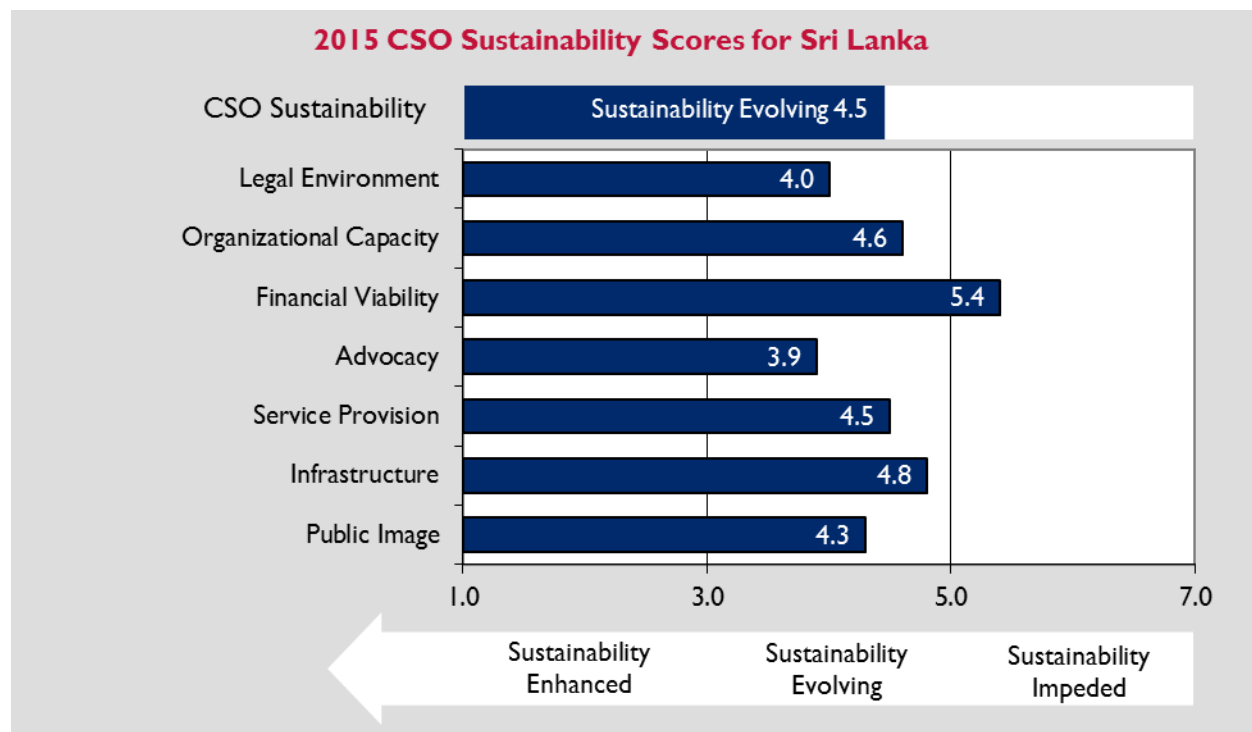


## SRI LANKA



### CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.5

#### Country Facts

**Capital:** Colombo

**Government Type:**  
Republic

**Population:**  
22,053,488

**GDP per capita (PPP):** \$10,600

**Human Development Index:**  
73

After nearly ten years of increasingly authoritarian and centralized rule, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the presidential election to Maithripala Sirisena in January 2015. Sirisena's presidential campaign centered on restoring good governance, abolishing the executive presidency, and fostering social integration between the majority and minority ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. The presidential election had the highest voter turnout (81.5 percent) in Sri Lanka's history. CSO-led advocacy platforms such as Puravasi Balaya (People's Power), the Platform for Freedom, and Aluth Parapura (New Generation) played an important role in generating public support for Sirisena's platform. The election of Sirisena ushered in a dramatic opening of space for civil society and media

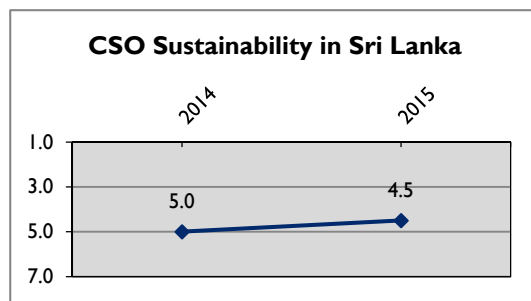


and significant democratic reform efforts.

Parliamentary elections in August 2015 led to the establishment of a new coalition government between the United Front for Good Governance (UNFGG) and the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The UNFGG secured the highest number of seats in the parliamentary election, and Ranil Wickremesinghe was subsequently appointed prime minister. President Sirisena currently leads the UPFA. However, a faction of the UPFA has remained loyal to former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and has come to function as the de facto political opposition in the parliament. Meanwhile, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which endorsed Sirisena's presidency, remains the largest undivided political party that is not formally part of the UNFGG-

UNFPA coalition government.

In 2015, Sri Lanka's media enjoyed increased freedom, and self-censorship in mainstream print media declined during the year. For example, a number of news stories in print media were critical of the governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, accusing him of manipulating government-issued treasury bonds. Moreover, the government lifted blocks placed by the previous administration on news websites such as The Colombo Telegraph. Amid this increasing media freedom, CSOs widely used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for advocacy. The government also became a member of the Open Government Partnership in 2015, reinforcing its commitment to transparency and accountability.



There were limited economic developments in 2015. Sri Lanka had single digit inflation throughout 2015, suggesting that the government managed local price levels. The agricultural sector recorded positive growth. According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the country's per capita income increased from \$3,853 in 2014 to \$3,924 in 2015.

In 2015, CSO oversight was shifted from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of National Co-Existence, Dialogue, and Official Languages. This shift from military to civilian oversight resulted in a significant reduction in state-sponsored harassment and intimidation of CSOs. Consequently, CSO-led advocacy campaigns improved markedly in 2015, both in quantity and effectiveness. These campaigns centered on constitutional reform and representation, transitional justice, and the transformation of public accountability systems. With the change in government, prominent CSO activists also took up government posts, reinforcing new linkages between government and CSOs. As a result, there were increased consultations between CSOs and the government in the process of formulating policies. For example, the drafting committee for the new Right to Information Bill included civil society actors, ensuring that CSOs' recommendations were considered. CSO consultations were also heavily influential in drafting the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution, which aimed to considerably decrease long-held executive powers. The public image of CSOs also improved significantly in 2015—in contrast to 2014, the media did not portray advocacy-oriented CSOs in a negative light and gave broad coverage to CSO initiatives.

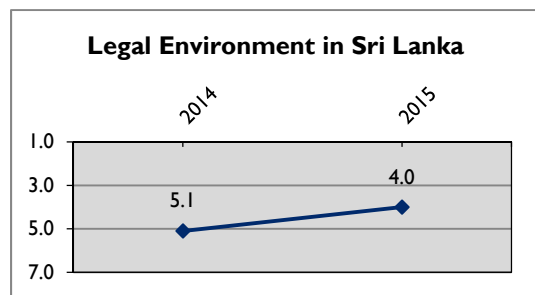
Less progress was made in other areas of CSO sustainability. The organizational capacity of CSOs remained weak due to inadequate succession planning and poor local constituency building. The financial viability of CSOs continued to be stifled by an over-reliance on donor funding.

It is difficult to assess the magnitude of the CSO sector. According to the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations, in 2015 there were 1,496 NGOs registered under the Voluntary Social Service Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act of 1980 (VSSO Act), a slight increase from 1,439 in 2014. This Act covers a range of other organizations besides NGOs, but there are no updated statistics available on these other registered organizations. There is also no reliable data on the number of unregistered CSOs in Sri Lanka.

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.0

The operating environment for CSOs dramatically improved in 2015. With the arrival of the new administration in 2015, CSOs could work openly on issues such as minority rights and transitional justice for the first time since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war, and CSOs experienced significantly less state harassment and censorship. Moreover, CSOs no longer needed prior approval from the Ministry of Defense or any other security-related institution to operate in the North and East of the country. As a result, the scope and coverage of CSO activity

in Sri Lanka increased. However, the laws governing CSOs have not yet been reformed to reflect this new space for CSOs to operate.



CSOs in Sri Lanka can register through one of five legal instruments: the Societies Ordinance of 1891; the Companies Act of 2007; the Co-operative Societies Act of 1992; the VSSO Act; and an Act of Parliament sponsored by a Member of Parliament through a Private Member’s Bill. The VSSO Act defines a voluntary social service organization (VSSO) as “any organization formed by a group of persons on a voluntary basis” that is either (a) of non-governmental nature, (b) dependent on public contributions or donations (local or foreign), or (c) set up with the objective of providing relief

services to the mentally and physically disabled, the poor, the sick, orphans, and post-disaster relief.” Therefore, regardless of the selected mechanism for registration, all organizations that fall into one of the VSSO categories listed above must also register under the VSSO Act, and in practice most organizations do so. The registration process under the VSSO Act takes approximately three months to complete. VSSO registration is free, while CSOs that register as limited guarantee companies or trusts are subject to fees. Organizations that operate within a single administrative division do not have to register under the VSSO; rather they receive registration permits from local authorities.

CSOs are subject to the oversight functions and reporting requirements of the NGO Secretariat established under the VSSO Act. In January 2015 the government shifted the NGO Secretariat from the purview of the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of National Co-Existence, Dialogue, and Official Languages. This shift from military to civilian oversight resulted in a more favorable climate for CSO registration and operation in Sri Lanka. Notwithstanding this shift, certain local CSOs engaging in issues such as human rights and transitional justice noted a lack of cooperation from authorities when applying for local registration permits. In particular, CSOs operating in the North and East of the country encountered excessive delays when applying for registration permits.

The internal management, scope of permissible activities, financial reporting, and dissolution of CSOs are not well defined in current legislation. There are no clear legal provisions to preclude unwanted state control over CSOs. An amendment to the VSSO Act in 1998 gave the Registrar of the NGO Secretariat the power of interim management of a registered CSO if it is suspected of fraud or misappropriation. There were no reports of the government dissolving CSOs for arbitrary or political reasons in 2015, but the law still permits the state to seize control over CSOs.

In 2015, CSOs faced markedly less state harassment and intimidation compared to previous years. The climate of fear in which CSOs operated under the previous government was transformed to one of openness and operational space for CSOs. The freedom of expression was largely restored in 2015, and CSOs openly demanded greater protection of vulnerable groups and criticized government policies, such as a new hate speech bill, without fear of reprisal. CSOs also were able to organize protests in 2015 without seeking prior permission from the government, and were not court-ordered to abandon protests. For example, in January, civil society activists, lawyers, and trade union representatives organized a protest demanding the resignation of Chief Justice Mohan Peiris, who was ultimately replaced. Furthermore, the state attempted to address certain instances of alleged abuse of civil society actors by state officials. For example, after police used tear gas, batons, and water cannons to disperse a student protest in October, the prime minister called for an investigation into the incident. The independent Human Rights Commission also launched its own investigation into the attack. These investigations were ongoing at the end of the year.

Despite this progress, the government still treated CSOs operating in the North and East of the country with a degree of suspicion due to the perception that CSOs in these areas are aligned with the interests of foreign

governments. For instance, organizations such as the Mannar Women’s Development Federation continued to face surveillance and questioning by military intelligence. However, in contrast to 2014, there were no reported arrests of CSO activists in 2015.

The tax structure applicable to CSOs is complex and at times inconsistent. Under the Inland Revenue Act of 2006, CSOs are required to pay an income tax of 0.3 percent on all income received from grants, donations, and contributions. This requirement often places a financial burden on smaller CSOs.

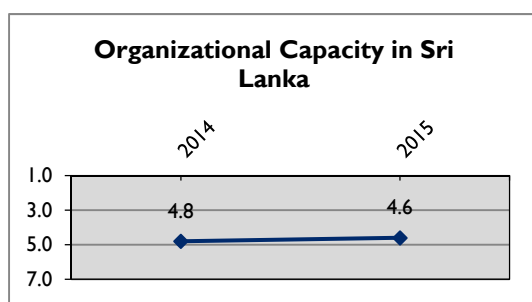
CSOs can legally earn income through the provision of goods and services but do not receive any tax exemptions on earned income. While there are no legal barriers preventing CSOs from competing for government contracts, in practice CSOs do not have the organizational capacity to provide the requested goods and services in public procurement contracts.

Sri Lanka lacks lawyers specialized in CSO law. This gap in legal expertise makes it difficult for CSOs to select appropriate registration mechanisms, ensure compliance with the VSSO Act, and apply for operational permits.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.6

In 2015, the freer operating environment for CSOs led to improvements in the sector’s organizational capacity.

CSOs that engage in service provision, environmental protection, micro-lending, and trade union activities regularly build informal constituencies comprising a wide range of actors, including government officials, media personnel, and donors. In 2015, increased press freedom enhanced the capacity of advocacy-oriented CSOs to build constituencies around many issues—anti-corruption, transitional justice, and missing persons from the 1983-2009 civil war, among others—through the use of traditional and social media.



At the same time, CSOs, especially those operating in urban areas, are not successful in engaging local beneficiaries in the design of their programs, primarily because donor priorities drive programmatic focus. Additionally, Colombo-based CSOs often have limited access to communities outside Colombo due to a lack of branch offices and partner organizations in rural areas. By contrast, rural CSOs operating at the grassroots level have relatively high levels of community participation, both because of their proximity to beneficiaries and their efforts to build local trust.

CSOs in Sri Lanka generally have clearly defined vision and mission statements in their founding documents. However, only larger CSOs carry out strategic planning for the short, medium, and long terms. These plans are often developed to meet donor requirements, resulting in ad hoc implementation and evaluation. Further, the indicators that CSOs use to conduct impact assessments of projects are often poorly designed and rarely subject to review.

In 2015, the increased operational space for CSO activity resulted in a number of organizations revisiting their strategic focus in light of the changing country context. For example, advocacy CSOs—across the country in general, and in the North and East in particular—refocused their services towards reconciliation, human rights, and social integration. According to CSOs in Jaffna and Kilinochchi, these priorities were not possible under the previous government.

Many CSOs lack clear governance structures, leading to weak distinctions between the roles and responsibilities of the organization’s management and its board of directors. Many CSOs are personality-driven and heavily reliant on the strategic vision of their founding members. Hence, frequently, an organization’s founding

members make key decisions. Moreover, there is poor succession planning, making it challenging for CSOs to sustain their operations upon the departure of their founding members.

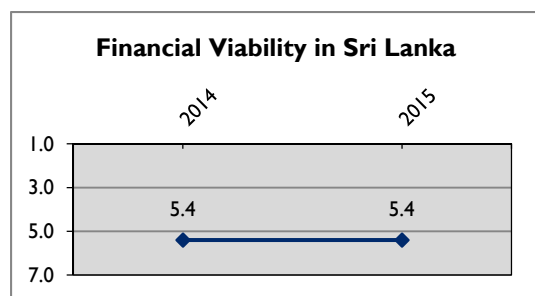
CSOs with long-term donor funding have the capacity to employ permanent paid staff. Smaller CSOs tend to rely on part-time staff and volunteers, who often lack technical knowledge and experience. However, CSOs continue to find it challenging to retain competent staff due to their inability to provide adequate compensation and benefits. In 2015, CSOs frequently lost competent staff members to donor organizations and international CSOs that were scaling up their operations in the wake of the political transition. Consequently, staff turnover remained high both in urban and rural organizations. At the same time, advocacy-oriented CSOs were able to recruit more interns and volunteers due to the public enthusiasm for President Sirisena’s good governance mandate and to the reduced risk of state harassment for engaging in CSO activity. According to the 2015 World Giving Index, 48 percent of respondents in Sri Lanka—the second highest of all countries studied—reported that they participated in voluntary action in 2014, compared to 50 percent in 2013.

In 2015, both CSOs and the private sector experienced difficulty with importing advanced technology due to complex customs clearance procedures. For instance, the Environmental Foundation Ltd. imported GPS Wildlife Tracking Collars that were held in customs for over seven months. Other CSOs were unable to import braille printers as costs became prohibitive.

There was an increase in youth engagement on social media platforms in 2015. According to data from Facebook, there are now between 3 and 3.5 million active Facebook users in Sri Lanka. However, almost 2.8 million of these Facebook users are located in the Western Province, while much of the rest of the country still does not use social media. The overall increase in social media activity has led CSOs increasingly to utilize platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to advocate for change.

Internet access is widely available in urban areas, as well as some rural areas. Most CSOs have access to information and communications technology (ICT), including computers, printers, and scanners. However, the available equipment is often outdated or in need of repair. Moreover, there is significant disparity between organizations based in urban and rural areas regarding access to ICT.

## FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.4



According to the United Nations in Sri Lanka, donor funding to service-providing CSOs continued to decrease in 2015, mainly due to Sri Lanka’s transition to lower middle-income status in 2010 after the civil war ended. For example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Sri Lanka was unable to renew funding that ended in 2015 for a local CSO focused on female victims of domestic abuse due to a strategic shift in priorities. In contrast, donor funding for advocacy-oriented CSOs increased due to the strengthening of Sri

Lanka’s relations with the international community (primarily India, the US, and the EU) and the government’s willingness to engage with international and domestic CSOs on rights-based issues. The new government gave donors increased access to travel to and interact with vulnerable populations in the North and East, particularly to address transitional justice issues. This increased access made donors more willing to fund rights and governance programs in the North and East. While no official data is available on the scale of foreign assistance, leading foreign donors to Sri Lanka in 2015 included the EU, USAID, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Local sources of funding remain limited. Sri Lankan CSOs do not attempt to cultivate a loyal core of local financial supporters, due to the time and financial commitment needed to implement local fundraising strategies. Furthermore, CSOs do not receive any significant funding from the government. However, due to

President Sirisena’s public endorsement of CSOs’ role in nation building, the private sector and the public were less apprehensive about funding CSO-driven projects in 2015. Some corporations such as Dialog PLC, MAS Holdings, and John Keells Holdings made grants and donations to CSOs as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. According to the 2015 World Giving Index, the percentage of Sri Lankans who made donations to CSOs was 59 percent in 2014, up from 56 percent in 2013.

CSOs typically do not have diverse sources of funding. In previous years, CSOs saw an acute need to diversify funding sources due to government suspicion of CSOs that received international assistance. The new administration’s more open attitude towards international assistance led CSOs to view diversification as less critical. CSOs therefore made little effort to diversify their funding in 2015. Furthermore, rural CSOs in particular do not possess the technical knowledge or capacity to effectively diversify funding streams. Thus, most rural-based CSOs did not have adequate resources to remain viable even for the short-term future.

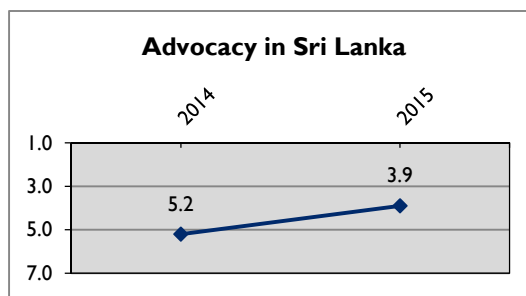
Though many CSOs are membership-based, only a few receive significant contributions from their members. These are mainly faith-based organizations, trade unions, and provincial and district-level clubs and associations.

Although CSOs are legally allowed to earn revenue from providing services and goods, few organizations engage in income-generating activity. Much of the public believes that CSOs have significant financial resources, which makes beneficiaries reluctant to pay for goods and services provided by CSOs.

A large number of CSOs lack transparent and consistent financial management systems, including procedure manuals, accounting systems, and operational plans. Although larger, urban-based CSOs conduct independent financial audits, annual reports with financial statements are rarely published.

### ADVOCACY: 3.9

The more favorable operating environment in 2015 significantly improved CSOs’ capacity to advocate for change. In 2015, CSOs were able to play a central role on issues such as accountability, transparency, and good governance—a marked contrast with 2014, when state-sponsored harassment and reprisal curtailed the capacity of CSOs to advocate on these issues.



CSOs had better cooperation with the government in 2015, including greater access to politicians, local authorities, and the central government. Access was partly granted through the development of new mechanisms. For example, the new National Executive Council aimed to formalize engagement between civil society and government. However, the Council failed to convene after April 2015, and the initiative was discontinued following the August 2015 general election. Thereafter, CSOs accessed the government and influenced policy-making largely through informal channels.

In 2015, the prime minister and the president formed new parallel mechanisms to address transitional justice. In December, the Prime Ministerial Action Group (PMAG) was established to make high-level decisions on this issue. The PMAG is composed of the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms and a Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms, an independent group of civil society representatives. It was informally constituted in late 2015, with formal appointments scheduled to take place in 2016. The President’s Office of National Unity and Reconciliation was also established in 2015 to coordinate and implement reconciliation and social integration programs, such as interfaith dialogues. Despite these new mechanisms, sections of civil society voiced concerns over the meaningfulness of the government’s efforts for national reconciliation. In November 2015, a Joint Submission of Tamil Civil Society Organizations on the



Victim Consultation Process to the Government of Sri Lanka noted its apprehension regarding the government's "mixed and confusing signals about its obligations under the UNHRC Resolution [to create transitional justice mechanisms] and how it intends to honour them."

Rural-based CSOs still have limited influence in national policy-making spheres because they have less advocacy capacity than Colombo-based CSOs.

In May 2015, women's groups, such as Women and Media Collective, launched a lobbying campaign that secured cabinet approval of a 25 percent nomination quota for women in local government elections. A number of prominent human rights activists now hold positions in government or independent commissions, which has strengthened linkages between CSOs and government. For example, the former executive director of Transparency International – Sri Lanka, was appointed the Chairperson of the Special Presidential Task Force for the Recovery of Illegally Acquired State Assets.

In January 2015, President Sirisena unveiled his 100-day plan, which aimed to re-institute *yabapalanaya* (good governance). The plan contemplated measures promoted by civil society, such as passing a Right to Information Act, introducing an Ethical Code for Parliamentarians, and reforming the executive presidency. The Right to Information Bill was published in December and is expected to be debated in the parliament in 2016. However, while the government expressed its willingness to consult with CSO stakeholders on good governance issues, CSOs' input was not effectively integrated into policy making due to weak coordination among administrative bodies.

In September 2015, the government co-sponsored a US-initiated Human Rights Council resolution to promote reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka. CSOs successfully advocated for transitional justice processes, security sector reform, and victim protection to be included in this resolution. The government's co-sponsorship of this resolution marked a significant departure from the previous government's human rights record.

In April 2015, the government passed the nineteenth amendment to the constitution, which attempts to reduce the powers of the presidency and restore the independence of commissions, including the Elections Commission, Public Service Commission, and National Audit Commission. Prominent CSO groups and coalitions such as Purawesi Balaya and constitutional scholars such as Dr. Jayampathy Wickramaratne, who was elected to parliament in August 2015, were involved in the initiation and drafting of this amendment.

Later in the year, CSOs initiated a lobbying effort for broader constitutional reform. In part because of this effort, the prime minister proposed a resolution that would enable the parliament to function as a constitutional assembly in 2016. In conjunction with this resolution, the Cabinet of Ministers appointed the Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reforms, consisting of representatives from political parties and CSOs. The Committee was tasked with seeking public opinion on constitutional reforms. To this end, a number of CSOs such as Vilithu and the Center for Policy Alternatives facilitated public consultations in local communities and on media platforms.

CSO-led advocacy resulted in some notable successes in 2015. For instance, CSOs launched a campaign that successfully blocked the government's attempts to introduce a new offense on hate speech into the Sri Lankan Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. The campaigners argued that the new laws would be used to target critics of government rather than hate speech offenders because it replicated a contentious provision in the Prevention of Terrorism Act on prohibited speech.

CSOs were extensively involved in monitoring the presidential and general elections in 2015. In the run-up to the presidential election in January 2015, the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) and the Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFFE) monitored the election process and election-related violence. CaFFE found that the violence was well organized and "almost always directed against the opposition's

(Sirisena's) campaign." For the August 2015 general election, the Center for Monitoring Election Violence mapped pre-election and Election Day violence.

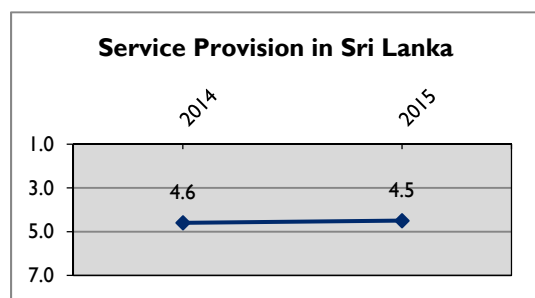
CSOs also actively engaged in advocacy on anti-corruption issues during the year. For instance, a CSO coalition initiated the March 12 Movement, which focused on ensuring that only uncorrupt politicians were nominated in the August 2015 general election. The March 12 Declaration was signed by all political party leaders, including the president. In addition, the CSO coalition Purawesi Balaya launched a campaign against the government's failure to take action against the Minister of Law and Order. The campaigners argued that the minister's involvement as the legal counsel for an allegedly illegal armory made him unfit to hold a ministerial post. The minister resigned shortly after the campaign commenced.

Trade union activism increased in 2015. For example, during the parliamentary debates surrounding the 2016 budget, trade unions for teachers, doctors, and farmers, among others, protested against proposed budget cuts that would adversely affect their interests. For instance, a proposal to convert fertilizer subsidies into a cash allowance prompted island-wide protests by farmers. In response, the government removed this proposal from the budget.

Despite the above successes, CSOs faced several challenges in their advocacy efforts. In particular, CSOs have difficulty building broad-based support for their causes, and mobilization on national issues often does not reach the local level. For example, according to the Center for Policy Alternatives, in 2015 52.8 percent of the population stated that they were not aware of the concept of "right to information."

CSOs did not engage in any initiatives to improve the legal and operating environment for CSOs in 2015 because they did not see such initiatives as necessary for maintaining the new operating space for civil society.

## SERVICE PROVISION: 4.5



In 2015, CSOs in Sri Lanka offered a wide range of services, including in the fields of health, environmental protection, education, livelihood development, and food security.

Due to Sri Lanka's lower middle-income status, donor funding decreased for projects focused exclusively on service delivery, such as the UN-Habitat housing program. At the same time, certain service-providing CSOs working in the North and East of the country were able to increase the scope of their operations due to a reduction in state-sponsored

harassment. For example, CSOs were able to provide psycho-social support to civilians in the North without the threat of state reprisals. Nevertheless, some service-providing CSOs operating in these regions reported challenges in implementing their mandates as donor priorities were shifting towards transitional justice.

In 2015, insufficient funding prevented projects from meeting community needs. This failure resulted in a number of one-size-fits-all projects that did not properly prioritize community needs and resulted in significant overlap in CSO activity. For example, CSO programs did not adequately address the immediate needs of women-led households, such as the need for permanent employment and vocational training.

The costs associated with issuing publications, disseminating research, and organizing workshops often prevent CSOs from expanding their reach beyond local constituencies. However, in 2015, CSOs began to use social media to disseminate findings and generate public discussion. For example, the Center for Policy Alternatives conducted a survey across the Western Province on consumption and perceptions of mainstream and social media. This survey resulted in a discussion calling for government ministers to increase their use of social media to engage with the public.



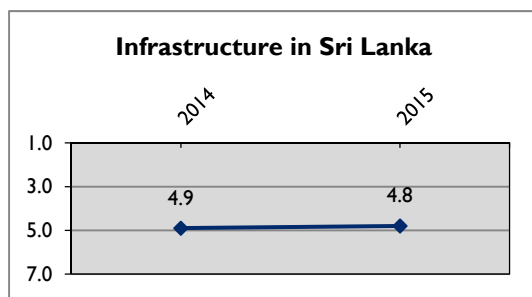
CSOs are typically unable to recover the costs of their services by charging fees. Moreover, constituents, particularly in the North, are often reluctant to pay for CSO services such as healthcare and livelihood support due to a perception that CSOs receive a lot of international funding.

The new government displayed increased recognition of CSO service provision compared to the previous administration. However, the government continues to expect service-providing CSOs to deliver assistance without its support. In 2015, the government provided non-financial support to CSOs that championed causes complementing state policy. For example, the government provided security and logistical support to CSOs that monitored elections.

## INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.8

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector saw marginal improvement in 2015 due to increased coalition building and growth in intersectoral partnerships.

There are no permanent resource centers in Sri Lanka that provide access to relevant information, technology, training, and technical assistance, although such services are provided through donor-funded programs delivered by individual CSOs or external contractors. A limited number of local community foundations, such as the Foundation for Goodness, provide funds to address locally identified needs and projects. Such funds include both locally generated and re-granted foreign funding.



CSOs significantly increased their coalition-building efforts in 2015. In early 2015, an informal CSO-led platform for good governance successfully supported Sirisena’s presidential campaign and partially achieved its aim of limiting the powers of the executive presidency through the passage of the nineteenth amendment. Enabled by the newly favorable operating environment, CSOs established informal issue-based coalitions on transitional justice, environmental governance, human rights, and President Sirisena’s good governance agenda throughout the rest of 2015. Through such informal coalitions, CSO activists collaborated to devise advocacy and lobbying strategies to advance issues of public interest. For example, CSOs such as Transparency International and PAFFREL formed a coalition to strengthen citizen’s access to information under the Right to Information Bill. CSOs even increased their coordination despite divisions along ethnic, linguistic, and regional lines. For example, in September, the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination organized an event called “Civil Society Responses to the OHCHR Report on Sri Lanka,” which aimed to unite a diverse range of CSOs in their response to the government’s reconciliation and transitional justice efforts.

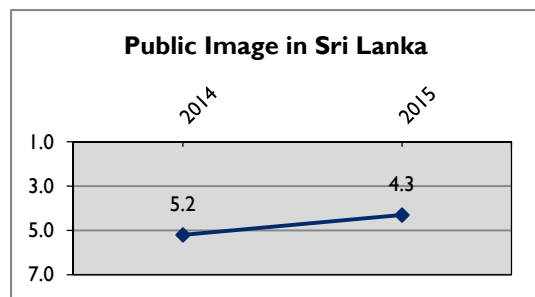
At the same time, there are very few established CSO networks in Sri Lanka. Official networks include the Federation of Environmental Organizations (a nationwide network) and the Women’s Action Network (based in the North and the East). At the district level, networks such as the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) provide free legal advice and assistance to clients. For example, CHA provides these services in Urelu, Jaffna. Moreover, the Council of NGOs of Jaffna District engages on issues such as peace education, youth, reconciliation, and women.

CSO management training is inadequate in Sri Lanka. Training, such as advocacy training and capacity development workshops, is provided to CSO staff on a short-term basis. However, such training is often implemented to meet donor requirements rather than to build organizational capacity to fulfill CSOs’ missions. Furthermore, few trainers specialize in CSO management issues like strategic and financial management, accounting, fundraising, and volunteer management.

Intersectoral partnerships increased in 2015. For example, the campaign on the Right to Information Bill

involved a collaborative effort between CSOs, government actors, and key media personnel. CSOs and the government also collaborated within the Public Representations Committee on Constitutional Reforms. This committee gathered key CSO activists and political actors to consider public proposals on constitutional reform. Partnerships between CSOs and businesses are infrequent because incentives for businesses to partner with CSOs are minimal.

### PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.3



The public image of CSOs improved markedly in 2015 due to the increased media freedom brought by the change in government. In contrast to previous years, the media did not portray CSOs negatively, and the press widely covered CSO initiatives, such as the March 12 Movement. The media promoted various CSO-led campaigns, including the campaigns to prompt an investigation into an alleged illegal armory, compel the withdrawal of new hate speech legislation, and force the discontinuation of military deployment to

exercise police powers. Moreover, the mainstream press gave coverage to certain CSOs that were critical of government policies, particularly with regard to financial reporting and accountability.

As a result, linkages between CSOs and the media improved in 2015. CSOs fostered relationships with journalists and conducted workshops for the press to develop investigative journalism skills and promote media ethics. Additionally, in the wake of the political transition, prominent CSO activists began to take up senior positions in the press. For example, media activist Lakshman Gunsekera was appointed as editor of the state-owned Sunday Observer paper in February.

In 2015, CSOs' use of social media for public outreach increased. For example, a week prior to the January presidential election, the Center for Monitoring Election Violence initiated a trilingual social media campaign, #IVotedSL, to encourage citizens to vote. According to Groundviews, a citizen journalism website, the campaign had extensive reach on Facebook and Twitter. The hashtag #IVotedSL was used in 40,623 tweets in the week before the election. Social media specialist Nalaka Gunawardena called the presidential election "Sri Lanka's first cyber election."

Despite the expanded media coverage and decrease in negative reporting, the public continued to be suspicious of CSOs. This continued suspicion was partly fueled by opposition parliamentarians and nationalist movements frequently condemning CSOs as being corrupt and supporting "separatist agendas." CSOs were viewed more positively by people in the North and East than they were in the South. This perception was due to the number of CSOs championing issues that aligned with minority interests in the North and East, including transitional justice, devolution, and minority rights protection. In contrast, CSOs were still viewed with skepticism in the South, largely due to the prevalent Sinhala nationalist sentiment and the perception that CSOs are foreign-backed.

Service-providing CSOs continue to be viewed positively by the local communities they serve. However, due to decreased donor funding, certain communities began to experience frustration, and even disillusionment, with service-providing CSOs.

The government's perception of CSOs, particularly those that supported government policies, improved in 2015. A number of CSOs engaged in legislative and policy-making processes, and the government even sought research from CSOs to support policy initiatives. For example, in 2015 the government reached out to environmental CSOs to obtain data on hazardous areas for mini-hydropower developments. It also engaged CSO actors in the design of transitional justice mechanisms that would be launched in 2016.

Collaboration between the business and civil society sectors is limited. While businesses do not harbor the same suspicions of CSOs as sections of the public and the government, they often perceive CSOs as being managed inefficiently and generally do not see CSO-led advocacy as useful in their lobbying efforts. Businesses also view some CSOs, especially environmental groups, as hindrances to their activity. Nevertheless, in 2015 the Chamber of Commerce demonstrated willingness to partner with CSO activists to champion governance reforms, such as the Right to Information Bill and the nineteenth amendment.

CSOs do not have a formal code of ethics. As such, there are no rules against sexual harassment and bribery within the CSO sector. Only larger and more visible CSOs publish annual reports, which enhance their credibility with the public.