

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February 2025

2nd Edition



## Message from the National Director

Dear Friends and Partners,

As we step into February, we reflect on a month filled with moments of deep significance and meaningful engagement. This month, Caritas Sri Lanka had the privilege of hosting the CSL Partner's Forum 2025, a significant gathering that fostered dialogue, collaboration, and renewed commitments towards our shared mission of social justice and human dignity. We are deeply grateful to all our partners for their unwavering support and dedication.

We also marked the 20th Commemoration of the 2004 Tsunami, a solemn occasion to honour the lives lost, acknowledge the resilience of survivors, and reaffirm our commitment to disaster preparedness and humanitarian response. This event was a reminder of the power of solidarity in the face of adversity.



Additionally, we were privileged to welcome our several partners for visits to our projects, providing an opportunity to witness firsthand the impact of their support on the communities we serve. Their engagement and encouragement continue to inspire us as we strive to uplift the most vulnerable.

As we continue our journey through 2025, may our collective efforts bring hope, transformation, and lasting change to those in need. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our mission.

With blessings,

**Fr. Luke Nelson Perera**

National Director



Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC successfully hosted the Partners' Forum 2025 on February 18, 2025, under the theme "Continuing the Journey Towards Uplifting Sri Lanka." The event brought together national and international partners, government representatives, experts, diocesan directors, and coordinators to address Sri Lanka's social and economic challenges and explore collaborative solutions. Held at the Caritas Sri Lanka-SEDEC premises in Colombo, the forum provided a platform for interactive dialogue, reflections, and strategic planning, with a focus on poverty alleviation, economic recovery, social cohesion, and humanitarian service.

The day commenced with a Holy Eucharistic celebration, presided over by Rt. Rev. Dr. Maxwell Grenville Silva, Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo, setting a spiritual and reflective tone for the discussions. Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera, National Director of Caritas Sri Lanka, warmly welcomed the participants, outlining the significance of the forum in shaping Caritas Sri Lanka's mission for the coming years. Most Rev. Dr. Justin Bernard Gnanapragasam, Chairman of the Catholic National Commission for Justice, Peace, and Human Development, emphasized the crucial role of partnerships in advancing social justice and development.

A key highlight of the forum was the screening of the documentary "50 Years of Compassion and Humanitarian Service", which showcased Caritas Sri Lanka's transformative impact on communities through emergency relief, education, livelihood development, peacebuilding, and advocacy. Mr Alistair Dutton, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, delivered a compelling address on "Ending Poverty, Promoting Justice, and Restoring Dignity", underscoring the collective responsibility of organizations, governments, and communities in tackling global inequalities. Dr. Benedict Alo D'Rozario, President of Caritas Asia, reflected on Caritas' identity and the importance of fraternal cooperation among regional Caritas organizations to address challenges like climate change, migration, and economic disparities. Mr. Priyantha Fernando, Programme Manager of Caritas Sri Lanka, presented key publications, including the Country Profile, Research Documents, Annual Reports, and Newsletters, highlighting the organization's ongoing work and achievements.

The first session of the forum featured insightful keynote presentations that analyzed Sri Lanka's current realities and sustainable development pathways. Dr. Trevor Mendis, senior management consultant and faculty member at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, provided an in-depth analysis of the economic crisis and potential recovery strategies. Hon. (Prof.) L.M. Abeywickrama, MP and expert in agricultural economics, discussed the critical impacts of poverty and hunger on human development, stressing the urgency of food security policies and sustainable agricultural practices. Ms Swasthika Arulingam, Attorney-at-Law and former Program Manager at the Legal Aid Commission of Sri Lanka delivered a thought-provoking presentation on social cohesion and reconciliation, addressing how historical divisions, ethnic tensions, and economic disparities hinder progress while highlighting community-driven initiatives and legal frameworks for a more inclusive society.

The afternoon session provided a government perspective on Sri Lanka's development vision, with Hon. Arun Hemachandra, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Employment, presenting the government's long-term strategies under the vision "A Thriving Nation - A Beautiful Life." This was followed by the presentation of the Caritas Sri Lanka Strategic Framework (2026-2029) by Mr Sagayaraj, Head of the Disaster Risk Reduction & Mitigation Unit, detailing Caritas Sri Lanka's core focus areas, including climate resilience, disaster mitigation, livelihood empowerment, peacebuilding, and youth engagement.

Regional presentations by grassroots leaders, including Rev. Fr. Pradeep (Plantation Region), Rev. Fr. Alec (Western Region), and Rev. Fr. Arulraj (Northern & Eastern Region), highlighted pressing regional concerns such as migrant labour, education access, post-war recovery, and disaster preparedness. The event concluded with reflections from global partners and a summary by Mr. Yu Hwa Li, emphasizing the need for sustained partnerships and collective action.

On February 19, 2025, Caritas Sri Lanka commemorated the 20th anniversary of the 2004 Tsunami with a Holy Eucharistic Celebration at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), Colombo, under the theme “Memories of an Empowering Journey of Resilience.” The chief celebrant was His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, joined by His Excellency Most Rev. Archbishop Brian Udaigwe, Papal Nuncio of the Holy See to Sri Lanka, and Most Rev. Dr Harold Anthony Perera, President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Sri Lanka. Religious leaders, diocesan directors, priests, religious sisters, and the faithful gathered to honour those who lost their lives while acknowledging the resilience of survivors. The service highlighted the Church and Caritas Sri Lanka’s unwavering commitment to relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction over the past two decades.

Following the Holy Mass, Caritas Sri Lanka hosted a special commemorative event at BMICH, Lotus Hall, bringing together international partners, religious leaders, communities, and humanitarian workers to reflect on the journey of recovery. The event began with a sacred moment of silence, floral tributes, and the lighting of lamps at the Tsunami Memorial Monument. Distinguished guests included Mr. Alistair Dutton, His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, and Most Rev. Dr. Justin Bernard Gnanapragasam, who delivered inspiring speeches on remembrance, healing, and continued service.

A highlight of the event was the launch of the Tsunami Commemoration Theme Song, “Tides of Hope and Resilience,” composed by Caritas Sri Lanka, capturing the emotions of loss and the strength of rebuilding. A dramatic performance, “A Glimpse of Memories,” took the audience back to December 26, 2004, portraying the devastation and the long journey to recovery through powerful storytelling and visuals.

Rev. Fr. Charles Hewawasam, Parish Priest at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Matara during the tsunami, delivered the keynote speech, sharing emotional stories of survival and Caritas Sri Lanka’s crucial role in immediate relief and long-term support. Survivors from Galle, Batticaloa, and Colombo shared personal testimonies, reflecting on their pain, resilience, and gratitude for the humanitarian efforts that helped them rebuild their lives. His Excellency Most Rev. Archbishop Brian Udaigwe emphasized the importance of unity and compassion in overcoming tragedies.

An especially moving moment was the honoring of tsunami-affected families from Colombo, Galle, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Jaffna, recognizing their resilience and perseverance. Caritas Sri Lanka also presented a special Tsunami Souvenir Book, documenting stories of loss, survival, and recovery. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson, followed by the Sri Lankan National Anthem, marking not just the end of a ceremony, but a renewed commitment to continued humanitarian efforts.

Even after 20 years, the memory of the tsunami remains, but so does the resilience of those who survived. This commemoration was more than a remembrance—it was a celebration of strength, unity, and the unbreakable human spirit. Caritas Sri Lanka remains steadfast in its mission to ensure that no community faces disaster alone.

## A Successful Start to the Mitigation of Thalassemia Disease: Embracing Progress, MISEREOR Delegation Visit to Sri Lanka.

A distinguished delegation from Misereor, Germany, led by Archbishop Stephan Burger and Auxiliary Bishop Ludger Schepers, visited the Diocese of Kandy and Badulla from February 3rd to 11th, 2025. The group included Dr. Andreas Peter Frick (Chair of the Board of Misereor), Dorothea Meilwes (Misereor Officer), Thillaiambalam Paramsothy (Interpreter), Volker Hasenauer (Journalist), Georg Thünemann (Misereor Officer), Corinna Broeckmann (Misereor Officer), and Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera (National Director of Caritas Sri Lanka SEDEC).

During their visit, the delegation engaged with staff from the Kandy and Badulla Diocesan Centers to learn about Caritas Sri Lanka's ongoing programs, focusing specifically on the plantation sector. They toured several key project sites, including the Caritas office in Hatton, where they met with staff involved in plantation initiatives, and the Dambulla dispensary, where they interacted with government officials and estate workers.

The delegation also visited estate Child Development Centres, schools, and various micro-projects in the Galabada Division, observing the positive impact of these initiatives on local communities.

They participated in community discussions and cultural events organized by community-based



organizations such as Vidiyalai Thedi 'Maatrathhai Nokiya Payanam', which helped strengthen their connections with the local population. The visit concluded with a debriefing session at Caritas Sri Lanka SEDEC, marking the successful completion of a meaningful and impactful program.

## Voice of Resilience: Stories of War-Affected Women in the North and East

As part of the 2024 Peace Project, Caritas Sri Lanka visited the Vanni Diocesan Centre from February 7 to March 1, 2025, to engage with women whose lives have been profoundly affected by the 30-year war. Many of these women have lost their loved ones and now serve as the primary breadwinners for their families, facing immense challenges with remarkable strength and resilience.

During the visit, we connected with 14 families, listening to their untold stories of struggle, survival, and perseverance. Despite their hardships, many of their grievances remain unaddressed, and their voices continue to seek recognition and justice.

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## An exposure visit to a climate-smart agriculture-based model farm at Anuradhapura under SSEP & VITAL projects

An exposure visit to a climate-smart agriculture model farm was organized by the ECPP unit as part of the "Stepping Stone to Safeguarding Sri Lanka's Natural Environment" (SSEP) Project, along with the "Vitalizing Income, Training, and Agricultural Livelihoods (VITAL)" Project. This event took place on February 28, 2025, in Thalawa, Anuradhapura. A total of 38 participants attended the visit, including Diocesan Directors, Project Coordinators, Field Officers, and National Center staff. The National Director of Caritas Sri Lanka-SEDEC, Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera, participated in monitoring project implementations and motivating staff to continue their hard work across ongoing projects.

The highlight of the visit was the climate-smart model farm developed by Mr Ishara, an Agricultural Instructor based in the Anuradhapura District. Since 2017, Mr. Ishara has transformed a 2 ½-acre paddy field into an organic and climate-resilient agricultural area, showcasing how innovative practices can sustainably support local communities and the environment. His approach integrates various techniques to ensure year-round cultivation and enhance the farm's ability to withstand climate challenges.



At the core of this model farm is an agro-well, along with a vermicomposting unit, which serves as the primary water source for the entire operation. This carefully designed system not only facilitates effective water management but also generates organic nutrients essential for the soil and crops. Mr. Ishara has organized the land into lowlands and upperslides to maximize space and productivity. In the upper lands, he planted coconut trees as a perennial crop, intercropping them with plantains and a variety of vegetables. This multi-cropping system ensures optimal land use throughout the year.

Additionally, Mr Ishara continues to diversify the farm by planting seasonal crops such as ginger, kohila (water spinach), ananas (pineapple), leafy vegetables, and various creepers, further enhancing the farm's resilience and output. He has also established canals integrated with poultry cages, allowing for the sustainable farming of fish and the cultivation of Azolla, a type of water fern. Azolla serves as feed for the chickens and fish, enriching the water, which is then pumped back into the farmland, nourishing the crops. This integrated farming system, where agriculture, aquaculture, and livestock farming work in harmony, exemplifies sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change. The farm's design, which allows for diverse and continuous agricultural output, reflects Mr. Ishara's passion for organic farming and his commitment to promoting climate-smart agricultural practices.

During the visit, Mr. Ishara guided the participants through the various systems and techniques implemented on the farm, demonstrating how each component contributes to a holistic and sustainable farming model. The participants were deeply impressed by his dedication and the innovative practices showcased, which provide valuable lessons in both agriculture and environmental stewardship. The exposure visit proved to be an inspiring and educational experience, underscoring the importance of sustainable farming practices that can adapt to climate challenges while offering both economic and ecological benefits.



On January 7th and 8th, members of Caritas from Galle, Colombo, and Rathnapura participated in an invaluable training programme hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at the Galle Face Hotel. This two-day workshop aimed to raise awareness about the critical issue of human trafficking and equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective identification, protection, and referral of victims.

The workshop began with an emphasis on understanding human trafficking, including its complex nature and the challenges faced by victims. Engaging presentations and real-life case videos allowed participants to gain a deeper insight into the realities of trafficking, illustrating the urgent need for comprehensive community response.

On the second day, the training shifted focus to the legal aspects surrounding human trafficking. Participants explored international, regional, and local legal frameworks, as well as key conventions and treaties that guide efforts to combat this serious issue. The discussions also clarified the differences between human trafficking and human smuggling, an essential distinction that has significant implications for the protection of individuals.

A noteworthy highlight of the workshop was the examination of the forthcoming 2024 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report and its potential impact on Sri Lanka. This session underscored the importance of accurate data collection, which is vital for understanding the scope of trafficking in our communities.

The comprehensive nature of the training not only enhanced the participants' knowledge but also strengthened the capacity of Caritas members to address human trafficking issues effectively. By improving our ability to report and support victims accurately, we can play a crucial role in combating this devastating crime.

As we reflect on the insights gained from this training, it is evident that education and awareness are key to empowering our communities to take a stand against human trafficking. Together, we can create a safer environment for everyone and ensure that victims receive the support and protection they deserve.

Let's continue to work collaboratively in raising awareness and building a strong network to combat human trafficking in Sri Lanka. Together, we can make a difference.

## **Stakeholder consultation to gather inputs for the upcoming National Strategic Action Plan to Monitor & Combat Human Trafficking (2026-2031)**

The International Organization for Migration organized a consultation on February 14, 2025, at the Kingsbury Hotel. The purpose of this consultation was to provide recommendations for the new National Strategic Action Plan (NSAP) to Combat Human Trafficking for the years 2026–2030. This event aimed to assess the implementation of the NSAP from 2021 to 2025 and involved participation from Civil Society Organizations and other non-governmental stakeholders.

The National Director and Programme Coordinator of the Community Empowerment & Safe Migration unit of Caritas Sri Lanka contributed their expertise on human trafficking and labour migration during the consultation. The discussions focused on the successes, challenges, and future improvements of the NSAP, particularly regarding prevention, protection, and partnerships.

Additionally, the consultation explored strategies for enhancing collaboration among Civil Society Organizations in addressing human trafficking in Sri Lanka. Key gaps were identified, along with recommendations for a more effective implementation of the upcoming plan.

## **Educational Assistance for O/L Students**

In February, Caritas Vanni and Caritas Jaffna conducted successful seminars for O/L students in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, aimed at supporting those affected by the economic crisis and conflict.

In Vanni, seminars on Mathematics and Science were held at Mu/Puthukkudijiruppu RC Vidyalayam, focusing on key topics and exam strategies. Meanwhile, Caritas Jaffna hosted a Mathematics seminar at J/Illavalai St. Henry's College, which was attended by 135 students. This seminar provided model exam papers and guided students through problem-solving techniques.

These seminars played a crucial role in helping students prepare for their O/L exams.

## IRASIL Foundation Strengthens Partnership with Caritas Sri Lanka Through Partner Visit

From February 20th to 25th, 2025, Mr. Gerard Chitty and Mrs. Shivanthi Chitty from the IRASIL Foundation embarked on a significant partner visit to Caritas Sri Lanka. The visit covered key project locations, including Caritas Badulla, CODESEP - Galle, Caritas Kurunegala, Caritas Anuradhapura, Don Bosco School Mannar, and Caritas Mannar, allowing for an in-depth evaluation of the progress, impact, and sustainability of ongoing initiatives supported by the Foundation.

The primary objective of this visit was to directly engage with Diocesan Centres and project beneficiaries, assessing the effectiveness of current programs while identifying successes, challenges, and key lessons learned. The discussions provided valuable insights into how these initiatives have positively influenced communities and explored ways to further enhance their sustainability and long-term impact. Additionally, the visit allowed for an open dialogue on future collaboration opportunities, ensuring that the efforts of Caritas Sri Lanka and the IRASIL Foundation continue to align with the evolving needs of the most vulnerable communities.

Throughout the visit, Mr. Gerard Chitty and Mrs. Shivanthi Chitty expressed their appreciation for the dedication of Caritas Sri Lanka to implementing transformative projects that uplift marginalized groups. Their engagement with local beneficiaries and project teams further reinforced the importance of fostering strong partnerships to drive meaningful and sustainable development.

This visit reaffirmed the enduring partnership between the IRASIL Foundation and Caritas Sri Lanka, reflecting a shared commitment to empowering communities, promoting social justice, and building a more sustainable future for those in need.

## Strengthening Partnerships: Caritas Norway's Visit to Sri Lanka

Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC had the distinct honour of welcoming Ms. Ingrid Rosendorff Joys, Secretary General of Caritas Norway, and Ms. Maria Knutsdotter Langas, Program Advisor at Caritas Norway, during their official visit from February 12th to 23rd, 2025. The visit, attended by Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera, National Director of Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC, along with key program coordinators and regional representatives, reaffirmed the strong partnership between Caritas Norway, the Government of Norway (NORAD), and Caritas Sri Lanka in promoting sustainable development initiatives.

Since 2018, the Food Security Program, implemented across 13 diocesan centres, has been instrumental in improving rural livelihoods, enhancing food security, and fostering climate resilience in Sri Lanka. The visit provided a valuable opportunity for the Norwegian delegates to witness firsthand the impact of their support and the transformative changes that have occurred through this collaboration.



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To amplify their narratives, Caritas Sri Lanka has begun documenting their experiences, with plans to publish a booklet that will illuminate the realities of women-headed households in the region. Through this initiative, we aim to advocate for their rights, raise awareness, and foster dialogue on social protection and empowerment.

These stories of resilience and courage serve as a reminder of the urgent need for collective action in supporting women affected by war and ensuring they are not forgotten.

**Caritas Norway's Visit to Sri Lanka... Cont. from pg 7**

As part of their itinerary, Ms Ingrid and Ms Maria visited diocesan centres in Chilaw, Colombo, Galle, Badulla, and Kandy, engaging directly with program beneficiaries, smallholder farmers, schoolchildren, and community-based organizations. Field visits to home gardens, village knowledge centres, school gardens, and fish ponds showcased the tangible outcomes of the program, emphasizing improved nutrition and sustainable agricultural practices.

On February 17th, a regional gathering at Caritas Chilaw brought together representatives from Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Kurunegala, Mannar, Ratnapura, Trincomalee, and Vanni, who shared project outcomes, success stories, and challenges. Additionally, the delegates participated in key events, including the Partners' Forum – 2025 on February 18th and the 20th Tsunami Commemoration on February 19th at BMICH, Colombo. These activities further strengthened their commitment to long-term partnerships and humanitarian efforts.

The visit not only reaffirmed Caritas Norway's deep-rooted commitment but also highlighted the significant impact of the Food Security Program in empowering communities. The warm welcome from villagers, along with their testimonies about improved food security, nutritional well-being, and climate adaptation, underscored the program's success.



### ***Migrant worker's journey back home: A success story of collaboration***

A Sri Lankan migrant worker, who had been employed in Oman for three years, found herself in a difficult situation when she was forced to flee her employer's home. In need of help, she reached out for assistance but encountered numerous obstacles. Fortunately, her situation took a positive turn when the Safe Foundation referred her case to Caritas Sri Lanka.

Caritas Sri Lanka quickly coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explore available options for support. Through these efforts, a compassionate Sri Lankan family residing in Oman came forward and generously offered to cover her airfare. Within just two days, the migrant worker was able to safely return to Sri Lanka.

This successful resolution highlights the importance of collaboration and the strength of community support during times of need. It also underscores the vital role of Caritas Sri Lanka in assisting vulnerable individuals, both locally and internationally, ensuring they receive the care and support they deserve.

Caritas Sri Lanka remains dedicated to supporting migrant workers and their families, working alongside various partners to address the challenges they face and promote their well-being.

## Our Network of Support

Caritas Sri Lanka express its heartfelt gratitude to our funding partners and collaborators. Your generosity and commitment play a crucial role in strengthening our mission. This February, we take a moment to reflect on the significant contributions of our partners, particularly during Tsunami relief initiatives in past and the regarding the 20th Tsunami Comemoration event.

Additionally, we were honoured to host the Partner's Forum, an important event that brought together our dedicated partners to discuss progress, challenges, and future collaborations. The forum offered a unique opportunity to enhance our shared vision and strategy for sustainable development.

Your support enables us to reach marginalized communities, empower individuals, and create lasting change. Through this partnership, we strive to foster a more just and compassionate society. We look forward to deepening our collaboration in the months to come.

**Do you want to make a meaningful impact in the lives of those in need?  
Caritas Sri Lanka invites you to be part of our mission to uplift communities,  
promote justice, and foster sustainable development.  
Here's how you can help:**

Join Hands With Us – Be the Change!

 Donate – Your generosity fuels our projects, helping us reach more vulnerable communities.

 Volunteer – Lend your time and skills to create real change on the ground.

 Advocate – Raise awareness and be a voice for justice, peace, and human dignity.

 Join Our Campaigns – Support initiatives for peacebuilding, sustainability, and social empowerment.

**Every effort—big or small—makes a difference.**

Take action today and be part of something greater!

Visit our website or follow us on social media to learn more.

Together, we can transform lives!

Stay Connected – Be Part of the Change!

Stay updated on our latest initiatives, impact stories, and opportunities to get involved by connecting with us online. Follow, engage, and spread the word!

**Follow us on:**

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**Together, let's keep making a difference one step at a time**