

TI IPP STRONGG IN SRI LANKA

Supporting Good Governance in Sri Lanka

Transparency International Sri Lanka (TI Sri Lanka) has started its operations in 2002. The chapter is part of the Transparency International global coalition against corruption that brings together chapters operating in more than 100 countries worldwide with an international Secretariat based in Berlin, working towards a shared vision: a world free of corruption.

BACKGROUND

Due to political and economic instability that resulted in unstable progress regarding anti-corruption efforts, Sri Lanka's score in Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)* has declined over the years, from 38 in 2017 to 34 in 2023). Results from Transparency International's *Global Corruption Barometer – Asia 2020 (GCB)* indicate that 8 out of 10 people in Sri Lanka think that corruption levels have either increased (52%) or stayed the same (26%) in the 12 months prior to the survey. According to *TI Sri Lanka's 2019 Corruption Barometer*, a quarter of respondents find it acceptable to pay bribes to obtain or expedite certain public services. However, TI Sri Lanka has

been successful in seizing opportunities to improve the country's governance through advocating for and championing recent anti-corruption legislation, including the Right to Information (RTI), and engaging citizens in powerful social accountability initiatives.

PROJECT APPROACH

With support from the *TI Indo-Pacific Partnership for Strong, Transparent, Responsive & Open Networks for Good Governance (TI IPP STRONGG) 2020 – 2023*, TI Sri Lanka worked towards enhancing social demand for accountable governance by citizens, particularly women, youth, and vulnerable groups. The chapter also focussed on strengthening national anti-corruption practices, guidelines, legislation, mechanisms, and institutions. The project interventions as demand-side approaches resulted in greater demand for accountability at all levels, across varying segments in the Sri Lankan society, and contributed to strengthening the role of TI SL as a mobiliser, social convener, and agenda setter in anti-corruption and good governance. The project was implemented over a period of 3 years, from December 2020 to December 2023.



ABC training for marginalised women in Putlam
© Picture: Transparency International Sri Lanka



Discussion with government officers for reducing corruption behind state-owned lands in Vavuniya © Picture: TI Sri Lanka

TI SRI LANKA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Fortifying Laws and Policies Addressing Corruption

Under the STRONGG project, TI Sri Lanka's overarching goals are anchored in three key theories of change. The first theory is oriented toward strengthening citizens' demand for accountability. The second theory focuses on enhancing the institutional capacity of the chapter to champion accountability and governance, thereby fostering a more robust stance against corruption. This involves not only bolstering the organisational capabilities but also empowering citizens through initiatives such as Right to Information (RTI) hubs and awareness programs, equipping them to assert their voices against corruption. Additionally, TI Sri Lanka's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALAC) have played a pivotal role, assisting more clients through legal advice services offered via the hotline and walk-in consultations.

The third theory of change underscores the commitment to applying increased advocacy efforts directed at fortifying laws and policies addressing corruption in Sri Lanka. Specifically,

under the STRONGG program, TISL has actively engaged in challenging the new anti-corruption bill, exemplified by its efforts to shape a more effective legal framework. TI Sri Lanka's advocacy resulted in more than 70 provisions to the New Anti-Corruption Bill. One of the notable amendments is the criminalisation of sexual bribery, marking a crucial milestone in enhancing accountability and transparency in Sri Lanka's governance.

In addressing policy or institutional changes stemming from its initiatives, Transparency International Sri Lanka has played a proactive role in advocating for and contributing to meaningful reforms. Notably, TI SL involvement in the economic crisis case (Case No: SC/FRA/212/2022) resulted in a landmark judgment that held former presidents responsible for the economic downturn. This legal outcome has the potential to catalyse broader policy changes aimed at preventing similar economic crises in the future.

Furthermore, TI SL suggested the Central Bank of Sri Lanka propose sections related to sexual bribery and microfinance loan schemes, and they will consider these reviews when they introduce microfinance bills. This demonstrates the chapter's direct influence on institutional changes and legal frameworks concerning corruption.

The implementation of the Action Plan for reducing corruption behind state land also signifies a strategic intervention with the potential to induce policy changes related to land management and corruption prevention.

Inclusivity has been a key aspect of TI SL approach, and the assistance provided to marginalised communities, people with disabilities, and youth networks has informed the chapter's advocacy efforts. By addressing the unique challenges faced by these groups, TI SL contributed to a broader discourse that could influence policy changes and institutional reforms geared towards inclusivity and equal representation. TI SL worked with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) of senior citizens further highlights its commitment to addressing the concerns of an aging population. By collaborating with these organizations, they contributed to the narrative around senior citizens' rights, potentially influencing policies that safeguard their well-being.



Talking to micro-finance victims in Kantale.
© Picture: TI Sri Lanka

Enhanced Citizen Participation in Reporting Corruption

In the pursuit of the anti-corruption goals under the IPP STRONGG project, TI Sri Lanka's reach expanded significantly, enabling the chapter to enhance public awareness and amplify voices against corruption. Through the ALAC mechanism, TI SL assisted 1,913 clients across the island, demonstrating its commitment to widespread

support. To further extend impact, a new branch was established in Kandy, strategically positioned to engage with a broader audience including marginalised groups.

It is evident that more slogans in Revolutionary Aragalaya were citizens' demands against corruption and corrupted politicians in the country. Money Recovery, beneficial ownership, and asset recovery were the key thematic areas that have been advocated by TISL in the past three years. These demands reflected those of the Revolutionary Aragalaya, which led to the resignation of the previous president in the country.

TI Sri Lanka's support extended to marginalised groups through the RTI hub in Nuwara Eliya, focusing particularly on state workers. Simultaneously, ALAC championed youth networks established by the community pillar in TI Sri Lanka, reinforcing the commitment to cultivating informed and engaged younger generations. Additionally, the chapter addressed the demands of women for accountability, particularly those in rural areas victimized by microfinance loan schemes.

An analysis of the ALAC database revealed a prevalent issue of corruption behind state lands, prompting the chapter to advocate for its reduction. Identifying key areas, TI Sri Lanka implemented an action plan to address corruption related to state-owned lands. The establishment of four lawyer's networks further strengthened the support infrastructure for the public. TI SL also assisted to persons with disabilities and elderly citizens, especially those who faced challenges such as losing their pensions and benefits due to corruption. Through these diverse initiatives, the IPP STRONGG project not only contributed to fostering accountability but also addressed the nuanced challenges faced by various segments of society.

Stronger Partnerships for Justice

In the last three years, one of TISL's primary accomplishments was the establishment and cultivation of new partnerships and coalitions for impactful advocacy initiatives. A notable collaboration unfolded with PARL (The People's Alliance for Right to Land) network, dedicated to assisting individuals in asserting their land rights. Together with PARL, TI SL engaged in developing a comprehensive action plan aimed at mitigating corruption behind state-owned lands.

In a commitment to facilitating legal support, the chapter successfully established Lawyer's networks in four key districts—Colombo, Vavuniya, Anuradhapura, and Polonnaruwa—signifying the chapter's dedication to providing pro bono assistance. Complementing this initiative, TI SL instituted a legal aid referral system to adopt a holistic approach when assisting clients grappling with various legal issues.

Additionally, TI SL actively expanded its outreach to Civil Society Organisation (CSO) leaders and organizations representing Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). This strategic engagement is aimed at empowering citizens through networking and fostering collaborations that advance TI SL collective mission. Furthermore, the establishment of RTI hub networks has been instrumental in extending TI SL's reach to 25 districts across the country. This innovative approach enhances the chapter's ability to engage with diverse communities and ensures a broader impact in promoting transparency, accountability, and justice.

In summary, the chapter's achievements over the past three years reflect a dynamic and multifaceted approach to partnership building, encompassing legal assistance, advocacy, and community engagement. These endeavours underscore the chapter's commitment to creating a more just and accountable society in Sri Lanka.



Presenting ways of getting involved with TI Sri Lanka's work to the Colombo Lawyer Network
© Picture: TI Sri Lanka

TI Sri Lanka's Impactful Legal Action on Economic Crisis: Holding Leaders to Account

TI Sri Lanka filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court aimed at addressing the country's economic crisis and holding key figures accountable. In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court found the ex-presidents culpable for exacerbating Sri Lanka's financial crisis through mismanagement. This judicial victory sets a significant precedent for promoting transparency and accountability in Sri Lanka's governance, signalling a pivotal step towards fostering integrity in the country's economic management.



Building the capacity of public officials in Eravur - Batticalao
© Picture: TI Sri Lanka