

External Evaluation of the PHRD Programme in Sri Lanka (2015–2025)

By Dr. Farah Mihlar and Nilshan Fonseka

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Executive Summary

The PHRD programme is characterised by a rich and powerful constellation of strengths that were consistently evidenced across the qualitative research. These strengths span the alignment of objectives with Sri Lanka’s contextual needs, driven by expertise and well-established experience, to flexible and approachable responses grounded in local realities. The programme’s exceptional grasp of the complex local context, its multi-track engagements that centre victims, and its unimposing, trustworthy, discreet, and impartial approach rooted in civil society and beneficiary needs confer upon it a standing of rare distinction.

This evaluation must be read against this record of strengths.

Sri Lanka underwent dramatic changes during the period of evaluation, 2015-2025, from the unexpected electoral defeat of an authoritarian post-war ruling party and openness towards building a just-peace, to potential return to conflict, then a regression to authoritarian-majoritarian nationalism, a global pandemic which crippled the country, followed by an unprecedented financial crisis, a people’s uprising or ‘Aragalaya’ that effectively brought down a government, a phase of transitional rule, and the eventual radical democratic removal of the political old-guard and election of the National People’s Power (NPP). The PHRD programme had to navigate this difficult and rapidly changing political and security landscape, demanding persistent flexibility and responsiveness.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods design structured around the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. Evidence was gathered through an extensive desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with national and international stakeholders, and was analysed using reconstructed theories of change, outcome harvesting, contribution analysis and thematic coding across the ten-year period. A critical analysis and time-series were applied to distinguish key phases of the programme and relate emerging findings to shifts in the political context. The evaluation was further guided by participatory and rights-based approaches which foregrounded local perceptions of change, minority and gender perspectives, and stakeholder definitions of results in the absence of a formal results framework.

The evaluation found that whilst the programme consistently maintained strengths through the ten-year period, the high relevance to context, stakeholders and achievement of objectives attained in the first half 2015-2019 was not maintained at the same level between 2020-2025. This is not to say the programme was unsuccessful, but it was unable to consistently reach the high bar set in the first half (2015-2019). This was largely due to unprecedented challenges the programme faced not just limited to the pandemic and the political and economic crises, but also the security threat faced by an embassy staff member which had a far-reaching impact. The more recent shift in direction, for example, working on reconciliation with the ‘troika’, the diplomatic grouping with South Africa and Japan, has yielded mixed results; conceptually welcomed, even described as ‘brilliant’ but critiqued in terms of process and approach, which affected coherence and relevance of the actions.

The table below provides a summary of how the programme performed against the OECD-DAC criteria, consolidating the findings of this evaluation.

Interpretation of colour coding:	High	Medium-high	Medium	Medium-low	Low
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Key Evaluation criteria	2015-2017	2017-2019	2019-2021	2021-2023	2023-2025
Relevance to context	Green	Green	Red	Light Green	Yellow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions in first half; supporting victim groups, developing DWP into national policy, advancing constitutional reform, and strengthening institutions - strongly aligned with contextual needs at the time. Relevance declined in the second half mainly due to unprecedented external and security challenges. Work with the troika, strengthening FoDs, and engaging Buddhist monks with select Tamil diaspora (leading to Himalaya Declaration) were strategic but lacked coherence 					
Relevance to stakeholders	Green	Light Green	Yellow	Light Green	Yellow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families of Disappeared (FoDs): Work consistently relevant and ensured victim recognition. Early documentation and engagement legitimised the group nationally and internationally. Recent north-south network and approach in selection of individuals affected relevance. Civil Society: Strong relationships built through committed support to key and diverse set of actors. Reduced presence after the 2019 embassy incident affected northern ties. Coherence issues with the troika and Himalaya declaration (23-25) reduced relevance. National Political Parties and Government: Relevance remained high; stronger links to the current ruling party are needed. International Partners and Missions: Relevance generally high but declined since 2019 due to limited censure of GoSL for unmet commitments and recent incoherence on international accountability vis-à-vis work with troika. 					
Coherence	Green	Light Green	Yellow	Light Green	Red
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notable issue of coherence on aligning DWP objectives with diverse stakeholder groups such as military, government officials and FoDs/victims. Coherence more seriously declined in recent years over disconnect between troika positioning on domestic DWP process and demand by key PHRD national and northern partners for international criminal accountability. 					
Effectiveness – meeting objectives	Green	Green	Red	Light Green	Yellow
Effectiveness – achieving outcomes	Green	Green	Red	Light Green	Yellow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives and significant outcomes largely achieved throughout the period. Achievement of objectives affected in 2019 by security challenges and unsupported strategy changes, ex: work on diversity management. Objectives on civil society strengthening and keeping SL on international agenda limited later due to incoherencies in last few years. 					
Efficiency – cost to result benefit	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant results and impact consistently achieved for minimum spending. 					
Synthesis – strengths vs limitations	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple and diverse strengths including exceptional relationship building, courageous and readily available engagement grounded in local realities, well established experience, expertise, credibility and trust, discretion and unimposing approach significantly outweigh; Limitations of insufficient grounding in international human rights, minority rights laws and critiques of transitional justice; recent communication weaknesses and overall gaps in programmatic development, monitoring and reporting. 					

Overall, the evaluation identified a strong set of outcomes demonstrating effective progress toward programme objectives. Impact is evident across four areas:

- **The PHRD Programme maintained transitional justice and reconciliation on the national agenda**, even at moments political leadership sought to diminish or suppress it,
- **Strengthened the recognition of families of disappeared (FoDs) as a legitimate and central victim group**,
- **Enabled a democratic expression of the public's desire for radical change**, with strategic engagements during critical junctures (2018 constitutional crisis and the 2022 people's uprising) helping preserve space for peaceful civic mobilisation reflected in the overwhelming electoral shift toward the NPP; and
- Provided **frontline protection and solidarity to civil society organisations and actors**, often the only international mission consistently doing so.

Together, these contributions reflect a programme that has shaped discourse, protected democratic space, and supported those most at risk within the transitional justice landscape.

Both the PHRD programme and Sri Lanka are at a pivotal moment. The new government offers **opportunity for the programme to bring all its previous work to a level of fruition**. However, the political organisation, ethos, and approach of the NPP is incomparable to any previous party that the PHRD programme has engaged with in the past. **Utilising the same tactics and methods are unlikely to gain much ground with the NPP, the programme needs to not only identify new interlocutors and points of engagement but additionally rethink and reconsider its approaches**. Following the devastating impact of cyclone Ditwah, humanitarian and development needs are likely to take priority in the short-term, moving human rights and peacebuilding temporarily to the backburner.

Emerging from the recommendations and noting the current context the following **three key takeaways offer strategic priorities for the next phase of the PHRD programme**:

- Use the current period to **deepen networks within the NPP, broaden the interlocutor base** to include individuals who understand and work closely with the party, and **build bilateral trust** through coordinated engagement – including, where appropriate, through other Swiss government channels supporting recovery and reconstruction.
- **Return to working on a political solution** to the ethnic conflict by a) providing bilateral expertise on federal and decentralised models that demonstrate how local empowerment can benefit pluralist societies and b) facilitating dialogue between minority parties and the NPP to work toward consensus on constitutional reform.
- **Continue engagement with the troika on dealing with the past but do so with more explicit clarity on positioning regarding criminal accountability, and take a more proactive role in facilitating troika engagement with government and civil society**. Findings suggest that lack of relevance and gaps on coherence were largely a result of approach and communication rather than on the mechanism itself which, given its unique composition, may retain greater influence with the current administration than other Western states. Strengthening, and articulating the internal logic between the programme's support for victim demands for criminal accountability and the troika's broader positioning will be important to avoid misinterpretation and improve strategic alignment.

Whilst the Sri Lankan context has once again shifted and presents new challenges, no other international actor in the country holds the same combination of experience, reputation, and trust to advance peacebuilding and human rights. The programme is well positioned to translate decades of investment and work into a lasting impact by using the current opportunities to move forward with confidence and leadership, to help achieve the long-sought pathway toward peace, justice, reconciliation and democratisation in Sri Lanka.

List of abbreviations and key term

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Civil Society Representative
CTF	Consultation Task Force
DWP	Dealing with the past
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FoDs	Families of disappeared and missing
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GR	Gotabaya Rajapaksa
HRD	Human Rights Defender
HSA	Human Security Advisor
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
NPP	National People's Power
OMP	Office of Missing Persons
PHRD	Peace and Human Rights Division
RW	Ranil Wickremasinghe
RTI	Right to Information Act
TJ	Transitional Justice
ToC	Theory of Change
ToT	Training of Trainers
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN HRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

Aragalaya: The 2022 mass protest movement in Sri Lanka against the economic crisis, which contributed to the resignation of the President and government.

Himalaya Declaration: A declaration signed between the Global Tamil Forum and senior Buddhist clergy identifying a common vision for reconciliation, peace and unity in Sri Lanka.

Troika: The tripartite diplomatic effort between Japan, South Africa and Switzerland to support the GoSL on transitional justice and reconciliation.

Rajapaksa rule: Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005- 2015) and his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa's (2019-2022) presidencies were marked by nepotism with many of their family members in key ministerial positions, including finance held by their brother Basil Rajapaksa.

Yahapalana government: Coalition government with Maithripala Sirisena as President and Ranil Wickremasinghe as Prime Minister voted in on good governance platform.

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1. Introduction

This evaluation was commissioned by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of the Government of Switzerland to evaluate the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) programmatic work in Sri Lanka from 2015-2025. The PHRD programme commenced in Sri Lanka in 2001, and the country has remained a priority for over 20 years, with a Human Security Advisor (HSA) present since 2003.

The aim of the PHRD program in Sri Lanka is to contribute to a sustainable, stable and lasting peace by facilitating dialogue processes that enable stakeholders to address the root causes of conflict and promote democracy and good governance. This is done through three principal areas of work:

- Dealing with the Past
- Dialogue promotion, support and facilitation
- Promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law

1.1 Purpose, aims and objectives of the evaluation

The **purpose** of this evaluation is twofold:

- **Accountability:** to assess the results of the PHRD's program in Sri Lanka over the years and
- **Learning** to generate lessons for improvement.

The latter is with a view to informing the FDFA's decision on future engagement in Sri Lanka.

The **objectives** of the evaluation are:

- To analyse the relevance of the past and present engagement in Sri Lanka with regards to past and current needs;
- To identify and assess the outcome and performance of the engagement (input/output);
- To identify specific components of the engagement, which could be of added value in Sri Lanka for the present and the future, and that PHRD could support;
- To recommend any effort that should be pursued;
- To provide recommendations and lessons learned from the engagement in Sri Lanka and how these could be transferred to other contexts.

Please see Annex 1 for a more detailed explanation on the programme, background and context of case study and scope of evaluation.

1.2 Timeline of background and context

2015

Maithripala Sirisena is elected president, ending a decade of the Rajapaksa family rule marked by allegations of serious violations of human rights and IHL during and after the war.

He forms a coalition government with Ranil Wickremasinghe and co-sponsors a UN HRC resolution promising comprehensive transitional justice process and a new constitution.

**2016 -
2017**

Fissures widened within the coalition government slowing implementation of transitional justice process, GoSL creates OMP and CTF, but distances from both; parliament acting as constituent assembly makes significant progress on drafting a constitution but momentum for reform dips.

2018

Buddhist nationalist extremist attacks targeting Muslims increase across the country - minimal response from government.

Maithripala Sirisena abruptly dismisses Wickremasinghe and appoints Mahinda Rajapaksa as PM. Supreme Court intervenes and reinstates RW.

2019

April: Coordinated Easter Sunday bombings by Islamist militants kill over 250 and injure hundreds, sparking nationwide anti-Muslim violence.

November: Gotabaya Rajapaksa is elected President of Sri Lanka and appoints his brother and former president Mahinda as PM.

Incident involving detention of embassy staff member culminating with closing of Jaffna office resulting in minimal presence in north and temporary reduction of engagement in Colombo.

**2020
-2021**

Covid outbreak imposes limitations on movements and hampers programming activities

Early signs of financial crisis emerge marked by revenue shortfalls, policy missteps and growing economic instability.

2022

Financial crisis worsens leading to large scale public protest movement, Aragalaya, resulting in resignation of government and eventually president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Ranil Wickremesinghe elected President after brief vacuum. Despite leading 2015 reform efforts, focus shifts to financial stability. His presidency sees weaker democratic performance and reliance on Rajapaksa allies, with little change to the political climate.

2024

Public demand for change sees electoral defeat of old parties and NPP's Anura Kumara Dissanayake elected President. The party promotes equality across communities but remains unclear on transitional justice and constitutional reform.

2. Methodology

2.1 Approaches

The following is a summary of the evaluation approaches used in data gathering and analysis. Details and justifications of these approaches can be found in Annex 2.

- i. A critical analysis approach was used to question assumptions and power structures through reflexive thinking and dwell deeper to identify structural factors.
- ii. Time-series analysis was utilised to better understand issues in line with longitudinal changes with findings were analysed and presented in two-year blocks based on key programmatic and contextual changes.
- iii. A participatory constructivist approach allowed for the evaluation to remain grounded in local perceptions of change enabling participants to shape outcomes and results.

These were grounded in a **decolonial, gender and human-rights based** overall approach.

2.2 Methods

DATA COLLECTION	
Desk Review	Over 100 reports by HSAs and other staff; over 100 proposals for programme funding; up to 8 final reports from key partners and key documented outputs were reviewed for the evaluation.
Key Informant Interviews	Semi-structured interviews with the following key stakeholders were conducted: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programme and embassy representatives (Colombo) - 4• Programme representatives in Bern - 10• National Civil Society representatives - 28• Former government representatives - 5• Current government representatives - 2 (local administration)• Members of parliament (former and present) - 7• International interlocutors - 4• International partner representatives - 3• Foreign missions - 2

METHODS OF ANALYSIS:

- **Thematic analysis and coding:** qualitative data was coded and analysed in line with the evaluation framework.
- **Reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC):** as the programme was not based on a theory of change, a recently developed ToC was strengthened through findings.
- **Outcome harvesting:** in the absence of predefined outcomes the research process was used to develop them.
- **Contribution analysis:** recognising the complexity of multiple actors influencing results and impact during the timeframe this method was used to determine plausibility of findings to the programme.
- **Integration of data sources:** while findings largely draw on triangulated data, certain analyses rely solely on desk review materials not available to interviewees but verified with programme representatives.
- In developing the analysis and formulating recommendations, the evaluation team also drew on their collective expertise and contextual understanding to interpret evidence and assess its implications.

Details of evaluation framework can be found in Annex 2.

2.3 Limitations and challenges

A primary limitation of this evaluation is that the project was not designed around formal evaluation criteria. It set objectives but lacked pre-defined outcomes, results, or a systematic monitoring process. This was addressed through reconstruction of the Theory of Change (ToC), outcome harvesting, and a participatory constructivist approach, enabling the evaluation to interpret contributions to results and impact despite the absence of formal tracking.

The multi-track diplomatic and political nature of the work makes evaluation challenging, as actions are adaptive rather than linear. The evaluation uses mixed methods and a generative logic to trace effects, examine causal pathways, and assess influence without assuming linearity.

Measuring impact in peacebuilding is widely recognised as challenging. To address this, we applied a participatory constructivist approach, enabling stakeholders to contribute to interpreting and identifying impact.

Finally, taking into consideration the complexity of this programme – its focus on sustained, process-oriented engagement in a dynamic, multi-actor context – applying conventional evaluational approaches limits the ability to fully capture its nature and value, raising questions about the suitability of such approaches for this type of work.

2.4 Presentation of findings

- **Visualisation:** Findings are primarily presented using graphs, tables, and charts to facilitate quick and clear comprehension.
- **Structure:** Data is structured according to the evaluation framework to maintain alignment with evaluation questions and criteria.
- **Contextual Interpretation:** Contextual information is provided to clarify trends and results.
- **Methodological Explanation:** Where necessary, further clarification on methods is provided alongside findings and analysis to ensure transparency.
- **Framing Synthesis:** Strengths and weaknesses are synthesised according to categories that naturally emerged from the findings.

Relevance / Synthesis	Objectives
High	Fully achieved
Medium-high	Mostly achieved
Medium	Partially achieved
Medium-low	Minimally achieved
Low	Not achieved

The evaluation uses a standardised five-point rating system to summarise performance against objectives and criteria; the table above presents the rating scale, including colour codes and corresponding descriptors. The main report only presents summary of findings and analysis. Detailed explanations of the findings have been annexed.

3. Findings

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Relevance to context.

EQ 3.1.1: Was the PHRD programme relevant to context?

Finding 1: The programme was highly relevant in its early phase, but relevance varied in the second-half as it struggled to adapt to the rapidly shifting and volatile context while maintaining coherence.

Period	Relevance
2015-2017 Start of Yahapalana govt.	High
2017-2019 Fall of Yahapalana govt.	High
2019 Elections: return of Rajapaksas	Medium
2019-2021 Start of GR period and embassy incident	Low
2021-2023 Aragalaya, economic crisis and RW presidency	High- medium
2023-2025 End of RW period and election of NPP	Medium
2024 Elections: NPP victory	Medium

Time series analysis divided the ten-year period into two-year blocks reflecting key contextual and programmatic shifts. Whilst there is some overlap of issues across these periods each block captures the major contextual features.

Contextual relevance is the extent to which the intervention was appropriately aligned with the political, institutional, and operational environment to support the achievement of its objectives

See annex 3.1 for details.

The programme’s relevance was strongest during the early phase of the Yahapalana government, characterised by prolific and robust engagement. It responded effectively to emerging needs in relation to momentum on transitional justice and constitutional reforms. Switzerland’s expertise and established trust were leveraged to address key gaps in the Sri Lankan national context in line with the PHRD programme’s objectives.

- 2015-2017**
- Singapore-2 – OTI and direct support for constitutional reform.
 - At the forefront of organising and supporting FoDs.
 - Strongly influencing GoSL policy and practice on TJ.
 - Focusing on institutional reform.

- 2017-2019**
- Preparing for collapse of coalition through strengthening existing institutions mechanisms.
 - Maintaining focus on constitution reform.
 - Limited response on attacks on Muslims and insufficient censure of GoSL backtracking on reform.
 - Efforts to mitigate constitutional crisis seen as exceptional.

Widening fissures within the coalition government in 2018, were promptly recognised and carefully analysed through tools such as scenario mapping, with resulting decisions aligned to maintain PHRD objectives and grounded in evidence-based assessment of emerging gaps. Interventions during

the 2018 constitutional crisis and the surrounding political volatility were of very high relevance to the challenging context.

Programme relevance declined sharply between 2019 and 2021 following the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Although this was partly due to challenging circumstances mentioned below, findings indicate an inadequate response to the political and security context, particularly the democratic backsliding and threats to minorities.¹ Many interlocutors viewed this period as a departure from the Swiss Embassy's strong reputation for being at the forefront of human rights and supporting civil society under threat. Criticism was also presented on the programme's insufficient response to attacks on Muslims before and after the Easter Sunday attacks.²

An unexpected security threat involving an embassy staff in late 2019, immediately following the election of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, had a significant bearing on the programme's operations. The incident created a heightened sense of risk that led the embassy to adopt a more cautious approach, including the temporary repatriation of staff, maintaining a low profile, reduced public engagement and closing its field office in the north. While the measures were necessary to prioritise staff safety, the situation limited the embassy's direct engagement, undermined confidence to work closely with stakeholders, and inadvertently weakened its capacity to support civil society and victim groups at a time when threats to democratic space and minority rights were intensifying.

The embassy's swift recovery from this threat and rapid re-engagement with the new government were commendable. However, the new strategic direction on diversity management (framed also as minority rights protection) showed little tangible action beyond a reduced continuation of earlier efforts. HSA reports during this period refer to communications with members of the Rajapaksa family on supporting reconciliation. The objectives of these communications were unclear, particularly given credible allegations of their involvement in war crimes.³

In a context of blanket denial of crimes, engagement with the government could in principle have offered avenues to influence its stance on justice and peacebuilding. However, given their open hostility to

2021 - 2023

- Diplomatic dialogue and coordination of international response important within context limitations.
- Aragalaya interventions and leadership to facilitate transition discussions highly relevant.
- Could have done more to bridge gap between

accountability such engagement was unlikely to yield influence, and a more calibrated approach would have better aligned with the programme's aims.

In 2021-23 the programme increased relevance to context. Some interlocutors claimed that Switzerland's continued presence and visibility – alongside UN Human Rights Council processes – may have helped deter more serious regressions in human rights and democratic governance under the Rajapaksas. Within the limitations of Covid-19

2019 - 2021

- Closing Jaffna office, reduction of engagement, limited support to civil society under threat.
- Revision of objectives responding to new govt., but with limited forward forecasting.
- No clear work on diversity management and poor overall response on minority issues.
- Responding to Basil Rajapaksa call for assistance incoherent with other work.

1 There were two different and interconnected points made here. One is in relation to the programme's inadequate response to the return of the Rajapaksas and the second is on the embassy's internal issue. Interlocutors generally expressed sympathy for the challenges the embassy faced following the arrest and detention of a staff member; however, views differed on how the situation was managed. Several interviewees felt the embassy overreacted by withdrawing from the north and scaling back engagement. Many argued that a firmer stance toward the government could have offered greater protection to civil society actors who were facing similar or even higher levels of threat.

2 Interviewees acknowledged the important mission supported by the programme that visited Kattankuddy immediately after the Easter Sunday attacks noting its significance at a time Muslims in the east were under attack. However, the research found the programme's response to attacks on Muslims at the end of the Yahapalana government, following the Easter attacks and on the government policy to forcibly cremate Covid dead bodies which specifically targeted Muslims, was poor.

3 HSA reports refer to a request made by Basil Rajapaksa for Swiss support on reconciliation please see details in Annex 3.

related lockdown diplomatic dialogues posed a useful tool to rethink and re-strategise. The embassy's role of engaging with diverse actors during the Aragalaya was highly valued and used Swiss strengths of approachability, objectivity, sensitivity, responsiveness and a grounded approach. This was further strengthened through facilitating critical meetings aimed at understanding the context and ensuring a smooth transition.

The final three years of the evaluation period marked a significant shift in direction, raising questions about the programme's objectives, approach, and coherence. Measuring relevance to context is difficult given the transition from the post-Aragalaya Wickremasinghe government to the election of the NPP. Political and public priorities shifted sharply toward economic stabilisation and structural reform post-Aragalaya, for which Wickremasinghe was considered the most experienced to deliver. This left limited space for assertive engagement on accountability, although Wickremasinghe's government introduced the TJ process, it became deprioritised by the financial crisis and his inaction against the Rajapaksa family. Additionally, his efforts to curtail freedom of expression and assembly raised serious doubts on his commitment to human rights and accountability.

The programme's work with the troika in advancing reparative forms of justice was valued by some interlocutors but, combined with confusion over support for TRC (see coherence section), was seen as backsliding from previous stance on accountability.⁴ Initiatives to strengthen FoD leaders and create a common north-south platform for action on paper responded to the needs at the time. However, this approach resulted in excluding some victim leaders as well as civil society that had a history of working with these groups, both of which contradicted with programme objectives such as strengthening civil society and victim groups. Overall, although the main engagements during this period were conceptually relevant to the changing context, shortcomings on process, approach and coherence (discussed below) affected contextual relevance as they did not effectively respond to the political and operational complexities to better achieve objectives.

Finding 2: Though analysed and anticipated, planning and proactive response to major electoral changes are limited.

This was notable both in the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019 and the NPP government in 2024.

In the first instance internal reports anticipated this change though situational and context analysis prior to the elections. The programme did not develop a comprehensive response that met the enormity of challenges faced by victim groups and civil society to the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Apart from actions taken to prevent democratic backsliding, such as strengthening institutions, other measures, for example analysis and forecasting of threats to minorities and victim groups, were below expectations. Embassy staff supported the transfer and safe keeping of data of one organisation in the north and local staff continuously monitored and checked on civil society organisations. However, there was no evidence of a more systematic programme of action, including tracking risk levels and strategising mitigation actions, which was needed at the time considering that in the preceding years several northern civil society and victim groups had publicly provided

2023 - 2025

- Troika potentially significant but issues on coherence and fears of work being instrumentalised by RW to disguise accountability failings.
- Himalaya declaration relevant but credibility affected due to approach
- DWP alumni actively engage with governments to kick-start TJ process though actions raise coherence concerns.
- Work with FoDs yield results but raise criticism from northern and southern civil society.
- Insufficient planning for NPP

⁴ See detailed explanation in Annex 3, the troika recommendations communicated to GoSL largely fall under reparative forms of justice. Confusion on TRC is explained under coherence.

evidence crimes by Rajapaksa family and military personnel close to them, including through projects supported by PHRD.

In the second instance no internal context or scenario mapping prior to elections was documented. The programme relied on OTI scenario mapping, which led to a basic actor mapping. No reports were provided for the assessment of attempted engagements with key NPP actors but in interviews staff explained that they had reached out to Dr. Harini Amarasuriya who after being appointed Prime Minister met with the embassy to discuss Switzerland's federalism model. Harshana Nanayakkara who went on to become Justice Minister is a DWP alumni. Some efforts were made to connect to the NPP politburo and the troika engaged with all political parties to influence their manifestos. However, there is little evidence of substantial analysis of what a NPP victory means to achieving programme objectives and what measures need to be taken to engage with the party and adapt actions where necessary. There had been little or no representation of the NPP in previous dialogues, including in OTI's work.

3.1.2 Relevance to key interlocutors

EQ 3.1.2: Was the programme relevant to key interlocutors: beneficiaries, civil society, government, political parties, international partners?

Finding 3: The programme was highly relevant to most key interlocutors with relevance varying during different periods (see details in Annex 3)

	BENEFICIARY GROUP 1: FAMILIES OF DISAP- PEARED	STAKEHOLDER 1: NATIONAL CIVIL SOCI- ETY	STAKEHOLDER 2: NORTH & EAST CSO'S	STAKEHOLDER 3: GOVERNMENT	STAKEHOLDER 4: POLITICAL PARTY REPS.	STAKEHOLDER 5: INGOS/PARTNERS	STAKEHOLDER 6: OTHER MISSIONS/UN
2015-2017	Validation and recognition through supporting their own actions and facilitating critical meetings	Supporting major actors working on PHRD objectives	Supporting and nurturing important actors working on PHRD objectives	Seen as important partner supporting bilaterally and through institutions (ONUR, SCRM)	At the forefront of engagement with all major actors	Convening power with int. actors used effectively though slow to respond to govt regressing on commitments	Engaging closely with core groups and complementing UN work.
2017-2019							Inability to leverage relationship with GoSI to meet commitments slightly reduced relevance.
2019-2021	Reduced engagement due to security incident; though relevance is low, positioning accounted for security of group	Re-evaluation of engagement, prioritising less sensitive topics - focus on local reconciliation mechanisms	Closing Jaffna office, reduced engagement due to security incident and limitations due to Covid	Did not overtly criticise govt. made efforts to engage positively within prevailing political context	Maintained informal dialogues on constitutional reform and power sharing albeit limited due to Covid and political space. Could have strengthened minority parties.	Loss of momentum and engagement after the security incident and retraction of activities and staff	Remained engaged with UN HRC on resolutions 40/1 and 46/1 though not at the forefront.
2021-2023	Re-establishing contact and engaging on DWP topics with new government which helped sustain advocacy campaigns	Consolidating networks to engage on window of opportunity for reforms - 21st amendment, strengthening independent institutions, etc	Focus was primarily on economic and political crisis, limited consultation on processes (strategy, troika, Himalayan D, etc.). Local officer presence and maintained engagement seen as some support.	Responded positively to RW, largely uncritical and worked through troika	Engaged at multiple levels and created safe space for dialogue	Navigating the crisis period - limited engagement	Used lockdown to brainstorm new strategies for diplomatic action which under circumstances was most relevant.
2023-2025	Victim centred approach through direct engagement, major recognition through troika. Building capacity and networks. Building of north-south network seen as less relevant	Supporting all major actors working on revised PHRD objectives/priority areas	Strengthening civil society initiatives (CMT, CJC, Suriya) and trust building after 2019-23 period. Exclusion on work with FoD and incoherence with troika and Himalaya dec., affected relevance.	The evaluators were not able to get access to govt representatives - unable to establish due to unverified information	Consolidating networks, parliamentary study group seen as highly relevant	Outside of the troika, limited convening power to have an impact on PHRD objectives	High relevance to troika with clear value addition; less relevance to western partners and UN.

3.2 Coherence

EQ 3.2: Were the actions within the programme compatible with each other? Did any actions mutually reinforce others? Were there actions that conflicted with each other?

Finding 4: Conflicts in actions reflect moderate levels of incoherence, driven by communication gaps and divergent stakeholder logic

The graphs illustrate the main points of reinforcement and clashes identified through the ten-year period. The analysis here integrates data sources and relies on critical analysis to identify deeper issues on coherence.

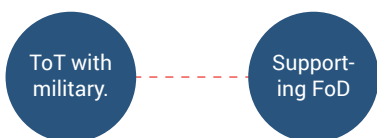
Coherence is measured through:

1. Alignment of activities with objectives
2. Components and stakeholders working towards the same objectives– compliment vs contradict
3. Stakeholders share clear understanding of aims and logic

Though theoretically transitional justice presents as coherent, research indicates real challenges in working with multiple stakeholders to align objectives of peacebuilding and reconciliation with upholding human rights and guaranteeing accountability. Accountability itself is a contested term. Within human rights discourse it refers to criminal accountability for violations, however victims may seek non-legal measures towards accountability.

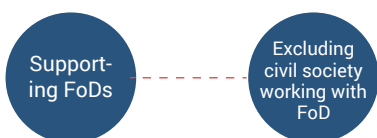
The PHRD’s objectives of dealing with the past and protecting human rights align through a logic of working with multiple stakeholders towards a just-peace. However, alignment of these two objectives in practice is not simple and can contribute to overall programmatic incoherence.

Challenges to internal coherence



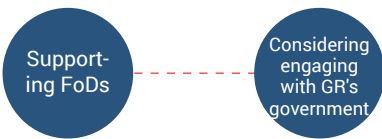
1. ToT not fully aligned with HR/accountability aims.
2. Trained military personal and FoDs aims contradict.
3. Understanding of programme logic not widely communicated.

Insufficient communication led to discovery and alarm among northern civil society of the programme’s work with the security sector (2017-18). Whilst engagement with both groups was aimed at strengthening the TJ process and thereby not inconsistent with the aims of the programme, harvested outcomes reveal that ‘fears of military criminal accountability was marginally appeased’ in Malaysia Training of Trainers (ToT). Criminal accountability for military personal involved in enforced disappearances has been a consistent core demand of FoD leadership advocacy.



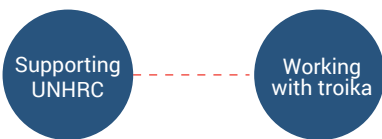
1. Action with FoDs misaligned with objective of supporting civil society.
2. Stakeholders and components clash.
3. Understanding of logic not widely communicated.

Based on their request, families of disappeared were supported to build a network that excluded civil society in the north and south that had played a critical role in organising and advocating for them, whilst programmatic support was maintained to these organisations for work with FoDs.



1. Attempted action misaligned with objectives on HR and accountability.
2. Stakeholders not working together towards common strategy.
3. Understanding of logic not widely communicated or consulted.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa and brother Mahinda Rajapaksa was at the top of the chain of command of the military which was responsible for majority of enforced disappearances. Though unrealised the effort to engage with leadership of this government on reconciliation, irrespective of the conditions, conflicts with work with FoDs and previous and ongoing positioning on justice.



1. Actions align with objectives.
2. Components contributing to different objectives.
3. Understanding of logic not shared.

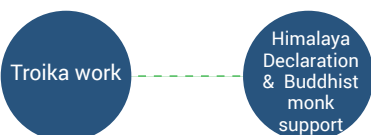
While the two approaches are not necessarily incompatible, PHRD's support for OSLAP's international accountability agenda alongside its work with the troika on a domestic process has appeared incoherent to some stakeholders, largely due to limited communication on the rationale for pursuing both. Incoherence was also noted in occasional delayed responses to engaging on UN HRC process reported by international partners and Bern.

Mutually re-enforcing engagements



1. Actions aligned with objectives.
2. Components mutually reinforce strategy.
3. Logic clear and shared.

Work with provincial councils on statue making and conference on decentralisation compliments strongly the dialogue and other engagement on the constitutional reform process between 2015-2019.



1. Actions partially aligned with objectives.
2. Components reinforce strategy.
3. Logic clear though not openly shared.

Engagement with Buddhist monks in recent years, leading to the Himalaya declaration, complements and reinforces work with the troika on developing justice and reconciliation through a domestic process.

Case Study: TRC and working towards diverse objectives

<p>Northern civil society sees troika as useful and important, but PHRD engagement with them as retreating on ‘hard accountability.’ Tamil MPs hold similar views. They understood the programme and troika to have supported the forming of TRC, discounting voices from the north and east.</p>	<p>Interviews with PHRD Colombo representatives indicated that they did not support the TRC and that the troika following national consultations eventually recommended against forming of the TRC.</p> <p>Two interviews with programme staff in Bern referred to hesitation to strongly engage with UN HRC process over needing to clarify position vis-à-vis troika, especially when government was mooted TRC proposals.</p> <p>DWP alumni created as a result of the PHRD programme to support with a comprehensive TJ process have engaged previous and current governments on setting up TRC. Though independent their association with the PHRD programme results in further incoherence.</p>
<p>Some national and northern civil society argue that troika engagement with the former government, including on TRC, unwarrantedly legitimised President Wickremasinghe and shielded his failings on accountability.</p>	
<p>International partners found the programme soft peddled on accountability citing delays/hesitance to strongly support the Geneva process in order to engage with the government through troika on TRC.</p>	

This case study illustrates challenges to coherence on one particular issue – the programme’s position through the troika in relation to the TRC. Two of three troika members do not publicly advocate for criminal accountability, and their internal communication, as reflected in the non-paper, does not emphasise it. In the Sri Lankan context, support for domestic process risks repeating past patterns in which such processes have avoided genuine accountability for serious human rights violations. While the PHRD programme’s engagement with both the UN HRC process and the troika is, in principle, aligned with objectives on dealing with the past and human rights, in practice programme components and stakeholders did not consistently work towards the same goals.

These inconsistencies became more pronounced when the Wickremesinghe government proposed a TRC without broader transitional justice guarantees. Although the programme and the troika ultimately did not support the TRC, delays and gaps in communication led some stakeholders to believe they did. Civil society actors, particularly in the north, believed that their advocacy against the TRC had been discounted, undermining the programme’s objective of strengthening civil society voices on reconciliation. Moreover, a shared understanding between stakeholders (international partners vs. troika members) was lacking, and the rationale behind the Swiss approach was unclear to many.

3.3 Effectiveness

EQ 3.3.1. To what extent were the overall objectives achieved?

Finding 5: High level of achievement based on criteria of ‘supporting and promoting’ with two out of three fully met and one partially met.

Though not identified as an objective, through reconstructed ToC and outcome harvesting approaches, constitutional reform and a political settlement were identified as objectives. Similarly, democracy has been included with human rights due successful outcomes and results on this.

Support and promote lasting peace and reconciliation by:	
Dealing with the past	
Dialogues	
Supporting constitutional reform and political settlements	Limited in second phase
Promotion, protection and fostering of human rights and democracy	

EQ 3.3.2. To what extent were the strategic objectives achieved?

Finding 6: Five of six objectives were fully achieved in the first half, but progress in the latter period was partial and uneven, reflecting declining coherence and focus.

2015-2019	
Supporting the political dialogue to facilitate and strengthen reconciliation, political reform and inclusive peace	
Supporting the constitutional reform initiative and providing expertise on decentralisation efforts	
Enhancing social cohesion and durable political settlements	Insufficient focus on issues concerning the Muslim population
Supporting the rule of law	
Supporting the implementation of the UNHRC Resolutions	
Maintaining the Swiss presence in Jaffna to preserve good contacts and access to the area	
2020-2025	
Rebuilding the trust with the contacts in the north following the closure of the office in Jaffna	Success affected by disconnect in understanding in relation to positioning on accountability in relation to troika; exclusion on work with FoDs and lack of consultation on Himalaya Declaration.
Keeping Sri Lanka on the international agenda	Affected by incoherence between troika work and Geneva process
Re-focusing on contributing to a new UNHRC Resolution through the input of experts, CSOs, and the diaspora	
Contributing to the creation of a local reconciliation mechanism	

Strengthening the voice of civil society on the topic of reconciliation	Largely achieved but affected by disconnect in understanding in relation to position on accountability.
Engaging with less sensitive topics , such as diversity management instead of the constitutional reform	Support for civil society but no clear course of actions
Providing technical expertise for the constitutional reform process and strengthening CS inputs	Achieved mainly through programme support, minimal direct engagement
Strengthening the Right to Information Commission	
Making contributions against hate speech	No evidence of action
Contributing to an increasing the number of women involved in political processes	Supported reforms on political participation, no major contribution to increasing numbers
The ultimate objective was to put pressure on the GoSL regarding human rights, enforced disappearances and transitional justice	Scrutiny on HR and enforced disappearances, focused work on TJ insufficient ‘pressure’ on GoSL

EQ 3.3.3. What were the positive outcomes of the programme?

Finding 7: The programme achieved extensive progress toward its objectives, evidenced by a wide range of outcomes that demonstrate its sustained influence and effectiveness over the ten-year period

DEALING WITH THE PAST

1. Successful inclusion of DWP model of ‘four pillars’ into President Maithripala Sirisena’s flagship speech on reconciliation and Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera’s outlining of the TJ process to the UN HRC thereby incorporating it into government policy (2015).
2. DWP 2016 alumni contributed to strengthening transitional justice framework, including by government using their road map for implementation (2016).
3. Marginal reduction of opposition to transitional justice process among select military personal following ‘debunking fear of international prosecutions’ in ToTs (2017–2019).
4. Shift in positioning of select military personal following ToTs leading to informal acknowledgement of contribution to violations of international humanitarian laws by the military during the last stages of the war (2017 – 2019).
5. Building evidence base for accountability for FoDs through MCC database of over 4000 cases (2015-2017).
6. Contributing to national level policies and coordination which enabled sensitising military, demilitarisation and land release to enable return/resettlement in the North and East.
7. Contributing to adoption of UN HRC resolutions 30/1 that set up TJ process and 46/1 that called for OHCHR to preserve evidence for future investigation process on violations of international crimes (2021).
8. Establishment of Peace Museum (2022).
9. Forming of DWP alumni group (2022-24).
10. Creating mutual understanding and trust between select FoDs in the north and south (2023-2025).
11. Critical meetings with FoD leaders and key political leaders and institutions (2017-2019)
12. Leading, supporting and facilitating select FoDs to present a joint statement to the Committee on Disappearances and participate in review dialogue with the GoSL.
13. Developing technical knowledge on law, forensics, etc., for select FoDs (2024-2025).

14. Gaining international attention for specific victim groups such as former combatants through meetings and engagement.
15. Formation of troika which offers a unique, international multi-stakeholder approach to dealing with the past that has increased legitimacy in the current global context and higher credibility and acceptance to GoSL, the majority of which disregard western intervention on this issue.
16. Victim recognition and public acknowledgement achieved through troika members' symbolic visit (2024) to main sites where war crimes, including large number of enforced disappearances (surrenderees), took place in 2009.
17. Acknowledgement of particular human rights and justice issues in the east through visit by troika to land related protest sites.
18. Senior and important representatives of Buddhist religious orders publicly calling for accountability and non-repetition in the Himalayan Declaration accountability (2024).

SUPPORTING CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

1. Singapore-2 dialogue provided imprint for constitutional reform process (2015).
2. Local and provincial governance structures strengthened through expertise building such as on statute drafting (2015-2017).
3. Enhancing support for devolution from majority community through provincial council leadership conference statement (2016).
4. Moderating position of select Tamil diaspora, contributing towards supporting national transitional justice and peacebuilding (2020).
5. Parliamentary inter-party caucus on constitutional reform established by OTI (2021)
6. Public coming together of senior representatives of the Buddhist clergy and Global Tamil Forum (GTF) for Himalaya Declaration (2023-24).
7. Senior and important representatives of Buddhist religious orders publicly supporting in the Himalayan Declaration the devolution of power and recognition of communal rights of all groups in a new constitution (2023-25).
8. Recognition of strengths of federalism for Sri Lankan context by group of current parliamentarians, including from ruling party, following study visit to Switzerland (2025).

PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND FOSTERING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

1. Safeguarding democracy and human rights through consensus building by 'shuttling' between core stakeholder to address the constitutional crisis (2018).
2. Addressing and raising awareness on sensitive thematic issues through proactive context assessment, enabling timely high-level engagement and intervention.
3. Safeguarding and protecting democracy and peace through facilitating dialogues between multiple stakeholders for safe transition during Aragalaya (2022).
4. Contributing language on early warning to OHCHR report (2021).
5. Progressive change in tone of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on accountability following financial crisis reached through OTI dialogue related lobbying (2022).
6. Increased knowledge among parliamentarians on financial crisis through OTI workshop (2022).
7. Contribution through OTI parliamentary caucus to the 21st amendment to the constitution (2022).
8. Successful sales and evidence of practical use of publications on Right to Information Act (RTI).
9. Contributing to successful resolution of at least 30 percent of PTA cases handled by CHRD in lower courts.
10. Support to families of victims of torture and prevention of torture during Aragalaya by Bar Association Anti-torture unit.

EQ 3.3.4 What were the negative outcomes of the programme?

Finding 8: Some unintended negative outcomes recorded over the ten-year period, stemming from conceptual and normative gaps, poor coherence, and limitations in processes, transparency, and communication.

DEALING WITH THE PAST

1. Lack of exposure to critical transitional justice research and sole focus on ‘four pillars’ constrained DWP alumni capacity to recommend more context-appropriate measures for Sri Lanka.
2. Limited depth of understanding of Sri Lanka’s religious context (or, for example seeing Buddhist monks as ‘spoilors’) marginalised the role of religion in dealing with the past contributing to reducing the relevance of transitional justice in the local context.
3. Work with FoDs minimally contributed existing divisions within the movement.
4. Deterioration of well-established relationships with select civil society organisations over their exclusion on work with FoDs.
5. No evidence of database on FoD cases developed or used for advocacy.
6. Reduced trust and marginal reputation damage among northern civil society and some key national human rights organisations over incoherence in work with troika.
7. Marginal weakening of long-established relationships with majority of northern civil society over the above.
8. DWP alumni group led by small group of participants and lacking broader consensus on programme of work (only one Tamil reportedly **active** in the group).
9. DWP alumni programme of work perceived as aligning with government by placing less emphasis on accountability for international crimes.

SUPPORTING CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

1. Himalaya Declaration presented by many interlocutors as a top-down process.
2. Himalaya Declaration seen to reinforce the supremacy of Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka.
3. Lack of initial consultation and timely communication with the Tamil communities resulted in rejecting the process and outcomes on the basis that GTF were not the sole representative of Tamil grievances.

PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND FOSTERING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

1. Trust and confidence of most of northern civil society and some national civil society actors affected over gaps in communication on work with troika.
2. Work with troika perceived as support for TRC which was seen by human rights actors as a ploy by the government to deflect from failings on rights, justice and democracy.
3. Swiss government accused by some diaspora groups of restricting visas of victim representatives in public statements at UN Forums.

Explainer: Negative outcomes based on perceptions and perspectives.

Nearly all of the above were harvested through interviews with interlocutors. Programme team’s positions have been accounted for in framing of the outcomes both positive and negative. Negative outcomes include perceptions and perspectives that were presented by more than one person but are not stated factually as they were not verifiable through triangulation. Although perceptions/perspective are not evidence of actual programme performance, they can be an outcome in themselves or contribute towards outcomes because they shape stakeholder understanding, trust and engagement. Some of these perception/perspectives could be accurate, others are a consequence of insufficient communication, gaps in understanding or misconceptions of the actions; nevertheless, they constitute a negative outcome as they exist among key stakeholders and affect trust and credibility.

Unforeseen negative outcomes. Case study: engagement with FoDs

The programme's engagement with FoDs is without doubt one of its most impactful actions. However, some mismanagement and the decision to be led entirely by what FoDs wanted without aligning with the diverse objectives of the programme led to some unforeseen negative outcomes. These have been exacerbated by insufficient communication with other stakeholders. At least three civil society organisations (including from the north) and two individual stakeholders identified the negative outcomes outlined above. The major concern raised was the complete exclusion of civil society actors from the process, even those which support FoDs on legal recourse. Secondly concerns were expressed on influencing of positioning of FoDs through the action.

It is critical to note that work with FoDs is immensely challenging as it takes place in a highly politicised, commercialised and dangerous space. Programme staff have demonstrated courage in pursuing this and endured significant private and public attack by some diaspora groups. Some diaspora groups appear to have launched a campaign against the Swiss government through public statements at the UN accusing them of denying visas to FoDs and Human Rights Defenders to speak at UN Forums.

Inevitably working with FoDs could not have avoided contributing to existing divides within the movement. However, the findings of the evaluation revealed that the inclusion criteria for the actions were not clear, leading to confusion and contributing to divisions in an already fraught environment.

Better and more open communication of the importance and impact of this action, how it aligns with the objectives of the programme and the logic of action, could have reduced some negative outcomes.

Analysis: Outcomes and results moving forward: revising perspectives and approaches

To push forward outcomes and results in the current political context, rethinking and revising perspectives and approaches may be required. Whilst recommendations on this are beyond the scope of this evaluation based on the findings, the following analysis and suggestions are being proposed:

- a. Gaining leverage and trust with NPP requires not only expanding networks into the party structures, but also recognising their very different ideology, politics and way of working. The programme will indeed need to cultivate contacts in NPP and JVP but must also enhance understanding of how they work and revise approaches accordingly. The conventional methods and approaches to engagement used with mainstream political parties and civil society is unlikely to succeed with the NPP.
- b. Work on DWP/TJ needs reassessment based on critical reflection of incoherences raised here. Behind the more obvious issues of communication are strategic and normative decision on for example pursuing criminal accountability, especially at the international level, as FoD leaders and some northern civil society want. The troika is likely to have more leverage with this government than other options, but internal and external clarification is needed on how working with them towards a domestic process meets PHRD's previously upheld positions on human rights protection and criminal accountability.
- c. Established work with Buddhist monks needs re-evaluation in line with NPP and recognising impending and continuing role of nationalist forces. They remain influential and moving away from framing of 'spoilers' to more respected and valued recognition of support for normative positions on dealing with the past and constitutional reform may be necessary.

- d. Developing work with all religious groups on dealing with the past may help gain greater credibility for the process. This is not necessary through an ‘actor’ based approach but one that sees the value in religious interpretations that support international normative positions DWP.
- e. Engagement with a diverse range of civil society actors, both in the North and South, with the aim of supporting more structured opportunities for them to inform governmental decision-making on transitional justice and related reforms is necessary. As the NPP administration is still relatively early in its period of governance, there may be scope for constructive collaboration that draws on civil society insight, research and experience. Creating pathways that enable this engagement could support more informed policy development and increase the likelihood that transitional justice priorities translate into practical outcomes.

3.4 Efficiency

EQ 3.4.1 What were the results achieved?

Finding 9: Substantial and significant results were achieved by the programme despite the challenging and dynamic operational context during the ten-year period. These are:

1. A **cohort of transitional justice experts** among diverse stakeholders developed through sustained DWP trainings **successfully influencing and developing transitional justice mechanisms and process.**
2. Through bilateral engagement and troika, **maintained transitional justice and reconciliation in the national agenda** by making recommendations grounded in national and victim consultations to high and multiple-level political actors.
3. **Strong and established relationships** with a range of diverse civil society organisations reflecting approachability, objectivity and sustained collaboration.
4. Significantly and uniquely contributed to **ensuring democratic and peaceful transitions** in extremely volatile and unstable political conditions.
5. Distinctive strong and **established relationships with civil society in the north** through grounded, supportive and sustained engagement including through presence of local staff.
6. **Strengthening and enhancing select leadership of FoDs.**
7. **Enabled recognition for victim groups such as former combatants and ‘surenderrees’ through sustained support and international attention.**
8. **Established credibility as trusted, reliable, committed, approachable, collaborative** international actor.
9. **Established reputation as uniquely unimposing, objective, neutral and discrete** international actor.
10. **Well-established expertise and experience on dealing with the past and facilitating dialogue.**
11. **Strengthening of core institutions such as HRC, RTI and OMP** working on democracy, human rights and dealing with the past.
12. **Right to Information (RTI) Commission** effectively utilised at village and community level due to awareness raising programmes.
13. **Some demilitarisation of land and reduction of military owned businesses** through security sector reform work.

EQ 3.4.2 Were the outcomes and results achieved in an economical way?

Finding 10: Resources were applied proportionately to strategic priorities, leveraging comparative advantages and delivering outputs that were high in value relative to their modest financial input.

Finding 11: The programme also demonstrated adaptability with funding to evolving contexts and needs.

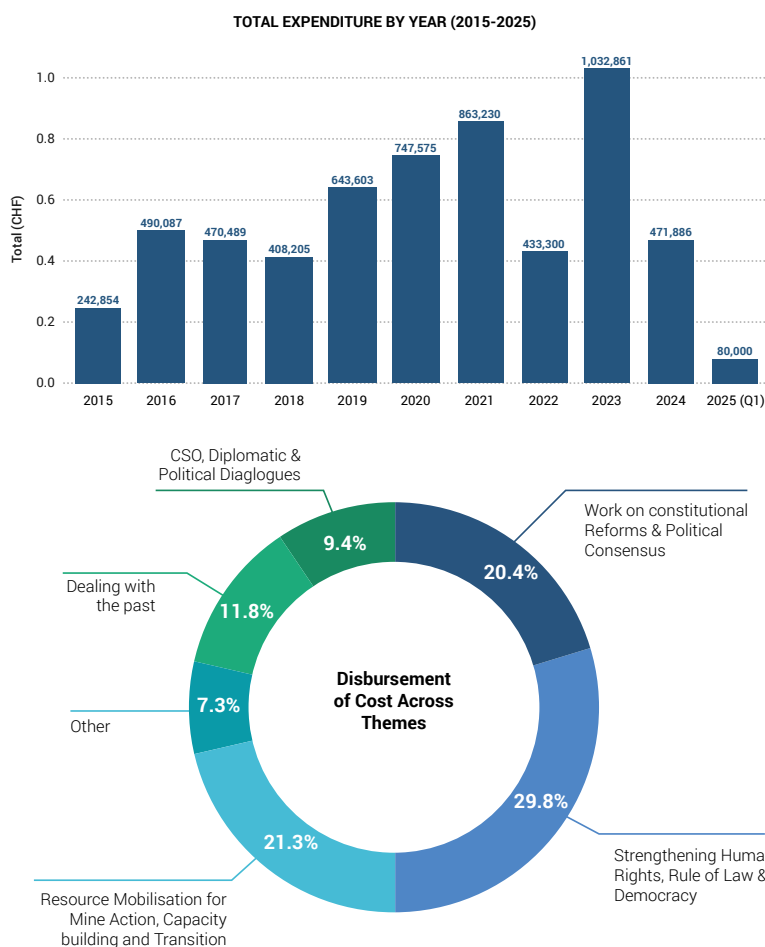
Over the ten-year period, the programme’s total expenditure of approximately CHF 5.8 million, excluding operational and deployment costs of about CHF 2 million, represents a modest investment relative to its scope, reach, and the significance of its impact. For a programme operating in a highly complex, variable and politically sensitive environment, the returns have been substantial. These achievements have been made possible precisely because of the Swiss approach – anchored in trust, credibility, and principled, long-term engagement, which has enabled outcomes disproportionate to the financial input.

Thematic allocations show the largest share directed to strengthening human rights, rule of law and democracy and finding political solutions to the ethnic conflict. These trends indicate that the programme channelled resources strategically toward issues of governance, accountability, and peacebuilding as contextual needs evolved.

The categorisation on cost effectiveness is interpretive rather than financial. The aggregated spending across key objectives and thematic areas are only for the period evaluated, and the results are not immediate or quantifiable. As such, the analysis does not attempt to directly align results and outcomes to the proportion of funds spent within a specific period. Instead, it provides a qualitative assessment of how expenditure patterns align with programme priorities, contextual relevance, and observed outcomes, drawing primarily on evaluation findings and documented results.

The distribution of programme expenditure across the four thematic areas broadly mirrors the programme’s strategic priorities and its evolving relevance to Sri Lanka’s shifting political context. The portion of funds directed toward DWP produced some of the most visible and durable results: embedding transitional justice principles into government policy and sustaining high-level diplomatic/international engagement and interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogues, including with diaspora groups and local communities. These outcomes reflect high strategic value and influence, achieved through relatively modest financial inputs.

Although Resource Mobilisation for Mine Action, Capacity Building and Transition was not part of the programme’s original



portfolio, these became significant interventions during 2019–2024. This strategic, time-bound allocation responded to a tightening global funding environment as traditional mine action support declined. Swiss assistance proved pivotal in sustaining national mine action capacity as Sri Lanka moved toward mine-free status. This intervention has allowed approximately 1,000 individuals to return to their places of origin while indirectly benefiting a further 15,000 individuals. This has included institutional transition and staff retraining for alternative livelihoods, ensuring that accumulated expertise and leadership, predominantly among a female labour force, were retained. The investment thus offered strong relevance and value for money by safeguarding the continuity and legacy of a sector nearing successful completion.

3.5 Impact

EQ 3.5.1: What were the positive impacts of the programme?

Finding 12: The programme achieved substantial and sustained impact across multiple dimensions, advancing justice, peace, democratic resilience, and relational support for civil society actors.

Impact 1 – Strengthened **recognition of FoDs as a victim group** with legitimate post-war justice claims reinforcing the need for a transitional justice and reconciliation process.



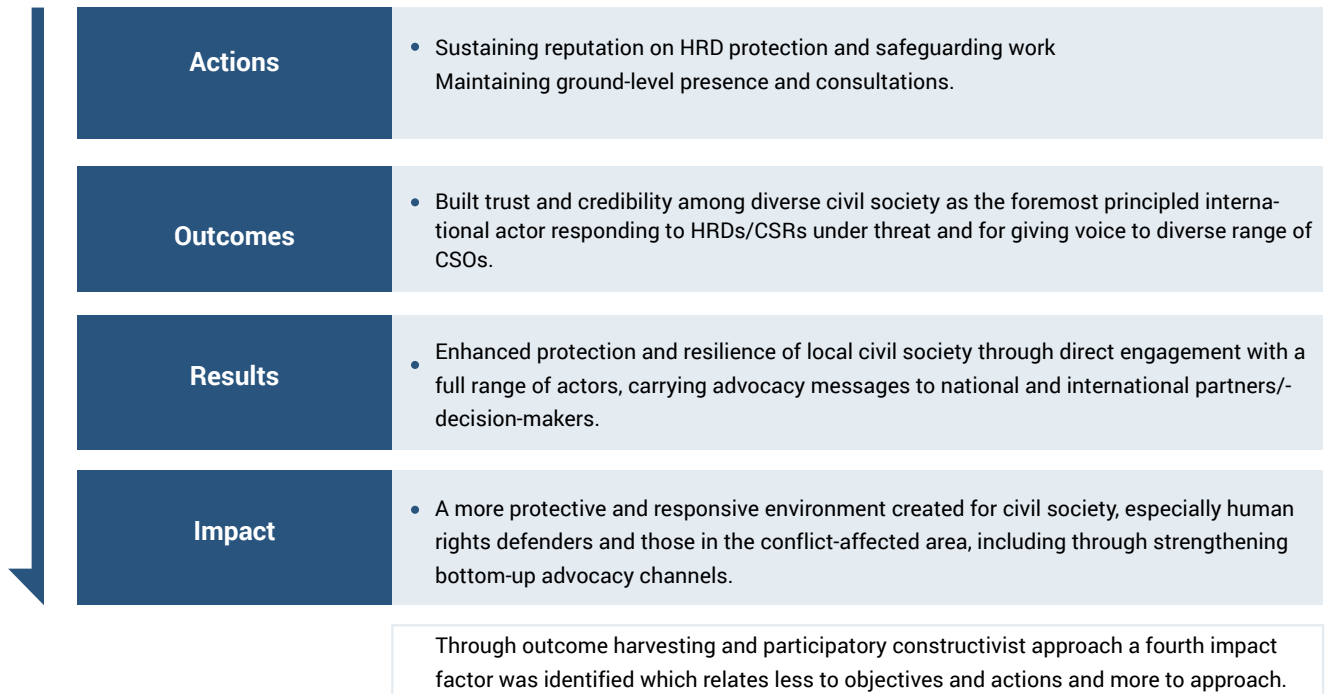
Impact 2: Through sustained and strategic engagement, **maintained transitional justice and reconciliation on the agenda** and avoided regression despite extreme and adverse political changes.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of DWP cohort and supporting them to influence TJ process. • Offering expertise and engaging on TJ and reconciliation with every government. • Supporting civil society to input and influence TJ process, supporting key institutions such as OMP. • Maintaining international pressure through Geneva process and working on domestic process via troika.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of '4 pillars' into national policy (2015) & presenting road map for implementation (2016). • Curtailing opposition to TJ through work with military and Buddhist monks. • Contributing to OHCHR report and to UN HRC resolution setting up OSLAP. • Strengthening victim groups and civil society to collect evidence and advocate for transitional justice nationally and internationally.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through bilateral engagement, cohort of multi-stakeholder transitional justice experts and troika influencing and strengthening the transitional justice process when possible and when not, maintaining it on the national agenda.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through sustained and strategic engagement maintaining transitional justice and reconciliation on the agenda and avoiding regression despite extreme and adverse political changes.

Impact 3: Through continuing and effective dialogues and engagement at volatile and destabilising political moments **contributed to democratic and peaceful political transformation**.

Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct engagement, facilitation of dialogues and OTI work leading to election of Yahapalana government, addressing constitutional crisis (2018) and transition during Aragalaya (2022).
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding democracy and human rights through consensus building between core stakeholder to address the constitutional crisis (2018). • Safeguarding and protecting democracy and peace through facilitating dialogues between multiple stakeholders for safe transition during Aragalaya (2022).
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to ensuring democratic and peaceful transitions in extremely volatile and destabilising political conditions.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through continuing and effective dialogues and engagement at volatile and destabilising political moments contributed to democratic and peaceful political transformation.

Impact 4: A more protective and responsive environment created for civil society, especially human rights defenders and those in the conflict-affected area, including through strengthening bottom-up advocacy channels.



3.6 Synthesis

EQ 3.6.1 What were the strengths and limitations of the PHRD programme?

Finding 13: Strong confidence in the programme’s relevance and performance outweighs limitations, though addressing these is vital to sustain credibility

Please see detailed explanation of table in Annex 4

	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS	IMPLICATIONS
Approach – conceptual	Highly relevant thematic focus and aims produced through clear and strong alignment of PHRD priorities with Sri Lanka’s post-war context.	Conceptual framework on DWP limited to four pillars constrains trained cohort of experts from developing a more context appropriate model that responds to existing findings on failure of TJ.	Constraints of DWP model challenged context specificity and raised questions on impartiality .
		Western liberal interpretative lens on human rights focuses too heavily on political and civil rights over socio-economic rights issues, which are critical to majority of women war survivors, especially following financial crisis.	Victim centred approach could have been strengthened by responding to and advocating for socio-economic rights. Highlights limitations on normative framing of actions.
		Problematic interpretation of ‘minorities’ and ‘diversity inclusion’ to mainly respond to Ceylon Tamils. Limited work on Muslims and Malaiyaha Tamils.	Raises criticism of lack of inclusivity and impartiality and reflects narrow understanding of normative diversity principles . Nevertheless, overall implications of these were minimal because alignment of PHRD objectives with context needs was excellent .

	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS	IMPLICATIONS
Approach - programmatic	Grounded in local knowledge and realities; flexible and approachable.	Strategic shifts (2015 and 2020) developed on evidence and analysis, but methodology poorly explained.	Lack of methodological rigour in programmatic decisions affect strengths in objectives, coherence, and contextual relevance. While this does not appear to concern stakeholders, it limits the ability to assess effectiveness, track progress, and demonstrate results. The programme's outstanding strengths mitigate some implications of internal process gaps, which remain largely invisible externally, but they nonetheless raise questions of accountability.
	Relationship-oriented: achieves objectives through relational knowledge production, partnership with civil society and strong institution-building.	Insufficient demonstrable rationale behind programmatic decision making.	
	Engagement broadened and strengthened to multi-track approach.	Weak overall reporting and monitoring process: few identifiable outcomes/results, poor documented monitoring of success.	
	Unimposing, impartial, and discreet.	Limitations in expanding interlocutors and networks, including amongst NPP and JVP	
	Established reputation for trustworthiness, dependability, and commitment.		
	Bold and courageous, willing to tackle sensitive and difficult issues.		
	HSA's unique position of diplomatic and political 'actor'; result oriented, responsive yet considered and diplomatic.		
	Local staff bridge link between diplomats and community; inclusion and importance given to them symbolically and in practice raises relevance and effectiveness of programme.		

	STRENGTHS	LIMITATIONS	IMPLICATIONS
Profile - structure	Expertise on dealing with the past and peacebuilding well recognised.	Challenges with gaps caused in staff turnaround.	Well established outstanding strengths undermine moderate level challenges and gaps.
	Well-established experience and relationship-based country knowledge developed through over a decade of work in Sri Lanka.	Occasional lack of coherence between Bern and Sri Lanka, e.g., in response to HRC and TRC processes.	
	Outstanding deep and nuanced local knowledge providing authority and credibility to positioning.	Looming risk of Sri Lanka losing priority status.	
Profile - expertise	Trusted, well regarded and approached by successive governments.	Heavy dependence on local staff	Well established expertise and experience combined with deep country knowledge trumps limitations in recent gaps in understanding. However, these need to be addressed to strengthen relevance and achieve results.
	Well-established and strong partnerships with diverse range of civil society organisations and actors.	Limitations in understanding the importance of identity – ethnic and religious – to conflict and justice dynamics.	
	Responsive to changing ground reality and now swayed by international donor agendas, e.g. shift to work on violent extremism targeting Muslims after Easter attacks.	Recent gap in understanding cruciality of criminal accountability for most of northern civil society.	
	Expansion of partnerships across diverse groups, areas of work and age groups.		
Implementation	Flexible and responsive to partners.	Poor monitoring and reporting process for programme funds.	Though strengths overcome these challenges, weak internal monitoring and declining transparency risk eroding the credibility and accountability
	Wide-range of partnerships covering diverse areas of work, age cutting across 'north' – 'south' divide	Questions on transparency with nature of work with multiple stakeholders, i.e., FoDs and military ToTs.	
		Unclear and insufficient communication exacerbated incoherence.	
		Limited innovation in actions.	

Conclusion

The PHRD Programme has established itself as a trusted, principled, and highly valued actor. It has carved out a unique space grounded in trust, long-standing relationships, and an unwavering commitment to local actors and needs, often demonstrating rare courage and consistency in a challenging environment.

In recent years, however, the programme's direction has been affected by some incoherence, reflecting challenges in communication and consistency in positioning. These in turn, have altered relevance and progress against objectives. This is not to suggest the strategic direction itself was flawed; rather, the pathways chosen to pursue results were not always clearly articulated, and the rationale underpinning a multi-track approach were not consistently communicated to stakeholders. At the same time, much of the critique appears to stem from the programme's earlier successes, which set exceptionally high expectations that were difficult to sustain, but also reflect the considerable trust and confidence and programme has earned over time. Overall, through the ten-year evaluation period the success and impact achieved for the financial investment made is exceptional. This reflects not only strong strategic judgement but also steady, adaptive engagement – maintaining progress through a period of shifting political landscapes and demonstrating the programme's capacity to translate long-term commitment into meaningful outcomes.

As stated at the outset of this report, both the country and the programme stand at a critical juncture. Addressing the identified issues, particularly by improving coherence and communication, and by reaffirming the programme's core strengths, will be essential to regain credibility and support for strategic direction. Implementing the recommendations in this report offers an opportunity not only to restore alignment and focus but also to renew the programme's role as a leading actor capable of achieving lasting results and impact.

Key lessons learnt from Sri Lanka case study for overall PHRD programme:

Managing Volatility: Sri Lanka case study demonstrates extremity in post-war contexts.

- **Key Takeaway:** Invest in relationship-building and maintain a responsive, flexible approach.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Improve adaptivity by deploying preparatory tools, such as situational and context analysis, systematically to map and plan for multiple options.

Sustained Engagement: nature of context mean engagement has to be long-term.

- **Key Takeaway:** Nurture individual and institutional relationships and carve out a credible, trusted position.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Maintain effort and momentum to ensure sustained impact over time.

Building credibility and legitimacy: essential in conflict affected contexts where trust is low.

- **Key Takeaway:** Model of hiring and strengthening local presences and staff, high-level delegations travelling to various parts of the country, especially conflict affected areas, wide consultations and constantly aspiring to expand understanding of context.
- **Areas of Enhancement:** Ensure that knowledge and acumen skills are institutionally inherited.

Maintaining Coherence: implications on all aspects of the programme.

- **Key Takeaway:** Lack of coherence in multi-track justice and peacebuilding engagements affects relevance, achievement of objectives, and overall impact.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Mitigate by ensuring strong normative basis for decisions, transparency, and effective communication.

Conceptual Frameworks: offer structure and guidance for objectives.

- **Key Takeaway:** Sustained investment in developing capacity in conceptual and theoretical areas can yield multiple outcomes and results.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Conceptual frameworks need to reflect the state of knowledge on the subject and remain flexible to structurally encompass alternatives, ensuring knowledge and understanding expand and adapt accordingly.

Normative Understanding: underpins post-war initiatives on transitional justice and peacebuilding.

- **Key Takeaway:** The programme model of prioritising human rights alongside peace is critical in post-conflict contexts.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Recognise the importance of knowledge and understanding of international human rights laws and frameworks, especially when dealing with the past as mandated by human rights council resolutions. Offer training where necessary and ensure engagements are premised on a strong normative basis. Build expertise and understanding on minority rights especially when working with minority groups in post-ethnic conflict contexts.

Lesson – Internal Systems and Accountability

- **Key Takeaway:** Robust internal monitoring, reporting, and decision-making systems are essential to ensure coherence, accountability, and informed strategic choices.
- **Areas for Enhancement:** Establish clear structures and frameworks for regular review and documentation to strengthen learning and support effective programme management.

Recommendations

1. DWP and reconciliation:

- 1.1 Continue work with troika taking a firm, clear and well communicated position on accountability in line with international human rights commitments.
- 1.2 Increase engagement bilaterally and through troika to work with GoSL to develop and commit to a comprehensive transitional justice process with the UN HRC 30/1 as the guiding framework.
- 1.3 Provide systematic facilitation support to help DWP alumni to develop and expand the cohort of active members.
- 1.4 Address knowledge gaps with DWP alumni by exposing the cohort to critical transitional justice scholarship and experts working on alternatives beyond and above the DWP conceptual framework.
- 1.5 Use expertise and experience, including through advanced trained DWP alumni to expand current transitional justice framework to better meet victim demands and context specificity.

2. Constitutional reform and political settlement:

- 2.1 Re-establish engagement on constitutional reform and build on recent parliamentary study tour to increase understanding of federalism leading to at the minimal cross-party agreement on increased devolution.
- 2.2 Facilitate dialogue among minority political parties to build consensus around a unified minimum platform for a political settlement.
- 2.3 Leverage existing work done on the Himalaya Declaration toward greater inclusivity, legitimacy and initiative by:
 - 2.3.1 Facilitating increased support by other diaspora groups for HD vision,
 - 2.3.2 Convening inter-religious leadership group to sign up to HD vision and work towards building a new understanding on TJ and reconciliation in line with religious positioning,
 - 2.3.3 Conduct dialogues with Tamil communities on the HD initiative and address concerns on its design and process.

3. Democracy and Human Rights:

- 3.1 Build on impact and results achieved on strengthening democracy and increase work on this together with current human rights mandate.
- 3.2 Extend human rights work beyond current focus on civil and political rights to include socio-economic rights, especially on post-war gender justice.
- 3.3 Develop work on diversity management that is inclusive of all communities and based on a strong minority rights framework relevant to Sri Lanka.

3.4 Train key staff on international human rights and humanitarian laws, norms and frameworks to ensure normative basis for work.

4. Strengthen strategic decision making and programme management:

- 4.1 Identify key NPP and JVP interlocutors, build networks within these parties and assess new approaches and strategies to engage with them.
- 4.2 Encourage innovative initiatives within existing thematic areas to enhance relevance and adaptability.
- 4.3 Review and, where necessary, recalibrate relationships with long-term civil society partners to ensure continued alignment with evolving objectives and context.
- 4.4 Establish rigorous, transparent methods for strategic and programmatic decision-making to improve coherence and accountability.
- 4.5 Introduce a light but systematic internal structure for monitoring and reporting to strengthen institutional learning and oversight.
- 4.6 Design and implement a comprehensive monitoring and reporting framework to track progress, assess outcomes, and demonstrate results more effectively.

Annexes

Annex 1: Introduction

1.1 Summary of the PHRD Programme

The aim of the PHRD program in Sri Lanka is to contribute to a sustainable, stable and lasting peace by facilitating dialogue processes that enable stakeholders to address the root causes of conflict and promote democracy and good governance.

This is done through three principal areas of work:

- Dealing with the Past
- Dialogue promotion, support and facilitation
- Promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law.

The programme's foundational work through dialogues with key stakeholders contributed to the major political shift that took place in 2015, paving a new path for engagement in Sri Lanka. During the first part of this evaluation period (2015-2020) the programme supported the strengthening of institutions under the government's commitments to the UN HRC resolution, building capacity of civil society, and working closely with victim groups, particularly with the Families of Disappeared (FoDs). It also provided the government with a roadmap on constitutional reform, contributing significantly to security sector reforms and continuing dialogues on democracy, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Following the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2019, the incident relating to the abduction of the Embassy's staff had direct repercussions on the operating environment. In the aftermath, the programme scaled back and adopted a low profile for a period. Subsequently, engagement shifted towards rebuilding trust with government stakeholders, maintaining reconciliation on the national agenda, and strengthening minority rights.

The second period of the evaluation (2020-2025) was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the programme continued to sustain its activities. It strengthened its focus on dealing with the past, including the establishment of a troika with the Japanese and South African embassies to steer a collaborative programme of work to support victims of the war and work towards accountability and reconciliation. At the same time, it maintained both political and civil society dialogues and supported civil society initiatives in line with its aims.

At the multilateral level, the PHRD has played a prominent role in international forums on Sri Lanka, contributing towards UN HRC processes and the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The programme has been adaptive, operating across diverse and shifting political contexts. Its evaluation therefore requires approaches that can capture not only tangible results but also the less visible effects of sustained diplomatic engagement and dialogue processes, particularly in shaping trust, relationships, and

influence over time. The evaluation methodology that follows sets out the approaches and tools to guide this process.

1.2 Background and Context of the Evaluation Period

The defeat of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2015 and the election of the *Yahapalana* (good governance) coalition, led by Maithripala Sirisena as President and Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister, marked a significant shift in Sri Lanka's political trajectory. This democratic transition, following the militarised end of the civil war and allegations of war crimes, human rights violations, and corruption, initially opened space for constitutional reform, accountability, inclusive development, and progress toward a more sustainable peace.

Early momentum through constitutional reform efforts and the co-sponsorship of United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Resolution 30/1, which introduced a framework for transitional justice and reconciliation, was lost as the coalition government fractured and weakened. This culminated in a constitutional crisis in October 2018, when President Sirisena abruptly dismissed Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and appointed former President Rajapaksa in his place. The Supreme Court later ruled the dismissal unconstitutional and reinstated Wickremesinghe, but the crisis exposed the fragility of governance reforms and narrowed the space for sustained reconciliation efforts.

The Easter Sunday attacks of April 2019 sent shockwaves through the country, raised fears of renewed conflict, and fuelled Buddhist nationalist sentiment, contributing significantly to the election of Gotabaya Rajapaksa as president. His government enhanced executive powers through the 20th Amendment to the Constitution (2020), withdrew support for the UNHRC resolution, increased militarisation in the north and pursued policies widely seen as discriminatory against minorities.

Rising authoritarianism, shrinking space for dissent, and entrenched corruption further eroded democratic governance. Simultaneously, fiscal mismanagement, populist tax cuts, an abrupt ban on chemical fertilisers, and overreliance on foreign borrowing precipitated a severe economic downturn. By 2022, dwindling foreign reserves, surging inflation, and default on sovereign debt triggered widespread shortages of fuel, food, and medicine.

By early 2022, public frustration culminated in the Aragalaya (Struggle), a mass protest movement that cut across ethnic, religious and class divisions in a unique moment of unified civic resistance, though it resonated less in the north and east. Persistent and large-scale demonstrations eventually forced President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign in July 2022 and prompted the departure of several other key political figures. Following a brief power vacuum Ranil Wickremesinghe agreed to take over the presidency and was elected by parliament. He entered a debt restructuring programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which stabilised the economy. However, his administration also curtailed freedoms of expression and assembly through repressive measures, including the Online Safety Bill and Anti-Terrorism Bill.

Public demand for systemic change persisted, culminating in the 2024 election of Anura Kumara Dissanayake as president with his centre-left National Peoples Party (NPP) securing a two-thirds majority in parliament. Though having wiped out much of the old guard of politics by defeating the historically dominant parties, the majority of the NPP are novices to politics and the nationalistic alignment of their main constituent party the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) raises some doubt on their willingness to pursue progressive minority rights focused political reforms, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

1.3 Scope and focus of evaluation

Time frame: The evaluation will focus on the programme of work between 2015-2025.

The PHRD programme in Sri Lanka was not designed within a structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, and therefore does not have predefined outcomes, indicators, or a results-based framework to assess progress. This affects the scope of the evaluation in the following ways:

IN SCOPE:	OUT OF SCOPE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the selected timeframe; • Analysis of criteria in relation to the changing political context; • Political engagements and programme activities; • Geographic cover – north, east and Colombo; • Outcomes and results reported and interpreted by interlocutors; • Contributions analysed based on interviews and documentation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the timeframe • Outside the geographical area • Quantitative evidence and analysis • Financial audits and cost-benefit analysis of efficiency criteria • Future situational analysis in relation to recommendations • Strongly qualifiable impact

Annex 2: Methods

2.1 Methodological Approaches to Research and Analysis:

2.1.1 Specific approaches:

i. Critical Analysis approach

- » This method is used to question unsubstantiated assumptions and cut through power structures to understand issues at structural and root levels.
- » It encourages reflexive thinking and is used as an analytical tool to draw out meaning beyond what is stated and obvious.

Rationale for this approach:

We believe such an approach is essential in a contested context like Sri Lanka, where international interventions are shaped by numerous evaluations and reports, and where clarity and analytical depth are required for more meaningful analysis. This is particularly important to make actionable recommendations for the programme.

ii. Time-series analysis

- » This quantitative data gathering and analysis tool is applied to better understand issues in line with the longitudinal changes, but we will adapt it to our qualitative work.
- » In the desk review the programme will be divided into critical time periods and moments of transition.
- » Questions within the evaluation framework will be scaffolded with this temporal aspect for nuanced contextual analysis and to capture diversity and difference in perspectives.

- » Synthesis and analysis will be conducted within and across these identified periods.

Rationale for this approach:

We believe this is necessary to identify and understand the findings in relation to the changing context within this ten-year period and to enable more strategic and actionable recommendations.

iii. Participatory constructivist approach:

- » This allows the evaluation to remain grounded in local perceptions of change, while still assessing the programme's relevance, effectiveness, and contribution.
- » During interviews and focus groups, participants are invited not only to reflect on changes that have occurred, but also to define what meaningful impact or success looks like in their specific context.
- » These stakeholder-defined results are then analysed thematically and triangulated with documented evidence and other data sources.

Rationale for this approach:

Given the absence of pre-defined results, indicators, or a formal results framework, this evaluation incorporates a participatory approach to interpreting what constitutes 'impact' and 'results' from the perspective of stakeholders.

2.1.2 Overall approaches:

Decolonial and gender approach

- Decoloniality seeks to delink from colonial logic and structures of knowledge production, processes, methods and practice by giving space to 'othered,' 'subaltern,' 'marginalised' forms of knowledge and understanding.
- As the evaluation criteria and guiding questions have already been set in this call, decolonial methods will not be possible but such an approach will seek to challenge power structures not only in process but in the production of knowledge itself.
- We believe this approach is important to gain a genuine and deep bottom-up understanding of the relevance, coherence, effectiveness and impact of this programme.
- Decoloniality challenges all forms of power-hierarchy including patriarchy and heteronormative positions thereby ensuring gender sensitivity and equality throughout the research and analysis process.

Rights-based approach

- The research and analysis will be grounded in human rights, promoting equality, dignity, justice and accountability.
- We recognise accountability as an important principle within the human rights framework which is especially relevant to an evaluation process.
- In the Sri Lankan context, we believe it is important to take a Minority Rights Approach which seeks to identify the specific experience of minority groups accounting for their non-dominant status and different identity.

- The pillars of minority rights; right to existence, identity, non-discrimination and participation, will be promoted throughout.

2.2 Evaluation framework provided in inception report

OECD/DAC CRITERIA	QUESTIONS	SOURCE OF DATA	ANALYSIS METHOD
Relevance	To what extent was the PHRD programme relevant to key national stakeholder (government, civil society, victim groups)?	KIIs, FGDs and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic analysis and coding • Reconstructed ToC
	Was the PHRD programme relevant to international stakeholders? To whom and to what extent?	KIIs and reports	
	Was the programme relevant to the context?	KIIs, FGDs and reports	
Coherence	Were the actions within the PHRD programme coherent?	KIIs, FGDs and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic analysis and coding • Reconstructed ToC
	Were the actions within the programme coherent with other embassy priorities, e.g., migration?	KIIs	
	Were the actions coherent with engagement of other international actors?	KIIs and reports	
	Were there duplication, synergies, contradictions, or tensions in each of the above?	KIIs, FGDs and reports	
Effectiveness	To what extent did the programme achieve overall objectives?	KIIs and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstructed ToC • Outcome Harvesting • Contribution analysis • Thematic coding and analysis
	To what extent did the programme achieve specific objectives set out in the strategic goals and changes?	KIIs, reports and FDGs	
	What were the outcomes achieved?	KIIs, reports and FGDs	
	What were the results achieved?	KIIs, reports and FGDs	
Efficiency	Were the outcomes and results achieved in an economical way?	Reports and KIIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstructed ToC • Thematic coding and analysis
	Were the outcomes and results achieved in a timely manner?	Reports and KIIs	
Impact	What were the positive impacts – intended and unintended?	Reports, KIIs and FGDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstructed ToC • Outcome Harvesting • Contribution analysis • Thematic coding and analysis
	What were the negative impacts – intended and unintended?	Reports, KIIs and FGDs	
Synthesis	What were the strengths of the PHRD programme?	All above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of methods
	What were the challenges and limitations?		
	What lessons can be learnt?		
	What recommendations can be made?		

Annex 3: Detailed explanation on relevance

3.1 Summary of relevance of actions

2015-2017

The programme identified clearly where Swiss expertise and experience could fill emerging gaps vis-à-vis the TJ and constitutional reform process. Building on uniquely embedded local connections in the north, support was lent to recognise and strengthen victim groups including ex-combatants and FoDs. Work with FoDs was particularly notable, facilitating meeting with different stakeholders and validating their positionality and recommendations in protests etc. Singapore-2 dialogue, work with OTI and bilateral engagement supported the constitutional reform process which for most of this period was extremely successful. The collapse of the process was detected early and through OTI and bilaterally, mitigating and recovery strategies were put in place. DWP training was used to maximum effect to shape the transitional justice process, which was strengthened through bilateral engagements including extending the framework into policy. The work in this period was prolific and at multiple levels covering vast ground. This included institutional and security sector reforms.

2017-2019

Widening fissures in the coalition government and the threat it presented to reforms were identified through robust methods and were responded to effectively. Primarily the programme decided to protect gains that were made in the previous period whilst working to maintain the reform agenda. Strengthening institutions was prioritised to help them withstand a shift in agenda. Similarly, security sector reforms were strengthened. Whilst internal documentation reveals concerns over GoSL backsliding on reform commitments, public censure was limited. Some national and northern civil society and international interlocutors stated that the programme could have taken a more publicly critical position of the government and pressured them to commit to the reform process. Response to rising Sinhala Buddhist extremist attacks and targeting of Muslim community was minimal. However, the role played by the programme during the constitutional coup was considered exceptionally valuable by all interlocutors. The strength of this engagement together with the strategic response in the early part of this period mitigated the programmes limitations in relation public censure of government and response to attacks against Muslims to maintain an average level of high relevance.

2019-2021

This was an exceptionally challenging period for the programme and the internal embassy security issue seriously affected its relevance. With the return of the Rajapaksa family to power the programme needed to have mapped and identified the extent of threats to civil society activists and victim groups it worked closely to meet objectives and had in place strategies to protect and support these groups. It should also have identified threats to democracy and human rights, particularly minority rights, and strategically responded to these through different methods, including advocacy. In line with its previous work on justice and accountability, the programme needed to have identified what measures could have been taken internationally to make up for the national limitations and engaged with these. Findings indicate insufficient preparation for the change in government (see below). Nevertheless, very little of this became possible as the embassy encountered a security threat very early in this period. Whilst interlocutors were empathetic to the embassy's

response many were of the view that it could have been handled differently. Some interlocutors thought the embassy responded publicly too quickly before details were clearly established. The decision for embassy staff to retreat from public engagement for a period of time was also challenged since civil society actors and victim groups did not have the same privilege. Though the continuing personal engagement of the local staff was noted and valued, the decision to close the Jaffna office at this time was condemned.

The strategic review and shift in priorities that took place immediately after was important and necessary. Documentation does not indicate the use of rigorous methods in context and situational analysis nor in how the eventual strategy was decided. The shift in strategy also does not account for alternative options in the context of a weakening or collapse of the Rajapaksa regime, which eventually occurred. There is a lack of clarity on what 'diversity management' envisaged and what actions would be taken as part of it. Whilst Tamil civil society groups in the north and east found the reduced engagement was starkly different to what they had been used to with the Swiss embassy, they nevertheless acknowledged that their visits to the north and international action may have reduced the threat to them by the new government. Apart from the important mission to Kattankuddy soon after the Easter Sunday attack, no major engagement was noted in relation to racism and attacks faced by Muslims.

The HSA report (Report 3, 2020) refers to a proposal being drafted by HSA in response to an informal request by Basil Rajapaksa to support the search for a 'local reconciliation mechanism to replace the implementation of resolution 30/1'. The 21-08-29 Benchmarking Sri Lanka report refers to a non-paper presented by the programme in response to this request to which the GoSL did not respond. Local staff stated that the embassy did not agree to assist the GoSL during this period. Whilst there is a lack of clarity on the nature of this engagement it raises questions of alignment of objectives as explained in coherence section.

2021-2023

Relevance increased significantly here as the programme utilised its experience and expertise effectively to meet contextual needs. Building on well-established experience and expertise, the programme took a leadership role to facilitated multi-level engagements on diverse issues through diplomatic dialogue. These maintained constructive engagement and created space for new ideas during the lockdown when little else could be achieved. The Embassy's engagement during the Aragalaya was exceptional and highly relevant to the context

2023-2025

The period marks a shift in direction which, while conceptually important, is marred by incoherence and a misalignment with previously held objectives.

The engagement with South Africa and Japan through the troika is extremely strategic as it brings together three different sets of experiences, expertise and reputation that have particular importance and value to Sri Lanka. The consultations conducted by the troika and their engagement with political parties ahead of elections were very relevant to context. As explained below, the actions in relation to victim recognition and reparative justice were also landmark. However, the statement of the governments of South Africa and Japan, for instance in the HRC as well as through comments as part of the troika with beneficiary group, emphasise reparative forms of justice over criminal accountability. This is also reflected in the confidential non-paper that makes only one recommendation in relation to 'investigating' five cases presented to the OMP and nothing further on criminal accountability. Some senior interlocutors who have had experience working with different delegations have been able to identify this positioning even if it was not made public.

This combined with the delayed and ineffective communication on the programme's position on the TRC caused a misalignment with PHRD's objective of promoting human rights and accountability, which has been articulated in the Sri Lankan context of advancing victim demands for criminal accountability with other forms of justice. The delay and effectiveness in communication together with the DWP alumni's engagement with Wickremasinghe's government to establish a TRC led to a widely held view among interlocutors that the PHRD programme enabled Wickremasinghe to stray from firmer commitments to justice and accountability. Therefore, even though troika conceptually important for the context, it lost relevance because it did not push Wickremasinghe to meet the full range of commitments he drew up as Prime Minister. Similarly, the Himalaya declaration as an idea was needed in the context but its approach of excluding local civil society in the north, GTF's lack of legitimacy and engagement with former heads of state including those facing allegations of international crimes affected its relevance to context. The strengthening of leadership of FoDs was the next important step towards victim recognition in the period of 2023-2025. However, the manner in which civil society organisations in the north and south were excluded from the process added to politics and divisions in the movement and with civil society was unhelpful at this juncture of time. Interlocutors from the north said they found that the PHRD support for FoD's public statements in international forums deviated from what they had previously held which indicated to them that they were influenced negatively through the course of their engagement with the programme. Cumulatively this reduced achievement of some objectives and distracted from responding coherently and effectively to the needs of the time, which impacted relevance to context.

3.2 Summary of relevance to stakeholders

F3.1. Beneficiary group 1: Families of Disappeared (FoDs).

The PHRD programme, through exceptional unwavering commitment and support has been critical in securing recognition for the FoDs as victims with legitimate and unmet accountability demands which justify the need for transitional justice. Cohesive and multi-track early direct engagement to organise groups, document evidence (through MCC), support legal cases (CHRD) and facilitate high level meetings (direct) were highly relevant. More recently, actions to build leadership and strengthen skills within the movement were relevant and welcomed. However, the process of doing so was subject to criticism and efforts to develop a north-south network of FoDs were seen to conflate the different experience and issues within the group. Issues on inclusion/selection process in an already charged and divisive context undermined the acceptance of those involved in the action and the action itself affecting relevance to the beneficiary group.

F3.2. Civil society – national

The PHRD programme was solely influential in nurturing and building select civil society organisations working within their thematic areas, such as the One Text Initiative (OTI), Institute for Constitutional Studies (ICS) and the National Movement for Social Justice (NMSJ). Throughout the evaluation period the programme has stayed relevant to national civil society through being attuned to their various needs in changing contexts, approachability, flexibility, adaptiveness, procedural ease and quick and timely responsiveness.

F3.3. Civil society – north and east

Similar high relevance at initial stages through nurturing and supporting select organisations such as Adayalam and the Mannar Citizen’s Committee (MCC) and staying attuned to local reality, though it could have been more vocal in its criticism of Yahapalana failings.

Relevance dipped significantly in 2019-2021 as the closing of the Jaffna office and the general reduced support to mitigate the challenges of the return of the Rajapaksas was perceived as safeguarding their own interests at the expense of civil society and victim groups in the north who felt abandoned. Though redressed in the subsequent period through strengthening networks, with the exception of CMT, other interlocutors found some initiatives misaligned with programme direction as understood by them and their work.

F3.4 Government

Generally, highly relevant including in 2019-2021 period where despite internal challenges, criticism of government was low.

The evaluators were unable to interview members of the current government.

F3.5 National Political Parties

The PHRD programme, mainly through the work of OTI, has consistently engaged well with all the national parties, including the main minority political parties, and remained highly relevant. Most relevant interventions were during the constitutional crisis (2018), financial crisis (2021-22) and the Aragalaya (2022) when it facilitated dialogues with political parties to work towards strengthening democracy and preventing conflict. Limited networking with NPP is a significant limitation.

F3.6 International partners

Relevance was strongest during 2015–2018 when it played a convening and coordinating role among diplomatic missions, international agencies, and INGOs active in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and human rights. Switzerland’s neutrality, credibility, and contextual understanding positioned it as a trusted interlocutor and effective bridge between local civil society and the international community.

Relevance declined 2019-21 when engagement became more cautious and limited and although coordination resumed from 2021 onwards, partners observed reduced visibility and leadership by the Swiss on accountability and governance issues. Discreet engagement during Aragalaya is seen as highly relevant. More recent engagement on troika is seen as highly relevant by some core partners and less so by others who perceive diminished alignment with broader accountability agendas. Overall, the programme remains a respected and valued partner within the international community, though its influence has become more selective.

F3.7 Other missions and the UN

Throughout the evaluation period, the PHRD programme remained a respected and trusted actor among diplomatic missions and the UN with recognition for Switzerland’s reputation for neutrality, discretion, reliability and deep contextual knowledge through its long-standing engagement in Sri Lanka.

Relevance was strongest during 2015–2018 when Switzerland worked closely with likeminded missions to sustain transitional-justice and constitutional-reform agendas. Relevance declined in 2019–2021 with limited coordination, nonetheless, Switzerland’s ability to maintain communication and re-establish dialogue during the Aragalaya period reaffirmed its value as a constructive bridge between the UN, other missions, and local stakeholders.

More recently, Switzerland’s work through the troika has remained relevant but is seen as less visible, with partners expecting greater transparency and collaborative strategising. Even so, its measured diplomacy and contextual understanding continue to make it an indispensable interlocutor within the international community.

Annex 4: Limitations of PHRD programme in detail

Approach strategic

1. Explanation:

Conceptual framework on DWP limited to four pillars constraining trained cohort of experts from developing a more context appropriate model that responds to existing findings on failure of TJ.

Detailed explanation:

There are well-established policy and academic literature on critical transitional justice that highlights the limited empirical evidence supporting the success of the mechanisms within the four pillars. This literature also questions the restriction of transitional justice to these pillars and critiques the role of international actors in imposing globally dominant models on local contexts. While limitations remain in proposing alternatives to existing models, DWP trainees interviewed for this evaluation were entirely unaware of these criticisms. This represents a significant oversight, and trainees themselves expressed surprise at their knowledge gap.

Sri Lanka has been a compelling case study in the field of critical transitional justice and research demonstrates a gap between the mainstream TJ framework and victim needs. In such a context, it is critical for Sri Lankan DWP experts to think beyond existing global models to develop new ideas that can genuinely respond to victim needs and local context. The DWP trainings provided the space for pragmatic and context specific thinking, but every trained interviewee emphasised the ‘four pillars’ and appeared to be constrained to this framing.

2. Explanation:

Western liberal interpretative lens on human rights focusing too heavily on political and civil rights over socio-economic rights issues, which are critical to majority of women war survivors, especially following financial crisis.

Detailed explanation:

Both feminist and peacebuilding literature critique the overemphasis on civil and political rights in Western liberal democracies at the expense of socio-economic rights. Human rights activists from the Global South frequently raise this as a prioritisation problem. The actions and engagement within the programme highlight this overemphasis. Whilst civil and political rights violations such as enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, etc., were critical to the Sri Lankan post-war context, socio-economic rights have emerged as a priority issue due to the high number of female headed households in the north and east, aggravated by the financial crisis. The gap in focus on these rights, despite being raised by victim groups, including FoDs, in HSA engagement or programme funding is stark and significant.

3. Explanation:

Problematic interpretation of ‘minorities’ and ‘diversity inclusion’ to mainly refer to Ceylon Tamils. Limited work on Muslims and Malaiyaha Tamils.

Detailed explanation:

Despite some engagement and work with Muslims and political engagement with one political party representing Malaiyaha Tamils, the programme saw Ceylon Tamils as representing all minorities. This is problematic from a rights and conflict prevention perspective.

Approach – programmatic

1. Explanation:

Strategic shifts (2020 and 2023) were based on strong evidence and analysis, but the underlying methodology was not clearly articulated.

Detailed explanation:

Although the strategic shift was informed by analytical evidence, the process through which new objectives were formulated lacked methodological clarity. While a contextual review was conducted, there was no comprehensive stakeholder or situational analysis nor a documented rationale linking evidence to revised objectives. As a result, the process through which priorities were determined is not easily traceable, even though the strategic direction itself remains sound.

2. Explanation:

Weak demonstrable rationale behind programmatic decision making.

Detailed explanation:

As above.

3. Explanation:

Weak overall reporting and monitoring process: few identifiable outcomes/results, poorly documented monitoring of success.

Detailed explanation:

No systematic process of HSA reporting; individuals follow different formats. Reporting does not align with the theory of change. Apart from a brief period of benchmarking (with no rationale for how benchmarks or expected results were formulated), results and outcomes are under-developed. Consequently, it is very unclear how the overall success of the programme is measured.

Consistency was also lacking in reports from partners as some provided results whilst others did not. The PHRD is seen as unique and distinct from development agencies among other factors for its flexibility on monitoring and reporting. Nevertheless, the programme's effectiveness can be strengthened by maintain internal and external reporting standards that broadly identify outcomes and results to objectives and monitor against these.

Limitation in expanding networks, including to NPP

Whilst one of the strengths of the programme is that it works with an extensive list of interlocutors across the country, at the national level, more can be done to expand to individuals and groups from diverse political and ideological backgrounds. Notably, there were few interlocutors connected to left oriented parties. Those interviewed stated that the NPP had not actively participated in dialogues.

Profile Structure

1. Explanation:

Challenges with gaps caused in staff turnaround.

Detailed explanation:

Staff turnaround gap between Davide Vignati and Damiano Sguaitamatti lasted a few months and affected engagement at a very critical period during the transitional period. This gap particularly affected the continuation of the Singapore dialogues.

There was also a gap in staffing between Sidonia Gabriel and Justine Boillat, though this was exceptionally requested for personal reasons.

2. Explanation:

Occasional lack of coherence between Bern and Sri Lanka, e.g., in response to agreement on priority areas or processes.

Detailed explanation:

Sri Lanka is one of the few contexts where the HSA plays a key role in international advocacy and raising the peace and reconciliation agenda while engaging with various mechanisms and processes with the HRC and locally. However there have been instances where the three main bodies – the Colombo mission, the Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva and the FDFA HQ in Bern have not aligned or responded in unison when windows of opportunities or needs were presented at times. One most significant instance was during the 2016-17 period when cracks were beginning to appear within the Yahapalana government and there appeared to be some retreat from the government on its UN HRC commitments as per the 30/1 resolution. Findings showed that a plan to convene diplomatic dialogues in Colombo and Geneva at this time did not materialise as a result of the varying positions on the initiative by these three sections. This further eroded the momentum and the opportunity to exert pressure on the government on its commitments. Interviews with staff in Bern also indicated some challenges to positioning vis-à-vis supporting the UN HRC process when troika was assessing GoSL's TRC proposal.

3. Explanation:

Looming risk of Sri Lanka losing priority status.

Detailed explanation:

Justifying the need to keep Sri Lanka as a priority country and the looming risk of the in-country work ending distracts from strengthening the vision and effective implementation.

Profile – team

1. Explanation

Heavy dependence on local staff

Detailed explanation

This is a very minor limitation especially when set against the positive of what local staff offer. One interlocutor in the north expressed concerns on the overt trust and dependence on local staff. Apart from this the local staff received high acclaim from every other interlocutor interviewed. Success of the local staff is down to the two individuals, whose exceptional work has made them somewhat indispensable. This individual dependence could pose difficult to sustain.

Profile – expertise

1. Explanation:

Limitations in understanding the importance of ethnic and religious identity to conflict and justice dynamics.

Detailed explanation:

Whilst international staff are exceptional in understanding local context and dynamics, one area they have demonstrated less understanding is on the importance of religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka. Some interlocutors raised concerns that the approach of dealing with the past does not recognise the role of ethnicity and religion in the conflict and in victim-perpetrator dynamics. There is also a gap (in the field as much as in the programme) in understanding justice through non-secular religious perspectives outside of Christianity. Work with Buddhist monks for example does not fully consider how the concept of accountability is applied within a reincarnation worldview. Additionally seeing monks as 'spoilors' is inaccurate and inappropriate. On the other hand, some interlocutors argued that working with the monks only and not extending to other religious leaders reinforced the supremacy of Buddhist clergy.

2. Explanation

Gap in understanding cruciality of criminal accountability for most of northern civil society.

Detailed explanation:

The research found divisions and distrust among northern interlocutors, but apart from one all others were united in perceiving a shift in position of the Swiss towards softer accountability. PHRD programme staff firmly deny this and confirm their knowledge and understanding of this factor. Whilst this could be a communication and perception issue, the fact that the programme has not recognised and addressed this indicates a gap in understanding of how crucial criminal accountability is to northern civil society. The strength of the Swiss embassy was not only that they always knew the issues that people in the north faced (which not all international actors are similarly attuned to) but that they understood the positions taken by these people based on historic and continuing grievances. Interlocutors in the north perceived a gap in this level of understanding in recent years.

