

# Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)

Quarterly Report (Q2 – June1<sup>st</sup> 2023 – September1<sup>st</sup> 2023)



GMSL's Field coordinator Amal conducting a KPI in Morayaya and Minipe  
**Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)**

Presented  
By



**The Green Movement of Sri Lanka Inc.**

to

**ACTED**

Colombo, Sri Lanka  
23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title	Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)
Project area, region and country of implementation	Victoria-Randenigala-Rantambe (VRR) sanctuary, Knuckles Conservation Forest (KCF) and Maduru-Oya Sactuary (MOS) and their environs.
Project Start Date	1 <sup>st</sup> March 2023
Project End Date	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Type of report (monthly, quarterly, bi-annual, interim, final)	Quarterly
Reporting Period (start and end dates)	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2023-1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023 (Q2)
Report due date to ACTED	
Date of report submission to ACTED	24 <sup>th</sup> April 2024

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## 2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

### [All types of reports] Project Summary.

*Please provide a short overview of the project (objective and expected results), what has been realized by the end of the reporting period, and the main issues faced. This section should not be more than half a page long.*

The Europe Aid-funded project - NDICI HR INTPA/2022441-153 / “SAFER: Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights” in Sri Lanka and the Maldives aims to uphold and protect collective socio-economic and environmental rights by optimizing the capacities and safety of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), environment activists and grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs). In order to achieve this overarching goal, the GMSL shall, in the target area:

1. Ensure that capacities of CSOs and activists focusing on environmental justice are strengthened via tailored coaching to uphold and protect collective rights
2. Impart necessary knowledge and technological inputs to facilitate safe and streamlined engagement of grassroots CSOs and activists in rights-based conservation, regeneration and management exercises
3. Create an enabling environment via an integrated approach to coach both government officials and communities to optimize environmental and climate justice activism
4. Mobilize and empower IPLCs and activists as watchdogs of socio-economic and environmental rights, including via targeted involvement of mainstream media journalists
5. Create an enabling environment for the promotion of rights-based and community-owned approaches to conservation, regeneration and management of natural resources

**[All types of reports]Context.**

*Please provide a brief update of the context situation(including security) and the problems that the project aims to resolve.*

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**Geophysical and environmental context:**

In Sri Lanka, environmental experts and conservationists are concerned about the toll that developmental activities can take on biodiversity and natural environments as well as indigenous communities. Importantly, studies have indicated that there are loopholes within the Sri Lankan legal and policy framework regarding violation of the rights of indigenous people due to developmental and illegal activities. Further, in light of the country's worst-ever economic crisis, experts warn that skyrocketing prices of food and other essentials could push a growing number of vulnerable communities, especially in forest communities, into environmental crimes such as illegal logging for firewood, poaching for meat, and sand mining. A [comprehensive research study](#) led by GMSL (funded by the European Union) indicates that the primary watershed of Sri Lanka is its central hill country from which 103 rivers originate and flow radially to all parts of the island nation. Within the central hills, the areas within and surrounding the Knuckles Conservation Forest and the Victoria RandenigalaRantembe Sanctuary are the richest in biodiversity and density. However, over the past four decades issues related to policy and ill-planned development as well as the lack of defenders of environmental rights as a key component of human rights has seen this most important area severely compromised environmentally and socially and, implicitly, economically.

**The communities in and around the range:**

The initial treatment terrain is complex when viewed through the comprehensive integration of its geology and topography, community dynamics, development dynamics and environment with the last four decades seeing significant turmoil in all of these interconnected areas. While primary livelihoods are related to agriculture, the communities have also perennially been utilizing forest resources and other shared commons whether such activity is deemed legal or not. Therefore, to understand life dynamics of the targeted terrain the GMSL, due to its over 2 decade presence in the area realizes that it must look beyond the narrow confines of GN/HH treatment of issues since environments do not respect administrative boundaries. While an initial group of approximately 50 GNs were identified, the GMSL understood that the final treatment group may exceed this number.

**Tensions and torques between laws and customs:**

The people in these terrains and indeed the entire country is working with an imported legislative system. However, their idea of the utilization of environment is based on significant use of shared commons. The two systems are often in conflict with one another and this had led to various issues when attempting to define what is right and what is wrong with respect to the management of the environment, environment rights and the right to life of communities living in and around conservation forests and sanctuaries.

**Intervention possibilities and threats:**

The GMSL has worked in these regions for over two decades and is a welcome and trusted civil partner that is seen to have been a sober, positive influence among communities living in these areas since it counts many local Community Based Organizations (CBOs) from those areas as part of its network and uses 10 of them in this intervention as well on a networked, voluntary basis. Additionally, the national and local state penetration of the GMSL through its work has also positioned it as a trusted supporter of state and local government initiatives. In many instances too, the GMSL has been a strong policy advocate and its experience in this will be invaluable to IPLCs. Therefore, from a goodness-of-fit perspective of the GMSL for this specific development exercise, it enjoys excellent interrelationships with three of the main stakeholders, namely, the communities, the local government and state.

However, illegal players as well as those that have political aspirations or plan politically motivated resistive action and interference, the GMSL understands that there are some risks involved although those risks are not clearly charted. Despite there negatives, unlike in delivery based civil sector interventions, the GMSL’s work is not merely limited to providing inputs or managing local development at a micro level but rather, encompasses the country and in the context of this exercise, its project design takes into consideration integrated mechanisms to optimally leverage Sri Lankan environment, social, agricultural, rural development policy, change what requires to be changed, manage what cannot be and overall engineer a project that can be used as a blueprint for future work. Therefore, bringing all players and stakeholders together is a primary takeoff point for this exercise and that very approach itself is considered to be a risk reducing one.

**[All types of reports] Security context (if relevant).**

*Please provide a brief update of the security situation and the measures taken to mitigate risks.*

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Environment activism or, activism of any sort has its own set of negatives regardless of where on this planet such efforts take place because by its very definition, activism attempts to correct socioeconomic ills that result from inequitable, unfair pressure put upon the many by a few. SAFER is in fact designed as a project that counters these negatives and will provide, eventually, a blueprint for safer activism not only in the target terrain but across the country.

**[All types of reports] Beneficiaries.**

*Please report on beneficiaries’ selection process, total number of beneficiaries reached by the end of the reporting period (households and individuals), providing gender and age desegregated data as much as possible.*

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Subsequent to the Inception Report, it was decided that the project landscape will be reduced to areas in the Kandy, Matale and Nuwara-Eliya districts. These were the Walapane, Ududumbara, Pathadumbara, Panvila, Medadumbara, Kundasale, Hanguranketha, Minipe, Abanganga, Laggala, Naula, Rattota and Wilgamuwa DSDs. A total of 150 GNs were identified as seen in the table below.

District	DS	# GNs
Nuwaraeliya	Hanguranketha	14
Nuwaraeliya	Walapane	11
Kandy	Pahathahewaheta	5
Kandy	Minipe	30
Kandy	Medadumbara	24
Kandy	Udadumbara	37
Kandy	Kundasale	4
Kandy	Panvila	13
Matale	Laggalapallegama	12
Matale	Naula	13
Matale	Wilgamuwa	24
Matale	Raththota	3

**3. REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS**

**[All types of reports] Description of progress made in activities implementation.**

Please list all activities of the contract implemented during the reporting period (as per Annex A – Project Description to the Grant agreement), using 1 paragraph per activity.

Information for each activity should address each of the basic questions: who, what, when (specific dates), where, why, how, and how much / how many?

Example: CEPA VTC team trained 25 people in bakery techniques during the month of April in Gendrassa Refugee camp to enhance refugees' income generating opportunities. CEPA VTC team delivered 5 sessions of one hour during a month followed by 4 daily hours of practice.

Please provide details to support statements (quantified data, pictures, graphs, tables).

In case an activity has been modified/ cancelled/ postponed, please elaborate on the problems faced and way forward.

### 3.1.Planned activities for the Second Quarter (Q2):

ACTIVITY	PLANNED OUTPUT	ACTUAL OUTPUT	% OF OUTPUT ACHIEVED
<b>INCEPTION STUDY</b>			
<b>Conduction K{Os</b>			
Kalu Ganga, Hulu Ganga and VRR area KPIs	12	12	100%
<b>Finalizing desk study</b>			
Identifying overarching scenarios with respect to terrain, legal and development dynamics	4	4	100%
Study of legal environment related to environment rights	1	1	100%
Study of Upper watershed development over 70 years	1	1	100%
Study of the environmental dynamics of the terrain	1	1	100%
Recalibrating treatment terrain	1	1	100%
Desk study completed			
<b>Identifying issues</b>			
Identification of issues at the micro-level (Blanket coverage)	1	1	100%
Identification of issues at the terrain level (Blanket coverage)	1	1	100%
Identification of issues at the national level (Blanket coverage)	1	1	100%
Mapping of environment issues against terrain (Blanket coverage)	1	1	100%
Finalizing treatment terrain	1	1	100%
Issue identification completed			
<b>Analyzing data and information</b>			
Legal dynamics of the country with reference to history	1	1	100%
Mapping local laws against international covenants and identifying overlaps and gaps	1	1	100%
Field information scrubbing and analysis	1	1	100%
Determination of ways forward to achieve goals and overarches to the project	1	1	100%
Analysis completed	1	1	100%
Writing up the narrative report and submission	1	1	100%
<b>IDENTIFICATION OF MASTER TRAINERS (MTs) AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS (EAs)</b>			
Conducting informal chats and interviews with various potential MTs (blanket cover of terrain)	1	1	100%
Conducting informal chats and interviews with various potential EAs (blanket cover of terrain)	1	1	100%

### 3.2. The Inception Report

The second quarter of the GMSL component of SAFER was taken up consolidating and triangulating materials to complete the inception report. The researchers took as wide an approach as possible pulling in desk data, FGDs and KPIs to establish a transdisciplinary rationale in dealing with environment rights as a human right.

#### FGDs and KPIs:

A total of 3 FGDs elaborated in the Q1 report were conducted. In Q2, for triangulation purposes, 14 KPIs were conducted with various individuals across the terrain. These identified development issues related to environment, illegal activities, aggressive resource exploitation by private sector companies etc. The resultant outcomes of these are provided at the link below:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pcE2z8OPW3WvcGlzdNE3DgAh1iCxN8n1>



### **Findings of the inception report:**

The full report may be found in annex 01 and below is a summary of the areas that they considered and analyzed:

**1. Understanding the social contract: The conflict between customs and laws**

Here the team found historical data dating back to Robert Knox, local ideologies and the ways of the Sri Lankan people in managing and governing their societies as opposed to those that were brought in with the colonists and the resultant conflicts and their impact on legal systems that form the core of rights related activism.

**2. Understanding the terrain – The complexity of the central watershed**

The team took a deeper dive into the complexities arising from the Mahaweli cascade, its impact on the climate and the changes it brought about to societal composition and societal socioeconomic stability. Here it identified the exact mechanics of climate as a multiplier taking a geographic zoning approach.

**3. Understanding the issues: Adivasi tragedy - Our lands, their laws**

A review through FGDs and KPIs of the multiple social, cultural and economic pressures faced by the Adivasi (Vedda) community of eastern Sri Lanka was conducted. The GMSL relied quite heavily on a recent study on this subject done by the Center for Policy Alternatives.

**4. Understanding the Issues: Development tragedy - Our wealth, their growth**

Here a deep analysis was done on the results of development aggression with special attention to the negative results that seem to far outweigh the promoted positives. In most instances, the team identified that such development was actually producing poverty and also created the conditions for resource commandeering and subsequent community impoverishment.

**5. Understanding the Issues: Development tragedy - Our wealth, their growth**

With development aggression came a significant push by various private sector entities to make profit by exploiting for personal profit, resources that were shared commons such as water and land. The researchers identified many such issues with respect to the negative results that they had on the environment, the rights of the people and their right to life itself.

**6. Engagement possibilities for SAFER**

The researchers identified macro problems related to environment such as land use, reservoirs, Adivasi rights, disenfranchisement of shared commons and the human-wildlife conflict. They also recommended the setting up of environment rights watchdog groups in the terrain to compliment similar groups set up under previous EU funded projects. Also stated by the researchers was the need for training master trainers, improving the knowledge of environment activities and macro-awareness for the communities on how to respond to climate pressures brought about by various external dependencies.

### **3.3. Changes subsequent to the inception report**

When the Inception Report was presented to ACTED, they observed that one of the key areas where there was a concentration of Adivasi's was outside of the initial project design. This meant that there needed to be a significant change in the approach, the terrain and the beneficiary numbers.

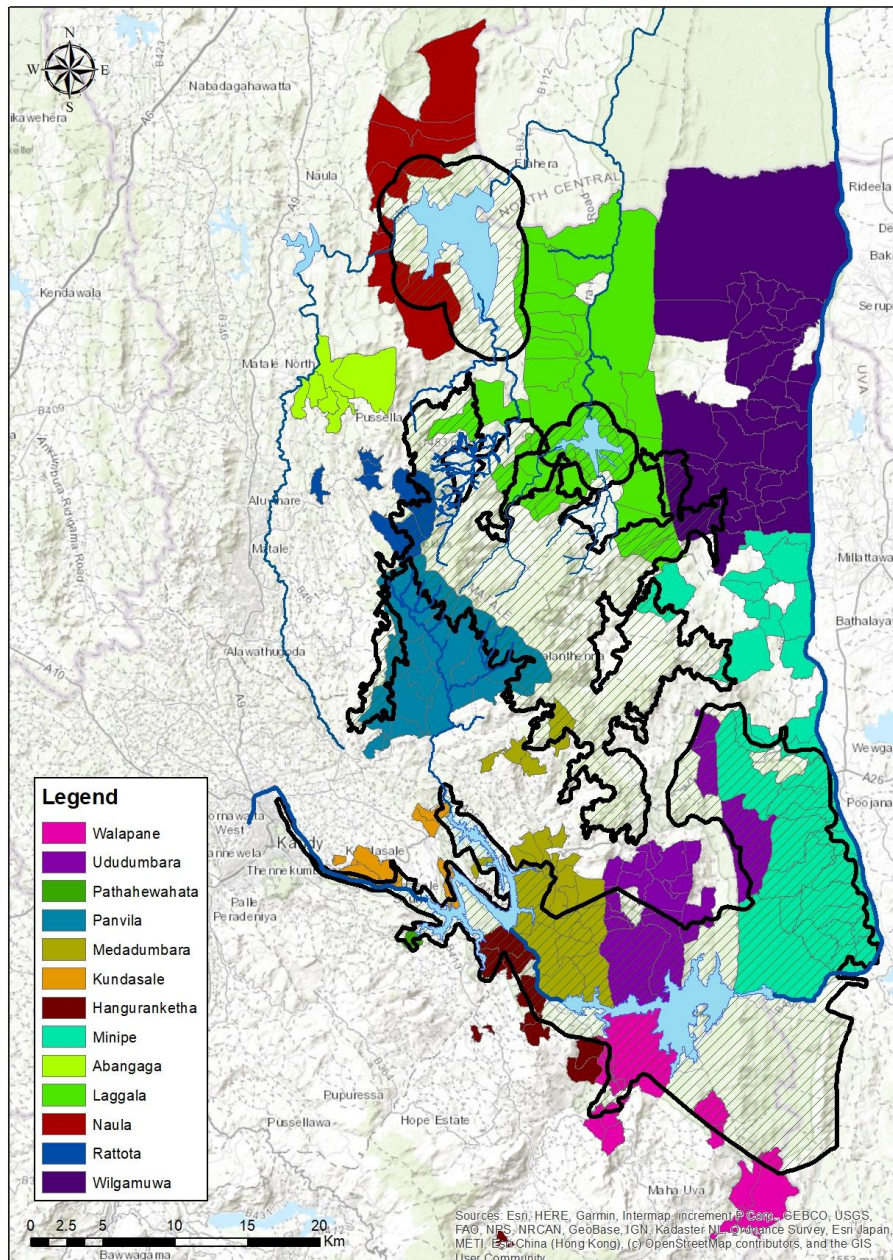
**a. Changes to the approach:**

Instead of the geo-zoning recommended by the research team, the GMSL had to shift to basin-zoning which is not ideal since this is a fractured terrain and river basin level)problems

are ring fenced naturally by the landscape and reduce to smaller, less important and more micro-geographic responses which have little bearing on the macro problems or the underlying causes and possible sustainable treatment.

**b. Changes to terrain:**

As mentioned previously, the treatment terrain was changed to include areas in just the Matale, Kandy and Nuwara-Eliya districts. The adjusted terrain for the project is given in the map below:



**3.4. Identification of Master Trainers (MT) and Environment Activists (EAs)**

A number of potential MTs as well as potential EAs were identified while the field teams and researchers were engaged in gathering information for the inception report. These were a long list which will be subsequently reduced to manageable levels during Q3/



**[All types of reports] Progress towards indicators' targets.**

*Please report on the indicators of Annex A as attached to the Grant Agreement. Add as many rows as necessary.*

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The GMSL's intervention will begin in the adjusted terrain in Q3 of the project.

## 4. PROJECT IMPACT

**[All types of reports] Specific impact of the project.**

*Please give an overview of the achievements of the project from a short and long term point of view, indicating the source of information used. How the activities and the way they were executed contribute to the achievement of expected results and the overall objective of the project?*

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The change in terrain and landscape will necessarily have a negative impact on lasting interventions since micro-geographic problems can be solved swiftly but keeping the activists and watchdogs interested requires more long term efforts that require geo-zoning based treatment of environment rights violations.

## 5. NEXT STEPS / SUSTAINABILITY / EXIT STRATEGY

**[Monthly, quarterly and other interim reports] Next steps in project implementation.**

*In light of the progress achieved within the reporting period covered by the report, please highlight the activities to be completely in the next reporting period.*

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The following are earmarked for completion up to the point of submission of the inception report:

- Complete the formulation of training curricula and toolkits
- Conducting the training of master trainers and subsequently, the training of environment activists.
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**[Final report] Sustainability.**

*How will the structures created under the project continue to function after the end of the project? What is the long-term impact of the action?*

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The research outcomes will be important not only to SAFER but to any other organizations that will wish to work on these issues in similar terrains.

**[Final report] Exit strategy and/or future perspectives.**

*How did your organization ensure a sustainable way out? Is further support required?*

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Not applicable.

## 6. SUCCESS STORY, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

**[All types of reports] Success story.**

*Please insert a human interest story illustrating the project’s success.*

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Not applicable at the present time. There are many human interest stories that the GMSL research team and project team obtained in text, visual and AV form. However, these are all relevant to the inception report but not necessarily related to the success of the project as a whole. Therefore, the GMSL shall desist from speaking of these at the present time.

**[Monthly, quarterly and other interim reports] Challenges.**

*Please use the table below to report on challenges faced and on how you overcame them. You may add as many rows as necessary.*

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<b>Challenges faced:</b> <i>Describe below each challenge faced and its impact on the project</i>	<b>Mitigation measures:</b> <i>Describe how your organisation responded to the challenge faced</i>	<b>Prevention measures:</b> <i>Please indicate measures that will be taken in the future to prevent this challenge from occurring again</i>
<i>Changes in the treatment terrain caused significant changes to program approaches that were not always seen by the GMSL as positive changes.</i>	<i>Shifted from geo-zoning to basin zoning and reduction of macro-level campaigns.</i>	<i>Clear and concise communications between GMSL and ACTED on all aspects including project design.</i>

**[Final report] Lessons learnt.**

*What were the challenges faced during project implementation, how were they addressed, and what could have been done differently? What has your organization learned, and how has this learning been utilized and disseminated?*

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Not applicable.

**7. EXTERNAL COORDINATION**

**[All types of reports] With Local Authorities.**

*How would you assess the relationship between your organization and State authorities? How has this relationship affected project implementation?*

The GMSL has enjoyed strong relationships with the state over its two decades of existence. In that respect, the GMSL has provided proven support to state agencies such as the Forest Department (FD), Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC), Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Disaster Management, Agriculture Ministry and their extension activities across Sri Lanka. While the GMSL has not yet commenced intervening via SAFER on rights issues in the VRR/KCF and environs, it plans to strategically leverage its good standing among state agencies to optimize project impact.

**[All types of reports] With other organizations.**

*Please describe your relationship with other organizations involved in implementation, including other implementing partners, CBOs, etc.*

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The GMSL is a network of 157 CBOs and NGOs working in Sri Lanka. Where required it will be working with other organizations including its own network. However, for SAFER, the key focus is on capacity building for environment activism and community action for environment rights.

## 8. LIST OF ANNEXES

**[All types of reports]Annexes.**

*Please list all relevant annexes here.*

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01. Inception report.