy have led many CSOs to distance themselves from the SDGs in their workplans. Furthermore, CSOs feel that they could make a significant contribution to the VNR reports if only they were invited to do so. In this regard, it is suggested that a CSO national review be considered to ensure that national reviews of this magnitude receive responses from the affected communities concerning the SDGs.

The SDGs are a holistic global agenda that contains 17 development goals, 169 development targets to be measured through 248 indicators. The SDG 2024 Sri Lanka report "Progress in achieving the sustainable development goals" outlines the current national policy framework – 'A Thriving Nation – A Beautiful Life' contributes directly to 108 of the 169 SDG targets.

Sri Lanka now possesses data for 159 SDG indicators. This brings Sri Lanka within the top 13 countries out of 53 countries in the Asia Pacific region in terms of data availability for SDG indicators in 2024, as per the estimates of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Sri Lanka ranks 93 out of 167 countries on the SDG progress, with an overall score of 67.4.

The report highlights that Sri Lanka is making strong progress towards SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). However, across the remainder of the SDGs, progress is generally behind schedule. In the cases of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 14 (Life below Water), Sri Lanka has regressed away from the target, relative to the starting point in 2015. At the current rates of trajectory, Sri Lanka would expect to achieve only 2 out of the 17 SDGs by 2030. An increase in both human and financial resources will be essential to reverse the negative trends experienced under SDG 8 and SDG 14 and resume progress towards the respective targets.

The report further highlights that between 2023 and 2024, Sri Lanka has made strong relative progress on SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The availability of data on SDG 5 (Gender Equality) also saw dramatic improvement; progress has been made to collect sufficient data to measure progress now effectively towards SDG 5. Therefore, going forward, SDC is now able to effectively evaluate progress on gender equality and the broader impacts of policy interventions.

However, the SDG data also demonstrates some setbacks concerning SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), relative to 2023. There have also been regressions under SDG 14 (Life below Water). The remaining indicators have remained relatively stable in this period; while stability demonstrates resilience under Sri Lanka's turbulent economic climate, resilience will not suffice to achieve the SDGs. Progress must be accelerated, and innovative policies are required to promote a sustainable economic recovery and fulfill SDG commitments by 2030. (Source: Sri Lanka's SDG Progress 2024 Report)

# Our engagement in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)

The GCM has 23 objectives as guiding principles to support (a) international cooperation on migration governance, (b) provide policy options that Member States should follow to address pressing issues around international migration, and (c) give Member States the space and flexibility to pursue implementation based on their migration realities and capacities. Sri Lanka adopted the GCM at the Inter-governmental Conference in Marrakesh in 2018.
Sri Lanka produced its National Implementation Plan in 2022, in which 8 objectives were identified as national priorities.

Each of these objectives has a list of action points or articles that states can be guided by in their policies.

CDS has played a very engaging role with successive governments and has led the GCM process with its civil society partners while contributing to the regional and international processes like the ESCAP and the GFMD.

The Government of Sri Lanka is showing considerable interest in joining the GCM Champion Countries Initiative, alongside Bangladesh and Nepal in the South Asian region. The Government has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing the GCM and expressed its commitment to making tangible progress towards reporting at the International Migration Review Forum 2026, scheduled to be held at the UN headquarters in New York City.

| Objective | Description |
|---|---|
| Objective 1 | Collect and utilise accurate data for evidence-based policies |
| Objective 3 | Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration |
| Objective 6 | Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work |
| Objective 10 | Prevent, combat, and eradicate trafficking in persons in international migration |
| Objective 11 | Manage borders in an integrated, secure, and coordinated manner |
| Objective 18 | Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competences. |
| Objective 20 | Promote faster, safer, and cheaper transfer of remittance and foster financial inclusion of migrants |
| Objective 21 | Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration |

# Partnerships for Success

As an Organisation we truly belive in engaging with stakeholders at all levels in tha discourse of out work. This dialogus is a critical factor in building relationships with communities, satate and non-state institutions and public and private partnerships. In the discourse we will have our agreements and disagreements. It is such a dialogue that keeps the discourse active and alive.

We believe yhat the recognition of our work is based on evidence and evidence based research. That we are alive onthe ground, listening, empathising touching lives. That we build capacities and develop our advocacy strategies based on such evidence and ground experience.

We thank our donors, technical partners, government and government institutions and communities and community partners for the continuous support and solidarity we have received through the years as we look forward building partnerships in our future endeavours.

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