

Background

The establishment of SPARC culminates from a process that was set in motion during the late 1990s by the University of Colombo with the inception of 'Improving Capacity for Poverty and Social Policy Research' (IMCAP) project. It was launched as a staff and student development programme to strengthen the skills of young academics from a social sciences background on poverty and social policy analysis and research.

The project has also implemented various research activities with the active involvement of junior staff members from different departments of the Faculty of Arts. Since its inception significant studies on poverty, alienation of youth, urban housing, education, social and economic security and conflict impact assessment have been undertaken by the project.

IMCAP has also been instrumental in the dissemination of research findings, through conferences and globally recognized publications. Further, the project has successfully developed into substantial partnerships by networking with Universities (national as well as international), research organizations, donors and policy makers.



Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre
(SPARC)

Faculty of Arts - University of Colombo, Colombo 03,
Sri Lanka

Tel/Fax: +94 (011) 2589382

E-mail: sparc@soc.cmb.ac.lk

Website: www.cmb.ac.lk/sparc

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Social-Policy-Analysis-and-Research-Centre-1251307814959772/>

What is SPARC?

The Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC) is affiliated to the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo. It functions as a major focal point within the Sri Lankan University system to explore critical areas of social and economic development. Activities of SPARC are centered around Research, Training, Advocacy and Networking.

Objectives

- To facilitate independent research within Sri Lankan Universities on issues related to social development.
- To facilitate interdisciplinary exchange between scholars from different backgrounds.
- To provide training and improve the quality of social science education.
- To strengthen local expertise within universities in poverty reduction and social policy formulation.
- To identify opportunities for social policy reforms in Sri Lanka.

Content

- | | |
|---|----|
| • Background | 01 |
| • SPARC | 01 |
| • Editorial | 02 |
| • Advancing Skill Creation to Enhance Transformation (ASCENT) | 02 |
| • Resource Centre | 02 |
| • Colombo Branch Office of the South Asia Institute (SAI), University of Heidelberg | 03 |
| • SPARC Research | 03 |
| • Field Excursion | 04 |
| • Rapid Assessment on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Sri Lanka (CLEAR) | 04 |
| • Forthcoming Plans | 04 |
| • Recent publications | 04 |

Editorial

A rapid change in the socio- economic culture and environment has created new challenges. Researchers of social sciences have to arm themselves with new tools and techniques to combat these new challenges with practical and sustainable solutions.

SPARC stands out as a research center by adding to the knowledge base through various research studies conducted in different social streams and by participating actively as a stakeholder in policy formulation.

Having explained the important services rendered by SPARC, it is with great pleasure that I pen down a few words on various activities we are currently involved in. Our SPARC calendar consists of a major international collaborative project on disaster resilience known as ASCENT.

ASCENT is a training programme which has been initiated with the objective of developing a detailed analysis of existing capacity of disaster resilience among higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Thailand. SPARC, faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, University of Moratuwa and University of Ruhuna are the national institutions of this international endeavor in producing knowledge on disaster resilience.

SPARC considers it an honor to be a part of this disaster resilience research endeavor and is looking forward to a fruitful series of workshops and training programmes on research methodologies, vulnerability assessments and disaster resilience research.

Resource Center

The PADHI (Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Intervention) and Impact of Globalization on Development (IGD) projects contributed to the development of the Resource Centre by purchasing new books. Globalization and Corporate Social Responsibility are the two new class titles added to the Resource Centre within the recent months. Both academics as well as undergraduates visit the Resource Centre regularly for reference work. Many foreign visitors find the Resource Centre a very useful source of literature on Sri Lanka. It is open daily for reference from 9.00a.m. - 4.00p.m.

Institutions and individuals are encouraged to contribute to the development of the Resource Centre.

ASCENT (Advancing Skill Creation to Enhance Transformation)



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Advancing Skill Creation to Enhance Transformation (ASCENT) project was launched in May 2016 under a partnership agreement signed between the University of Huddersfield and the University of Colombo. Dr. Nishara Fernando is the ASCENT project manager of the University of Colombo. The aim of this project is to ensure building research and innovative capacities of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to tackle the challenges associated with developing social resilience to disasters. This project consists of a consortium of 13 European (Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania) and Asian HEIs (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand).

University of Moratuwa and University of Ruhuna are the other local partners of this project. The project aims to encourage and develop capacities of junior academics by providing training on research methods, Disaster Risk Resilience and disaster management to undertake high quality research studies.



First research progress meeting with the coordinators at University of Huddersfield, UK. Prof. Siri Hettige and Dr. Nishara Fernando took part in this on behalf of University of Colombo.



Colombo University who participated in the Research Colloquium

SPARC participated in the ASCENT Research Colloquium and Discussion Forum organized by the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna from 27th February to 4th March 2017 at University of Ruhuna and the Fisherman's Bay Hotel, Weligama. The programme covered an array of topics related to disaster management such as; research methods, Disaster Risk Resilience, observation and experimental studies, interviews, Delphi Method, systematic reviews, questionnaire survey and planning and designing and research ethics.

The colloquium further provided trainings on; building a research profile, understanding the impact of research, importance of online presence, interdisciplinary nature of research, fundamentals of advocacy and communication, and case studies of international collaboration. More than 70 Academics representing United Kingdom, Sweden, Estonia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka participated in the event.

SPARC Research

Since the establishment of SPARC at the Faculty of Arts in 2005, a number of research projects were conducted in cooperation with international organizations such as ILO, UNFPA, UNICEF, The Asia Foundation and FES. The SPARC Board of Management decided to make these research projects available to the faculty staff to revisit and write academic papers for an edited volume to be published by SAI/SPARC.

The objective of this exercise is two-fold;

- To advocate a multidisciplinary research culture in the Faculty of Arts by encouraging members from different departments to get together and revisit the data with a multi-disciplinary perspective
- To encourage junior staff members to engage in academic writing by producing joint papers with senior academics

Colombo Branch Office of the South Asia Institute (SAI), University of Heidelberg

The South Asia Institute (SAI) at the University of Heidelberg was established in 1962 and opened a branch office in New Delhi, India. Unlike other European universities at the time, SAI at Heidelberg was keen to expand South Asian studies beyond India by broadening its regional focus. In addition to its branch offices and regional representatives in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. SAI opened a branch office in Colombo in 1999. It was closed from 2007- 2014 due to the then prevalent vulnerable political situation in the country but was re-opened in 2014 with Dr. Darshi Thoradeniya as its branch office manager. The branch office is located within the SPARC premises at the University of Colombo, cementing SAI's decade long relationship with the University. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions was signed on the 24th of March 2014, with the intention of fostering mutual collaboration. SAI strives to maintain academic contact and cooperation with universities and academic institutions all over Sri Lanka.

Conferences

International Conference on 'Body, Mind and Healing: Reflections on Post-disaster Responses in Sri Lanka' was held from 21- 23 August 2015 at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The objective of this conference was to initiate a dialogue on post-disaster responses in Sri Lanka and assess their comparative and relative effectiveness on healing the body, mind and effected communities. Prof. Daya Somasunderam (Prof. of Psychiatry, University of Adelaide and Jaffna) delivered the key note address while distinguished academics such as Prof. William Sax (Deputy Director, SAI University of Heidelberg), Prof. Tudor Silva (University of Peradeniya), Dr. Malathi de Alwis (Socio-Cultural Anthropologist), Dr. Sivathas (Psychiatrist, Vavuniya) and Prof. Ven. Deegalle Mahinda (Reader, Bath Spa University) presented papers. Junior academics such as Ms. A.W.N. Naleefa (Sociology, South Eastern University of SL) and Mr. Thanges Paramsothy (PhD Candidate, University of London) also presented papers.

Apart from the international conference a number of guest lectures and workshops were held on diverse topics according to the requests made by researchers.

Field Excursion of the Master's students of Disaster Management, University of Copenhagen, Denmark 2017



SPARC organized a field excursion for the students offering a Master's in Disaster Management, at the School of Global Health, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Associate Professor and core course leader of the master's programme Emmanuel Raju and Ms. Mariel Britanico coordinator of the programme accompanied the students in the excursion.

The students stayed in Sri Lanka for a period of three weeks. In the first week, they received lectures from the local specialists about the country's social, political and economic aspects. During the second week they visited field locations in the Anuradhapura district. The villages of Ruwanmaduwa and Kiwulekada were chosen because they were affected by a series of natural disasters including floods, droughts and wild elephant attacks. In these locations students gathered information through multiple research tools such as; transect walks, seasonal, spatial and disaster maps, seasonal calendars, historical timelines and social network analysis. In the third and final week, SPARC organized interactive discussion sessions with multiple local government and NGOs working with disaster management such as; the Disaster Management Center, Department of Meteorology, National Building Research Organization, UNDP, UNHABITAT and Child Fund.

Forthcoming Programmes –ASCENT

There will be an International Conference on Building Resilience using scientific knowledge to inform policy and practice in disaster risk reduction in Bangkok, Thailand from 27-29th November 2017. This is organized by the ASCENT project in association with Global Disaster Resilience Centre at the University of Huddersfield, UK, Chiang Mai University and Naresuan University, Thailand.



Rapid Assessment on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Sri Lanka National Technical Report (CLEAR)

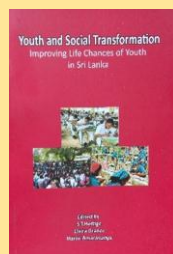
SPARC was given the opportunity to carry out a national study on commercial sexual exploitation of children in Sri Lanka, as an extension of the CLEAR project commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Dr. Subhangi M.K Herath was the principal investigator of the study, while Dr. Nishara Fernando was the co-investigator. The research was carried out in 7 districts of the country namely Colombo, Galle, Anuradhapura, Pollonnaruwa, Rathnapura, Gampaha and Trincomalee from 24th of August 2016 to 31st of March 2017.

The sample included 15 children from each district and key informant interviews were carried out with their parents, and government officials stationed in the field locations.

The draft report of the study has been submitted to the ILO for reviewing and is expected to be handed over to the government in the mid August 2017.

Recent Publications



S. T. Hettige, Elvira Graner and Harini Amarasuriya (eds), 2014, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and SPARC, *Youth and Social Transformation*
ISBN Number 978-955-1282
Price- LKR 500/=
Student Price- LKR 400/=



Nishara Fernando and Asitha G. Punchihewa, 2013, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Relocating the Displaced: Strategies for Sustainable Relocation*
ISBN Number 978-955-1282-05-9