

# HANDS THAT SPEAK



## SEDR

Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution  
உலகளாவிய ஈடுபாட்டு கிரகணம் ஸ்தாபனம்  
பயனுறுதிமிக்க வகையில் பிணக்கை  
தீர்ப்பதற்கு ஆதரவளித்தல்

Part of the programme



Funded by  
the European Union

Implemented by



The Asia Foundation



The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of bold, overlapping shapes in shades of red, orange, green, and dark blue. The shapes vary in size and orientation, creating a dynamic and energetic visual field. A central dark blue rectangle serves as a backdrop for the text.

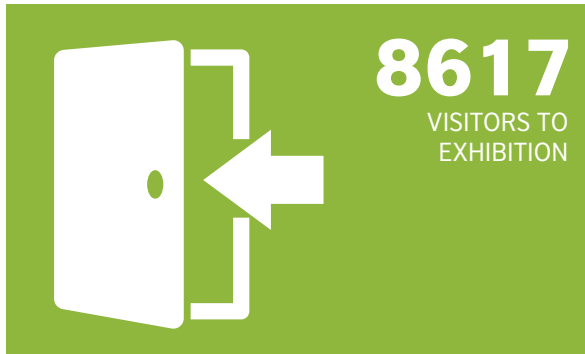
**ARTS-4-ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ARTS-4-ADR)**

# **THE SILENT POWER OF ART**

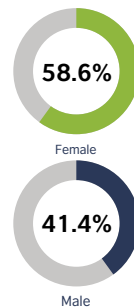
**A VISUAL EXPLORATION OF HOW ART  
FOSTERS DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION  
IN SRI LANKA  
BY PANCHALI ILLANKOON  
(2025)**

# 02

# IMPACT STATS



**463**  
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

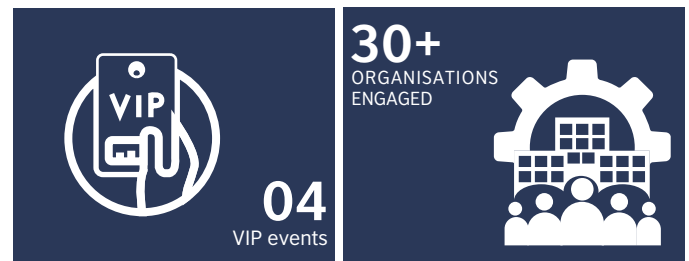


FOUND IT USEFUL

100%

INTEND TO APPLY IT

75%



# 03

## WHY ART FOR JUSTICE

Visual art plays a key role in access to justice efforts, especially for communities affected by conflict who often struggle to express their perspectives in traditional settings. Art can bridge divides, enabling communities to express their lived experiences, develop empathy and recognise shared concerns while 'sketching' possibilities for reconciliation.

Sri Lanka has a long history of using art for resilience and social cohesion. The most recent example being the 2022 Aragalaya (struggle) people's movement where communities from across the island called for change and justice through, amongst others, visual art and artistic expression.

The Arts-4-ADR project was conceptualised by SEDR and implemented by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Sri Lanka from late 2023 to early 2025, to utilise artistic expression as a tool to facilitate dialogue on the root causes of community grievances and increase awareness of and encourage the use of community-based ADR mechanisms.

The project hosted a public programmes with commissioned artworks, engaged in a dialogue and civic fellowship and carried out community workshops across six districts in the Northern, Eastern & Uva Provinces of Sri Lanka.

# 04

## THE HANDS BEHIND THE ART

“

After my initial interactions with women from different communities at various locations I realised there were many commonalities among them when it came to land disputes. I found similar stories frequently and my engagement with those women influenced my aesthetic decisions during the editing stage.

Anomaa Rajakaruna

”

### ANOMAA RAJAKARUNA NO MORE LAND (2024)



Land Disputes and Gendered Displacement in Ampara

**Artist Profile:** Anomaa Rajakaruna is an award-winning filmmaker, curator, and photographer known for documenting minority communities, with a focus on women and children. She was Sri Lanka's first female editor of a cinema journal and has directed the Jaffna International Cinema Festival since 2015. She also founded and led the Agenda 14 Short Film Festival since 2011 and juried over 20 film festivals worldwide. She was born in Panadura, Sri Lanka in 1965 and lives and works in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

**Artwork Description:** No More Land (2024) examines land disputes and displacement caused due to the large-scale human settlements in Ampara, a district established in 1961 after the completion of the Gal Oya Project. By recording the district's histories through the perspectives of women, the film amplifies voices often overlooked in land conflicts and encourages cross-community reflection on shared histories.

# 05

## HANUSHA SOMASUNDARAM SHIFTING LANDS (2024)



Structural Inequalities in Land and Housing Rights on Tea Estates

**Artist Profile:** Artist Hanusha Somasundaram works primarily with drawings and installations and holds a BFA in Art and Design from the University of Jaffna in 2014. Her work has been exhibited nationally (Taste of Tea, Jaffna/Colombo, 2013; Embodying Power, Colombo, 2018; Recurrence, Colombo, 2020) and internationally (Suffer, Afghanistan, 2015; Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh, 2016). She was born in 1988 in Hatton, Sri Lanka where she lives and works.

**Artwork Description:** : Mixed media installation நகரம் நிலங்கள் (Shifting Lands) (2024) presented intricate drawings on tea bags in grid-like arrangements similar to plantation line rooms. It contrasts a newly paved road disrupting housing of estate communities with an access road long neglected by estate management for decades. Over 200 years of land struggles by estate communities in infrastructure development are documented through 200 drawings on tea bags, providing a visual archive of estate workers' marginalisation and rights.

## JASMINE NILANI JOSEPH DS WAITING ROOM (2024)



Bureaucratic stagnation in land restitution process.

**Artist Profile:** Visual artist Jasmine Nilani Joseph explores narratives of displacement, militarisation, and daily life in northern Sri Lanka. Winner of the DBF Asia Art Future Award (2022), her work has been exhibited nationally (Human Rights Arts Festival, Colombo, 2017; One Hundred Thousand Small Tales, Colombo, 2019; Colomboscope, Sri Lanka, 2019) and internationally (Manifesto for Artists in a Strong State, Germany, 2020; Kochi Biennale Foundation, India, 2020; 10th Asia Pacific Triennial, Australia, 2022). She was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka in 1990 where she continues to live and work.

**Artwork Description:** Immersive installation DS Waiting Room (2024) recreates Sri Lanka's Divisional Secretariat (DS) waiting areas with benches and drawn-in case files, documenting stories from communities in Vavuniya and Mannar whose lands have been lost, annexed or occupied during the war. Recalling from her own childhood memories of waiting in DS offices, Nilani places the audience in the bureaucratic limbo experienced by land-dispute claimants.

06

**ADR training hours**

**48**

**Inter-provincial field visits**

Jaffna | Mannar | Hatton | Badulla | Monaragala | Ampara

**06**

**Months of residency in Colombo**

**03**

**Facilitated public workshops in Colombo**

**12**

**Developed Art + ADR integrated lesson plans**

**03**

**Facilitated regional workshops in  
the North, East & Uva**

**15**





**THAMILINI  
SITHTHIRAVADIVEL**

Thamilini is a director, filmmaker, artist and social justice advocate who uses cinema and theatre to weave social issues into their narratives. Exploring themes of social harmony and gender equality in her work, she is a passionate advocate for human rights and women's empowerment and uses her platform to engage communities to push for a more inclusive future. She is based in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.



**KALYANI  
SUNTHARALINGAM**

Kalyani is a performance artist and community worker dedicated to women's empowerment and youth activism. She has worked as a Programme Officer at the Suriya Women's Development Centre since 2013 and is an active member of Suriya's Young Women's Cultural Group for over 18 years. She uses artistic expression to address social conflicts, gender issues and governance. She is based in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.



**BAVANEEDHA  
LOGANATHAN**

Bavaneedha is an independent filmmaker and cultural practitioner dedicated to amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, especially stateless communities, through cinema and animation. Her films tackle sensitive topics such as child abuse, sex trafficking and gender-based violence. Her work also focuses on underprivileged minority groups, particularly the rubber plantation society in the Uva district, a community she deeply connects with through her family roots in Monaragala. Bavaneedha is based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

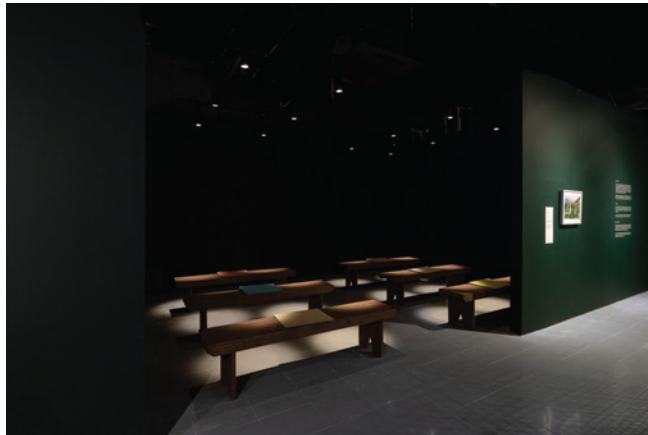
# FELLOWS

“The Fellowship really expanded my artistic approach, teaching me how art forms beyond film, like installation art, can deeply impact communities. Visiting different regions, connecting with people, and listening to their stories helped me understand the cultural contexts behind their struggles. As a result, I'm now working on two new film projects focused on these communities and their grievances, with the aim of sharing their stories, and empowering women as well as the community.”

**Bavaneedha Loganathan**

07

08



# ARTWORKS

## NO MORE LAND

ANOMAA RAJAKARUNA

## DS WAITING ROOM

JASMINE NILANI JOSEPH

## SHIFTING LANDS

HANUSHA SOMASUNDARAM

# 09

## VOICES IN COLOUR

### PUBLIC EXHIBITION

#### Free Public Programmes

MMCA conducted 40 free public programmes engaging over 1000 participants which included curator-led exhibition tours, workshops conducted by fellows and artist talks featuring the three commissioned artists. These programmes presented the artworks as visual narratives of conflict and also served as a catalyst for dialogue and policy engagement.

#### Public Artwork Showcase in Jaffna & Ampara

DS Waiting Room & No More Land showcased at Kālam, Jaffna.

No More Land showcased at Diriya Women's Development Foundation, Ampara.

#### Total Landscaping – MMCA Colombo (September 2024–January 2025)

Three commissioned artworks were displayed alongside additional works in MMCA's Total Landscaping public exhibition.

#### VIP Events

A private tour of Total Landscaping was hosted by MMCA for 76 high-level policy influencers and diplomats.

91.2%

reported an improved understanding of land conflicts

87.3%

stated they were likely or highly likely to apply the insights from these sessions in their professional work.

“When you talk about an art exhibition, people may tend to look at it from the perspective of 'buying' or 'collecting.' This is a fantastic way to raise awareness and start conversation in a safe place on important topics.

”

# 10

## EAST



# REFLECTIVE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE WORKSHOPS

## NORTH



## UVA



# REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

MMCA conducted 15 arts-based regional workshops across 8 districts in the North, East, and Uva Provinces – Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Monaragala, and Badulla.

## Workshops engaged community leaders and activists including :

Representatives from Mediation Board Commission and District Secretariat Office, youth, religious leaders, rural development groups, women's organisations, social workers, teachers and estate labourers.

**58.6%** women

Workshops engaged over  
450 participants

At the workshops, participants engaged with the commissioned artworks, reflecting on elements of the artwork that were relatable to their lived experiences. The shared views and commonalities among the participants softened assumptions and new perspective emerged into the discussion.

Fellows used their arts-based ADR lesson plans to teach participants how to frame conflict resolution discussions through artistic expression and reflective structured dialogue.



“

We often jump straight into the dispute, which isn't always effective when emotions run high. This workshop showed us how framing questions in a less direct and sensitive manner can lead to better conversations, making parties feel heard and more open to resolve the problem” – Officer from Justice for People NGO, Cheddikulam.

”

“

In reality, directly resolving a conflict with those involved or finding an alternative path is challenging. However, I believe using art as a structured medium for dialogue is an excellent approach.” – Workshop participant (MMCA final report)

”

“

Sharing our experiences, I saw how interconnected our issues are. I also realised how art can engage people in new ways.” – Workshop Participant, Ampara

”


“

Seeing Anoma's film No More Land was like seeing a reflection of my life. It showed things I can't easily say out loud.” – Workshop Participant, Ampara

”

# 13


## LOOKING AHEAD



Creative / artistic approaches enhance access to justice, particularly for marginalised and conflict-affected communities who may be distrustful of formal justice systems.



Artistic expression facilitates non-adversarial dialogue, allowing communities to express grievances, share lived experiences, find commonalities and build empathy across divided groups.



Strengthening partnerships between arts, justice and development sectors to merge artistic expression with access to justice programmes by establishing knowledge-sharing networks and evidence of what works between artists and development practitioners can allow these sectors to up-scale and replicate successful models.

Investing in long-term mentoring initiatives that empower and equip local leaders and practitioners will reinforce learnings and disseminate knowledge and know-how within their communities, ensuring sustainability.

Designing arts-based access to justice programmes around the local culture where artistic interventions reflect the specific conflicts and nuances of each community, with participatory components from the community actively contributing to the creative process, builds trust and ownership over the narratives being shared.

Engaging multi-donor funding in cross-sector initiatives that engages art, justice and community development can ensure that difficult issues are continuously addressed, as art displayed strategically over time keeps these issues in public consciousness rather than forgotten over time.







# SED R

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பயனுறுதிமிக்க வகையில் பிணக்கை  
தீர்ப்பதற்கு ஆதரவளித்தல்

The complete Arts-4-ADR Case Study  
report can be accessed here



Part of the programme



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The Asia Foundation

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