



Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution  
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தீர்ப்பதற்கு ஆதரவளித்தல்

# Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution

## ARTS FOR ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ARTS-4-ADR): CASE STUDY REPORT

Final Report – March 2025

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# ABBREVIATIONS & KEY TERMINOLOGY

## Abbreviations

<b>ADR</b>	Alternative Dispute Resolution
<b>CMB</b>	Community Mediation Boards
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DS</b>	Divisional Secretariat
<b>EUNIC</b>	European Union National Institutes of Culture
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>LIRC</b>	Local Inter-Religious Committee
<b>MBC</b>	Mediation Board Commission
<b>MMCA</b>	Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>RSD</b>	Reflective Structured Dialogue
<b>SEDR</b>	Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution
<b>SRO</b>	Senior Responsible Officer
<b>SMB</b>	Special Mediation Boards
<b>SCOPE</b>	Strengthening Social Cohesion & Peace in Sri Lanka
<b>STRIDE</b>	Strengthening Transformation, Reconciliation, and Inclusive Democratic Engagement
<b>TAF</b>	The Asia Foundation

## A Note on Key Terminology

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is term used to describe ways of resolving a dispute without litigation. **For the purposes of the Arts-4-ADR project and this report, the term “ADR” used in this report refers to the informal mechanisms or processes facilitated by local actors to resolve community-based disputes/grievances/conflict without the involvement of the formal justice system.** This includes various committees and local action forums established by civil society and community-based organisations, including inter-religious structures.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the United Nations introduced Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), aiming to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels’, underscoring a global commitment to fostering access to justice efforts that serve and protect all members of society equitably. Central to SDG 16 is the concept of people-centred justice which places people at the centre of justice by understanding their needs, experiences and expectations and strengthening justice systems to meet these needs for all, especially those most at risk of being left behind.

In Sri Lanka, a nation emerging from decades of civil conflict, the pursuit of people-centred justice has become paramount. The formal justice systems have often been characterised by hierarchical, top-down approaches that can leave marginalised communities underserved. In response, community Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms have emerged as vital complements to the formal justice systems as culturally sensitive dispute resolution mechanisms that integrate local participation to ensure accessible justice for all.

Against this backdrop, the Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution (SEDR) project (2020-2025) is a five-year initiative commissioned by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the British Council to strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms and foster social cohesion in Sri Lanka. Within this framework, the Arts-for-ADR project was conceptualised in August 2023 as a proof-of-concept to explore how artistic expression could contribute to facilitating dialogue on root causes of community grievances and raise awareness, as well as encourage the use of ADR mechanisms as pathways to justice.

This Case Study Report is a result of a consultancy assignment undertaken from June 2024 to March 2025 to provide an independent assessment of the Arts-4-ADR project. Drawing on extensive field observations, key informant interviews, and a review of project documentation, this report offers a detailed account of the project’s design, implementation and outcomes. It also includes insights and actionable recommendations to development practitioners, ADR and justice policymakers and art practitioners on integrating arts-based approaches in access to justice efforts in communities with complex socio-political contexts.

Conceptualised by SEDR, the Arts-4-ADR project was implemented by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from December 2023 to December 2024. MMCA proposed to implement artwork-centred dialogue as an effective tool to introduce alternative ways to resolve disputes at a community level.

At its inception in February 2024, MMCA commissioned three local artists from the North, East and Uva Provinces of Sri Lanka to capture lived experiences of communities from the same provinces. These artists conducted extensive field research over a five-month period, from February to August 2024, during which they conducted interviews, focus group discussions and community visits, engaging over 300 individuals, of which 236 were women, to create artworks reflecting community grievances under the theme of land-based conflicts.

The commissioned artworks were exhibited both nationally at a public exhibition in Colombo at the *Total Landscaping* exhibition at MMCA Colombo from September to December 2024 and regionally across the three provinces, reaching over 8,600 visitors. The artworks were a powerful mechanism for fostering dialogue, as it gave agency to the community by allowing them to bring forward their personal narratives

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and lived realities through visual storytelling, prioritising the experiences of the people affected by the community grievances. Through the exhibition of the artworks, 96.5% of visitors reported an enhanced understanding of the root causes of land conflicts, and 88.9% said they were motivated to further explore land issues in Sri Lanka.

The use of art as a tool for dialogue was a key insight that emerged from the implementation of the project, as the use of visual storytelling through art and film proved to be a highly effective medium for opening dialogue, enabling viewers to express their grievances and experiences in a non-adversarial context. It also highlighted the importance of grounding interventions in extensive field research. The community engagement the artists conducted as a part of their artistic process ensured that the artistic interventions authentically reflected lived experiences of the communities which it sought to represent, which built trust from the community and enhanced the legitimacy of the interventions.

MMCA also established a Dialogue & Civic Engagement Fellowship which engaged four fellows from the Northern, Eastern and Uva Provinces who are already engaged in work within their communities either through artistic platforms or advocacy, in using art as a device for mobilising ADR mechanisms as effective pathways to achieving justice and reconciliation in community-based conflicts.

The fellows participated in a 6-month fellowship programme from June to November 2024 and received over 48 hours of ADR training as well as training in art programming, community engagement and public pedagogical approaches. Through this fellowship, the fellows were able to deepen their understanding of ADR and learn how to create new approaches to ADR in their respective districts, empowering them to implement projects of their own in their locality.

During the fellowship, the fellows used the commissioned artworks and their learnings to develop and pilot arts-based lesson plans that integrate the Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) approach as dialogue interventions that used the artwork to foster open, thoughtful dialogue through guided questions. These lesson-plans were implemented in 15 community workshops across the three provinces conducted by the fellows in the months of November 2024 and January 2025.

These community workshops were the culmination of the commissioned artworks and the fellowship, translating these efforts into practical community interventions. MMCA conducted 15 arts-based ADR workshops across eight districts – including Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Monaragala and Badulla, engaging over 450 participants comprising community members, youth, women, civil society representatives and local officials from the District Secretariat Office and the Mediation Board Commission to engage with the art-based methodology developed by the MMCA and Fellows.

In the workshops, commissioned artworks from the respective provinces were used as a focal point and arts-based methodology to spark dialogue on the root causes of community grievances. Through structured activities such as identifying patterns in conflict and close-looking exercises to engage with the artwork in a manner that resonates with their own, workshop participants were able to share personal stories and reflect on their experiences with community-based disputes through a series of guided questions. The fellows executed their lesson plans by using the commissioned artworks to train participants on how to approach conflicts and disputes in their communities using reflective dialogue and artistic expression through generative questioning exercises.

The outcome from the workshops was encouraging. MMCA reported that 68.75% of the workshop participants recognised art-based dialogue as a form of ADR and 100% expressed intent to apply the methods learned in the workshops in their communities, while 75% also noted some improvement in their

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understanding of ADR after the workshop. The commissioned artworks were well received by the participants, with many expressing that they could see their own realities mirrored in the artwork. This gave insight that when the artwork is tailored to the specific community or conflict and there are participatory elements to the artwork by the community, there is deeper engagement and increased effectiveness in using the art as a tool for dialogue. On the flip side, these artworks also triggered deep emotional responses from some participants where they recalled difficult memories and lived experiences that were often traumatic. This highlighted that as powerful as art can be, there is also a sensitive nature to art that evokes personal histories and it's crucial to be aware of do-no-harm principles when using art as a tool for dialogue, particularly in post-conflict or trauma-affected communities.

It was also important to note that while MMCA successfully increased understanding of ADR mechanisms through the fellowship and community workshops, its role as a museum and artistic facilitator limited its ability to provide the technical expertise on ADR in executing some of the specific objectives of the project, which was to raise awareness of ADR mechanisms and to encourage the use of them. A stronger alignment between artistic practitioners and ADR experts in the design of the project, particularly in community workshops, would benefit a project of this nature as it can enhance the overall impact of the project. Other challenges identified – such as the insufficiency of one-day workshops and lack of long-term mentorship – point to opportunities for refinement and scale-up. A long-term design of this project would ensure sustainability of the learnings beyond the project's lifecycle.

From a global perspective, the Arts-4-ADR project offers several lessons and insights for policymakers and ADR practitioners for social cohesion and people-centred justice initiatives. The project demonstrates that by enabling communities to express their experiences and identify common ground, arts-based approaches have the potential to make ADR mechanisms more accessible and relevant, particularly for marginalised and conflict-affected communities, which is critical in settings where the formal justice system may be perceived as distant or unresponsive to local needs.

Based on the findings of this consultancy, the following recommendations are put forward:

- Policymakers on ADR and justice should further explore the role of the art in conflict resolution by engaging in evidence-based discussions on how creative approaches can enhance access to justice. Pilot programmes within the national and regional ADR sector should be explored to formally integrate arts-based tools and methods into established training curricula.
- Strengthen partnerships between the arts, justice, and development sectors by facilitating close collaboration between artists and development practitioners and establishing knowledge-sharing networks to scale and adapt successful models to different contexts. These partnerships should be built on evidence of what works and be responsive and adaptive to local cultural and socio-political dynamics.
- Investing in long-term capacity building is crucial for ensuring sustainability. Empowering and developing the skills of the local people, local mediators, community leaders, and cultural practitioners will help disseminate the skills and knowledge gained through arts-based interventions, ensuring that the benefits are sustained over time.
- Programmes must be designed with local culture in mind. Artistic interventions should be tailored to reflect the specific conflicts and the cultural nuances of each community. Including participatory

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elements in these programmes allows communities to actively contribute to the creative process, thereby fostering trust and ownership over the narratives being shared.

- Multi-donor engagement is recommended to support long-term, cross-sector initiatives. Strategic, sustained funding will ensure that arts-based tools and methods can be scaled and integrated as part of broader efforts for social cohesion and maintain the visibility of critical social issues through art to ensure that they are continuously addressed rather than forgotten over time.

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## OVERVIEW

This Case Study Report is the outcome of a stand-alone consultancy assignment commissioned by SEDR in June 2024 to independently assess the conceptualisation, evolution and implementation of the SEDR Arts-4-ADR project. The project is an initiative designed to explore the use of artistic expression as a tool to enhance the reach, inclusivity and impact of SEDR's work on ADR at a community level in Sri Lanka.

The insights, observations, and analysis presented in this report are those of the consultant and are based on independent key informant interviews, implementation observations, and review of project documentation conducted by the consultant between July 2024 and January 2025.

This report captures the design and implementation considerations, insights, challenges and best practices, as an evidence base for scaling, replication and integration for broader social cohesion and people-centred justice programming and policymaking.

This report is structured on the following key lines of inquiry:

- The objectives and conceptualisation of the Arts-4-ADR project
- The criteria and rationale for selecting an implementing partner
- The delivery model, including methodologies, partnerships, and stakeholder engagement in implementation
- Successes, challenges, and learning outcomes from project implementation.
- The alignment of project activities with people-centred justice frameworks and its intersection with customary and informal justice (CIJ) systems.
- The potential for adaptation and replication in ADR and/or arts-for-development initiatives.

By addressing these inquiries, this report aims to provide actionable insights for development practitioners, policymakers and art practitioners on integrating arts-based approaches for social cohesion, inclusive dialogue and access to justice efforts in complex socio-political contexts within communities.



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## INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a small island off the southern coast of India, home to approximately 22 million people of different ethnic groups: Sinhalese (in majority of about 75%), Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors and Malayaha Tamils (also referred to as Indian Tamils and Up-country Tamils). The country's administrative framework is organised into 9 provinces: Central, Eastern, North Central, Northern, North-Western, Sabaragamuwa, Southern, Uva, and Western, and is further divided into 25 districts, each overseen by a District Secretary.

From 1983 to 2009, Sri Lanka endured a brutal 26-year civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which fought for a separate Tamil state in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the country. The war left deep socio-economic and psychological scars, particularly in these regions, where issues of displacement, land rights, and inter-ethnic tensions remain unresolved. While Uva Province was not significantly affected by the war, it is by all indicators, the poorest province in Sri Lanka due to high income inequality and poverty rates.

Post-war, efforts were made by successive governments toward reconciliation and transitional justice; however progress has been slow and inconsistent. The 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, a series of coordinated bombings targeting churches and hotels, further exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions. This was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic which, coupled with poor governance, devastated the economy, leading to Sri Lanka's worst financial crisis in 2022.

The economic collapse triggered the "*Aragalaya*" (struggle) people's movement in the country, a mass civilian-led protest that resulted in the resignation of the then-president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, in June 2022. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was appointed President amidst the political crisis to serve the remainder of Rajapaksa's term until 2024. In November 2024, Sri Lanka held its presidential and parliamentary elections where the National People's Power (NPP) alliance achieved a significant electoral victory, coming into government with a supermajority while its leader secured victory in the presidential election. This election marked a departure from traditional political factions, with voters expressing a strong desire for anti-corruption measures and economic revival amidst the country's ongoing economic challenges.

Sri Lanka's justice system includes both formal and informal mechanisms, each serving distinct roles in the administration of justice. The formal justice system operates under a hierarchical court structure<sup>1</sup> influenced by a blend of English common law, Roman-Dutch law and customary laws reflecting the country's legal heritage. Sri Lanka also recognises the role of informal justice mechanisms and has strong customary and informal justice systems<sup>2</sup> such as mediation as established by the Mediation Board Commission and the intervention of community organisations and leaders in informal dispute resolution and access to justice efforts at a community-level.

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<sup>1</sup> Established by the Judicature Act No. 2 of 1978

<sup>2</sup> Customary and Informal Justice (CIJ) systems describes justice and conflict resolution mechanisms that operate outside the formal system of state-based laws and courts ranging from traditional and indigenous systems to local alternative dispute resolution.

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## About SEDR

The Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution (SEDR) project (2020-2025) is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the British Council in Sri Lanka. The project aligns with EU's wider Strengthening Transformation, Reconciliation and Inclusive Democratic Engagement (STRIDE) programme.

SEDR aims to enhance the availability and effectiveness of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms while promoting social cohesion and fostering inclusive engagement between communities and the state. The project focuses on institutional and capacity building support to Sri Lanka's Mediation Boards Commission, whose mandate is the management and supervision of the National Mediation Programme, as well as working with civil society partners to strengthen community-based ADR mechanisms to address local level grievances, which fall outside the ambit of the national mediation legislation.

SEDR operates within four overarching Result Areas to advance dispute resolution services at the community, regional, and national levels.

- **Community Level:** SEDR strengthens the capacity of existing local forums to address diverse community grievances while encouraging collaboration between local government and CSO's. To this end, SEDR works primarily within three target Provinces – Northern, Eastern, and Uva.
- **Regional Level:** SEDR supports the government in the establishment of Land Special Mediation Boards (SMBs) in Uva Province to resolve disputes.
- **National Level:** SEDR enhances mediation quality through training programmes for Mediation Training Officers and Community Mediators nationwide, while also increasing public awareness of ADR.

SEDR's Art-4-ADR project (2023-2024) is implemented under SEDR's Result Area 3 - addressing shared problems and improving resolution of community-level grievances through community-based ADR mechanisms.

## ARTS-4-ADR: Exploring the Potential of Visual Art in Community Dispute Resolution

Conflict at the community level is often deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural tensions where disputes within communities arise from competing interests, miscommunication, or the absence of shared spaces for dialogue.

In Sri Lanka, community-based ADR mechanisms play a vital role in resolving these disputes and preventing the escalation of conflict into overt violence, by providing effective pathways to access justice for local communities without the involvement of the formal justice system, through various committees and fora established by the National Mediation Programme, civil society and community-based organisations as well inter-religious structures.

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In addition, Sri Lanka today has a well-established National Mediation Programme operated through more than 300 Community Mediation Boards (CMBs)<sup>3</sup> where approximately 8,400 well trained volunteer mediators deal with roughly 250,000 disputes per year with settlement rates exceeding 65% and customer satisfaction rates above 80%. The CMBs use an interest-based mediation approach where ordinary Sri Lankans resolve a wide range of inter-personal and community level disputes such as family disagreements, land and financial disputes and minor offences. The interest-based mediation approach allows for parties to focus on identifying their interests and needs and jointly strive to facilitate mutually agreeable solutions that satisfy the interests of all parties involved.

While these community-based ADR mechanisms are effective pathways to people-centred justice, they address disputes on an individual level and do not address broader community-based conflicts that continue to fester in the absence of a shared space for collective dialogue and reconciliation.

In this context, can art, particularly visual art such as film, photography, drawings, poetry, storytelling, and theatre, serve as a transformative tool in the ADR sector in effectively resolving broader community-based conflicts?

Art has long been recognised as a fundamental medium of human communication, knowledge formation and social interaction (*Kaplan, 2007; de la Fuente, 2014*). It has the potential to create shared spaces where individuals can express their perspectives, represent themselves, their beliefs and values, visualise new possibilities and engage in collaborative discussions. The role of art in conflict transformation is well-documented; numerous grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have utilised visual artmaking to inspire dialogue between conflicting communities such as projects like *Creativity for Peace* in Israel and Palestine as well *Building Bridges* in Sri Lanka<sup>4</sup>.

In community-based grievances, visual art provides a unique mechanism for engagement. Research suggests that people affected by conflict often struggle to articulate their perspectives within traditional dialogue-based settings (*Garioian & Gaudelius, 2004*). They arrive at negotiations having vividly experienced an unpleasant division or violence yet lack the ability to envision pathways toward resolution. Art, when incorporated into these processes, can act as a bridge—as it enables communities to express their lived experiences, develop empathy and recognise shared concerns while “sketching” possibilities for reconciliation<sup>5</sup>.

Sri Lanka has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that continues to manifest itself in contemporary artistic practices across multiple overlapping communities and in this context, there is also a long history of individuals, communities and organisations utilising the arts to strengthen resilience and social cohesion, and to call for social change. The most recent and perhaps striking example of the merging of arts and community grievances was the creative outputs from the 2022 *Aragalaya* movement where large number of members from all communities were able to represent and reflect themselves, their beliefs, interests and values for calls for change and justice through various visual arts.

To this end, SEDR sought to employ an arts-for-development approach through a dedicated project, **Arts-4-ADR**, as a potential tool for not only shaping public awareness and encouraging dialogue, but also in strengthening social cohesion through mediating community-based conflicts in Sri Lanka, which fall outside the ambit of the Mediation Act No. 72 of 1988 and the National Mediation Programme.

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<sup>3</sup> Established by the Mediation Boards Act No. 72 of 1988

<sup>4</sup> [buildingbridges.lk](http://buildingbridges.lk)

<sup>5</sup> Yelyzaveta Glybchenko: *A Visual Approach to Peace Mediation: Exploring the Conceptual Potential of Visual Art-Making in Peace Mediation*

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# PROJECT DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

## Conceptualising Arts-4-ADR

The Arts-4-ADR project was conceptualised in August 2023 in response to the need for an innovative, culturally sensitive, community driven approach to ADR in Sri Lanka.

SEDR conducted a comprehensive national and provincial level problem analysis in 2022/23 and identified five key barriers to effective community-based ADR which formed the foundational basis for the Art-4-ADR Project:

1. Exclusion of marginalised groups (women, young people, lower caste persons, ethnic/economic minorities) from local decision-making leading to unaddressed grievances, social exclusion, frustration and resentment.
2. Large-scale national level economic development neglects local SMEs, creating local-level unemployment and alienation, which may be perceived as ethno-religious neglect and discrimination.
3. Unaddressed post-conflict legacy issues such as displacement, land dispute, conflict related disability, language and communal intolerance hinder reconciliation and exacerbate existing ethno-religious suspicions and divisions
4. Traditional structural issues such as discrimination, inequality, and patriarchy etc. limit inter-group harmony and social cohesion.
5. Environmental and geographical disparities including access to resources and justice, which can be perceived as systemic exclusion of marginalised communities.

The Arts-4-ADR project therefore sought to propose a new creative arts-based approach to address community-based grievances with a particular focus on understanding the root causes of conflict, while encouraging and supporting the use of ADR mechanisms at the same time.

The Arts-4-ADR project was conceptualised on the basis that art can contribute to alternative dispute resolution by:

- Using imaginative strategies, devices and solutions collaboratively to address the specific challenges faced by marginalised communities and raise awareness/understanding of the root causes of conflict/disputes/grievances, as well as locally available ADR mechanisms.
- Building the capacity and agency of arts practitioners to facilitate dialogue and engagement with target communities/audiences around ADR themes.
- Providing arts practitioners with the opportunity to represent the lived experiences of marginalised groups and local communities through language, music and cultural practices.

The project is well aligned with people-centred justice which is a core principle of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 which seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

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## Scope and Objectives

The **Overall Objective** of the Arts-4-ADR project was to widen the scope and enhance the impact of SEDR's existing initiatives supporting the resolution of community level disputes/grievances in the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces of Sri Lanka.

The **Specific Objectives** of the Arts-4-ADR project were threefold:

- [1] to **facilitate dialogue** regarding root causes of community-based conflict/disputes/grievances,
- [2] to **increase awareness** and understanding of community-based ADR mechanisms and,
- [3] to **encourage the use of ADR mechanisms** as pathways to access justice, through art-for-development approaches

The scope of the project was limited to implementation across SEDR's existing target provinces and districts: Northern Province (Mannar & Vavuniya), Eastern Province (Ampara & Trincomalee) and Uva Province (Badulla & Monaragala) as well as an exhibition in Colombo for national-level engagement.

## Selecting an Implementing Partner: Calls for Proposals and Selection Criteria

SEDR issued a call for proposals in September 2023 for an implementing partner for the Arts-4-ADR project to design and implement the Arts-4-ADR programme addressing the Specific Objectives by using art as a vehicle to strengthen social cohesion in the project's target communities.

### Eligibility Criteria

Proposals were invited from qualified local art curators, art organisations, art collaborators, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and/or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with experience in arts-for-development work. Applicants were required to demonstrate five years of experience in artistic practice or arts-for-development, a proven record of successful collaboration with various stakeholders, and strong financial management and monitoring systems.

### Project Scope & Model

- **Target Groups:** Art practitioners, women, young people (between ages 18-35) and marginalised communities. Proposal had to outline engagement strategies and impact.
- **Funding and Duration:** One grant of up to EUR 100,000 for a 12-month implementation period.
- **Three-plus-One (3+1) Model:** Activities uniquely implemented in each of SEDR's target provinces (Northern, Eastern, and Uva) culminating in a showcase in Colombo.

Applicants were required to submit proposals demonstrating the use of elements of interdisciplinary arts-based initiatives and interventions, such as (but not limited to): *Forum Theatre* (dramatising ADR methods to raise awareness and practical examples), *Film/Video* (Representation on local films with post-screen discussions to engage communities), *Social Media Storytelling* (spotlighting stories of the youth to amplifying youth voices and intergenerational dialogue), *Artistic Exchange & Art Therapy* (Using art a tool for self-expression, sharing stories of home, family and community) and *Artist Story Sharing* (artists share their own community stories through workshops and public exhibitions to facilitate dialogue). Applicants

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were encouraged to utilise the *Facilitator Guide: Facilitating Dialogue for Critical Engagement with Art* (GIZ, 2022) and apply a “do-no-harm” approach to minimise conflict sensitivity risks.

### Project Oversight

The project design also called for a:

- **Technical Grant Supervisor** to provide arts-related technical supervision, support, guidance and advice to the successful grantee to ensure effective delivery of the Arts-4-ADR project and alignment with objectives.
- **Advisory Group** chaired by the British Council Country Director with members from the local chapters of European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) (Goethe Institute and Alliance Française), EU and GIZ-funded Strengthening Social Cohesion & Peace in Sri Lanka (SCOPE) to monitor and advice on implementation.

### Evaluation and Awarding of the Project

In November 2023, SEDR implemented a two-phase review process: administrative eligibility and technical/financial evaluation. In the first phase, an Eligibility Panel assessed proposals against the published criteria. Out of 15 submissions, 10 were initially deemed ineligible and following a successful appeal, 6 proposals advanced to the evaluation phase. The evaluation phase proceeded in two tiers:

- **Tier 1 – An Evaluation Panel**: comprising three external evaluators (including an art consultant, a cultural institute representative, and a civil society representative experienced in reconciliation) alongside the SEDR Team Leader—assessed proposals using a weighted scoring system (80% Technical and 20% Financial) across four criteria: Problem Analysis (15%), Approach/Methodology (50%), Project Management (15%), and Financial (20%).  
Based on consensus, the highest-scoring applicant, MMCA, was recommended for the grant.
- **Tier 2** - The SEDR Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) reviewed and endorsed the recommendation, awarding the project to MMCA with a reserve option for the second-highest applicant.

Key Informant Interviews conducted with several members of the evaluation panel recommended prioritising artistic quality and community engagement over form (how the project is managed) in arts-for-development projects. A strict eligibility criterion favouring organisations with strong formal management, may inadvertently exclude smaller, community-based arts groups. In such instances, a conditional award approach, requiring organisations lacking formal structures to engage project management and financial consultants, could ensure due diligence without excluding deserving applicants.

*“An excellent and unique proposal which responds well to the overall goal and objectives of the SEDR Call for Proposals”*

- **Orlando Edwards, British Council Country Director & SEDR – SRO**  
(on MMCA’s project proposal for Arts-4-ADR)



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# IMPLEMENTATION

## About MMCA

The Arts-4-ADR grant was awarded in December 2023 to the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The MMCA is a non-profit, education-focused initiative establishing a public museum for modern and contemporary art.

The museum collects, conserves, and displays art, emphasising its power to foster dialogue, especially around conflicted histories and social change. Funded by local and international donors (no government funding), and governed by a volunteer committee, MMCA is committed to trilingual education programmes and promoting public understanding of art from the 20th and 21st centuries. Its mission is to spark dialogue, encourage research, and facilitate social transformation and reconciliation through art.

## MMCA's Project Proposal

MMCA's proposal for the Arts-4-ADR project was centred around the concept that as a museum, MMCA is a societal mediator and the museum as a mediator engages with concrete mediation; building networks and understanding from the grassroots up.

The primary goal of the proposed project was to empower marginalised communities in the target regions by fostering critical thinking, increased empathy and building common ground through artistic practice, thereby reducing the root causes of local conflict.

To this end, MMCA adopted the Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) approach as an arts-based methodology for the Arts-4-ADR project, which is a dialogue intervention practice used by the MMCA in their operations to foster open, thoughtful engagement by visitors with the artwork.

RSD is a facilitation method that encourages personal reflection, and mutual understanding through guided questions. This approach allows participants to freely interpret the artwork in a way that resonates with their own experiences, rather than being directed towards a fixed narrative, allowing the participant to form a more personal and relatable connection with the artwork. In turn, these personal narratives offer glimpses into experiences that had shaped these participants' views, beliefs and interests, creating an empathetic and transformative space where assumptions are softened, and new perspectives can emerge.

MMCA proposed the use of the RSD approach in the Arts-4-ADR project through a twofold strategy: (1) commissioning artists to create community-specific artworks and (2) establishing a fellowship programme to train practitioners in applying the RSD approach using the commissioned artworks.

The commissioned artwork serve as a catalyst for dialogue and reflection in workshops held across the target provinces where trained fellows utilised the RSD methodology to facilitate meaningful discussions and reflections on the root causes of community-based grievances while equipping workshop participants

with this arts-based methodology to raise awareness and encourage local engagement in community-based ADR mechanisms.

To that end, MMCA proposed the implementation of the Arts-4-ADR project in three phases:



*“MMCA’s work spoke well to the type of work we were doing. Their proposal for Arts-4-ADR was unique and well thought, and as a pilot initiative, we were all for trying something new.”*

– Jacques Carstens, Team Leader – SEDR



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## ARTIST COMMISSIONS

MMCA commissioned three artists (one from each target province) on a five-month creative process between the period of February and August 2024, to create artworks that directly engaged with the root causes of community-based conflicts, particularly around issues of land rights and gender inequality. The commissioned artworks give agency to the community by allowing them to bring forward their personal narratives and lived realities through visual storytelling which aligns with principles of people-centred justice by prioritising the needs and experiences of the people within the justice system.

### Artist Selection

An open call by MMCA in January 2024 yielded 16 shortlisted candidates (8 men and 8 women). Proposals were evaluated on artistic capacity, thematic relevance, community engagement, logistical competency, and administrative capability. After evaluation, three art practitioners from each target province were commissioned:

- Jasmine Nilani Joseph – Northern Province
- Hanusha Somasundaram – Uva Province
- Anomaa Rajakaruna – Eastern Province

### Artist Research and Production

In April 2024, commissioned artists participated in a one-day ADR training conducted by SEDR. They then undertook a five-month creative process from February to August 2024 which required artists to dedicate four months of field research in their respective districts and engage communities via interviews, meetings, group discussions, and field visits. MMCA's curatorial team maintained regular check-ins with the artists to ensure that ADR principles remained central to their artistic processes.

Between March and June 2024, the artists conducted intensive field research in their respective districts engaging over 300 individuals, of which 236 were women<sup>6</sup>. The artists often spent consecutive days in remote areas to conduct interviews, focus groups and on-site visits, learning about stories of displacement, women's perspectives on landlessness, inter-ethnic tensions, and how they intersected as root causes for community-based conflicts.

MMCA and the Fellows visited the artists in their studios and on-field to review progress. Artists were also connected with SEDR's provincial coordinators to facilitate connection with local mediation boards and community leaders for insight into local ADR mechanisms and challenges in each district.

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<sup>6</sup> MMCA Arts-4-ADR Final Report

## Artists' Commissioned Works

Through their research, each commissioned artist developed a unique artwork reflecting the specific community-based disputes underlying in their respective target province.



**Anomaa Rajakaruna**  
**No More Land (2024)**

Land disputes and gendered displacement in Ampara.

Film maker, Anoma Rajakaruna amplified the often-overlooked voices of women in land conflicts by pairing static landscape imagery with disembodied testimonies. The film functioned as a narrative mediator, encouraging cross-community reflection on shared histories of loss and dialogue on deeper grievances beyond legal disputes.



**Hanusha Somasundaram**  
**நகரும் நிலங்கள் (Shifting Lands) (2024)**

Structural inequalities in land and housing rights on tea estates.

Artist Hanusha Somesundaram used drawings on tea bags in grid-like arrangements akin to plantation line rooms to symbolically contrast a newly paved road disrupting estate communities with a neglected access road. Over 200 drawings on tea bags documented 200 years of land struggles by estate communities in infrastructure development, providing a visual archive of estate workers' marginalization and their rights.



**Jasmine Nilani Joseph**  
**DS Waiting Room (2024)**

Bureaucratic stagnation in land restitution process.

Artist Jasmin Nilani's installation recreated waiting areas of Divisional Secretariat (DS) offices, with benches and drawn-in cardboard files documenting stories from communities in Vavuniya and Mannar whose lands have been lost, annexed or occupied during the war. Recalling from her own childhood memories of waiting in DS offices, Nilani places the audience in the bureaucratic limbo experienced by land-dispute claimants.

Photos Courtesy - MMCA Sri Lanka 2024

## Impact

The commissioned artworks were showcased by MMCA at the public exhibition *Total Landscaping* (MMCA Colombo, Sept 2024-Jan 2025) and in portable displays across eight districts (Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Monaragala and Badulla) covering the three target provinces. The exhibition attracted 8,617 visitors including a significant number of young people (18-30 years old) and first-time museumgoers.

The exhibition was complemented by 40 public programmes that included curator-led tours, workshops, artist talks and interactive sessions, 5 event presentations attended by policymakers and stakeholders and extensive media coverage including social media campaigns and news articles.

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MMCA also reported the following impacts<sup>7</sup>:

- 88.9% of surveyed visitors to the ‘Total Landscaping’ exhibition said it has motivated them to further explore land issues in Sri Lanka.
- 96.5% of visitors reported an enhanced understanding of the root causes of land conflicts.
- Familiarity with socio-political underpinnings of land conflicts increased from 15.2% pre-exhibition to 88.9% post exhibition.
- Artworks and supporting narratives—such as the powerful visual storytelling in Anomaa Rajakaruna’s *No Other Land* (identified by 47.2% of respondents) and Jasmine Nilani Joseph’s *DS Waiting Room* (26.7%)—provoked deep reflection and meaningful dialogue.

## Observations

The artist commissions successfully translated grassroots research into accessible visual narratives, fostering dialogue between policymakers, affected communities, and the general public. As evidenced by the high positive feedback and robust visitor engagement, the artist commissions demonstrated the potential of arts-based initiatives to bring visibility to the lived experiences and grievances of marginalised communities. This visibility is essential in shifting towards a people-centred justice framework where solutions to disputes are co-created with the people most affected by it.

It’s important to note that while the artworks were highly engaging, the chosen narratives by the artists primarily addressed structural and systemic issues in communities that require state policy-level interventions. For example, both Nilani (*DS Waiting Room*) and Anomaa (*No More Land*) highlighted critical community issues of displacement and stagnated land restitution process, underpinning community grievances against the state requiring state interventions rather than community-based ADR mechanisms. A greater alignment between the artistic narratives and ADR mechanisms could bridge the gap between the art and the project’s specific objective to not just spark dialogue, but also demonstrate how ADR approaches and models could actively play a role in these dialogues.

## Lessons Learned

The power of visual storytelling in fostering dialogue was evident and stronger alignment with ADR mechanisms could enhance its practical impact. Deep community engagement and field research were essential in ensuring authentic representation of local community grievances, as it fosters trust and lends credibility to the artwork.

## Recommendations

Where artwork seeks to be representative/reflective of a community dispute, extensive field research is recommended to deepen community engagement and deliver authentic narratives. Projects should also ensure closer alignment between artistic expression and ADR mechanisms with clear parameters and guidelines to focus on community-based disputes. Increased collaboration between artists and ADR experts would also strengthen impact.

*For full discussion of lessons learned and recommendations, see the [Insights & Lessons Learned](#) and [Recommendations](#) sections.*

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<sup>7</sup> MMCA Arts-4-ADR Final Report

## DIALOGUE & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP

MMCA established the Dialogue and Civic Engagement Fellowship programme which aimed to increase awareness of and encourage the use of community-based ADR mechanisms while building capacity to implement their learnings.

The Fellowship is partially built on MMCA's Visitor Educator programme (a programme that equips museum staff with skills and knowledge to actively guide and educate visitors through their experience at the museum) and trains emerging art practitioners, educators, and community leaders in integrating ADR methodologies with artistic practices, equipping them with skills to facilitate civic dialogue on root causes of conflicts.

### Selection of Fellows



Bavaneedha Loganathan

Thamilini Siththiravadivel

Kalyani Suntharalingam

Photos Courtesy: MMCA Sri Lanka

In March 2024, MMCA's call out for the Fellowship received 50 applications from artists, educators, community workers and activists across the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces. After a rigorous selection process, four Fellows were chosen from the target provinces based on their existing engagement and work within their communities to build capacity by transferring their learned skills from the Fellowship among their community.

- **Thamilini Siththiravadivel (Eastern)** – Filmmaker and performance artist exploring gender rights and socio-political engagement.
- **Kalyani Suntharalingam (Eastern)** – Performance artist and community worker focusing on women's empowerment and youth activism.
- **Bavaneedha Loganathan (Uva)** – Filmmaker amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, especially stateless communities.
- **Chanthrakumar Thiveegabalan (Northern)** – Performance artist and counsellor using traditional Koothu storytelling to address community conflicts. Following his subsequent withdrawal, MMCA recruited **Thadsajini Thavachelvam** from Jaffna as a facilitator in the Northern Province to maintain regional impact.



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## Fellowship Structure

The fellowship involved research through fieldwork in the period of June to August 2024, where fellows worked closely with the commissioned artists to integrate art and ADR mechanisms by conducting interviews, field visits and discussions across six districts (Jaffna, Mannar, Hatton, Badulla, Monaragala, Ampara) to understand ground-level challenges in land disputes. They also participated in 48+ hours of ADR training and inter-provincial exchanges.

During a three-month residency in Colombo (September to November 2024), the Fellows received curatorial and operational training, attended a specialised ADR training with SEDR to bridge ADR theory with real-life application, and developed and piloted three ADR integrated lesson plans using the commissioned artworks with arts-based approaches such as storytelling, guided questioning and collaborative problem-solving.

Fellows also facilitated 12 public workshops in Colombo and 15 regional workshops in November 2024 and January 2025 across the target provinces, using the art-based lesson plans to address community grievances and promote conflict resolution.

## Impact

The Dialogue and Civic Fellowship provided intensive training and mentorship to Fellows, equipping them with tools of their own to facilitate art-based dialogue and incorporate ADR approaches and models in their own communities, thereby effectively encouraging the use of ADR mechanisms by fellows as pathways to justice. The Fellowships' impact was demonstrated through:

- **Bringing Awareness to ADR mechanisms:** Prior to the Fellowship, Fellows expressed little understanding of ADR or were skeptical of its effectiveness in real community contexts<sup>8</sup>. Post Fellowship discussions indicated a notable improvement in their understanding of ADR mechanisms, particularly in how art can be used to support conflict resolution.
- **Empowering Fellows as Civic Facilitators:** Fellows gained expertise in ADR methodologies and public programming through the fellowship, allowing them to integrate these approaches into future community projects of their own, which reflects a people-centred justice model by empowering those who understand the local dynamics best to lead the change. *For example: Kalyani Suntharalingam (Eastern) shared that she plans to incorporate art-based ADR techniques into her work with Suriya Women's Development Centre while Bavaneedha Loganathan (Uva) and Thamilini Siththiravadivel (Eastern) shared they intended to apply these methodologies in their independent film making projects<sup>9</sup>.*
- **Using Art as a Tool for Conflict Mediation:** Fellows developed lesson plans and tools that uses art as a tool to lower barriers to discussing sensitive topics like land rights and displacement through visual storytelling sessions, exhibitions and public events.

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<sup>8</sup> SEDR Arts-4-ADR Training Workshop – 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024: At an ADR training conducted for the Fellows, one Fellow expressed her skepticism towards ADR and its ability to bring justice to communities in dispute citing personal experiences.

<sup>9</sup> MMCA Arts-4-ADR Final Report

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## Observations

The Dialogue and Civic Engagement Fellowship equipped practitioners and activists with ADR-based facilitation skills that taught them to facilitate a better understanding of the root causes of community-based grievances through artistic interventions and structured dialogue.

Over the course of the Fellowship, fellows attempted to bridge the gap between conflict mediation and creative practice by using art as a transformative mediation tool. Fellows organically demonstrated the potential of art not just as a tool to raise awareness of existing ADR mechanisms but also as a potential standalone tool in the ADR sector by creating arts-based lesson plans and methodologies to shift conversation from adversarial debate towards constructive dialogue and mutual resolution of conflict.

The three-day ADR training conducted by SEDR to MMCA Arts-4-ADR project personnel, and the fellows in September 2024 was valuable in building foundational knowledge of ADR mechanism and in creating the lesson plans.

The Fellowship exemplifies the project's specific objectives by raising awareness of community-based ADR mechanisms through ADR training and developing lesson plans to foster dialogue on the root cause of community-based grievances as well as empowering fellows as civic facilitators who hope to apply their learnings in their communities.

## Lessons Learned

The Fellowship demonstrated that art-based approaches to dialogue on conflict can serve as a potential standalone tool in informal justice systems by shifting conversations from adversarial debate to constructive dialogue. ADR training was key in facilitating a foundational understanding of ADR mechanisms. Additionally, the programme successfully built capacity and empowered the Fellows to integrate the approach into their own work and in their own communities. However, without continued mentorship, its sustained impact could diminish.

## Recommendations

A long-term Fellowship is recommended for sustained impact with greater collaboration between the Fellows and ADR practitioners to converge art-based tools into already existing ADR approaches and models. Expand ADR training ensure fellows have a strong foundational understanding of community-based ADR mechanisms.

*For full discussion of lessons learned and recommendations, see the [Insights & Lessons Learned](#) and [Recommendations](#) sections.*

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## ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The Arts-based Community Workshops were a culmination of the outcomes of Artist Commissions and the Fellowship, translating the creative and theoretical work done so far into tangible, community-based interventions.

The final phase of the project focused on developing and implementing district-specific Art and ADR workshops that integrated art with ADR approaches to foster critical dialogue on root causes of community grievances, raise awareness on ADR mechanisms, and equip participants with practical tools to resolve community-based conflicts through art. By grounding discussion in lived experiences and using art as an entry point, the workshops created space for deeper community engagement where communities could see ADR approaches and methods as a viable, community-driven solution to disputes rather than a distant, formal process.

Originally, MMCA's proposed target beneficiaries for the workshops was to reach 1,800 participants through large-scale public and school workshops. However, after field visits in July 2024 and community feedback, MMCA proposed a shift towards smaller, targeted workshops engaging those already involved in conflict resolution such as community and religious leaders, activists, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Divisional Secretariat (DS) and Mediation Board Commission (MBC) representatives. This allowed the workshops to have a more strategic impact by equipping those already engaged in dispute resolution with new tools and perspective in their existing work. This shift was justified to SEDR, and upon approval, the scope was revised to a target of 300 participants overall for full-day workshops tailored to the above key stakeholders.

MMCA reached out to local partner organisations in each target province (such as the People's Alliance for Right to Land, Uva Shakthi Foundation and Eastern Diriya Women's Development Foundation) to organise the workshops and recruit participants. Additionally, MMCA engaged with the MBC and DS offices to send representatives to the workshops. While this approach was successful in bringing together a diverse group of participants, collaborating with SEDR's provincial coordinators who already had the resources was an overlooked opportunity. Since SEDR had already trained many community mediators and active citizens in these target provinces, their direct involvement could have strengthened the impact by allowing those already familiar and trained in ADR mechanisms to directly explore how art could complement their work in ADR.

### Workshop Structure

MMCA conducted 15 arts-based regional workshops in November 2024 and January 2025 across 8 districts in the Northern, Eastern, and Uva Provinces, including Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Ampara, Monaragala, and Badulla, engaging over 450 participants.

The Workshops were structured around three core components:

- (i) **Dialogue tools** for engaging in difficult conversations through art;
- (ii) **High-quality reproductions** of commissioned artworks, including a bilingual film screening and installation reproductions and

(iii) **Hands-on lesson plans** developed by the Fellows, often in collaboration with local mediators and community organisations.

By combining these three components, the workshops not only facilitated difficult conversations but also strengthened the connection between community experiences and the broader justice system. The workshops equipped participants with tools to navigate disputes within their own cultural and social contexts, making justice more approachable and relevant to their own lived realities. This aligns with the global people-centred justice movement by emphasising local ownership and inclusive community engagement, advocating for dispute resolution approaches and methods that empower communities towards participatory, community-driven solutions.

## Workshop Content

The workshops followed a structured segmented approach introducing various activities to demonstrate using art as a medium and tool for dialogue:



### 1. Co-creating communication agreements:

At the beginning of each workshop, both the participants and MMCA jointly established co-created communication agreements – mutually agreed-upon rules for engagement for the workshop. These agreements varied from workshop to workshop depending on what the groups prioritised as important to them.

For example: *communication agreements included rules such as asking permission before speaking, not interrupting others while they are speaking, active listening, communicating calmly, adhering to time and active participation from all.*

**2. Identifying Patterns in Conflict:** Participants were asked to reflect on difficult conversations from their communities that escalated into conflict and identify barriers to discussion or dialogue, as well as breaking points where conversations shifted towards confrontation. These included patterns such as interruptions, imbalances of power, louder voices dominating the conversation etc. The participants were then introduced to the concept of Dialogue vs. Debate and guided in shifting focus from argumentation to shared reflection.

**3. Two Circles of Conflict:** Art was introduced to the participants through the introduction of the “**Two Circles of Conflict**” as a metaphor, explaining how a third element, in this case – art, can serve as a bridge to mutual reflection by redirecting attention to a shared focal point to reduce defensiveness and foster understanding by identifying their formative beliefs or experiences that have formed their interest.

**4. Introduction of the Artwork and Close Looking Exercise:** Participants were introduced to the commissioned artwork and guided through a close-looking exercise describing the visual elements of the artwork (colour, texture, composition) before interpreting meaning. Facilitators would encourage reflection through generative prompts such as: *What personal experiences does this artwork remind you of? What*



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*story from your life does this artwork bring to mind?* It's important to note that participants were not given any context or information about the artwork or its artist.

This introduced MMCA's **Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD)** approach to the participants which encourages personal reflection, and mutual understanding through guided conversation using generative prompts. These prompts sparked a broader, reflective conversation, during which participants shared moving personal stories that reframed the discussion.

In this context, participants were allowed to freely interpret the artwork in a way that resonated with their own experiences, rather than being directed towards a fixed narrative allowing the participants to form a more personal and relatable connection with the artwork. These personal narratives offered glimpses into the experiences that had shaped participants' views, beliefs and interests, creating an empathetic space within the workshop where assumptions were softened, and new perspectives emerged into the conversation.

**5. Story-Sharing:** Participants were encouraged to reflect on the artwork and share personal stories connecting elements of the artwork that were relatable to their lived experiences.

**6. The Art-Based ADR Tool:** Participants were taught how to frame conflict-resolution discussions using the RSD approach through generative questioning exercises.

*For example: Participants were asked to work in small groups to reflect on a conflict that wasn't resolved well. They were asked to formulate dialogue using reflective questions and/or art to facilitate a more constructive approach to resolve their conflict. Participants demonstrated a high understanding of reflective dialogue prompts and many participants incorporated elements of artistic expressions together with these prompts, such as plays and documentaries reflecting the dispute, to highlight the conflict and foster deeper reflection.*

## Impact

Overall, MMCA held 17 sessions in total: 15 regional workshops in Tamil and Sinhala languages in November 2024 and January 2025 and two public artwork showcases in Jaffna and Ampara in November 2024.

The workshops exceeded the original target of 300 participants, reaching 463 participants overall, with a diverse range including MBC and DS office representatives, youths, religious leaders, rural development groups, women's organisations, social workers, teachers and estate labourers.

MMCA also reported the following impacts<sup>10</sup>:

- 83% of participants found the sessions highly engaging
- 79% found the workshop content directly relevant to their work and community challenges
- 78% reported increased confidence in engaging in discussions
- 79% felt more confident using art as a tool for conflict resolution
- 75% participants reported improved understanding of ADR concepts through the workshop
- 68.75% recognised the use of art-based dialogue as a valid ADR mechanism; while 31.25% felt that its effectiveness was high yet could be enhanced with further contextual adaptations.
- 100% participants expressed their intent to apply the art-based ADR methods in their communities.

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<sup>10</sup> MMCA Arts-4-ADR Final Report

## Case Studies

The following case studies have been selected based on the consultant's observations of the Arts-4-ADR workshops conducted in November 2024. These examples illustrate key dynamics that emerged during the sessions, and reflects a unique aspect of the workshop experience, demonstrating both the strengths and learning opportunities.

### Vavuniya



In Vavuniya, a workshop was held with 26 participants comprising of community members, officials from MBC, DS office, Local Inter Religious Committee (LIRC), and local youth. Initial engagement from participants was hesitant and reluctant with few dominant voices leading the conversation. However, there was a significant shift in engagement after the introduction of the artwork. Participants were asked to describe elements of the artwork that called out to them and share personal stories related to it. This sparked emotional conversations about war-related memories and the post-conflict issues and challenges the communities face. As participants reflected on their experiences, the conversation became more inclusive. A notable dynamic emerged, where MBC and DS officials were able to step in and offer solutions to grievances shared by some participants, creating a bridge

between the public and officials. Post workshop, one official from the DS office shared that *“as people in service, we heard problems in the community we didn't know existed. At the same time, we got the opportunity to share resources and help people who didn't know we could help them.”* This case study effectively demonstrates how the project's specific objectives were realised: dialogue on root causes of community grievances emerged through the commissioned artwork, making discussions more inclusive of community perspectives. MBC and DS officials were able to offer solutions to some voiced concerns, raising awareness of ADR mechanisms available to these communities and by connecting participants with available dispute resolution resources, the workshops encouraged the use of ADR mechanisms by these participants.

### Batticaloa

In Batticaloa, a group of 25 young participants, aged 18-23, joined the workshop. The participants all knew each other as they learn at the same institute. As a result, these participants were comfortable engaging and sharing stories from the very beginning of the workshop and even shared common conflicts. During the story sharing component of the workshop, one participant questioned the necessity and value of sharing personal stories in a group, stating that *“it achieves nothing”*. Other participants engaged in response with their perspectives on why it's important to share and there was a brief moment of discord

between the one participant and his peers. At this point, the facilitator stepped into the discussion and asked the participant 'why' he felt sharing his experiences achieved nothing. It was only in response to this reflective question that the participant reveal that he often felt that, in similar conversations, his experiences and losses during the war were not heard or acknowledged due to his association with a side of the conflict that was often villainised. His explanation caused a notable shift in attitude and gathered understanding from his peers who previously disagreed with him. This moment became significant as it showed how the facilitator's reflective questioning using the RSD approach in a discussion with contrasting perspectives created a safe space for dialogue and led to peer understanding, highlighting how reflective structured dialogue can create space for the recognition of personal narratives that might otherwise remain unspoken when conflicts between groups are confronted directly.



## Ampara



Anomaa Rajakaruna's film *No More Land*, which was based in district of Ampara, was screened at a workshop held in Ampara. It was well received by the participants as it resonated deeply with them as they saw their local issues concerning land, human-wildlife conflicts reflected in the artwork. Many participants expressed that the film helped them recognise commonalities across communities and this led to a very engaging session where participants were highly interested in sharing their grievances and experiences with others. However, while this led to rich discussions, facilitators were unable to fully execute the lesson plans, particularly the component aimed at teaching participants to use the art-based tools in conflict resolution due to constraints of time, which perhaps left

participants with a sense of having shared their grievances without tangible tools to address them. This was a unique occurrence in the execution of the workshops, but it demonstrated a challenge in arts-for-development projects - while art can open doors for dialogue and reflection, the ultimate goal of equipping participants with a tangible tool, in this case, art as a tool for conflict resolution, must be prioritised with careful attention to timing and structure and facilitators must find a balance in the emotional engagement and practical training elements of the project.



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## Observations

Many participants arrived at the workshop with little to no prior knowledge of its purpose or content, with many expressing that they had primarily come to learn about art. However, at the end of the session, there was a noticeable shift in perception, a significant number of participants were enthusiastic about the potential of using art as a tool for conflict resolution.

An officer from the Justice for People NGO in Cheddikulam shared how the workshop shifted her perspective on how disputes can be approached: *“When people come to us with a dispute, we jump straight into the issue and ask direct questions from the parties about what happened. That’s not always effective, especially if the parties are still angry and charged about the situation. But now we see how framing questions in a less direct and sensitive way can allow us to have a more productive conversation. This way, both parties will feel heard, and they will be more amenable to negotiate and resolve the issue.”*

Similarly, in Muthur, a training officer from the MBC expressed his interest in incorporating art into the mediation process: *“I want to see if we can use art in some of the cases that come to us, where after hearing from both parties, we can have someone from the MBC illustrate their dispute in visual form and make it a part of the conversation. This could help parties express themselves and their perspectives through the artwork instead of engaging in direct confrontation of the issue. It may not be a quick solution, but today I saw real value in having people share their stories and reflect on their experiences.”*

More broadly, the workshops highlighted the importance of collaboration in arts-for-development projects such as this, which sought to introduce art as a tool to encourage the use of community ADR mechanisms. While artists and cultural organisations can highlight social issues and spark critical dialogue through artistic expression, they are unlikely to have the technical expertise necessary to responsibly engage and encourage the overarching goal. In this case, MMCA brilliantly executed SEDR’s first objective to facilitate dialogue regarding root causes of community grievances through commissioned artwork and their pedagogical approaches. However, the effectiveness of raising awareness and understanding of ADR mechanisms and encouraging their use could have been enhanced with SEDR’s direct involvement. Since SEDR holds the technical expertise in ADR mechanism, its contribution to the workshop structure and content would have provided more responsible engagement with the participants on ADR approaches and models.

It was also observed that the artwork commissioned for each province was very well received by the participants of that respective province. The impact was most pronounced in workshops where participants could see their own realities mirrored in the work. For instance, *“DS Waiting Room”* by Jasmine Nilani Joseph was particularly impactful in the Northern province and in the Batticaloa district of the Eastern province, where participants easily related to the themes of displacement and land reclamation struggles. Similarly, in Ampara, *“No More Land” Documentary* by Anomaa Rajakaruna sparked engaging discussions, with participants recognising members of their own community and their struggles with land resettlement, ethnic conflict and human-elephant conflicts as a reflection of their own. One participant in Ampara said that seeing Anomaa’s film was like *“seeing a reflection of my life. I wish this film is screened to the public and the officials because it shows what I can’t directly say.”*

This is worth noting as at the main public exhibition in Colombo, the response to the artwork was markedly different in the sense that while the visitors were equally engaged with the artwork, they engaged with it from an external perspective, expressing curiosity about the context and conflicts depicted in the artworks.

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It highlighted a contrast in reception between those who saw their lived experiences reflected in the art and those who viewed it from an outsider's viewpoint. This demonstrated that the effectiveness of the art-based tool is greatly enhanced when the art is tailored to the specific community or conflict.

Post-workshop feedback also highlighted two key challenges: first, that one-day workshops were too brief as participants expressed that they only had opportunity to grasp the art-based methodology and desired for more opportunities to receive training on its practical application in their communities. Secondly, though MMCA provided participants with printed lesson plans outlining how to use and teach the art-based tool and participants were eager for the workshop to be disseminated to more people in their communities, some expressed that they would prefer external facilitators to conduct these workshops to lend credibility, highlighting the need to adopt a long-term training model to empower these participants with the confidence to transfer their learnings independently to their communities.

Moreover, an unexpected but significant aspect of the workshops observed was the deep emotional response some participants had to the artwork. In certain workshops, some participants engaged with the artwork on a personal level, recalling difficult memories and lived experiences that were often traumatic. This highlights that as powerful as art can be, there is also a sensitive nature of art that evokes personal histories. As a result, it is crucial for facilitators to adhere to the do-no-harm principles when using art as a tool for dialogue, particularly in post conflict or trauma-affected communities.

## **Lessons Learned**

The workshops produced evidence that art-based methods can create safe spaces for dialogue and conflict mediation. Participants engaged enthusiastically and openly with the process, but some expressed reluctance to facilitate similar workshops or share learnings without external guidance. This illustrated the need for structured capacity-building efforts beyond one-time training. Additionally, the effectiveness of the artwork and the art-based ADR tools was demonstrably enhanced when the artistic narratives were customised and closely aligned with community-specific conflicts. The workshops also revealed that stronger collaboration with ADR practitioners is necessary for a project with the dual objectives of raising awareness of ADR mechanisms and actively encouraging their use, as art practitioners are not equipped to deliver the specialised technical expertise on ADR mechanisms. Moreover, artworks can trigger emotional responses that facilitators were not always fully equipped to handle; therefore trauma-sensitive facilitation is necessary to avoid re-traumatisation.

## **Recommendations**

Community-specific customisation is important when using/creating an art-based ADR methodology/tool. Public community elements such as workshops should be co-designed and co-delivered by experts to ensure engagement but also benefit in engaging. To measure true impact, a long-term programme over one-day is recommended where participants are trained over a period of several months with capacity-building models in place, such as train the trainer approaches to empower participants to facilitate sessions independently and ensure sustainability.

*For full discussion of lessons learned and recommendations, see the [Insights & Lessons Learned and Recommendations](#) sections.*

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## INSIGHTS & LESSONS LEARNED

- **Art as a Bridge for Dialogue:** The project demonstrated the power of visual storytelling to engage diverse audiences, particularly those unfamiliar or distrustful of formal justice systems. Art facilitated non-adversarial dialogue, allowing communities to express grievances, share lived experiences, and build empathy across divided groups, making complex-socio political issues more accessible. The artwork and the reflective nature of the workshops sometimes triggered intense emotional responses, highlighting the need to integrate strong trauma-informed training in adherence to do-no-harm principles in arts-for-development projects.
- **ADR Awareness through Creative Expression:** Fellows and participants reported an enhanced understanding of ADR principles post-fellowship and workshops. In addition to highlighting existing ADR mechanisms, the project also demonstrated the potential for art itself to be a unique tool for shifting conflict resolution from adversarial debate to constructive storytelling and reflection. This art-based tool together with the reflective structured dialogue approach has potential to be explored as an independent approach or a complementary approach to conflict resolution.
- **Multi-Level Impact and Inclusive Participation:** Extensive field research ensured that artistic outputs authentically reflected community narratives, fostering trust and legitimacy. The workshops engaged diverse stakeholders (youth, women, mediators, local officials) adopting a participatory approach that prioritised the voices of marginalised groups. The project operated at multiple levels: community workshops engaged local and regional beneficiaries and the main public exhibition in Colombo engaged on a national level. The project also demonstrated cross-sector collaboration between the arts, justice and community development sectors, offering a replicable model for integrating cultural initiatives within the ADR and justice sectors.
- **Need for Closer Alignment with ADR Frameworks:** Stronger collaboration with trained ADR practitioners in integrating ADR approaches and methods could enhance the effectiveness of using art-based methods in dispute resolution.
- **Sustainability and Capacity Building Gaps:** The short-term nature of the project limited the long-term sustainability of the impact delivered by the project. The lack of a long-term mentorship or continued support for the implementation of train-the-trainer models in the Fellowship and community workshops limited the sustainability of the approach beyond the project's lifecycle.
- **Adaptive Approaches & Responsive Programming:** MMCA maintained an adaptive approach in all components of the project. The Fellowship's emphasis on iterative learning; refining lesson plans through pilot sessions and incorporating real-time feedback, and post-workshop debriefings across all 15 workshops ensured a flexibility that allowed project components to be adapted to on-the-ground situations. As a donor, SEDR maintained a low-interference, high-accountability model, allowing MMCA autonomy while providing structured check-ins and accountability through the Advisory Panel to ensure alignment with project objectives. This approach fostered innovation and local ownership, demonstrating good donor-implementer relationship.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report provides a number of recommendations to ADR policymakers and development practitioners as well those engaged in artistic practices such as artists, museums and cultural institutions.

- Policymakers on ADR and justice should further explore the role of arts in conflict resolution by engaging in evidence-based discussion on how creative/artistic approaches can enhance access to justice, particularly for marginalised and conflict-affected communities. Pilot programmes within national and regional ADR sector should be explored to recognise and integrate arts-based approaches into established ADR training curricula.  
*For example, the Mediation Board Commission of Sri Lanka which follows a five-step mediation procedure should explore the possibility of integrating art as one of the techniques in the third step of identifying the interests of the parties as well as the success of using the Reflective Structured Dialogue approach as a communication technique utilised in mediation by the mediators.*
- Strengthen partnerships between the arts, justice and development sectors to combine artistic expression with access-to-justice programmes by facilitating close collaboration between the artists and development practitioners and establish knowledge-sharing networks and evidence of what works to up-scale or replicate successful models that can be adapted to new contexts.
- Developing the skills of the local people and local NGO's are important for project sustainability. Invest in long-term, train-the-trainer programmes and mentorship initiatives to empower local mediators, community leaders and cultural practitioners to help deliver the programme locally and reinforce learnings and disseminate skills, knowledge and know-how among their communities ensuring the benefits are sustained over time.
- Programmes should be designed around the local culture where artistic interventions reflect the specific conflicts and cultural nuances of each community. Art-based interventions should include participatory components that allow communities to actively contribute to the creative process, fostering trust and ownership over the narratives being shared.
- Encourage multi-donor engagement to fund long-term cross-sector initiatives that engage art, justice and community development as art displayed strategically over time can keep difficult social issues in public consciousness to ensure they are continuously addressed rather than forgotten over time.

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## CONCLUSION

The Arts-4-ADR project implemented by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, has demonstrated the transformative potential artistic expression can play in fostering social cohesion and people-centred justice. Their power to engage communities on an emotional, reflective, and empathetic level means that art, in its many forms, has a unique ability to engage communities in conflict through a common element. While art alone cannot address nor resolve deep-seated issues of conflict, by giving communities a third external element to potentially find middle ground in, art can work as a part of a spectrum of interventions to create inclusive spaces for dialogue and community engagement around conflict resolution.

This project was conceived as a pilot initiative—a first-of-its-kind proof-of-concept designed to test whether integrating art into ADR approaches and models is a viable approach. The high levels of engagement, positive feedback and increased understanding of ADR following the project indicate that arts-based interventions can function both as advocacy tools and as informal mediation mechanisms. The project's implementation by MMCA revealed that, even in its experimental form, art can help transform conflict dynamics by fostering empathy and facilitating reflective open dialogue.

However, it is important to note that the project was implemented with limited long-term monitoring; and the insights presented here, and the recommendations that follow, are solely based on the consultant's implementation observations, key-informant interviews and post-completion statistics provided by MMCA. Further evaluation and evidence are necessary to fully understand how to harness the potential of arts-based approaches for community-level conflict resolution.

With further refinement, closer alignment with the ADR sector and active policy-level support, the potential to scale and replicate this Arts-4-ADR model is significant.



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## Annex: List of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

During the period of September 2024 to January 2025, several individuals were interviewed to gain insight on the implementation of the Arts-4-ADR project. Many of these interviews were conducted one-on-one while some took place during field visits and workshops. These interviews provided valuable insight for this report. This is a list of key informants interviewed and their affiliations (where appropriate);

1. Jasmine Nilani Joseph, Commissioned Artist – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024
2. Senthuraan Sivanathan, SEDR Provincial Coordinator (Northern Province) – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024
3. Bonny J. Vincent, SEDR Provincial Coordinator (Eastern Province) – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024
4. Chandra Kumara, SEDR Provincial Coordinator (Uva Province) – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024
5. Menika VanderPoorten, Arts-4-ADR Technical Grant Support – 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2024 and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025
6. Nathalie Johnston, Consultant: Arts-4-ADR Concept Note – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024
7. Aaranya Rajasingam, Arts-4-ADR Evaluation Panel & Advisory Panel – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024
8. Bavaneedha Loganathan, Fellow – Dialogue and Civic Fellowship – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024
9. Jan Ramesh De Saram, Arts-4-ADR Evaluation Panel & Advisory Panel – 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024
10. Anomaa Rajakaruna, Commissioned Artist – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2024
11. Sandev Handy, MMCA Senior Curator and Arts-4-ADR facilitatory – 26<sup>th</sup> November and 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025
12. Jacques Carstens, SEDR Team Lead – 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024
13. Amalini De Syrah – MMCA Arts-4-ADR Project Manager – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025
14. Indika Perera, SEDR Key Expert – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025
15. Udara Jayasena, SEDR, Key Expert – Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025
16. Workshop participants, Mannar – 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024
17. Workshop participants, Cheddikulam – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024
18. Workshop participants, Vavuniya – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024
19. Workshop participants, Kinniya – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024
20. Workshop participants, Muttur – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024
21. Workshop participants, Batticaloa – 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024
22. Workshop participants, Ampara – 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> November 2024
23. Workshop participants, Monaragala - 25<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024