

Empowering Women through E-Governance

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	Plan International Sri Lanka (PISL)
Project Name	Empowering Women through E-Governance
Location	Sri Lanka
Date(s) of Implementation	January 2, 2015 – January 2, 2018
Funding amount	EUR 533,418
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	European Union – NSA-LA
Number of Women and Youth Trained	Total: 12,990 Women: 12,990 Men: 0
Type(s) of Digital Work	Public Sector – E-Public Goods and Governance Private Sector – Non-IT sectors Online platforms for improving livelihoods
Source of Metrics	Internal monitoring & evaluation

ABOUT EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH E-GOVERNANCE

The overarching goal of this initiative is to contribute to the post-2015 agenda by ensuring that women in target communities in Sri Lanka can claim and exercise their rights as citizens. To do so, Plan International Sri Lanka (PISL) is working to empower marginalized women and youths from plantations and rural village communities in Monaragala and Nuwara Eliya Districts and their CSOs to claim their rights, and access opportunities and services.

To do so, PISL committed to the following objectives:

- Selectively provide ICT technology for use at the community level. This principally consists of more mobile technologies (either laptops, tablets, or in some cases smart phones), that can be taken into the communities.
- Apply to ICTA for the establishment of at least two telecenters, called Nenasalas, specifically for women’s groups, owned and operated by them, to be placed in strategic locations, and which can be used by women to access information and/or to train themselves.
- Train a cadre of young women in the communities who have some existing IT literacy to be able to use the mobile technologies and serve as trainers to interested community groups. As well as providing access to the technology and how to use it, this cadre of young women will operate as a conduit for women who struggle with ICT literacy to access and make use of information and e-governance services.
- Build women’s capacity through a process of awareness of their rights to public services and rights to participate in public spaces, by acquiring skills and technology to access information and services and to engage with government through its e-services.

PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Program Design	Supply-Side Components		Demand-Side Components	
	Training & Skills Development	✓	Improving Access to Finance for SMEs	×
	Employment & Intermediation Services	✓	Capacity Building & Information Provision	×
	Subsidized Employment	×	Targeted Sector-Specific Approaches	×

ACTIVITIES

Each year, the project aimed to train a cadre of 50 young women in Monaragela and 25 young women in Nuwara Eliya in ICT skills and knowledge, including how to use smartphones, tablets, ATMs and the e-governance platform (<https://communitywomen.lk/>). This is both for their own benefit, and so they can act as a resource to and trainer of other women in the community. Each year, the cadre of ICT specialists has been equipped with relevant mobile computing technology and instructed on how to access e-government services.

The project builds the capacity of two federations of women, one in the Monaragala District and the other in the plantation community in the Nuwara Eliya District, to claim their right to public services and participate in public spaces as well as to develop and support the wider needs of their membership. Women are encouraged to provide regular feedback through project structures and through ICT facilities to raise consciousness and call local government authorities to account.

Project activities included:

- **Livelihoods Support:** This is specifically targeted at young women, to provide information and access to vocational training and internships or work placements for up to 50 young women annually from both project locations.
- **Training:** Training CSO staff and leaders in methodologies and systems for formation of Economic Empowerment Groups (EEGs)
- **Financial Management:** Provides financial management training to participants.
- **E-Platform:** Developing an e-platform focused on the information needs of target communities, designed to be in accessible formats. Information on the platform includes details of relevant government services, and information on women's rights, livelihoods and on gender-based violence issues. Project outputs included an e-platform containing livelihoods-related information and advice tailored to the specific needs of the two project communities. (<https://communitywomen.lk/>)
- **Awareness:** Providing training and tailored information to raise awareness of legal and human rights.

- **Gender Mainstreaming strategies:** Through a series of training seminars, focus group discussions and selected mentoring, the project supports local government authority capacity to develop gender mainstreaming strategies

RECRUITMENT

The target populations were identified through a participatory process of mapping populations affected by the issues identified in the project and the services that the work of the two federations address. Plan also trains staff to ensure that they work with most vulnerable populations even when working within a specific excluded group. For example, when working with women and children in villages that were affected by 27 years of conflict and specific caste groups in the Monaragala District was important to identify who is excluded even within the excluded group, such as girl children in female-headed households.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Obstacles to the use of telecenters by rural women included: (i) centers are mainly owned by men and in locations that women are not comfortable visiting; (ii) opening hours were not suitable for women; (iii) content provided was generic with little or no relevance to them; (iv) the operators were center-bound and had few outreach programs to encourage poor, illiterate women or women with little or no education to use their services. Consequently, women are not receiving the information they require for their empowerment, nor IT skills to access the information they require. Lack of digital literacy and access by women in both rural and plantation communities threatens to marginalize them further as Sri Lanka transitions to an upper middle-income country and as IT is becoming a central part of business and society.

An analysis with women in both these communities showed that most have accessed local government services for essential business, but have limited knowledge of the extent of services available. Their knowledge of e-governance services in both communities is zero. This, and a lack of access to information, prevents them from knowing, fully understanding or demanding their rights. Their total dependency on plantation employers and government institutions for services and resources has not only narrowed their resource base but they have also failed to broaden their capacity to take advantage of new opportunities.

BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

Gaining support from plantation management was key to retaining beneficiary participation. In both plantation and non-plantation contexts, provision of childcare was added during the project to support beneficiary participation. The ICT component proved to be a key aspect for recruitment and retention of beneficiaries of all ages.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Up to 50% of women and youths of the two federations have improved livelihoods and resilience through accessing livelihood information, training, and grant provisions.

Demand-driven e-platform providing information and evidence as a vital tool to link women & youths with LGA and service providers (<https://communitywomen.lk/>).

SOCIAL IMPACT

12,990 women and youths from 2 women's federations have improved knowledge of their rights and entitlements. At least 50% of women and youth members of DWF and WiAA have begun to effectively realize their entitlements through use of e-governance services by the end of the project. At least 50% of women seek support from WiAA and DWF GBV-support structures.

Two CSOs have established fully staffed project units and volunteer networks. Staff and members have new skills in:

- citizen report card methodology and reporting;
- analyzing government budgets with a gender lens;
- dialogue and participatory planning with local government authorities;
- accessing and reviewing e-government services;
- monitoring government budgets and programs; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

50 local government officials have better skills in gender-based budgeting and are actively piloting the methodology. At least 100 local government officials have improved knowledge and awareness through workshops around key issues of:

- Lack of access to services of women in the federations;
- Suitability of e-services to users; and
- The need for gender-based budgeting.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. There is clear demand for the skills training offered, both by the targeted beneficiary groups as well as the local government authorities.** The government authorities are keen to “keep pace” with their constituencies, and demand for training from them outstripped the abilities of the project to provide. In the future, this should be considered.
- 2. Childcare was initially one of the factors limiting participation and should be taken into consideration in the future.**
- 3. In terms of sustainability, future projects should consider long-term accommodations for federations.** The fact that the project provided rent for meeting space posed a challenge to sustainability for the project, although this was overcome by acquiring space through supportive stakeholders (in Monaragala, the local government donated a building, and in Nuwara Eliya one of the plantations provided space).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. There is a lack of digital jobs in the area to be obtained, even once participants have gained digital skills.** Future projects focused on this element should consider working with the private and public sector to create jobs while simultaneously training the populations to access those jobs.