

# Sri Lanka

With the formation of a national unity government in 2015, Sri Lanka entered a new era of hope for the dismantling of wartime restrictions and the restoration of fundamental democratic norms. In this new environment, The Asia Foundation remains committed to its long-term objectives of promoting inclusive economic growth, advancing local democracy and access to justice, helping the survivors of trauma and violence, and promoting citizens' participation in the decisions that affect their communities.



## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GROWTH THROUGH RESILIENT, REPRESENTATIVE, AND RESPONSIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The end of the three-decade civil war in 2009 brought prospects for accelerated economic growth whose benefits would spread to neglected regions and marginalized groups, but challenges of subnational economic governance could threaten these peace dividends. An important lesson from The Asia Foundation's decade of governance programs in Sri Lanka is that inclusive decision-making and strong local governance can increase local economic opportunity, improve public services, and build trust and collaboration between local governments and their communities. To improve subnational governance in Sri Lanka, the Foundation is actively supporting 27 Local Authorities (LAs), innovatively recast as Dynamic Economic Centers, to institutionalize tested models for resilience, representation, and redress.

To strengthen the economic resilience of provincial and local governments, the Foundation supports legal and policy reforms to widen the revenue base of LAs, manage allocations through evidence-based

decision-making, and reengineer the delivery of key public services. To expand citizens' representation, the Foundation has introduced tools like the Electronic Citizen Report Card to capture citizens' feedback on public services. To improve mechanisms for redress, the Foundation is developing "service-level benchmarks" for key public and regulatory services.

The Foundation supports the Right to Information (RTI) Act and the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan by making all partner LAs RTI compliant and facilitating information sharing and the disclosure of key information to citizens in their language of choice. The Foundation also works closely with the national Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government to ensure that LA procurement systems are transparent and accountable.

## PROMOTING SECURITY AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

With roots in British colonial practices, Sri Lanka's policing institutions have been more reactive than proactive and service-orientated. Thirty years of



### SRI LANKA

The Foundation is committed to helping Sri Lanka achieve long-term peace and prosperity by strengthening institutions of governance and improving the environment for economic growth, security, and justice.

Innovative tools like the Electronic Citizen Report Card are expanding citizens' representation in local decision-making.

civil war further eroded community-police relations – particularly in the northern and eastern provinces, which bore the brunt of the violence, but in communities across the country as well. To lower these barriers of mistrust, The Asia Foundation has been working since 2009 with local leaders, community groups, and the Sri Lankan Police Service to implement community policing programs, inviting citizens' input to resolve security and safety concerns. Recognizing that change will take time, the Foundation has supported training for new recruits at the Police College, and trained officers-in-charge of police stations to champion this approach at the village level. The Foundation supports Tamil language training for police officers in bilingual regions, conducts research to support evidence-based decision-making by the police, and works to improve police sensitivity to violence against women. Since late 2016, the Foundation has also provided support to the Police Reform Committee, under the purview of the Ministry of Law and Order and Southern Development, to produce recommendations for police reform.

The Community Mediation Boards of the Ministry of Justice, supported by the Foundation since their inception, have been a popular and widely accepted form of alternative dispute resolution since 1990. Working with the Ministry of Justice, the Foundation is promoting the expansion of this system to cover all districts in the country, particularly the North and East. Since 2014, the Foundation has supported the establishment of Special Mediation Boards, with a special focus on land disputes, to be piloted in five districts. The Foundation is also keen to examine the current state of commercial mediation and identify improvements.

## HELPING THE SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

The upheavals of war have left a range of psychosocial issues in their wake. The Asia Foundation's psychosocial support program commenced in 2005, with local NGO partners in eight districts providing counseling, medical support, physiotherapy, and referral services to survivors of war, trauma, and torture. In 2014, the Foundation shifted its focus from NGO partners to state institutions. Using mapping studies to identify the needs of vulnerable populations, the Foundation now supports capacity building for government

cadre tasked with improving and decentralizing mental health services. Continuing professional development programs have been created for state psychiatrists, mental health officers, psychiatric nurses, and counselors, and a peer-support system has been introduced to provide mentoring for counseling assistants based around the country. Standardized client intake forms and data assessment methodologies now enable providers to manage client data more effectively.

## NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Since the end of the war, there has been a resurgence of tensions, common in postwar contexts, among some ethno-religious identity groups. Since 2016, The Asia Foundation has supported Sri Lanka's reconciliation policy through local-level interfaith and interethnic dialogue. Nationally, the Foundation's LankaCorps Fellowships provide opportunities for young people of Sri Lankan heritage to live and work in Sri Lanka for a period of six months, experience the country firsthand, and arrive at a better, more nuanced understanding of the nation's contemporary affairs.

## BOOKS FOR ASIA

The Asia Foundation Books for Asia program began distributing textbooks on business, finance, science, and social studies in Sri Lanka in 1954. Today it is the only English-language book program of this kind serving the entire island. More than 3.4 million books have been donated to Sri Lankan libraries, schools, and institutions, and more than 125,000 texts are donated each year to nearly 800 institutions. The Books for Asia program now sources Sinhala- and Tamil-language books from local publishers and successfully distributed 11,000 local-language books last year.

In Sri Lanka, The Asia Foundation's programs are also funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT Australia), the British High Commission, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, among others.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*



**HEADQUARTERS**  
465 California Street,  
9th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94104 USA  
Tel: (415) 982-4640  
Fax: (415) 392-8863  
info.sf@asiafoundation.org

**WASHINGTON, DC**  
1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Suite 815  
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA  
Tel: (202) 588-9420  
Fax: (202) 588-9409  
dc.general@asiafoundation.org

**SRI LANKA**  
30/1 Bagatalle Road  
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka  
Tel: + 94 (11) 205-8701  
srilanka.general@asiafoundation.org

[www.asiafoundation.org](http://www.asiafoundation.org)