

The background features several horizontal, wavy bands of color. From top to bottom, the colors are: a dark red band, a light orange band, a medium red band, a white band, a gold band, and a dark red band. The text is overlaid on these bands.

TRANSFORMING LIVES

A Collection of Women's
Perspectives on Reparations

FOREWORD

The Centre for Equality and Justice (CEJ) works towards making reparations more accessible for Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim women in Sri Lanka affected by war and political violence and unrest. We work with community women, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other women's collectives to educate and capacitate them to access and claim reparations. CEJ also works with the State sector to facilitate a gender sensitive and more inclusive approach across reparations processes and mechanisms and to influence policy level reforms.

The collection of images featured in this publication are from various capacity building sessions and discussions CEJ conducted with community women, CSOs, and the Office for Reparations with the aim of achieving better access to meaningful gender-sensitive reparations for women. The workshops and discussions featured in this publication took place between August 2019 and April 2021. The objective of this publication is to document the interventions at local, national and policy levels CEJ has engaged in for the past few years to inspire others in relevant sectors to engage in community level interventions and advocacy on women's need for reparations.

Shyamala Gomez
Executive Director
Centre for Equality and Justice
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Counter Point: An exchange of ideas between teammates before they present their art installation.



Concentrated Effort: A woman lays down paper as measurement while constructing her team's art installation.



A training session for those working in Civil Society Organizations on women's rights and how they can step-in to bridge gaps.

What are the ways in which reparation can be offered to victim survivors?

*An eye for detail:
Women work on a costume for a figurine which will
be a part of their art installation.*





Silent Figures: An art installation depicting the social and cultural realities women are faced with.

Military wives in Kurunegala expressed the need to rehabilitate their husbands who have returned from conflict,

as post trauma has led to

an increase in domestic and

sexual violence in many military

households.

A participant noted that reparations are limited to material needs and not psychosocial care.

They also noted the limited number of OfR offices around the island, making it difficult for aggrieved persons to reach out for their remedial needs.

They believe law must evolve with the needs of people.

Women expect to memorialize death in a dignified manner,

receive more information about the violations, employment opportunities, to address structural inequalities, economic and educational support, appropriate and adequate monetary compensation based on the gravity of the violation suffered are some of the remedies women have been seeking from authorities.



Quiet Reflection: Youth participate in a workshop that helps them to understand Sri Lanka's history through stories recounted by the older generation.



Clarity: A resource person works with women to bring their art installations on women and reparations to life.

“ My father was killed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) during the 1988 riots. He went to a shop at 7.00 pm and didn't return. So around midnight my mother and sister went in search of him.

They found him dead in a drain. He had been shot thrice and his neck and mouth both had been slit...

My siblings and I still carry the pain of losing our father. We haven't received any reparations.”

- Woman community representative, Hambantota



Caged Aspirations: An art installation depicting the social and cultural realities women are faced with.

*First Steps:
Women examining materials to build their art
installations, depicting their thoughts on reparations.*



“We want our disappeared
persons back.”

We don't want money as compensation.

Were these people with us now, they would have
earned for us far more than whatever
the state will give as compensation.

“We want a public apology from the state for what happened, along with the reassurance that it will never happen again.”

– Woman community representative, Kilinochchi

“We feel that there is no point in answering questions on what types of reparations can be obtained, because we don't think it's possible to get reparations.”

– Woman community representative, Ampara

Guests take a look at a mural of memory produced by community women.



CEJ presents its findings and women's views to a Commissioner of the Office for Reparations.



The deceptive veil: A participant explains her team's thinking behind an art installation of their creation.



A few final touches: A participant briefs her teammates on how to present their art installation.

“Reparations should be provided to all women who have been affected by the war or political unrest,

as women are more vulnerable and comparatively tend to face far more problems due to violence.

Through reparations, one can prevent women from facing further violations. I think that reparations can also address social stigma to a certain extent.

- Woman community representative, Puttalam

“I believe education should be provided to children who have lost their parents due to the war, as a form of reparation.

Without an education, there is no meaning to life, and I regret not having studied further.

I know that my experiences have affected me psychologically and I believe that psychosocial support services and the creation of community centers can help provide emotional rehabilitation to those who have been affected by the atrocities of war.

- Woman community representative, Puttalam

“I believe that reparations should be collective and achievable.”

Though reparations cannot compensate for what I have gone through and lost in life, if the government can provide monetary compensation, we might be able to cover educational and livelihood expenses and help others who are similarly affected.

If the reparation provided can improve our living status, there will be some level of happiness and satisfaction.”

– Woman community representative, Puttalam

“Receiving reparations will help victim survivors feel at peace and overcome stigma.”

I am not aware of any laws relating to violations suffered during the war, but I believe that a commission can be established to ensure non-recurrence. I am also of the view that reparations can contribute to the overall healing process.”

– Woman community representative, Puttalam

Loud colours: Community women hold up a saree they painted with messages of hope and their aspirations for peace.



A group makes sketches as they lay the groundwork for their art installation on the theme of women and reparations.



The team behind the art installation- "Silence" depicting the lack of answers given to those asking for reparations.



Character Building: Some staff of the Office for Reparations make puppets as they explore the topic of gender and how it is relevant to their work.



Lift Off: Installation art pieces are slowly sculpted into life.



Propped up: Two women set-up a cardboard cage to construct their group's art piece.

Back to the Drawing Board: Facing minor setbacks as women work in teams to build art installations.

Puppets and Reparations: Some staff of the Office for Reparations make puppets as they explore the topic of gender and how it is relevant to their work.

“Providing reparations to people, irrespective of ethnicity, is a responsibility of the government and I believe that when doing so,

special attention should be given to elderly people, pregnant women, widowed women and female headed families, as they may be more vulnerable.

Further, the overall situation in a household should be taken into consideration when providing monetary compensation and the government can take steps to follow up in order to confirm whether it is being used for its intended purpose.

”
– *Woman community representative, Puttalam*

Women plan the pattern for their group's saree.



proofreading: Women check the hope-inspiring words painted on their group's saree at a saree painting workshop.

The team behind the art installation "Caged Aspirations."



“ I would also like if we had broader reparations for the community, where people who were scattered because of the conflict were brought together and reconciled. Religious ceremonies could also help with this.

They could also build memorials for the missing and the dead, name roads and build community centres and libraries after them.

They could set up a day of remembrance, where families of the affected can get together and remember their loved ones.”

“ All reparations should try to present long-term solutions. I am of the firm belief that reparations can contribute towards healing and reconciliation.”



*Stories on a String:
Women start
work on their art
installation.*



*Laughing
and learning:
Community
women waiting
for a puppet show
and a discussion
on their rights to
commence.*



*Continuing
Thread: Women
from different
ethnic groups
start planning
what their group's
painted saree will
look like.*

“It would be wonderful if I could share my experience before a truth commission. To date, I have not had this opportunity, and neither has anyone I know.

It would also be very useful to understand what people think on what should be done to prevent another war in this country. I don't have much knowledge on a Special Court, but there should be opportunities for justice for violations and harassment people have suffered in connection with the conflict.

I believe that implementing the law properly is also a form of reparation.

It is also important for us to have knowledge about laws and regulations.”

“I had no document stating that my husband was missing.

This has also prevented me from being able to file a case to seek compensation. Eventually, a Grama Niladhari in Vavuniya gave me a certificate stating that he was dead. I cannot believe that he is dead, because I have not seen his body, but I took the certificate thinking that it would be necessary when admitting my daughter to school.

If I at least know what happened to my husband and who was responsible for his disappearance, it will give me a great sense of relief.”



Sarees of hope: Community women drape the workshop facilitator in a saree they painted.



Learning through Play: Women unpack history using memory as a tool.



Women sharing their thoughts on what they learned during a workshop.



Intent Listening: A woman listens to her group discussing their ideas for an art installation.

Mic Test One: Women get ready to present their art installation to their cohort.



“ The law should be implemented properly.

I think the conflict happened
because people were not seen
as equals.

In order to prevent this from happening again, that has to change and the leadership of the country should consult the Tamil community. I think reparations have the potential to contribute to the healing of the country.

(A community woman from Jaffna)”

“ I have informed and registered my son’s disappearance with the District Secretariat. Although I have heard of reparations, to this date, I have not received any compensation for my loss.

But I don’t think you can
compensate for the loss
of a missing child.”



Community women listen to a session on gender and reparations before building art installations to convey their opinions on the topic.



Community women take notes and reflect on gender and reparations before breaking out into groups to build art installations on the topic.



Bringing Puppets to Life: Some staff of the Office for Reparations make puppets as they explore the topic of gender and how it is relevant to their work.

“Forgiveness should be asked publicly for the violations that have been committed.”

But I think, because of what has happened to us, forgiveness can only be given when we die. But if forgiveness is asked, it will give our minds some level of comfort.”

“During the last stages of the war, our people suffered a lot. It is important that we remember that, and that people are aware of the hardships we faced and continue to face because of the war.

Everyone here would like to have a day of remembrance. They could give food to children’s homes or elder’s homes and engage in similar activities. On a national level, a specific day should be allocated for this.

However, we do not feel comfortable talking about this outside of our community. We feel threatened.”

I didn't know that the Office for Reparations had been established, but I believe such work is important. There are many people, especially women who have been left helpless due to the conflict, and who continue to fight to sustain their families, single handedly.

It is important that the Office for Reparations works towards providing compensation and benefits to them according to their current needs and degrees of hardship.

(Woman Community Representative, Hambantota)

I also believe that a reparations policy should specifically address the needs of women, and perhaps even prioritize them. This is because women, regardless of ethnicity, are the ones who are affected at every turn and have suffered the most in providing for their families.

Women should also be included in drafting a reparations policy, because only a woman will understand the struggles of other women.

(Woman Community Representative, Hambantota)



Conceptual Roadblock: Women consult the facilitator of the workshop in the planning stages of their art installation on women and reparations.



Take Note: Women noting down their ideas and plans for their art installations which would convey their thoughts on reparations.



Cross Cultural Communication: Women share ideas with their group in the planning stages of producing an art installation.



Building a case: A woman shares her ideas with her group in the midst of planning their art installations on women and reparations.


“There should not be another war. To achieve this end, the government should establish the truth and provide solutions to our problems to ensure non-recurrence.”

- Woman community representative, Batticaloa

“Reparations cannot bring back my husband, but it can at least give me a sense of peace, knowing that my children received a good education and are living comfortable lives.

I don't want to go through another war and in order to ensure this, we should develop an attitude that favours peace and reconciliation.

- Woman community representative, Batticaloa



I am expecting assistance to construct the house and obtain a job, medical assistance and employment for my son.


I would ask for monetary compensation to buy a plot of land.

I am requesting in my last stage of life to live in a small house.

I need a monthly income to carry out my lifestyle.
I need medical assistance since I am sick.

Reparations have to be long term because we need to look after the entire family and satisfy our needs too.

Long-term reparation is not only monetary compensation – if a house is provided even that will be long term. Other reparations can be long term or short term... rather than micro-credit services, if government can help me to earn an income by working from home, for instance by providing a machine that would be useful. Rehabilitation reparations such as psychosocial support for the long-term is also expected... Reforms in law will also be useful...





Contemplation: A woman listens as her group continues planning their art installation.



Cut Flowers: A woman cuts around floral print to gather cloth flowers for her team's art installation.



The team behind the installation artwork 'Hope and Resilience.'

Information about the missing child should be given. I don't wish to receive compensation for my missing child. But monthly grants should be given regarding loss of property.



Partners in Twine: Women silently work on wrapping twine around cardboard to shape their piece of installation art.

Muted Expressions: Women create expressionless figurines for their art installation to communicate social limitations they face.



The 'eyes' have it: A team assembles part of its art piece.

Apologizing, building memorials, setting aside days for memorialisation, seeking out what happened to the missing persons.


Sharing Experiences: Women share their hopes and aspirations for the future at a saree painting workshop.



A place that identifies as a safe space for women to discuss the violations that they have undergone [symbolic reparation] is also a reparation that is expected.

All of us who were in that village lost our property. All of us should be compensated for the loss caused to us.

It is good if a memorial is built in the village on behalf of all of us who had to leave our village. New people have been settled in that village now. I visited that village recently. But there is no monument to recognise that it was our village and the one we had to leave. I felt so sad about it. I felt sad when I remembered that we had a right to that village, that we had memories there.



Actually, officers at those institutions (government officials) need those trainings more than us. They treat us extremely badly - they are the ones with no idea how to behave.

- *Women community representatives, Kilinochchi*

A lot of people think that the war affected Tamil women only, but Sinhalese women also suffered. Nobody talks about the rights of Sinhalese women that were violated.

- *Women community representatives, Puttalam*

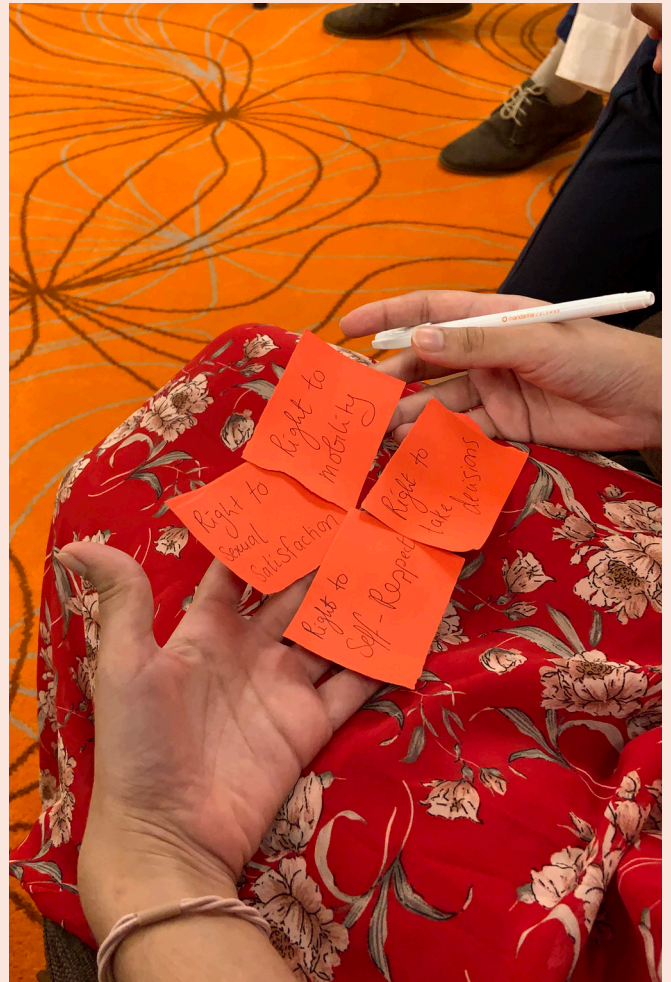
When it comes to human rights or fundamental rights it's women who are most knowledgeable about them. But women don't have the freedom to go out. Women even need permission to go out from the men in their lives.

- *Women community representatives, Puttalam*






*Behind the Scenes:
An exchange of ideas between teammates
before they present their art installation.*



*Pieces of a whole:
exploring rights at a workshop for CSOs.*



*A brief moment of entertainment: women gather
to watch a puppetry performance on their rights.*



The war has left many women as female heads of households (FHH). They face serious problems in raising money for their basic livelihood.


It's important for a reparations process to target women like that. Although some programmes have been started, not everyone has access or benefit from those programmes.

Many women have lost their education because of the conflict. Many have also become female heads of households (FHHs). Reparations must prioritize these women.

We also have questions on whether the reparations given to female heads of households (FHHs) will be the same given to male heads of households or will our different struggles be recognized?

Reparations need to directly address issues of disappearance and displacement.

When we talk about reparations, people immediately think about money. We need to explain that reparations is more than that.





*Pointed Questions:
A variety of pins representing different unheard inquiries
from women hang suspended as part of an art installation.*




*Resilience and Hope:
An exhibit depicting the hope of those asking for reparations in Sri Lanka and those who still remain unsated.*



A Quick Chat: Women from culturally diverse backgrounds enjoy a lighter moment while building their pieces of installation art.



*Teamwork:
Women of different cultural backgrounds work on art pieces together.*





Women have faced many rights violations. Many harms experienced by Muslim women remain hidden. There is no justice or relief.

These women are struggling with basic material necessities. Reparations should also be for the loss of someone who died, disability because of the war, mental trauma. So many meetings have happened about reparations, but there has been nothing yet. Reparations should be assessed on the basis of need. At the moment, the greatest need is material – especially after covid-19 with women who can't go to work. Their most important need is development and livelihood.

War affected women continue to be scared and traumatized by the shells. They need trauma counselling.

There is a loss of around 10 years of education due to displacement – they are now unable to study, and we cannot educate them. If they had studied, they could have been able to work in society. The government should put that right – provide vocational training, and make them able to work and earn.





The political situation is also changing. In this context, uniting people to discuss and agree on solutions is also very difficult.

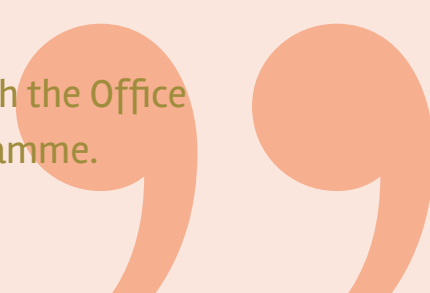
Since 1983, a lot has happened but now we are unable to get evidence of losses that happened earlier (children who went missing/ people who disappeared). People who lost land are no longer there. For people displaced from Ampara, there is not much documentation, and even when they are there they are faulty. Here the narrative that is being pushed is that there was no war, nothing happened.

One of the challenges is that when we go and ask for birth certificates, they will ask us to prove that that is who we are.

We lost so much of that data during the war. Now if we go for something like reparations they will ask us for the same thing – what are we supposed to do then? The lack of documentation is a real problem.

People are scared to go and ask for things now. They say if I talk about disappearance, will I also disappear.

That is one reason why now people won't approach the Office on Missing Persons about the interim relief programme.





Quick Refresher: Women brush up on their talking points, awaiting their turn to present their art installations.



Deep thought: Women engage in group work to plan their art installations on women and reparations.



Thoughtful Consideration: Women ponder on ideas put forward by their group while planning their art installations on women and reparations.



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