

# Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)

Quarterly Report (Q4 – December 1<sup>st</sup>2023 – March 1<sup>st</sup>2024)

Strengthening Activism For Environmental Rights (SAFER)



GMSL-SAFER trained activists at an environment cleanup operation

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	1 <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> December 2023 - 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2024 (Q4)
Report due date to ACTED	
Date of report submission to ACTED	25-04-2024

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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/HRINTPA/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 Rantemba 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 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 in the GMSL, due to its over 2 decade presence in the area, 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 has led to various issues when attempting to define what is right and what is wrong with respect to the management of the environment, environmental 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 understand that there are some risks involved although those risks are not clearly charted. Despite the 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 take off 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 effort takes 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 counter 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 aged segregated 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: CEPAVT team trained 25 people in bakery techniques during the month of April in Gendrasa Refugee camp to enhance refugees' income generating opportunities. CEPAVT team delivered 5 sessions of one hour during a month followed by 4 daily hours of practice.*

Please provide detail 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>Conduct coaching for Environment activists (Group 02 - 64 participants)</b>			
Complete logistics			
Conduct coaching			
Complete end-of-coaching survey and analytics			
<b>Conduct coaching for Environment activists (Group 02 - 64 participants)</b>			
Complete logistics			
Conduct coaching			
Complete end-of-coaching survey and analytics			
<b>Coaching and Training of MTs, EAs and communities completed</b>			
<b>SO2: Output 01: Required technological and knowledge inputs are provided to facilitate high-impact and safer engagement of grassroots CSOs and activists in rights-based conservation, regeneration and management exercises</b>			
<b>Indicator 2.1.1. related: Total amount of EUR invested in improving digital and ICT capacities of activists</b>			
<b>Create tool for mapping ICT access and usage by MTs, EAs/WGs</b>			
Create TOR and advertise for consultant			
Hire of consultant			
Obtain detailed app design			
Obtain ver 0.1 of app			
Test and adjust			
Commission and deploy app to all MTs, Eas/WGs			
Train MTs and Eas/WGs on use of app			

#### 3.2. Completing cascade training via MTs for 2 further groups of EAs/WDGs

Similar to the first batch trained, the two other groups from the Hulu Ganga region and the VRR region were retrained. Once more the consultant hired by the GMSL performed the training. These were held from 29<sup>th</sup>–31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 (Hulu Ganga cluster) and February 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> 2024 (VRR cluster). The VRR cluster training programs saw the consultant group joined by Mr. Arjuna Seneviratne (Chief Technical Advisor GMSL) and Mr. Somiruwana Rupasinghe (Sirasa TV) to coach the group on the use of social

media.Smartphonesweredeliveredto themby the consultants,GMSLleadershipandACTED representativesinsimilarfashiontothefirstclustertrainingprogram.



The HuluGanga group beingtrainedwiththe smartphones they will receive in the foreground



Arjuna Seneviratne and Somiruwan Rupasinghe lecturing to the activists from the VRR cluster

### 3.3. Cross-section of environment action of the trained activists

#### 01. December 2023: Loss of lands

Activists noted that with the construction of the Kalu Ganga and Moragahakandadamams, some villagers were removed from their ancestral homes leading to much socioeconomic pressure. 3 female activists spent 6 days (6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 onwards) obtaining primary data from

these victims of development aggression on a) loss of livelihoods, b) water pressure from loss of perennial springs and streams, c) degradation of arable lands.

## 02. Earth slips and landslides

**Madugalla earth slips:** As a result of climate-induced torrential rain on 03<sup>rd</sup> January 2024, earth slips were recorded in the Kalalgamuwa and Miniwangamuwa villages in the Madugalla area of the Ududumbara DSD. On GMSL-SAFER activists being notified of the event they made a first-hand observation of the damage and provided those who were in camp temporarily created for the displaced with necessary requisites including sanitary needs, food etc. over a number of days. They observed also that the affected families were fearful of returning due to doubts about the structural integrity of their homes and that schooling for the children had come to a standstill. 12 activists from the Huluganga cluster (9 female and 3 male) took part in the intervention.



GMSL activists joined other villagers to cook food for the displaced



Damage caused by the earth slips photographed by GMSL-SAFER activists

**Etanwal landslides:** As a result of climate induced torrential rain on 04<sup>th</sup> January 2024, a landslide was recorded in the Etanwal village in the Laggala-Pallegama DSD and GMSL field officers and SAFER activists deployed immediately to the area. After initial observations and obtaining all relevant information as they had been trained to do, they supported the DSD officer to provide the displaced families with sanitation facilities and other requisites. They also did a complete study of the disaster as well as an estimation of hazard threat to the area residents and obtained additional information on potential hazards from the DSD's disaster management officer and identified what sort of state interventions were required in the future to stabilize the area. GMSL field officers and 9 activists (6 female and 3 male) from the Kalu Gangaregion intervened in this instance.



Damage caused by the Etanwal landslides photographed by GMSL-SAFER

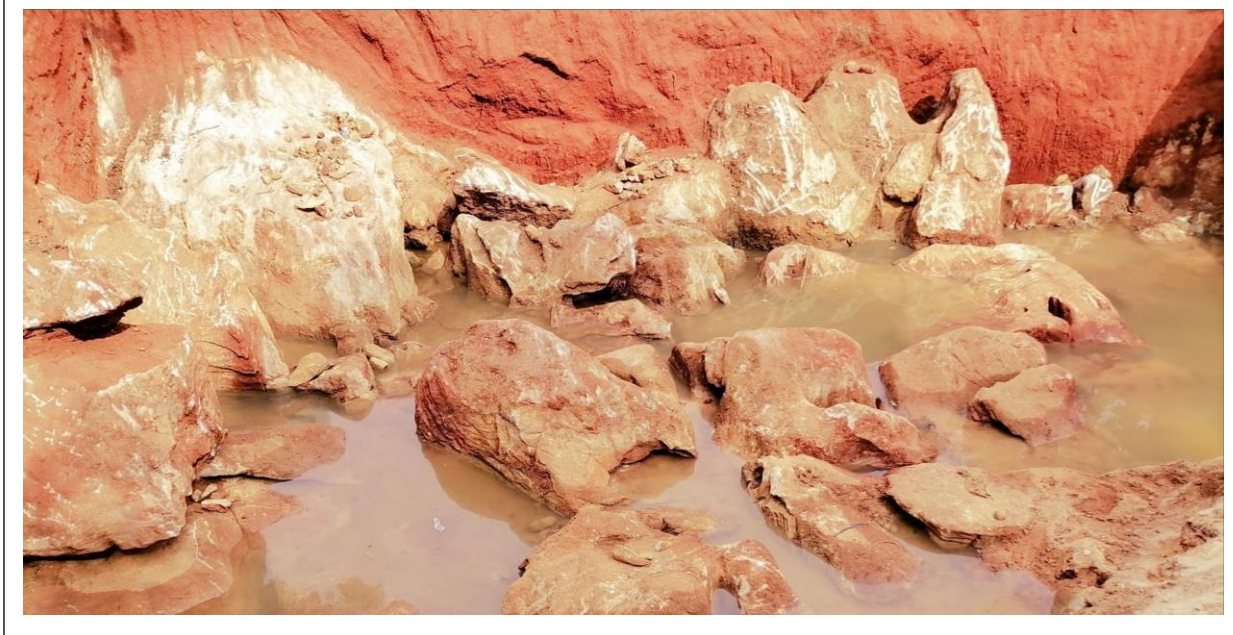
### 03. Illegal mining

Observing that there was illegal mining after supposed deposits of gems in the Ratna Ella area on the eastern slope of the KCF, a team of activists deployed secretly to obtain the required information on the extent of these illegal operations. They observed that the villagers may be protecting these perpetrators and found that they engaged in mining activities at various times and under protection. Five GMSL-SAFER activists (3 female and 2 male) were involved in this action.

### 04. Legal mining in the Kalu Gangaregion

On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024, 3 female activists from the Kalu Gangaregion engaged themselves in determining if legal mining in the Dasgiriya area was being done with due consideration given to environment protection mandates stipulated by government regulations. They identified that the closure of excavations was not being done in line with environmental regulations resulting either in the creation of sinkholes or the general degradation of lands in the area.





Excavation pits at Dasgiriya photographed by GMSL activists



#### 05. Illegal sand mining from the Mahaweli river

On 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, a female activist obtained information of environment damage caused by illegal mining on the Mahaweli river from Hasalakato Kolongoda and, from Kolonyayato Palugolla and Sonuththa. She found that despite a permit allowing only 10 cubic meters to be mined, they were using the same permit to mine a very large quantity of sand causing significant degradation of river beds and stream sides.

#### 06. Pollutants entering the Minipe canal

On 20<sup>th</sup> January, a female activist identified pollutants entering the Minipe canal from Wilgamuwa town and obtained information on the potential problems to the health of communities who use the water for drinking and other purposes. She also noted that with the development of Wilgamuwa as a modern town, solid waste from stalls and areabusinesses

had increased significantly and that this was contributing to the increased pollution of the Minipe canal.



Solid waste on the upstream side eventually finds its way into the Minipe canal

#### **07. Environmental issue identification in the Deanston-Rangala area**

2 male activists obtained the required information on environmental issues besetting the watershed, environmental zones and critical micro-catchment areas in the Deanston-Rangala area on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2024. The area is the source for much of the water of the Galmal Oya and the recent increase in state populations in the region has caused a rise in pollution of the water. Additionally, with tourism trekking and camping being done in the area without any controls or supervision, further damage to the biodiversity and ecosystem were identified.

#### **08. Trek and awareness of Gombania mountain**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024, 22 activists (10 female and 12 male) joined a trek to Gombania mountain by ADA and obtained valuable environmental knowledge of the ecosystem.



Trek up Gombania mountain

### 3.4. Creating tool for mapping ICT usage of EAs/WDGs

The design specs were created by the GMSL in January 2024 for a mobile app coupled to a web application to monitor activism by SAFER activists. While payment mechanisms were an issue that somewhat delayed the commencement of the design phase, the mobile app design was completed in February 2023.

#### [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 voluntary activism of the trained individuals has taken off and harbors well for getting to targets on the experience side of activism.

## 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 environmental actions of activists seem to be in line with their training and the impact on how to get a better quality activist to work in these areas is bearing results. However, there are still a few months to fine tune their approaches.

## 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 completed in the next reporting period.*

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- Complete the monitoring app and continue activism.

#### [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.

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.

<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>Financial clearance for app development due to budget constraints</i>	<i>Away was found to obtain required funding and a decently priced consultant was also obtained to reduce costs.</i>	<i>Not applicable.</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?

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.

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. List of participants of cascade training (Hulu Ganga and VRR clusters)