

Advancing Transparency and Accountability and Countering Corruption in Sri Lanka

Final Narrative Report

EAST • WEST
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INSTITUTE



AFRIEL
Association for Friendship and Love



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Grant Details

Organization Name	AFRIEL (Association for Friendship and Love)
Grant Number	G1377-17-100-3025-20
Grant Amount	\$ 11,215.40
Grant Start and End Dates	May 1, 2017 – December 15, 2017
Project Title	Advancing Transparency and Accountability and Countering Corruption in Sri Lanka
Target District	Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya

Objectives

To increase youth involvement in anti-corruption movements and promote whistleblowing in corruption-fighting efforts.

Overall Achievement

- 190 Citizen Watchers and youth volunteers from Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya districts were trained on anti-corruption intervention. Trained youth took a leadership role in conducting the Anti-Corruption Forums and approximately 300 youth engaged with the trained Citizen Watchers and their communities, supporting anti-corruption activism and community involvement.
- 1,980 people from 102 villages in across the Northern Province with 72.8% of them were women learned about how corruption delays settlement of their day-to-day life issues and poses challenges for people to find solutions. The forums also enhance their knowledge about legal mechanisms and tools available for finding solutions that motivates them to fight against corruption activities.
- The Citizen Watcher and youth volunteers identified critical corruption issues in 9 topic areas, including anti-poverty or relief programme, land, resettlement, military intervention, public administration, development project, education, government recruitment, agriculture, and environment. 409 major corruption complaints affecting nearly a thousand individuals in respect of these areas were received throughout the project period.
- Youth addressed the needs of reform of the Independent Commissions of Sri Lanka, including CIABOC, to strengthen the Independent Commissions' investigation processes/mechanisms and public engagement by handing over a recommendation paper to the Prime Minister.

- A mobile application, I against Corruption (IAC), developed to empower citizens to reveal corrupt practices. Throughout the project period, 409 complaints have been received through the application. A team consisting 25 members established to continue maintaining the mobile application and follow-up on complaints made by users and to engage with the public for anti-corruption awareness raising.

Activities and Impact

Provide training for youth volunteers and Citizen Watchers from all five districts of the Northern Province on anti-corruption intervention

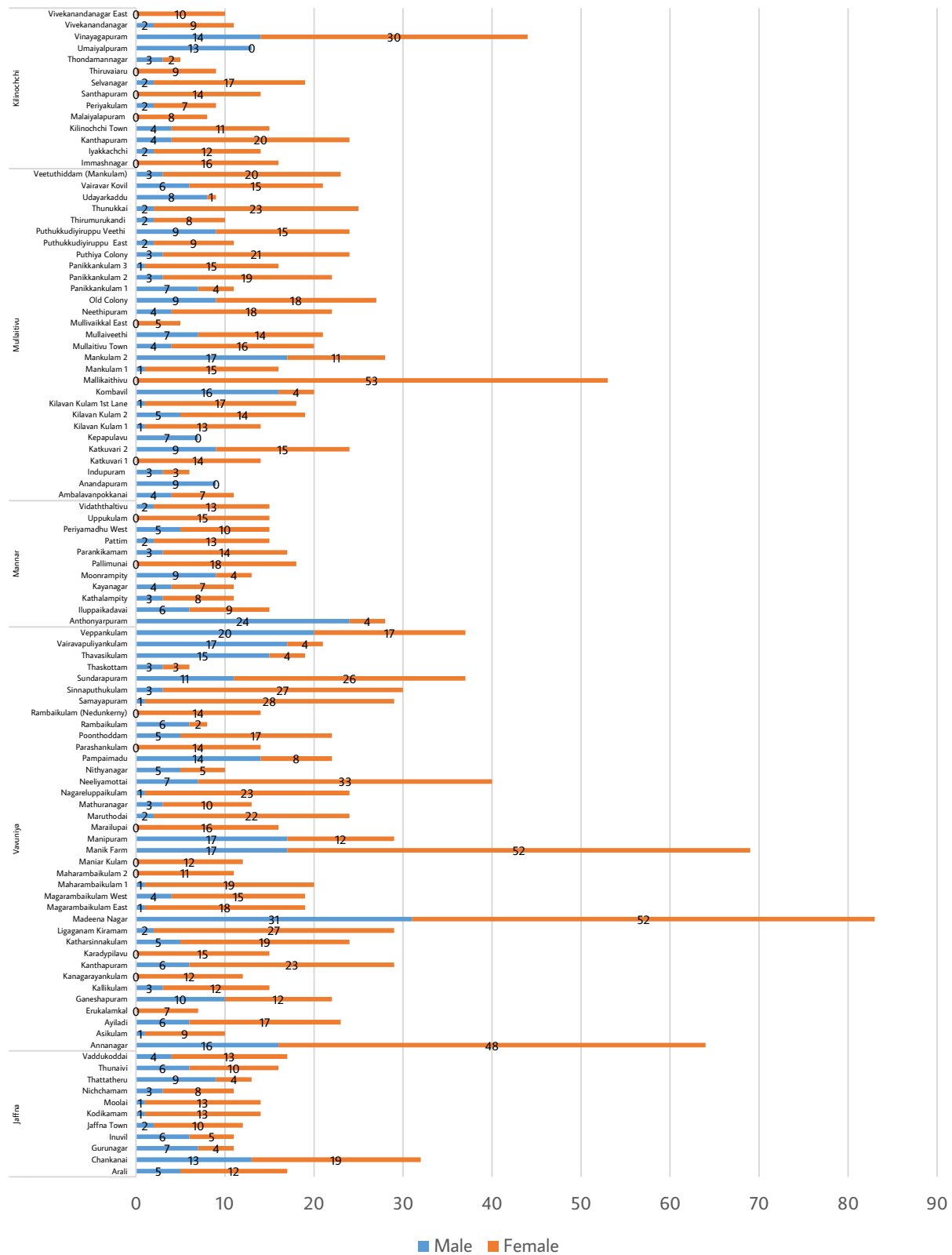
The main activities implemented under this objective were training and capacity development of youth activists to fight corruption. 190 youth with 71% of them were women have received 3-day anti-corruption intervention training on topics including sources of corruption and social effects, ways of prevention, good governance and its benefits, anti-corruption related law and regulations, and anti-corruption law and regulations.

The training activities have increased the youth volunteers' knowledge of how to identify and tackle corruption issues in their communities and beyond. Such activities include mapping the reasons why people engage in corrupt activities and identifying the challenges of anti-corruption interventions in post-conflict context.

Raise awareness against corruption for Sri Lankans living in remote areas of the Northern Province

In order to enhance public support against corruption, the project supported village level Anti-Corruption Forums. 102 village level Anti-Corruption Forums were carried out to raise awareness among marginalized groups in remote areas, victims of corruption and CBO stakeholders about the corruption issues that commonly exist in the war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. In all, 1,980 people were directly benefited from the training, including 1443 women. Trained youth took a leadership role in conducting the forums and approximately 300 youth engaged with the trained Citizen Watchers and their communities, supporting anti-corruption activism and community involvement, while also advancing cooperation between communities and local government officers in whistle-blowing efforts.

Figure 1: Village Level Anti-Corruption Forums Conducted



The project contributed to identify vulnerabilities to corruption in the Northern Province. During the Anti-Corruption Forums, many people indicated that they do not know that bribery is illegal and they have rights to refuse the request for a bribe because their lack of knowledge about the public administration system, regulations and legal process due to the nearly three decades of war. Another major vulnerability to corruption reported by forum participants is seeking quick solutions by paying a bribe or approaching politicians to end their long-term issues.

This project, through experiences sharing activity during the Anti-Corruption Forums, increased understanding of types of corruption and its social effect in the northern Sri Lanka and involved in-depth discussions of corruption that created the common issues facing by the northern communities and challenged victims to solve their problems. Learning of legal mechanisms and tools available for finding solutions fostered the forum participants' further engagement with the Citizen Watcher to report corruption cases. Table 1 presents the critical corruption issue areas in the Northern Province, based on the information gathered through the Anti-Corruption Forums.

Table 1: Critical Corruption Issues in the Northern Province Identified in Village Forums

Issue Area	Corruption Identified
Anti-poverty/Relief Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people were removed from the Samurdhi beneficiary list due to political intervention and the benefits were provided to some others who did not meet the eligibility criteria.
Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government officials provided fake documents for private or State land acquisition. It was also learned that land officers asked bribe for land distribution and misuse power to distribute land for certain parties' supporters. Political parties and politicians abused their powerful position to occupy private or State land and distributed it to people who have no proper documentation for political purposes. For example, forest reserve land distributed by Ministers to party supporters. Military illegally acquired or occupied private land and public land, including forest and agricultural resources such as a lake.
Resettlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political intervened in housing scheme beneficiary selection process and asked bribe from the selected beneficiaries. Government officers charged commission for releasing housing scheme grant and take bribes for housing scheme beneficiary selection. Grama Niladhari collected signatures from housing scheme beneficiaries without providing materials for construction. The housing authorities showed bias on certain housing scheme beneficiaries and violated financial regulations regarding resettlement fund distribution.
Military Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are plenty of issues regarding military occupied or illegally acquired private or State land in the north through producing fake documents or intervention in public administration.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military personnel asked bribe from rehabilitated person and threatened people who refused.
Public Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grama Niladhari not report to work at their office. • Government officers produce fake documents for land acquisition. • Land officers asked bribe for releasing land permits. • Police ignored complaints and failed to offer protection to victims. • Financial fraud in banks registered under the Central Bank.
Development Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political intervention and corruption in contractor selection process. There are also many corruption issues in the Rural Development Society Development Programme. • Corruption left a lot of idle buildings and unfinished construction sites. • Police supported illegal land mining. • Financial fraud in housing construction projects. • Corruption involved in incomplete construction projects funded by local authorities.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bribery and corruption during school admission seasons and military intervention in preschool education.
Government Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption in government job recruitment. The selection was in favor of political party supporters and those who hold politician's recommendation letter, rather than based on the exam performance. • Stealing public fund allocated for government officer salaries.
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police supported criminal groups to steal farmers' property.
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divisional Secretaries provided illegal permits for sand mining. People who transported sand with legal permit were arrested by police and asked for bribes for releasing their property. • Police and politicians supported illegal tree cutting.

Using Right to Information (RTI) Act for whistleblowing process

While assisting victims and witnesses of corruption in reporting cases, an emerging issue noted by AFRIEL was lack of convincing evidence. Considering that sufficient evidence will be helpful to support any prosecution or disciplinary proceedings by the CIABOC, AFRIEL facilitated them on the RTI petition processes with volunteers' involvement to seek evidence of the causes of corruption that were hidden from the public by corrupt politicians and officials. Throughout the project period, AFRIEL facilitated 271 individuals in filing RTI applications for the information regarding illegal land distribution, 33 RTI applications regarding illegal land acquisition by the military, and 28 RTI applications regarding road and other development programs.

Advocacy for strengthening the Independent Commissions

AFRIEL youth representatives handed over a recommendation paper which proposes reform of the Independent Commissions of Sri Lanka, including CIABOC, to the Prime Minister in October. The recommendation paper stated that the Independent Commissions are under scathing criticism for its long inquiry process and political influence and distancing itself from the grievance redressal seekers by

failing to perform its duties. The suggestions proposed include strengthening the Independent Commissions' investigation processes/mechanisms with no external or internal pressure put on by the political strongholds and establishment of Provincial subcommittees of each Independent Commission to speed up the investigation process and strengthen public engagement. The Prime Minister promised the youth representatives that the recommendation paper will be considered by the Steering Committee of the Constitutional Assembly.

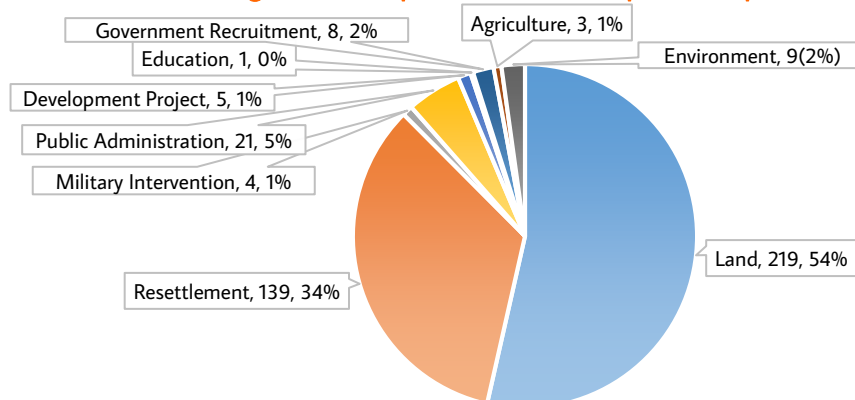
Empowered citizens to challenge corruption through mobile platform

This project designed and developed a mobile application, I against Corruption (IAC), that assists victims and witness of corruption to access services from youth activists and CIABOC. Aiming at providing modern communication technology integration for public participation and interactive anti-corruption actions in Sri Lanka, the application allows users to submit specific categories of bribery and corruption and it generates individual and summary reports which include case briefing and geographic location on a map. The application is available on Google Play and, throughout the project period, 409 complaints have been received through the application.

The project also formed an I against Corruption (IAC) team of 25 members selected from each district of the Northern Province basing on their activism during the project period. With knowledge gained and a solid background built through the Anti-Corruption Forums for collaboration with people in remote areas on anti-corruption and whistleblower initiatives, the team will continue maintaining the mobile application and follow-up on complaints made by users under the AFRIEL's mentorship. The IAC Team will also continue to engage with the public for anti-corruption awareness raising and work with work with public sector agencies to prevent corruption.



Figure 1: Corruption Related Complaints Reported



Challenges and Lesson Learned

- It was observed that, in general, people could only provide vague information about the corrupt practices that they reported during the Anti-Corruption Forum. Additional effort is needed to retrieve sufficient evidence for supporting any prosecution or disciplinary proceedings by the related authorities. In this project, AFRIEL used RTI as a tool to dig out information that victims and witnesses of corruption need to file strong complaints. Although many responses have been received with regard to the RTI applications, some of applications were rejected because the information requested is unavailable or served a national security interest.
- Another lesson learned from the project was people are in fear of taking action against corrupt officials, politicians and military personnel. The solution to this requires long time engagement to build confidence and accountability in the minds of communities who may become more willing to actively oppose corruption.