

# Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)

Quarterly Report (Q3 – September 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 – December 1<sup>st</sup> 2023)

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



GMSL staff and activists celebrate World Food Day 2023 showcasing climate resilient rice varieties

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> August 2025
Type of report (monthly, quarterly, bi-annual, interim, final)	Quarterly
Reporting Period (start and end dates)	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023-1 <sup>st</sup> December 2023 (Q3)
Report due date to ACTED	
Date of report submission to ACTED	24/04/2024

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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 Randenigala Rantembe 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	Laggala pallegama	12
Matale	Naula	13
Matale	Wilgamuwa	24
Matale	Raththota	3

<List of activists from each GN or DSD>

**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 Gendrasa 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>SO1: Output 01: The capacities of grassroots activists are strengthened to uphold and protect collective rights and preserve civic space</b>			
<b>Indicator 1.1.3 related: # of people at grassroots level training with EU support</b>			
<b>Creating curricula and toolkits for MTs and WGs</b>			
Create TOR and advertise for consultant	1	1	100%
Hire of consultant	1	1	100%
Engagement between consultant and project team based on IR findings	1	1	100%
Create river basin nuanced curricula	1	1	100%
Create and publishing required toolkits for each of the river basins	1	1	100%
<b>Conduct coaching for Master Trainers</b>			
Identify Master trainers	8	8	100%
Acquire required resource persons			
Complete logistics	1	1	100%
Conduct coaching	1	1	100%
Complete end-of-coaching survey and analytics	1	1	100%
<b>Conduct coaching for Environment activists (Group 01 - 80 participants)</b>			
Complete logistics			
Conduct coaching			
Complete end-of-coaching survey and analytics			

**3.2. Identification of Master Trainers and Environment activists and watchdogs**

During the month of September 2023, 8 trainers representing 8 zones in the targeted terrain were identified and shortlisted from over 50 applicants. In choosing the final eight, their past experiences, their commitment and their ability to work long hours were all taken into consideration. The shortlist of master trainers is provided in annex 01.

**3.3. Creating curricula and toolkits for master trainers and watchdog groups**

A consultant (Mr. Amila Chanaka) was hired to create the required curricula and toolkits for MTs and, by extension, the Environment Activist (EA) cum Watchdogs (WDs). The curriculum was created so that the resource persons could nuance them with their unique approaches to coaching with leeway in place for them to utilize the curriculum as a reference. It covered base information related to local tensions and torques that will impact the project as well as 5 scenarios, namely, climate, economic, biodiversity, rural, systems and investment scenarios. The curriculum may be found in annex 02.

**With respect to the toolkits, the approach rationale is given below:**

- Created as a reference that highlights critical areas of the curriculum
- All all times, the approach was to present complex ideas visually with very little narrative so that the story is clear quickly
- Toolkit is not an elaboration of the curriculum but rather a supportive instrument
- Much of the information is presented as tight as possible with many components bound together to optimize space
- Where segments of the curriculum were seen to be more impactful through voice narrative, no counterpart was given in the kit
- Additional anecdotal infographics were provided as bolstering of the arguments but not always directly related to them
- Financial constraints were taken into consideration and the kit is made as short as possible.

Although initially it was surmised that specific toolkits would be required for specific terrains given the macro-treatment envisaged, the subsequent switch from geo-zoning to basin-zoning eliminated this requirement and just one comprehensive toolkit was created. This toolkit may be found in annex 03.

### **3.4. Conducting MT training program:**

The 4 day training program was conducted at Wingate Hotel in Wilgamuwa from 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The resource persons used for this program are as follows:

1. Amila Chanaka: Zoological director, Ridiyagama Safari Park,
2. Mr. Priyantha: Naula District Forest Officer;
3. Mr. Saman Kumara: Lawyer;
4. Mr. Suranjan Kodituwakku: Environmentalist.

The program adhered to the general guidelines provided by the curriculum but also went further in providing the participants with emotional wellbeing programs through meditation as well as identifying other qualities, skills and capabilities through various impromptu sessions.



### 3.5. Conducting cascade training via MTs for 80 EAs/WDGs

The first batch of 80 shortlisted EAs/WDGs comprising of 48 females and 32 males from the Minipe cluster were provided with a comprehensive 3 days training program at Wingate Hotel in Wilgamuwa from 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023 with the curriculum and the toolkits both utilized. The training had to be conducted by the previous resource persons since the curriculum and toolkits were not yet translated to Sinhala albeit with a shorter and less complicated delivery of the material. The list of participants for the training from the Minipe cluster is provided in annex 04.



Amila Chanaka lectures to the first batch of 80 activists from the Minipe cluster



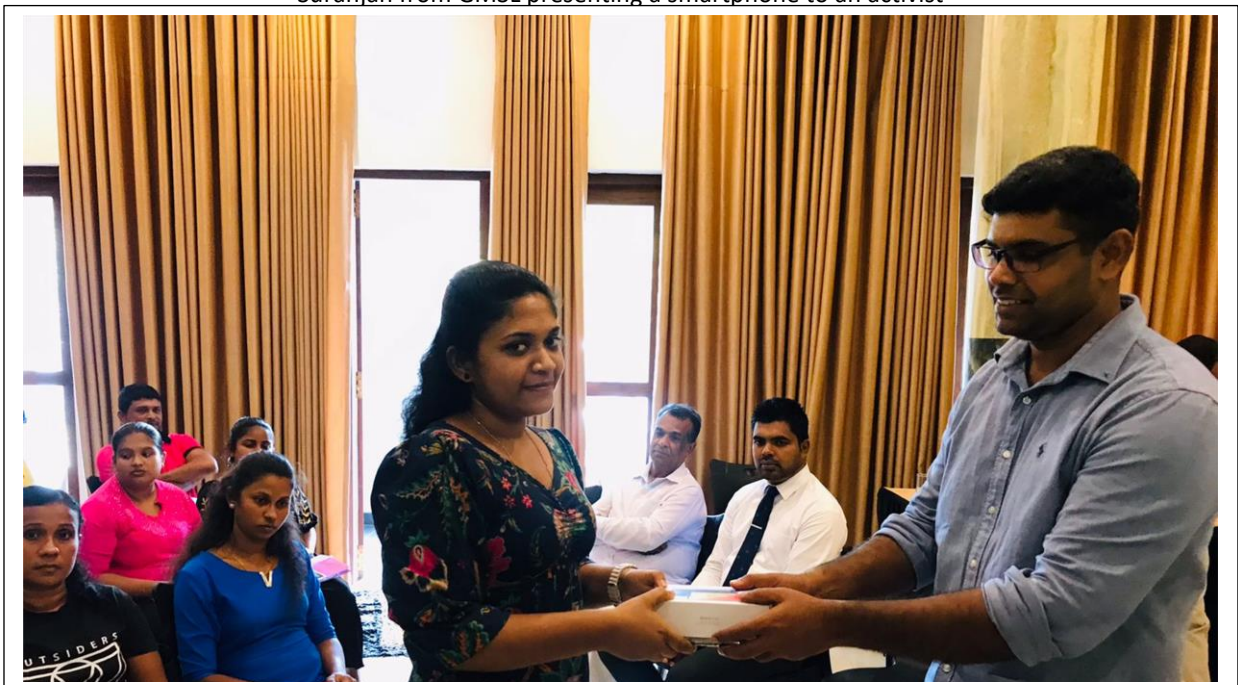
Group activity session during the training

### 3.6. Delivery of phones to MTs and 80 EAs

When the training were completed, the MTs and the EAs were provided with smartphones to continue their activism. These were presented to them by GMSL and ACTED leaders as well as resource persons.



Suranjan from GMSL presenting a smartphone to an activist



Tharindu from ACTED presenting a smartphone to an activist

### 3.7. Other activities



To celebrate World Food Day 2023 on October 16<sup>th</sup>, the GMSL organized an event at the Public Library where climate resilient rice varieties, mee oil food recipes, Dumbara products etc. were put on display and sale to the general public along with many GMSL publications with the participation of activists and community members of the target terrain.



Tharindu from ACTED presenting a smartphone to an activist

**[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.*

The MT training and the first batch of activists were comprehensively trained during the period under review.

**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?*

The trained activists were provided with their connectivity and communications phones which will be an innovative strategy to digitally transform environment activism.

**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.*

- Complete the training programs for activists.
- Commence activism after each group is trained.

**[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 creation of these informal watchdogs who were carefully selected for their long term commitment and environment volunteerism will ensure that activism goes beyond the PLC as has already been demonstrated through similar strategies deployed in previous EU funded projects.

**[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>Some of the phones were found to have been used.</i>	<i>Immediate replacement was done by ACTED.</i>	<i>A system of quality assurance on the side of the suppliers were put in place.</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. Name list of master trainers
02. SAFER training curriculum
03. SAFER training toolkit
04. List of participants of cascade training (Minipe Cluster)