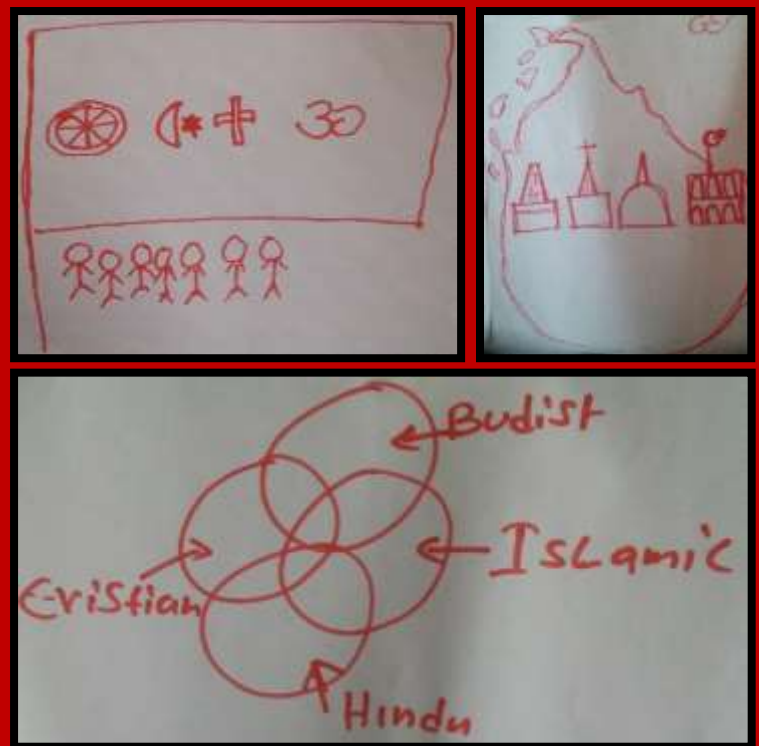# Promoting Religious Harmony in Sri Lanka

Lessons learned and good practices

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Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education, a non-profit organization that works for the advancement of equality, social justice and respect for human dignity in Canada and around the world through transformative human rights education programs.

International Centre for Ethnic Studies, *an independent research centre, with a mission of deepening the understanding of ethnicity, identity politics and conflict, and fostering conditions for an inclusive, just and peaceful society through research, publication, dialogue, creative expression and knowledge transfer.*

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http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/sri_lanka_map.htm

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Introduction

About this publication

This publication is one of the tools developed through the *Promoting Religious Harmony* Project. It features the lessons learned and good practices for engaging various actors during the implementation of the project which involved decisions makers, religious groups, government officials, members of civil society organizations, children and youth, teachers and other stakeholders.

About the project

The Promoting Religious Harmony Project (2014 – 2016) aimed to enhance understanding between different religious groups in Sri Lanka, promote social harmony, and foster inter-religious coexistence.

The project was implemented in communities in the districts of Ampara, Colombo, and Galle. It helped equip groups in these districts to promote religious harmony and freedom of religion and beliefs through action projects they carried out in their districts.

The main components of the project were:
- Legal and social **research on the state of religious freedom in Sri Lanka**
- **Capacity-building workshops** on human rights education and promoting religious harmony
- **Action projects** in 3 communities aimed at promoting religious harmony and fostering religious co-existence
- **Practitioners' forum and research launch**

Human rights education is a tool for social transformation aimed towards building a universal culture of human rights. It is guided by a human rights-based approach (HRBA), which emphasizes participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and links to human rights. Moreover, HRBA provides an internationally recognized standard of achievement for social actions.

The **participatory approach**, which is an effective means for implementing HRBA in human rights education and other social actions, is the educational approach that guided the implementation of all activities of the *Promoting Religious Harmony* Project. A participatory approach promotes the sharing of individual knowledge and experience of human rights and fosters critical reflection on personally held values and beliefs. The participatory approach is not only a process but also an essential skill to be mastered.

The participant-led community action projects focused on engaging members of target communities including children and youth, men and women representing religious and government institutions and civil society organizations, working towards religious harmony and using human rights-based and participatory approaches.

Definitions of lessons learned and good practices[1]

A **lesson learned** is knowledge or understanding gained through the experience of an activity or a process. The experience may be positive, such as a successfully run videoconference, or negative, such as an awareness campaign that did not reach the desired target group.

Good practices are practices that are well documented and evaluated, providing evidence of success or impact. They are generally based on similar experiences from different countries and contexts. They are practices that have been tested and have produced positive results. Good practices include strategies, methods, and techniques that are worth repeating and sharing.

Target audience

The lessons learned and good practices in this publication are specifically intended for practitioners, civil society organizations and other stakeholders working on promoting freedom of religion or beliefs. The strategies outlined are also useful for decision makers and other stakeholders who intend to involve communities more effectively around issues on religion, ethnicity and human rights.

Information sources

The lessons learned and good practices presented in this document were drawn from experiences during the implementation of the Promoting Religious Harmony Project as well as information and results from the following documents:

1. **Notes from the Practitioner's[2] forum**: held on November 30th, 2015, the forum brought over 50 men and women which comprised of representatives from civil society including religious groups, government, and the academe.
2. **Notes from the National research launch** held on December 1st, 2015, the Launch brought together over 100 men and women from civil society, government, religious community, and the academe.

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[1] Definitions adapted from: www.ilo.org/ipec/programme/Designandevaluation/Goodpractices/lang--en/index.htm http://www.unep.org/eou/Pdfs/Lessons%20Learned%20rpt.pdf.
Unicef, *Evaluation and Lessons Learned* www.unicef.org/evaluation/index_49082.html.
[2] Practitioners refer to representatives of civil society organizations (including religious organizations), government representatives and individuals who are engaged in the promotion of freedom of religion and beliefs.

3. **Research** publication: *The Chronic and the Acute; Post-War Religious Violence in Sri Lanka* by Gehan Gunatilleke. The research is one of the project components.
4. Detailed **activity reports** which documents each activity carried out from the district groups.
5. **Proceedings and evaluation results** from capacity building workshops.
6. **Meetings and reflections** with project staff and the coaching team.

Important features of this publication

The lessons learned and good practices shared in this publication are specific to the *Promoting Religious Harmony* Project in Sri Lanka. They are derived from the experiences of the project; they are not absolute and we expect they will evolve over time.

While we have added quotes and examples that reflect some of the know-how that emerged from our experience, we know there is a lot of tacit knowledge in the hearts and minds of the project participants and partners.

The lessons learned and good practices presented here are meant to inspire you. You know your context best and you should adapt these practices to suit your specific context.

Lessons learned and good practices

Lessons learned and good practices gathered during the implementation of the project are categorized into 5 themes. These are:

1. Creating spaces for dialogue
2. Bringing together different religious communities
3. Engaging decision makers
4. Engaging children and engaging youth
5. Engaging the media

Overall strategies for organizing inter-religious events to improve shared understanding are outlined in the subsequent section.

Each theme is introduced and explained in the context of the Project. For each theme, we then outline lessons learned and a good practice stemming from the lessons learned. Finally, we provide an example of good practice in action from the Project.

The lessons learned reported in this publication are drawn both from positive and negative experiences of district groups that participated in the Project. Measures undertaken to mitigate the less positive experiences were taken into account in the description of the lessons learned.

1. Creating spaces for dialogue

Dialogue comes from the Greek words *dia* (through), and *logos* (word or meaning). W. Isaacs takes the definition further as a "*conversation with a center, not sides . . . a conversation in which people think together in relationship. Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result from being in a relationship with others – possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred.*[3]

The experience of this Project was that there was limited dialogue within and between religious communities. This was perceived to limit the opportunity of religious communities to explore the reasons for acts of intolerance or violence, either against their own communities or by factions of their own communities.

By creating spaces for reflection, communication within communities can be improved. This process helps communities to better understand how they assert group identity. It also helps communities to discuss their individual experiences of religious intolerance, breakdown the root causes and engage with intolerance in a constructive manner. Constructive engagement can help inform the larger community of any misconceptions about other religions, clarify the

diversity within religions and the reasons and values that certain practices are based on. It also helps communities to reflect on practices of other religious communities which they may find difficult to understand.

The Project, through its various components sought to create these spaces for dialogues by focusing on building an understanding of the context using a participatory and a human rights-based approach.

Lessons learned

Lessons emerging from the Promoting Religious Harmony confirmed that the **creation of spaces that are safe and enabling** is essential to ensure effective participation. Moreover, safe and

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[3] Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. Doubleday: New York. page 19.

enabling spaces are conducive to raising awareness and understanding of the 'other' and among different religious communities.

In this Project, creation of safe spaces for dialogue started with the core group of practitioners who were engaged in the implementation of the Project. They included men and women from Ampara, Colombo and Galle, from different faiths and ethnicities, representing civil society organizations, religious clergy, government agencies, and individuals.

The lessons described below illustrate some of the strategies used to achieve this result.

A sound **understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and political context** of the target communities helps build confidence in the practitioners and ensures the appropriateness of activities to be implemented.

Using **a participatory approach** rooted in human rights is an effective approach to adopt with practitioners and target communities alike as this approach enables them to:

- Fully understand their expectations and work effectively together
- Critically analyse and reflect on human rights issues and develop strategies and come up with solutions
- Transcend divisions based on religion, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic conditions, by bringing diverse groups together for an activity
- The Project teams from Ampara, Colombo and Galle realized quickly that to get participants motivated to learn about human rights and religious harmony, it was important to organize activities that were enjoyable and non-threatening. It is for this reason that many exposure visits were organized, along with festivities, interactive workshops, cultural events, etc. The participatory approach, which promotes the sharing of personal knowledge and experience and encourages critical reflection on individual beliefs and values, was key in this process.

Using a **human rights-based approach** as a framework for addressing conflictual issues and crafting solution to problems brings into the discussion the duty-bearers and rights holders, links the issue to human rights and related local legislations, hence avoiding the personalization of issues which could easily worsen the conflict.

Time is an essential factor in the creation of spaces for dialogue. Rushing the process could at times be counter-productive.

Good practice

Throughout the Project, to ensure that safe spaces for learning, reflection and dialogue are created it is important for practitioners to:

Have a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and political context of the target community.

Use a participatory approach, which allows practitioners to build on their experience, critically analyze and reflect on human rights issues, and develop strategies to move to action and achieve concrete results.

Use a human rights-based approach as a framework in addressing conflictual issues as it depersonalizes the issue in question.

Creating spaces for dialogue
Example of good practice

In their activities with Sunday schools, the Colombo group used the participatory approach in conducting the activities. This involved:

- Developing group guidelines with the participants on how to make the experience conducive to learning and at the same time creating a safe and enabling space for dialogue. The guidelines included:

    - Listening to what the other is saying.

    - Respecting the other participants by being present 100% of the time.

    - Turning off mobile phones during the activity.

    - Asking participants' written permission to take their photos and share these in publications or on the web.

- Providing participants with opportunities to work together, discover each other's strengths and weaknesses, and in the process building a team that can work well together in delivering the community action project.

- Playing the role of facilitator/coach guiding the group through the process and allowing time and space for reflection and exchange of experiences.

2. Bringing together different religious communities

> *"Through this program we got a chance to introduce ourselves to people from other religions. Once we were restricted. Now we can work together. Before we were in isolation and now we are in a network…This is a very healthy step for our future!"*   School Principal, Colombo workshop participant

Although this may seem self-evident, it is not always easy to bring people from different religions together. In the context of Sri Lanka, different religious groups have not necessarily been exposed to each other in a meaningful way. The concept of "the other" is often heard when people speak about someone from a different religion. Tensions are easily created when people are not exposed to different religious practices and do not understand each other's traditions and customs.

Lessons learned

A number of community activities implemented under the Project were attempts to create a space for communication and development of understanding among different religious communities. From these efforts, we learned that:

- Respect for the other is important, including being aware of different religious practices to ensure that these are appreciated.

- Addressing divisions within the same religious group will facilitate subsequent efforts aimed at building inter-faith coexistence.

- Encouraging understanding within and between religious communities will help communities react more constructively to attempts to agitate or create distrust between them.

- Building relationships, including inter-faith relationships, is a process that takes a lot of time.

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Good practice

To successfully bring together people from different religious communities, it is important to:

- Provide various opportunities for different religious groups to meet with each other, to discuss, and build relationships.

- Allow the necessary time for different religious groups to be ready before bringing them together. Being "ready" means that each religious group has been approached separately, and that members are willing and have a positive attitude to working with other religious groups.

- Seek out religious leaders who are receptive or supportive and take time to personally meet, discuss and engage with them.

- Build understanding about different religions and of the foundation of religious practices in a constructive manner among all the religious communities

Bringing together people from different religious communities
Example of good practice

The activities of the Galle group are an example of good practice in providing opportunity for people to meet with each other, discuss, and develop relationships.

The Galle group organized many activities bringing people from different religious backgrounds together. One activity was an exposure visit to four religious places of worship (Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Hindu) with residents coming from different religious backgrounds. One participant noted from this activity that:

"… for the first time in my life I entered a temple, learnt about the Bible, got to know about different religious festivals. For the first time in my life, I sat with people belonging to all four religions."

The group understood the importance of allowing sufficient time to achieve the desired results for their project. To ensure that persons they were targeting would participate in the exposure visit, they first approached each person individually to gauge their interest and then followed up with them as the date of the event neared. While this process was time consuming, it paid off as the group had 53 participants from four religious groups participating in the exposure visit.

3. Engaging decision makers

For the purposes of this Project, decision makers are defined as people who are in positions of power at various levels, and who are involved in decision making affecting religious harmony at the local or the national levels. Decision makers can include elected representatives, heads of organizations (e.g., NGOs, schools), heads of government agencies, religious leaders.

It must be acknowledged that getting decision makers involved is a challenge. This is due to the perceived or real barriers encountered when first engaging with some decision makers or when trying to pursue a relationship with them over the longer term. In certain communities, for example, people do not trust particular decision makers or the decision makers themselves take a negative view of getting involved in projects. Despite the barriers, the core group of practitioners involved in the Project managed to develop relationships with decision makers on several levels. For instance, the group in Ampara engaged with decision makers from DS (Divisional Secretariat) divisions and religious leaders; and the group in Colombo worked with Sunday school principals.

Lessons learned

The lessons learned described below include several ideas to consider when engaging with decision makers.

- It is common knowledge that getting the buy-in of decision makers is crucial to the success of this type of project. To foster successful engagement with decision makers, we learned that:

    - The **context analysis,** which included the identification of decision makers, carried out by the groups in the districts made it easier for them to contact the right people.
    - It is important to **allow sufficient time** for a response after the initial contact with decision makers.
    - **Using existing networks** or people with connections to decisions makers paves the way to an initial meeting.

- Involvement of community, government and religious decisions makers should start from project inception in order to achieve tangible results. The following points positively contributed to the involvement of decision makers in the Project. NB: A decision maker who is enthusiastic about the project is a great promotional resource in the community.

    - **Making links** between the project goal and the work of the decision makers facilitates their involvement in the project.
    - **Acknowledging the position and experience** of decision makers at the outset helps reassure them of your intent.
    - Providing decision makers with **possibilities about their involvement** in the project activities will help them decide on the extent of their participation.

- Ensuring **regular follow up** with decision makers throughout the different phases of the project keeps them involved and interested in the project.

- **Addressing preconceived notions** about the interest and accessibility of decision makers with the group helps ensure that these do not become a hindrance to engagement with decision makers.

Good practice

To cultivate engagement of decision makers in a project, it is important to:

- Provide decision makers with full information about yourself and about the project when you make initial contact.

- If possible, engage the assistance of a national organization when trying to access decision makers. For instance, the Ampara group had the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) send a letter requesting a meeting with government officials for their group each time they wanted to meet.

- Develop one-on-one relationships with decision makers, sharing information about the work you are carrying out in the community on a regular basis.

- Identify what they can bring to the project and provide them different options for their engagement.

- Encourage their participation from the outset to the final activities of the project.

- Recognize that different factors influence their engagement (e.g., timing, availability, alignment with their political mandate) and that different approaches will be needed.

Engaging decision makers
Example of good practice

At the very beginning and throughout the project, the Ampara group identified the need for engaging multiple decision makers (from different backgrounds) as addressing religious conflict is a multi-stakeholder phenomenon.

Religious and community-based organization leaders were continuously engaged throughout the project. The group used individual and group meetings as well as informal discussions to develop relationships, assess the capacity of these leaders and how they could be involved.

The administrative hierarchy in the districts was observed in engaging government. The group started with divisional-level officers[4] who were then asked to share with the next level officers at the divisional secretariat. This ensured they were well-informed about the project.

As the project activities progressed from the division (implementing community action projects) to the national level (Practitioners' forum) so did the engagement of government representatives. At the Practitioners' forum, the group invited and engaged with district secretariat officers to ensure they were informed about the next steps in the district. This allowed the district officers to understand the usefulness of this project and the importance of their role. It also paved the way to their participation in the final activity, which involved the creation of a multi-stakeholder body that would monitor and try to address issues before they turned into conflicts.

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[4] Development officers, cultural officers, land officers.

4. Engaging children and engaging youth

The entry into force of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* in 1990 brought with it changes in perceptions and effective ways of engaging with children and young people. These included among others, better listening[5] and consultation processes and the inclusion of children and young people as active participants in matters that affect them.

Encouraging meaningful participation of children and youth is important in their growth and development. Through their participation, they also play a role in their personal development as well as development in their communities. In the process they develop their confidence, learn life-skills, and develop an appreciation of volunteerism and civic engagement.

Lessons learned

During the implementation of the project, we learned that the following led to successful engagement of children and youth in our community action projects.

- Creating opportunities to listen to the ideas of children and youth. Activities in the form of games used by the Colombo and Galle groups allowed children to express themselves freely and to be heard.
- Providing children and youth with the space to practice skills learned during an activity.
- Providing equal opportunity for all groups to celebrate and share their different cultures and traditions.

- Conducting activities in "culturally" neutral venues.
- Designing age-appropriate activities.
- Working with the same group over a period of time.
- Identifying appropriate structures to work with and getting them on board. In Colombo, the group identified children in Sunday schools as target participants for their project. Getting the permission of school principals facilitated their access to the children.
- Using videos and cultural programs proved to be good tools for engagement.
- Including, in the local curricula, teaching children about values, rights and responsibilities, to encourage respect for all religions, tolerance and non-discrimination.
- Treating children and youth separately, and not as one entity in developing interventions to address an issue.
- Providing children and youth with the proper tools, such as information, education about and access to their civil rights so that they can participate effectively.

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[5] In contrast to hearing (the physical perception of sound), listening is hearing with understanding.

- Identifying appropriate structures to work with – e.g., youth clubs, youth parliament – where youth are already engaged.

Good practice

To effectively engage children and youth, it is important to:

- Introduce the subject of values, rights and responsibilities to teachers, educators and school children within the formal and non-formal education systems, such as Sunday schools. This creates spaces and opportunities for teachers and children to engage with the values that directly underpin the discussions on religious tolerance. It also equips teachers and children with the appropriate language and framework to address the problems.

- Engage youth in discussions on dignity, equality and tolerance.

- Create a space for youth to make decisions, develop social activities and engage in community life in a constructive manner.

The experience of leadership, the ability to articulate experiences in terms of values, better understanding of different religions to address misinformation and suspicion, and working together with youth from other communities are valuable in building a youth leadership that can address religious intolerance in an informed and constructive manner.

Engaging children and youth

Example of good practice

The issue

The Colombo group identified a lack of understanding of each other's religion and religious practices as a contributing factor to the conflict in the community.

The initiative

The group decided to target Sunday school children as their strategic entry point to address the issue. Equipped with their newly acquired knowledge on human rights education and the *Play it Fair!* Toolkit[6], the groups trained 22 teachers from 4 Sunday schools on human rights values, and the use *Play it Fair!*

The teachers in turn used the Toolkit in their classes. Children explored the various human conditions that lead to conflicts and how to prevent potential conflicts. As well, they discussed how values such as respect can build bridges and understanding between different religious communities.

The results

Feedback from all who participated in these workshops was very positive. Children learned about the human rights values in the Toolkit, i.e., respect, acceptance, inclusion, cooperation, respect for diversity, fairness, responsibility; and how these can build bridges and understanding among communities.

Teachers gained new ideas on how they could engage with children on important inter-religious issues in a fun way. A teacher from a Sunday school, sums it in the statement below:

> "*Before, we taught within the boundaries of our own religion.*
> *Now, we have a platform to communicate with each other and we*
> *have created a bond with different religions. We can now pass this*
> *positive message on to our students.*"

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[6] The *Play It Fair!* Pocket Toolkit contains a collection of activities that are aimed at providing teachers with the skills to teach human rights values to children through play. For the Project, this Toolkit was translated into Sinhala and Tamil for the program.

5. Engaging the media

The media play an important role in informing the public of what is happening in the world especially in areas where the public does not have direct access or lacks the knowledge. All project participants were encouraged to use the media (traditional and social media) in order to broaden the project's reach among the Sri Lankan public.

Our groups in Colombo, Ampara and Galle made use of both traditional media (mostly newspapers) and social media wherein Facebook was the preferred medium.

Lessons learned

The following are lessons learned about using media in order to reach a wider public and raise awareness about the project.

- Social media could be the fastest and easiest way to engage the public especially when there is an absence of mainstream media, or when mainstream media is biased. While it could help promote awareness and counter rumours, it can also be easily used to create rumours that could lead to religious misunderstandings and conflicts.

- While social media, e.g., Facebook, provided the groups with a tool to reach out to a wider public, it required vigilance from the group in order to control what outsiders posted on the site which could be damaging to the content of the site.

- Having a prepared report or a press release to provide to journalists avoids misinterpretation and builds good rapport with them.

- Getting good coverage requires selecting the right journalist.

- Using both social media and print media enables you to reach a wider audience. The group from Ampara, for example, created a Facebook page as well as engaging the local newspaper, The Tamil Mirror to get media coverage for their activities.

- The research, *The Chronic and the Acute: Post-War Religious Violence in Sri Lanka*, pointed out the important role social media plays in religious freedom and the need for it to be protected and not regulated or censored by government.

". . . this realm must be safeguarded, bearing in mind its irreplaceable value in times of authoritarian control over other media and in terms of counter-messaging. Ultimately, it is reasonable to suggest that religious freedom is tied closely to the freedom of social media[7]. "

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[7] See G. Gunatilleke, 2015. The Chronic and the Acute: Post-war Religious Violence in Sri Lanka. p. 55

Good practice

To effectively engage with the media, it is important to:

- Know the players in the field, e.g., which side the journalists or media organizations they would like to engage with are on, to be able to have good coverage and avoid misinterpretation of the facts.
- Have press releases or briefing kits ready to help pave the way to good reporting.
- Ensure that people in the community using social media such as Facebook and Twitter have the necessary capacity to effectively use these tools and be prepared to provide support if required to develop or strengthen their capacity.

Engaging the media

Example of good practice

Participants from the Promoting Religious Harmony Project used Facebook as a tool to communicate with community members who participated in their activities, and later on to reach out to the broader community. Their Facebook pages featured the activities they implemented in their communities. Some also engaged with mainstream media to reach a wider audience at community level.

Ideas and strategies for organizing inter-religious events

Reflection on Equitas and ICES' experience in implementing the project has generated a number of additional ideas and strategies for effective organization of inter-religious events. These are outlined below.

- Respect all religions present at all events by ensuring that any one cultural or religious practice is not given priority over the others. In this way, you are creating an environment of inclusion, equality and dignity for all present.
- When making arrangements, accommodate the religious practices of the participants. This also contributes to an inclusive environment and sets an example of inclusion and accommodation. For example:

  - Be mindful of dietary restrictions. These must be considered as many participants for personal, religious, medical or other reasons may have restrictive diets. In Sri Lanka it was important to make arrangements for participants of the Hindu faith who may be vegetarian and Muslim participants who may require Halal food.
  - When scheduling sessions, be mindful of the religious practices that participants must engage in. For example, Buddhist priests must have their lunch by 12:00 noon and Muslim participants will need to engage in prayer.
  - It is important to choose a date for activities that is suitable to all religious communities. This can be done through discussions with religious leaders and community members (e.g. Sundays would be inconvenient for Christians, *Poya* days for Buddhists and so on).
  - Ensure that the time, space and logistics are appropriate for all religious communities and inclusive of all people.

- One important aspect of the participatory approach is that it enables people with different backgrounds, cultures, values and beliefs to learn effectively together and learn from each other. One way of ensuring that this process is smooth when bringing people together from different faiths, is to agree on guidelines for discussion. The group should identify points that could trigger conflict within the group and then establish guidelines to address these. The guidelines will help create an environment where participants feel safe in sharing their ideas and anticipate difficulties that the group may face and how to deal with them. Examples of group guidelines are:

  - Listen and "hear" what is being said
  - Avoid put-downs (of yourself or others)
  - Give everyone a chance to speak.

Be **respectful of participants' individual needs, especially around their privacy**. Ask participants' permission if they can be included in photos or videos taken during the activity. This can be done through the registration sheet or individually by asking them prior to a group photo session.

Ensure that **all materials to be used during the activity are translated** into national languages (In Sri Lanka, Tamil and Sinhala).

Holding activities in various religious places is an enriching experience. Having said this, the activities should only occur where all people are allowed to enter and participate. Some religious institutions will not allow women, for example, and therefore, this excludes participants. These places should not be used for the activities.

Summary of community action projects

Ampara group

Goal
To strengthen the capacity of the communities to address religious conflicts created by extremist groups.

Activities
Activities organized as part of the project included: 11 awareness-raising sessions that focused on religious coexistence and human rights targeting students from religious schools, youth groups, religious and community leaders, teachers, and field officers of local government offices; and 6 sessions that focused on the creation of monitoring and mediation groups to mitigate future violence brought about by extremist groups. These sessions involved religious and community leaders, teachers, and local government representatives from 5 DS divisions.

Colombo group

Goal
Children from all religious communities understand each other's religious expression and practices.

Activities
Activities organized as part of the project included a teacher-training workshop, four workshops on understanding values, respect for religious diversity, and non-violent communication for children of four different religious Sunday school: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Catholic. Two joint activities celebrating religious diversity and promoting understanding included an exposure visit for the children and teachers to four different places of worship and an inter cultural festival showcasing the cultural and traditional practices of the four different religious communities. A Facebook page was launched to share the experience of the project in real time and later a photo journal was published to celebrate the achievements and carry the message of religious understanding to a wider audience.

Galle group

Goal
Strengthen understanding between the different religious communities in Galle District

Activities
Activities organized as part of the Project included a visit, with the participation of people from different religious backgrounds, to their religious places; two workshops for 100 youth, three training programs for 150 teachers; three workshops for 250 school children; and one

workshop for 40 government officials from the health sector. A final consultation workshop with the participation of youth, religious leaders, Government officials, and other duty bearers from the Karandeniya Division in the Galle District was seen as an important step to increase the understanding of different religions among the people and to increase respect for each of the religions using the human rights-based approach as a tool.