

Evaluation report

Category B - Local organisations

Grantee: Community Development Services (CDS)

Project: Reaching out – from resistance to resilience

Primary Grant Liaison: USD \$ 14,500

Dates of implementation: 1 March 2023 and ending 31 January 2024

Place of implementation: Puttalam District, Sri Lanka

Reporting date: 1st August 2023 to 31st January 2024

Activities follow up:

Which activities were carried out during this reporting period?

- A series of knowledge workshops for fishing societies and youth
- A series of resilience discussions with fishing societies and officers of local administrative authorities in the divisional secretariats.
- Review meetings with project staff
- Presented the district stakeholders with the trainer's manual. They included the local authority officers in the divisional secretariats and fishing societies.
- Street drama performances in the four identified divisions in the Puttalam district.
- The setting up of an information centre and providing information and guidance to clients through the centre.
- Project completion review with senior local administrative officers, local community leaders, and fishing society leaders

Please summarise the impact these activities had on your community:

[e.g. Which activities had the greatest impact? Which were the most transformational?]

All the activities carried out during the project in the Puttalam district, and its four selected divisions, had an effect and impact on the relevant communities and the vulnerable fishing population and youth.

The second half of the implementation period's activities had an impact on the district's community by providing them a platform to voice their concerns and learn more about maritime human smuggling. It also had an impact on the attendees, encouraging them to make well-informed choices about their plans for maritime migration, such as avoiding the irregular, illegal and uncertain and risky journeys that human smugglers thrive due to the economic downturn in the country and the absence of a legal framework and mechanism.

The awareness and knowledge-giving workshops had a significant effect because they offered participants a personal understanding of the MHS and the distinctions between human smuggling and human trafficking. Participants were better able to comprehend MHS trends and community vulnerabilities as a result of this knowledge and were able to share their ground experiences through the interactive nature in which the workshops were conducted.

Through a series of knowledge workshops for fishing societies and youth, we were able to develop a connection with and foster a strong sense of awareness and knowledge among the larger fishing community along these hotspot coastal line areas.

The resilience discussion allowed participants to discuss and voice their concerns as members of a hotspot community living in the district's coastal areas, which are famously known for human smuggling as well as other financial and environmental issues affecting their daily livelihood, including drug smuggling. The resilience discussion series had a positive impact on these participants and clients, inspiring them to share their stories with the group.

A trilingual trainer's guide on TOC and maritime human smuggling (MHS) was distributed to senior government officials and fishing society leaders in the district. This provided them an opportunity to speak about prevalent MHS issues with the appropriate officers in order to bring the project's activities to their attention and gain their support. This increased the project's ability to garner their support and raised the Community Encouragement Foundation's (CEF) recognition among district and divisional officials. It also cleared the path for organising and producing MHS knowledge at community awareness workshops with support from the Sri Lanka Navy command post for the district and other government officials.

The development of IEC materials (leaflets and drop-in centre cards, an information centre billboard) and the establishment of an information counselling centre have enabled the public to gain access to the necessary services. An information card was designed, printed and distributed in the four divisions among stakeholders such as fishing communities/societies, youth groups and the local government officials.

The street drama performances that took place during this reporting period enabled us to reach a large audience quickly, facilitating community discussions on the subject. The audience responded favourably to the drama; they were impressed by the storyline, its importance, instruction, and relevance. Consequently, some audience members disclosed that members of their families who were duped by these maritime human smugglers and large sums of money were extorted for the journey.

Overall, the project's second phase of activities had an impact on the hotspot community members living along the district's coast by educating them about the urgent problem of maritime human smuggling and discouraging these risk-taking and vulnerable communities from embarking on these irregular maritime journeys.

The impact of the activities thus far is undeniable, as these communities and stakeholders now recognise the risk involved and the importance of speaking out against maritime human smuggling.

Which follow-up mechanism did you implement to ensure the proper development of activities?

[e.g. interim reporting, field visits, evaluations]

Our local partner is on the ground, consulting with stakeholders, and MHS has been taught to the most relevant communities and stakeholders at the local decision-making level. Members of the fishing community and the community of the project-implemented divisions have learned about maritime human trafficking and the gravity of the crime in order to voice their concerns and start and maintain a community dialogue. A district information and referral centre has been established for this purpose. It must be stated that our district community partner,

	<p>Community Encouragement Foundation (CEF) are trained in counselling as they work with vulnerable HIV populations in the district. This knowledge has and will be useful to sustain the centre.</p> <p>Moreover, to ensure the proper development of the activities, at the conclusion of each workshop, CDS conducted evaluations by administering an evaluation questionnaire to each participant to ensure they gained knowledge and to see how they intended to put what they had learned to use. This allows us to assess the success of the initiatives and the workshop's impact. In addition, review meetings were used as a follow-up mechanism to ensure that activities were properly developed.</p>
What process did you use to identify the beneficiaries of the project?	<p>Beneficiaries for the project were identified with the assistance of local government officers from the divisions where the project activities are being carried out, such as foreign employment development officers (DOFEs) and village officers (GNs). In some cases, socially engaged community leaders and community members also helped to identify appropriate beneficiaries.</p> <p>In addition to this identification process, we received support from the district and divisional secretaries, the fishing communities and societies and the youth group leaders. It was the district secretary who gave us the leads to conduct our activities in the selected divisions in his district. These were divisions with a high percentage of maritime movement in the district.</p>
Please describe the gender-sensitive considerations you take into account in your activities.	<p>Recognising the diversity of men and women by understanding and respecting their thoughts, CDS works to provide knowledge to both men and women to enhance their capacities in all our activities. It must be noted that there are many women led grassroots and outreach networks and societies that have been identified as local partners of the project.</p> <p>Consequently, during this project, we respectfully involved both genders in all activities to provide knowledge on maritime human smuggling while considering gender sensitivities. Women leaders in the fishing communities and societies were, in fact, active participants in the workshops and resilience discussions. Besides, our partner organisation is respectful of gender balance in program activities as they work with female sex workers in the district, pushing for their rights and society acceptance, fighting against stigma and discrimination.</p>
If relevant, please describe how you monitored the work of any implementing partners	<p>Our partner, CEF, is the project implementing partner in charge of all on-the-ground follow-up, monitoring, and visits to key stakeholders, including the community, and has a physical presence in the district. In addition, CDS physically attends workshops and review meetings to monitor the effectiveness and progress of the initiatives. It is this process and partnership that we follow rather than trying to patronise communities and stakeholders when our physical presence is not in the district. CDS makes it very clear in its project implementation model not to patronise local communities. It gives this responsibility to the local partner, so that there is project ownership and responsibility.</p>

<p>Is the implementation of the project in line with the project plan agreed? If not, how did it change, and which advantages and disadvantages did this bring?</p>	<p>Yes, the project in line with the project plan agreed. However, we must state that the engagement of law enforcement authorities and the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) command post responsible for the Puttalam district have their geographic jurisdiction cut out in a way that does not necessarily cover the entire district. We also felt that the SLN could have offered a more committed response to the project and project activities.</p> <p>The absence of a legal system to apprehend the MHS perpetrators is a big challenge to the project in Sri Lanka. Also, the apprehension and detention of clients of MHS are treated as criminals who are violating the general maritime peace and are conspiring with the MHS perpetrators.</p> <p>Human trafficking is given a bigger response by government officials because of labour migration. We are beginning to wonder if MHS to countries in Europe are both linked to human trafficking as well. This needs to be further debated and discussed at the national level.</p>
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Impact and capacity building:

<p>In which way did the grant improve your capacity to carry out your work?</p>	<p>The grant has improved our capacity to carry out the project's second phase of work at a maritime human smuggling hotspot along the coastal line district of Puttalam and build links with key district subnational, law enforcement, and Naval stakeholders to talk about the pressing issue of maritime human smuggling and to take the lead in the district and raise awareness and local level advocacy among its vulnerable and risk-taking communities.</p> <p>During the second half of the project, the grant increased our ability to reach out to a hotspot community member living along the district's coastline through fishing societies and educate them about the dangers associated with this perilous journey of maritime human smuggling. Furthermore, it paved the way for us to learn about their pressing issues concerning maritime human smuggling, as the behaviours and lifestyles vary significantly from district to district. We experienced this in the second round of funding. It was further observed that the local authorities, the naval personnel, and the law enforcement personnel had quite different experiences from the first experience.</p>
<p>Please describe any vulnerable groups supported by the project</p>	<p>The fishing community, which consists of boat owners, boat operators, fishermen, and workers in various fishing-related occupations, as well as the migrant and youth communities, clients, and their family members, are identified as a vulnerable group of communities supported by the project.</p>
<p>Which difficulties did you encounter when carrying out your activities?</p>	<p>There were challenges in obtaining Navy office support for all awareness workshops; even though promises were given to attend meetings and workshops, Navy officers were unable to attend due to their busy schedules and other commitments.</p> <p>There were fears that human smugglers would threaten the lives of people volunteering to give information and even openly discuss issues and concerns at our forums and workshops.</p> <p>The law enforcement officers were also not very supportive of the project and its activities. Community members and leaders were of the view that they were part of the human smuggling ring and were well looked after by them.</p>

	<p><i>It was difficult to identify the venues for the street drama because of the persistent rain in December.</i></p>
<p>Which lessons can you identify from this process to be applied in the future?</p>	<p><i>It is beneficial to educate the target and vulnerable fishing communities about the risks and incidents associated with maritime human smuggling, as this empowers them to make well-informed decisions.</i></p> <p><i>We were able to attract more community attention through street dramas. This form of entertainment and education created a space to convey the message associated with this dangerous journey of maritime human smuggling. It also led to an open dialogue with the audience.</i></p> <p><i>The open dialogue with the target groups that resulted from the resilience discussions had a positive effect because it gave participants, clients, and families a platform to express and discuss their concerns, including those of the fishing communities and their associations.</i></p> <p><i>We had difficulties meeting clients early in the project because they were reluctant to speak up and share their experiences. Discussions through the resilience meetings, however, made it possible for these clients and their families to approach the topic and talk about their experiences.</i></p> <p><i>Using a variety of communication strategies, such as print, electronic, and IEC materials, to raise awareness was very helpful to the targeted communities.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, introducing informative videos on the risks involved in this dangerous maritime human smuggling journey through WhatsApp and YouTube (short story animations) was found to be very beneficial.</i></p>
<p>Did you have any security challenges and how did you manage them?</p>	<p><i>At the midterm period of the project, we encountered very few security concerns. However, with the rollout of the community knowledge workshops, we encountered some security challenges. We hope that the Naval Command in Puttalam and the police will be of assistance to the project's sustenance.</i></p> <p><i>However, community members discussed possible threats from the human smuggling rings operating in the district.</i></p>

Impact Figures:

If possible and if suitable to the type of activities developed

Number of people actively working in the project (hired and on voluntary basis):	Local Government officials at the district & divisional secretariat offices, Navy officers in the district, migrant leaders and interested community members. Fishing societies. The CEF staff
Number of people that benefitted from the project:	750–1000 communities were reached by the street drama performances.
Number of beneficiary children (boys, girls, non-specified) and adults (men, women, non-specified): <i>[If not possible to identify, please provide the general number for children and adults]</i>	114 females and 122 males During the second half of the project, 236 fishing community members, including clients and their families, benefited from knowledge workshops and resilience discussions.
Deliverables (workshops, training sessions, reports, investigations, publications, interviews, etc.):	<p>For the first time, 140 fishing community members gained a deeper understanding of maritime human smuggling and the present situation of community risk through knowledge workshops for fishing societies. They have been empowered to make informed decisions and share what they've learned with their communities and peers, thereby increasing MHS awareness.</p> <p>The resilience discussions enabled us to engage with 96 people in the vulnerable areas. Clients and their families are included in this. Furthermore, we were able to identify the key issues that this community is dealing with as a result of the financial and environmental concerns.</p> <p>Furthermore, during the project period, five clients volunteered and provided information on their MHS journey. (Interviews are attached.)</p> <p>A trainer's guide on TOC and maritime human smuggling was presented to senior government officials, community leaders and fisheries societies in the district. This guidebook was updated to reflect the second phase of the project's objectives. This opened an opportunity to introduce the project to government officials in order to gain their support, as well as bring recognition to the project and the services it provides to the community.</p> <p>Review meetings with the partner organisation helped the project team identify and resolve issues, as well as align activities with the work plan.</p> <p>Referral cards were distributed throughout the community to promote the services provided by the information and counselling service centre; as a result, the community is aware of the services provided by the information and counselling service centre, which is situated on the CEF premises to assist smuggled migrants and the local community.</p>

CDS created leaflets with nine statements to help the public understand MHS issues, and a community Q&A on maritime human smuggling was widely distributed throughout the community during the project period.

CDS also produced a series of digital posters on MHS to be used in social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Street drama provided the project team with an opportunity to inform a much larger district community about the risks involved in this dangerous maritime human smuggling journey.

By staging the drama at strategic locations such as bus terminals, we were able to spread awareness of this message to communities in the other divisions in addition to the project implementation divisions. The bus terminal locations were used so that commuters from other locations had the opportunity to observe the performance and learn about MHS.

A review of the project's completion was discussed with stakeholders, including the district secretary. The project team led the discussion, outlining how the activities were successfully carried out in the four divisions of the district that were chosen. They also presented the project's accomplishments and lessons learned, as well as the concerns raised by the fishing community regarding maritime human smuggling in relation to the fishing industry.

Communications

How have you promoted your project to the public? If you haven't, are you considering establishing a communication strategy?

CDS used a variety of promotional materials to highlight the project, including an MHS statement, a community Q&A leaflet on its Facebook page, an outdoor board, a project banner, information cards, and a trainer's guidebook.

Are you comfortable with the Resilience Fund publicising your project in media or communication materials?

Yes

Do you have any considerations the Resilience Fund should consider when publicising your work?

No

Please provide as attachment any photos, videos or other material

Attach selected pictures and the case studies

**you would like the
Resilience Fund to use.**

Concluding remarks

Sri Lanka does not have a separate or exclusive law for the smuggling of Migrants. It is considered under the Act of Immigration and Emigration. There is no mention of human smuggling in the amended national labour migration policy or in the amended Act of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), either.

The offence of human trafficking was first introduced by the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 22 of 1995 to deal with illegal adoptions and related offences. The section was amended by the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2006 to bring it in line with the Palermo Protocol. By this amending Act, Section 360C of the principal Act was repealed and the following provision entitled "Trafficking" was substituted:

(1) Whoever—

(a) buys, sells, or barter or instigates another person to buy, sell or barter any person or does anything to facilitate or induce the buying, selling, or bartering of any person for money or other consideration;

(b) recruits, transports, transfers, harbours, or receives any person or does any act by the use of threat, force, fraud, deception, or inducement or by exploiting the vulnerability of another for the purpose of securing forced or compulsory labour or services, slavery, servitude, the removal of organs, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation or any other act which constitutes an offence under any law.

(c) recruits, transports, transfers, harbours, or receives a child or does any other act whether with or without the consent of such child for the purpose of securing forced or compulsory labour or services, slavery, servitude or the removal of organs, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, or any other act which constitutes an offence under any law, shall be guilty of the offence of trafficking. (Extracted from National Programme Coordinator, Regional Office for South Asia, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

It is very clear from the above legislation that Sri Lanka does not have a legal framework or a local Act that is aligned with the international protocols to manage human smuggling. Besides the economic downturn and the political turmoil in 2023, human smuggling has reared its head again in large numbers as we observed during this period. Ignorance, the absence of a legal framework and economic and social concerns can be attributed to human mobility of this nature. Another concern that can be cited is the fact that the island nation has not developed policies in the field of skilled labour to match the international demands. Though the country boasts a high literacy rate in Asia, it has failed to convert it into a decent work-life balance and offer its citizens decent living and competitive wages to support their lifestyles and livelihoods. It is no wonder that there was an exodus of people leaving the country in search of greener pastures, whilst some fell into the traps of unscrupulous job agents, human smugglers, and their intermediaries. We also witnessed a large exodus of professionals leaving the country in sheer frustration with the political system. Filling this brain drain will take many years as it is feared that what has been lost will never be regained.

Project experience

A key community or stakeholder group in MHS are those engaged in the fishing industry, who are boat owners and fisherfolk who work for the boat owners. There are businessmen in the industry who rent out boats during the season. The industry, of late, has been marred by environmental concerns such as heavy rains and rough seas during the fishing season. Middlemen have entered the industry to purchase fish and to also engage in human smuggling activities.

Foreign vessels enter the demarcated waters of Sri Lanka, and authorities are not in a position to monitor their movements due to the lack of personnel and policing vessels. This has also resulted in foreign vessels engaging in bottom trawling and dynamiting popular fishing spots in the deep seas, creating environmental havoc.

Average-sized trawler and vessel owners are in a dilemma as they don't receive a decent income for the investments they have made. Local and national fisheries authorities have not been able to resolve the issue and offer redress to these boat owners and their employees. With the high fuel prices and the high loan and lease interest rates, the small and medium boat owners are increasingly finding it difficult to make reasonable profits. The situation was aggravated by the government importing fish from large trawler operators in the region, despite Sri Lanka being an island nation surrounded by the sea. One could say that ill-conceived policies have led to this chronic state in Sri Lanka's fishing industry, which has opened up alternative avenues to make money, such as the lucrative human smuggling industry.

The dire economic situation in the country and the general negligence of its officials have not helped those working in the fishing industry, especially those who are employed to go to sea. Their economic plight is neglected and overlooked. They have no option but to look for alternative income either within the industry or outside of it. Sadly, some of them are lured into working for the maritime human smuggling ring operators for larger sums of money than the fishing industry may offer.

The journey

The two years of ground experience we gained from the maritime human smuggling project in two important coastal districts in Sri Lanka reiterate the dangerous and risky journey that people are willing to take to get to their destinations. On the one hand their documents are forged and fake. On the other hand, they pay large sums of money to get across and are duped by the human smugglers who paint a very rosy picture that the journey is safe and secure.

Those who have been through the journey, especially in smaller vessels or fishing trawlers, are often overloaded with very little provision for safety measures. Basic facilities like life jackets are not provided. As a journey can take many days to get to a destination, there is often a shortage of food and water. Hygiene factors are not looked into. The boats are exposed to the harsh weather and rough seas in the deep waters, and they are not technically sound. There have been breakdowns at mid sea. There have been sicknesses resulting from sea sickness and other health issues that the human smugglers ignore or don't even have the provision of basic first aid facilities on board.

Migration continues to be a contentious issue in many destination countries. Not many countries favour migration on humanitarian grounds. The Sri Lankans who took this irregular route and who were apprehended were denied the grounds they cited as joblessness and the economic collapse, to gain entry.

When apprehensions are made by the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN), the boat and the people on it are brought ashore and remanded for about a week. They don't receive any form of counselling to be reintegrated with their families and communities. Some have had to pay a bail fee. In some instances, cases are filed, and a judicial process takes over. The boat owners and operators have the wherewithal to pay the fine and be released faster than their clients who took the journey. This is the unfair and unreasonable nature of how apprehensions are carried out by SLN. It is because there is no judicial framework or law in the country to address human smuggling.

Those people who get on board foreign vessels when apprehended have been detained in the closest port of the border petrol country where a brief investigation is conducted and then sent back. The Australian experience has been that their border patrol would not entertain the boat and its people, as they are asked to return immediately. They would not want to listen to the clients as to why they took the journey to Australia, as their immigration laws are very strict.

In both instances, there is stigma attached to the returnees who, in fact, go into hiding for many reasons, such as hiding from loan sharks or others from whom they got their loans to take the journey. Others hide because the journey was unsuccessful, and they are often living in shame and dejection.

Migration

Sri Lanka is well known to be a labour-sending country to the Gulf corridor. Labour markets have gradually opened in Europe in countries like Poland and Romania. It is a well-known fact that Italy continues to be a country for human smuggling, as there is a large population who have travelled over the years by boat and succeeded. Many people still believe that they could make it through the irregular and illegal human smuggling means.

A lucrative channel has opened for migrants to enter Italy via Romania. People travel to Romania on a work visa and skip the country to reach Italy. This route has become very popular, and smugglers are not only getting a steady clientele, but they are

also making very handsome profits as the whole journey can cost as much as 3-4 million Sri Lankan rupees or 9,000-12,000 USD.

The other phenomenon that is popular among labour migrants in the subcontinent and perhaps even in other regions is that people travel on a visit visa and convert it into a work visa if they get a job. If not, many stay on. Some extend the pay the destination country authorities and extend the visit visa. This has become a scandal where agents and intermediaries thrive on for a fast buck. In the even jobs are not forthcoming, the person remains in the country illegally and undocumented. We are inclined to believe that since unscrupulous agents and intermediaries are the primary operatives of this scheme, it amounts to a human smuggling scenario.

Since covid 19 the labour migration recruitment patterns changed from the traditional agency registration process to online recruitment and an increase in intermediary involvement in the recruitment process. Many migrant workers acted as intermediaries either for their employers or they worked to make a supplementary income whilst being in service in the destination country.

Whilst these new trends came about post the pandemic period, it also bypassed contractual obligations that have now become a serious issue in the migration recruitment process, as workers are often denied their rights and privileges.

The visit visa scandal is also known to take people across to Europe from destinations such as Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. As this is a new trend, it needs proper tracking to understand its modus operandi and the transport routes it takes to get people across to European destinations. Dubai is a safe destination, as one can look for short-term employment whilst your main objective is to get to Europe.

Looking forward, and some points to consider

Sri Lanka, being an island nation, will continue to battle human smuggling, drug smuggling and other goods smuggling. It has become a very lucrative business for maritime smugglers as the profits they make are enormous.

The absence of a law on human smuggling makes it easier for human smugglers to operate freely and get away when apprehended, as they have nothing to lose.

There are very few diplomatic negotiations as destination countries have their own immigration and migration laws. Because of this very reason, the laws are very harsh, and there is no ground for humanitarian support in understanding why people take the human smuggling routes to these destinations.

If laws are considered, they must recognise the clients and their reasons to take such perilous journeys. It is very clear that a law on human smuggling is urgently needed for Sri Lanka in order to mitigate its existence.

With maritime human smuggling, the fishing industry has suffered quite severely as boat owners and operators take to this business for the large sums of money that is offered to them by the human smuggling operators.

As the number of smuggled people apprehended and returned home increases, there is an urgent need to look at their economic and social reintegration/integration needs, including legal counsel and livelihood needs. It is equally important to mitigate the stigma and shame from society.

A national-level advocacy led by the responsible UN agency must take more responsibility in proposing a set of laws on human smuggling for Sri Lanka. This is lacking at present. It is hoped that these agencies and institutions will welcome civil society who work on the ground and has gathered experiences to the development of such laws and policies. All of society and all of government approaches must be considered with greater responsibility and accountability from all stakeholders.

As there is a very thin line between human smuggling and human trafficking in migration, it is proposed that both cross-cutting themes are looked at from the broad lens of the transnational organised crime convention and their respective protocols.

Community Development Services (CDS)

Sri Lanka

Budget distribution

To keep track of expenditures and prevent over or under spending