

LankaCorps is a unique opportunity for young leaders of Sri Lankan heritage to professionally engage in social, cultural, and economic development activities in Sri Lanka. The program aims to foster the involvement and understanding of young members of the expatriate Sri Lankan community who have limited in-depth experience with the country of their heritage. Each year, The Asia Foundation selects an outstanding group of LankaCorps Fellows to live and work for six months in Sri Lanka, granting them the unique chance to “explore their roots while giving back.”

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In order to provide young adults of Sri Lankan heritage the opportunity to engage in social, cultural and economic development activities in Sri Lanka, see the country today through their own eyes, and arrive at a better unfiltered understanding of its contemporary affairs, The Asia Foundation launched the LankaCorps program in 2012. This fellowship program gives young professionals of Sri Lankan origin the opportunity to contribute to the dynamic, multi-ethnic nation's development through six-month fellowships where they will be placed in government agencies, the private sector, and community-based organizations and nonprofits. Placements are customized to Fellow's interests, experience and qualifications.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

LankaCorps Fellows will be placed with host organizations identified by The Asia Foundation in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. These individual placements will be supplemented by a multi-disciplinary orientation program, language training, and two organized cultural field trips. The Asia Foundation staff will offer in-country advisory and logistical support for the Fellows during the six-month internship. Read more about previous Fellows and their placements at www.lankacorps.org.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Fellowship will provide round-trip international airfare, in-country expenses (including a monthly stipend), and health insurance coverage.



ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants must:

- Be at least 21 years of age, and not over 30, on the projected start date;
- Have at least a bachelor's degree with high academic achievement;
- Have demonstrable leadership skills and civic engagement;
- Be in excellent physical health;
- Be of Sri Lankan heritage; and
- Have U.S., Canadian, U.K., French, or Australian citizenship (Citizens of other countries considered on a case-by-case basis)

Candidates in all fields will be considered; however, preference will be given to those whose background and interests are likely to contribute to Sri Lanka's development.



"Before LankaCorps everything I knew about Sri Lanka—the people, the culture, the religions, and of course the politics—was through something or someone else. But after LankaCorps I have a real deep emotional and

personal connection with Sri Lanka. I have my own experiences, good, bad, and even ugly... I have my own Sri Lankan work experience, my own Sri Lankan friends, my own favorite restaurants, and even my own favorite temple."

– **Sivashankar Krishnakumar**, 2012 LankaCorps Fellow



"The Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to reconnect with my relatives in Sri Lanka, many of whom I had long lost touch with—it was my first trip back to Sri Lanka in 13.5 years. It also helped establish a strong sense of Sri Lankan identity and attachment to my country of birth. I'm not entirely sure what these things will lead to, but I certainly have a strong desire to engage with Sri Lanka and contribute to the future of my country in some capacity. It is possible that the stronger bond that I now have (as a result of LankaCorps) to both Sri Lanka and its people may be the one thing that ensures that I stay committed to these aspirations well into the future."

– **Anthony Obeyesekere**, 2013 LankaCorps Fellow

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"I am also incredibly grateful for the opportunity to connect with the other fellows. Living together gave us a chance to have deep conversations about the triumphs and challenges in our work, and the differences and similarities between our background and our experiences in

Sri Lanka. I am so grateful, as a Sri Lankan-American raised in a Sinhala Buddhist community, to have had the chance to live and become good friends with a Sri Lankan-Canadian raised in a Tamil Hindu community. Sharing our different experiences of what the term Sri Lankan meant to us each growing up (exclusive of the other group) helped open both of our minds and show us that there is much more to Sri Lanka than what our small immigrant/diaspora communities taught us back home."

– **Ruvani Fonseka**, 2015 LankaCorps Fellow



"Personally, the fellowship was extremely valuable to me. It brought me to the country for the first time and brought my parents back for the first time since they left. In that way, it left a lasting meaningful connection to Sri Lanka for my family in a way that nothing else could have. I do feel a different perception of the country and am much more invested now than ever to help in the country's development, as I would like to look into returning to Sri Lanka in the future and working further in the psychosocial field."

– **Shaaranya Pillai**, 2016 LankaCorps Fellow

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HOST ORGANIZATIONS

Carbon Consulting Company (2016)	International Centre for Ethnic Studies (2015/2016)
Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2013)	Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute (2012/2013)
Centre for Poverty Analysis (2014/2015/2016)	MAS Holdings (2012)
Chitrasena Dance Academy (2016)	National Water Supply and Drainage Board (2012)
Emerge Lanka Foundation (2015)	OpenDRI (2016)
Family Planning Association (2014)	Redlime Pvt. Limited (2014)
Family Rehabilitation Centre (2015/2016)	Regional Center for Strategic Studies (2013)
Federation of Environmental Organizations (2013)	Sri Lanka Unites (2013)
Foundation of Goodness (2012/2013/2015/2016)	The Post Graduate Institute of Archeology (2013)
Genetech (2014)	University of Visual and Performing Arts (2013)
Good Practices Group (2014)	Verite Research (2014/2015)
Institute of Policy Studies (2014)	Women in Need (2012/2015)

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Promoting Inter-Community Dialogues Through Economic Engagement



The Asia Foundation
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

Inter-ethnic engagement through the economic domain has proven effective in many countries since it leverages a natural motivation to improve livelihoods and promotes shared space to foster interdependence and generate tangible outcomes for participants. The Asia Foundation in Sri Lanka works to promote inter-community dialogue through economic engagement.



The Initiative for Sustained Peaceful Inter-ethnic Relations for Economic Development (INSPIRED) aims to promote social cohesion through inter-community engagement in the business sector and advocacy for institutionalization and replication of successful inter-community reconciliation pilot initiatives. The project focuses on the Eastern Province and is implemented with the support of local partners; Group Action for Social Order, Eastern Self-Reliant Community Awakening Organisation, Sarvodaya, the Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities (FSLGA), and Good Market. It is based on the premise that if all communities involved in the formal and informal economy in the Eastern Province are supported to interact collaboratively around common economic interests, and the resulting benefits are inclusive and available equally to all, then inter-community relations at the community level will also improve. The project aims to do so by focusing on the

following key objectives:

- Strengthening evidence-based policy making
- Improving inter-community relations through economic engagement
- Ensuring equal economic opportunities for both men and women
- Institutionalizing inter-communal collaborative business models

DATA-INFORMED PLANNING

To establish an evidence base on socio-economic relations within and between communities in project locations, the Foundation conducted a series of studies which included a Social Capital Assessment, a Business Environment Barometer, as well as a qualitative and quantitative mapping of formal and informal economic activities in the Eastern Province. Data collected through these studies enabled the program to build a comprehensive picture of community dynamics in project sites which later

informed intra- and inter-group dialogues conducted with project participants on economic interdependence and social cohesion.

FUNDING ENTREPRENEURS

As a part of this project, the Foundation is disbursing seed grants for a selected number of micro, small, and medium enterprise owners to support business ideas that promote and strengthen inter-community collaboration. Through these seed grants, the project reinforces social cohesion links between communities via economic resiliency, especially in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has badly hit small and micro enterprises, as is evident from the declines in sales, supply chain interruptions, and employee layoffs. The seed grant approach aims to build and strengthen relationships beyond project participants by engaging all actors involved in both the production cycle and the value chain (from suppliers to consumers) and eventually boosting economic recovery among communities, especially women entrepreneurs.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE POLICY DIALOGUES

In partnership with the FSLGA, the Foundation is also conducting a series of Public-Private Dialogues (PPDs) to facilitate state officials and the private sector in constructive engagement to resolve business practice and policy concerns jointly. Through the implementation of PPDs, the Foundation aims to institutionalize equitable business practice reforms and policy changes within the project locations while applying a gender-sensitive approach when addressing key business concerns. These dialogues provide a platform to share inter-community concerns on recent and ongoing issues faced by local

businesses and to find constructive and sustainable solutions that could be replicated more broadly within the province.

FOSTERING NETWORKS

In 2020, a series of district-level trade fairs were conducted to highlight the links that are being forged between local businesses from different communities and to provide an opportunity for consumers to come together to support cross-community initiatives.

The Foundation also partnered with Good Market to build capacity and networking among micro and small business owners within selected locations in all three project districts. The partnership aims to further facilitate inter-community dialogue and interaction between project beneficiaries through mentoring, knowledge sharing and training, to improve their business skills and perspectives via more sustainable channels.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 364 small entrepreneurs, over half of them women, were trained in business skills and gender and conflict sensitivity, with 90% rating the programs as very good
- 90 seed grants were provided to a total of 171 project participants, with the majority being joint applications across ethnoreligious groups
- 10 business committees comprising of key officials from local authorities and representatives from the private sector were established across the Eastern Province to address issues faced by local businesses through a series of Public-Private Dialogues. Overall, 282 matters were submitted through this process.

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.



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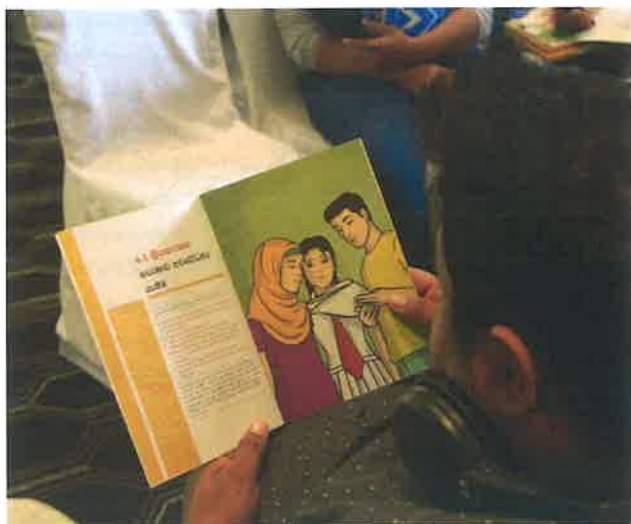
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Empowering Sri Lankan Youth Through Shared Values



The Asia Foundation
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

With support from an education specialist and in close consultation with religious leaders and community leaders, The Asia Foundation has developed a shared values education curriculum. Covering seven core humanistic values—active listening, peace, respect, tolerance, compassion, honesty and sincerity, and working together—the curriculum promotes a range of interactive and thought-provoking activities to help understand each value, their impact on relationships and ones' own personal development.



The Foundation believes that if young people understand, appreciate and absorb common humanistic values that underpin every society, they will then be more likely to support a plural and tolerant approach to resolving communal issues that arise within their own communities. The Values Curriculum is designed to be easily accessible by youth across Sri Lanka.

VALUES CURRICULUM

The curriculum is available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English and includes modules designed to be used by anyone with an interest in encouraging commitment to positive values, especially by groups of young people across youth clubs. It also remains flexible enough that it can be used in other contexts, such as schools, universities as well as professional workspaces, with the material being adapted to reflect examples from the participants' local area or made appropriate for different age groups. The Asia Foundation is promoting the curriculum under a three-year project, Promoting Shared Values, Shared Spaces, and Building Local Capacities for Dispute Resolution in Sri Lanka, implemented in six districts: Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee, Ampara, Kurunegala, and Kalutara.

The values curriculum rollouts and training of trainers (ToTs) reflect current trends in perceptions of youth in project locations captured by research and surveys conducted under the project. Most youth (88%) in project districts believe that peace education is lacking and should be made part of the existing school curriculum. The research also shows a high number of youth who claim to face discrimination on the basis of ethno-religious identities within their own area (72%) and within the country in general (44%).

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM

Keeping up with current trends in the growing digital and IT domains and backed by research which indicates that more than half of young people in project locations are online at least once a month and 32% use their online activity for educational purposes, the Foundation updated and digitized the values curriculum into an android-based mobile application called Values4All. The curriculum is also available on its website www.values4all.lk and via e-thaksalava (the online library of the Ministry of Education). By digitizing the curriculum, the Foundation aims to provide greater access for young people in a context where technology and social media presents both

an opportunity and a challenge to promote social cohesion.

The Values4all project is also extensively promoted on social media; where engaging content collected from the ToTs and directly from participants have been shared on Facebook and Twitter. Video tutorials from the ToTs were also created in Sinhala and Tamil languages, including sign-language, and made accessible on the Values4all Youtube channel.

The digitization of the curriculum has enabled a systematic roll-out of these values and has helped expand reach outside project locations. As such, the program specifically focuses on youth leaders and activists who would be able to share the curriculum with a much wider audience through their own networks.

TRAINING YOUTH LEADERS AS VALUES4ALL FACILITATORS

The Foundation partnered with the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) and Sri Lanka Unites to conduct a series of ToTs in each project location. The overarching goal was to help the facilitators better understand and respond to ethnic and/or religious incidents in a non-violent manner. Through an initial three-day ToT conducted with youth leaders from each district, a core group of 88 male and female Values4All facilitators was formed for the purpose of supporting a series of curriculum rollouts to be conducted across project locations. The training experience gained by these youth facilitators will help them improve their relations among peers as well as other segments in society (elders, clergy, authorities etc.) and provide them a platform to strengthen dialogue across communities.

ROLLOUT OF VALUES4ALL WITH YOUTH

The Foundation continued working with the National Youth Services Council and partnered with Sarvodaya to rollout the values curriculum with youth across the six project districts. A mentorship approach has been adopted throughout the training and rollout process in order to provide necessary support and guidance to the youth facilitators in developing interpersonal skills, sharing their experiences and understanding how to respond to ethnic and/or religious incidents in a non-

violent manner.

In 2019, the Foundation supported two phases of rollouts for over 900 youth from NYSC, Sarvodaya and other youth organizations. The rollouts enabled the youth facilitators to further develop their facilitation and leadership skills and was an opportunity for some facilitators to overcome linguistic barriers in certain bilingual districts. Overall, the project aims to train a minimum of 1800 young people who are active within their communities. The Foundation has mainstreamed gender as a cross-cutting issue to ensure interventions promote equal participation, representation, and access to project resources.

A reconciliation event was organized in Colombo for the core group of trained facilitators from all six project districts. The event provided a platform for the youth to innovatively engage with each other through arts and culture. Facilitators explored music, language, and history over this two-day event. Shared culture was explored throughout the event, and the inter-district interaction was greatly enjoyed by the participants. The event concluded with an invitation to the youth to host similar events within their own districts by focusing on a notion of shared culture, to encourage youth-led initiatives within the project.

WIDENING THE SCOPE OF VALUES4ALL

Based on increasing interest from higher education institutions and universities, the project has also organized a pilot training of trainers for lecturers at the National School of Business Management (NSBM). The two-day training allowed the lecturers to understand the benefit of including the study of values in business studies. NSBM will be using the values curriculum to complement the mandatory personal development module for their MBA programs. Similar requests from the Mediation Boards Commission (MBC) materialized in a three-day training for program assistants in charge of establishing peer mediation cells in schools. The training was a good opportunity to institutionalize the curriculum as part of the regular MBC training.

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