## IN THIS ISSUE ...

**1** — South Asia's First Extensive Desk Review on Online Violence against Children

**2** — Innovative learning in the 21st Century : Introducing MOOC courses in Sri Lanka

**3** — Life after relocation in Kegalle and Kilinochchi

**4** — Being better prepared : COVID 19 as a disaster

**5** — Redefining Research beyond Traditional Practice...

## 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 developments. Activities of SPARC are centred on research, training, advocacy and networking.

# EDITORIAL

**Dear readers and colleagues,**

This edition of the newsletter contains articles which focus on the ongoing activities of the Social Policy Analysis and Research Center (SPARC), Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo.
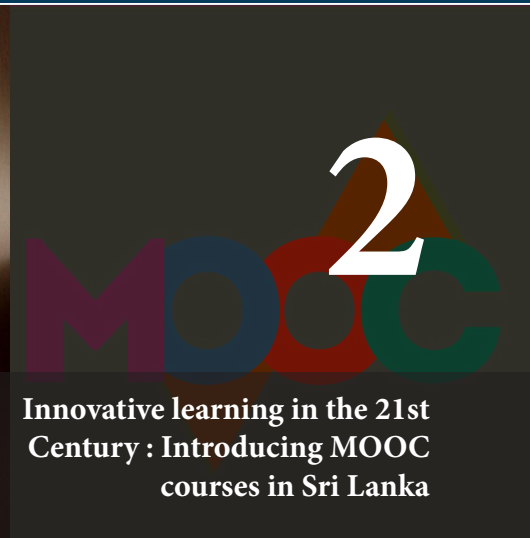
The year 2020 is a milestone in the life of SPARC. Throughout its 15 years of existence, SPARC has been involved in world renowned research and has focused on the creation of new knowledge with the ultimate aim of contributing to social wellbeing. The year 2020 has proved challenging and eventful to SPARC because of the COVID-19 pandemic situation; challenging the data collection processes of projects and administrative processes of the center. It also uncovered a novel field of research for SPARC with the involvement in a project titled, *"Improving COVID-19 and Pandemic Preparedness and Response through the Downstream of Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems"*.

Many crucial research areas including social integration of youth, community based poverty monitoring, conflict sensitive development planning, decent work and socio-economic security, democratisation and local governance, psychosocial assessment of development and humanitarian interventions, the impact of globalisation, corporate social responsibility, natural hazards and early warning systems have been subjected to scrutiny over the past years.

The involvement of the SPARC team in both international and local research projects has benefitted local academics, research staff, policy and decision makers, students and the general public via various methods such as training programmes, workshops, intervention programmes, policy documents and recommendations, reports, and needs assessments. Notable among them was the recently concluded project on relocation which I wish to elaborate in the following paragraph.

High impact disasters such as floods and landslides have been occurring frequently since 2011 in Sri Lanka, affecting more than 1 million people annually. Given this situation, various stakeholders in this field have grappled with emerging challenges, and have worked towards sustainable relocation. The project titled "Life two years after relocation: Status quo of natural hazard induced displacement and relocation in Kegalle, Sri Lanka" focused on the 2016 landslide tragedy in the Kegalle district which affected 36,121 people from 9,983 families, causing 168 total damages and 1,631 partial damages to the district's housing stock in 11 Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions. In the aftermath of the disaster, the National Building Research Organisation (NBRO), which is the national focal point for landslide risk management in Sri Lanka, provided technical assistance to implement a relocation programme which was approved by the Cabinet. SPARC was tasked with researching the socio-economic status of the people two years after they were relocated. A policy document was compiled thereafter, which included the following recommendations;

• *Conducting need, social impact and capacity assessments prior to every relocation process:*

It was revealed that displaced families select a relocation option according to the social and the financial capital available to them. Hence, in certain situations, the displaced communities might not have an accurate estimation of the capital available to them. Therefore, conducting such need analyses will help the community to make better decisions.

• *Introducing additional funding opportunities for displaced communities based on capacity assessment*

The study revealed that financial assistance required by families should vary depending on unique family attributes such as families consisting of aged and/or disabled members, or those having members with medical conditions.

• *Providing support to improve the livelihood strategies of relocated communities*

Implementing livelihood enhancement programmes to support and improve the livelihoods of the relocated communities is also seen as a measure which can enhance the socio-economic conditions of the relocated community.

• *Expediting the process of issuing deeds for houses and land ownership*

Given that legal documents which prove ownership are vital in the Sri Lankan context, the overall process of providing legal documents to prove land and house ownership should be expedited.

The discussion and recommendations of the policy documents will be of much benefit to stakeholders at various levels in the relocation process.
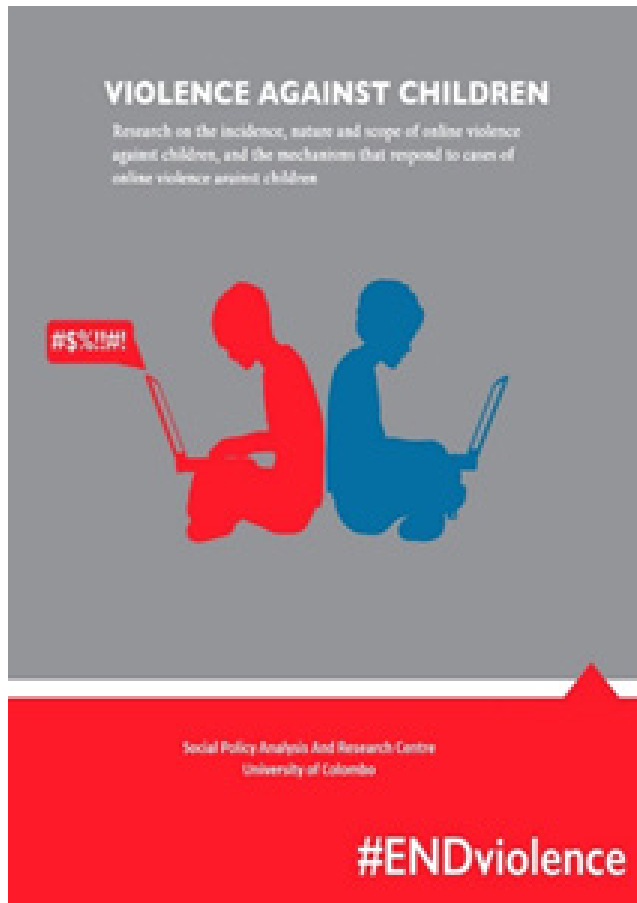
We unfold the details of many other timely and important projects undertaken by SPARC in the following pages. While we are grateful to everyone who has been part of this journey of excellence, we look forward to reaching greater heights in the future.



**Dr. Nishara Fernando**

# SOUTH ASIA'S FIRST EXTENSIVE DESK REVIEW ON ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

## RESEARCH TO END ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA



The Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC) recently complied South Asia's first extensive desk review on online violence against children. The desk review was a major output of the research project titled, "Research to end online violence against children in Sri Lanka". The project is an initiative of the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Security and is funded by Save the Children Sri Lanka.

The desk review consists of eight sections; defining online violence against children, types of online violence, risk factors, cyber security, threats faced by children, online violence against children and

a law and legal gap analysis based on national standards. The first three sections of the desk review examines definitions of online violence against children with reference to a number of internationally acknowledged definitions, different types of online violence experienced by children and discusses various risk factors that make certain groups of children more vulnerable to online violence. The third section discusses Sri Lankan studies conducted on the subject matter and gaps in the local literature. Dr. Nishara Fernando, Sociologist, SPARC and Mr. Malith De Silva, Coordinator/ Sociologist, SPARC developed these three sections.

Mr. Sampath Chandrasena, Information Technology Expert, National Center for Advanced Studies developed the cyber security section of the desk review which explores the technical protective measures used in the United States, Europe and other developed countries to protect children from online violence and discusses the most suitable and affordable technologies for Sri Lanka. The last three sections of the review explores the legal dimensions relevant to online violence against children such as international treaties, agreements, conventions and local legal measures. These sections further examine the loopholes and gaps in the local legal system while exploring remedial action that can rectify the legal gaps to provide better protection to children of Sri Lanka. Professor Wasantha Senaviratna and Mr. M.A.M. Hakeem of the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, developed the legal section of the desk review.

The desk review revealed a clear lack of research on online violence against children in Sri Lanka. Previous research on the subject have identified phishing, abuse of privacy, malware, e-mail harassment, identity theft on social media such as Facebook, and intellectual property violations as key types of online violence and harassment cases reported to Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team (SLCERT) and the cyber-crime unit of the Sri Lanka Police. The desk review exposed the highly organized nature of online sexual abuse against children in Sri Lanka. It discusses these abusive mechanisms by referring to websites containing adult content of children in Sri Lanka and, abusive usage of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and telegram where said sites are used to collect nudes of children and coerce children to share intimate pictures and videos of themselves and their peers using threats and financial incentives. The cyber security portion of the review revealed that Sri Lanka lacks digital infrastructure and trained specialists to reduce and minimize online violence against children. It also discusses protective mechanisms used in UK, USA and Europe and the adaptability of these mechanisms to suit the Sri Lankan context. The legal section of the review revealed that Sri Lanka lacks legal provisions to take legal action against perpetrators as relevant laws such as the Computer Crimes Act does not address online violence against children. The above Act seems to be insufficient to deal with certain situations of cyber bullying as it only addresses computer crimes pertaining to hacking, etc., and does not pay attention to online violence against children. Therefore, the desk review suggests that Sri Lanka needs to consolidate its existing laws against harassment and computer crimes in order to introduce a single, all-encompassing law to suppress cyber bullying, grooming and child pornography.

The research team submitted the final draft of the desk review to Save the Children Sri Lanka in May 2020. The edited desk review will be incorporated into the final report of the project titled "Research to end online violence against children in Sri Lanka".



**Mr. Malith De Silva**
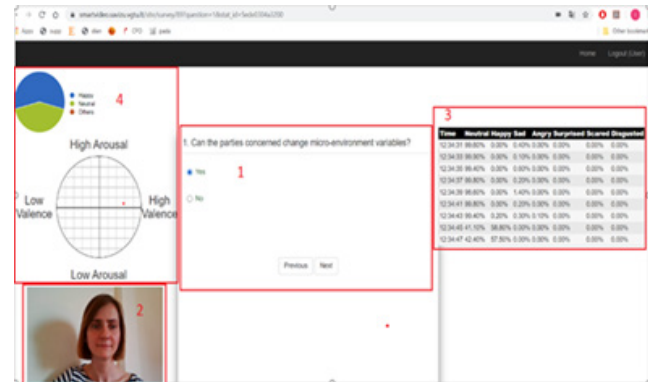
# INNOVATIVE LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY
## INTRODUCING MOOC COURSES IN SRI LANKA

The Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC) has introduced an online learning platform titled "Simulated Big Data Inter-university Networked Affective Educational Centre (BECK Centre) as a key output of the "Integrating education with consumer behavior relevant to energy efficiency and climate change at the universities of Russia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (BECK) project". The online platform was developed by the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania with the input of 14 project partner universities in Europe and South Asia, including Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, University of Huddersfield, Tallinn University of Technology, Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, Kaliningrad State Technical University, University of Ruhuna, University of Bologna, Peter the Great St.Petersburg Polytechnic University, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, University of Colombo, University of Barisal and University of Moratuwa.
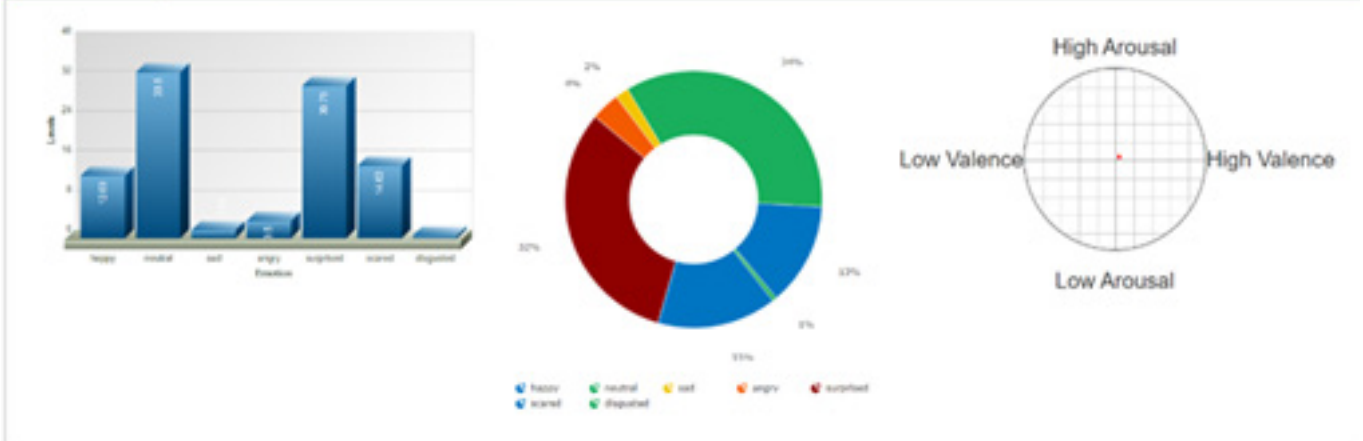
The main objective of establishing the BECK



*The BECK website*



*Video material and emotion tracking using "neuro-matrix"*

Centre is to create a platform to enable the delivery of BECK adaptive Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In addition, this Centre will enable and promote lifelong learning within the society by making study materials accessible outside the traditional classroom environment to various parties such as students, academics, practitioners and policy makers. The BECK Centre offers 16 adaptive MOOCs, Computer learning systems, Big Data Mining systems, Affective Tutoring System, Access to e-sources and a Moodle environment. The BECK Centre has adapted a 'neuro-matrix' (emotion detection technology) to satisfy the individual needs of learners, along with the social and cultural environments and traditions of their countries. The BECK Centre has the capacity to interpret the emotional state of students and to adapt the learning process accordingly to suit a student's emotional state.

Another special feature of the BECK Centre is its Big Data Mining facility. This system allows users to mine Big Data related to the project from multiple locations of the internet at the touch of a finger. The data that can be mined using the system are weather, climate, dwelling envelopes,

*Big data on climate change*

utilities, occupancy, market data (government data, trade association data, financial data from major players, customer surveys), climate change, best practices, human influences and the behavior of users.The Centre will also offer open-source videos, simulators (calculators and software), and case studies from renowned universities in the world to enhance the MOOC modules. Anyone who is interested can use these simulators (calculators and software) for their homework, term papers and final thesis.

The SPARC is currently examining all the above mentioned tools and is planning to develop a tutorial video series of instructions to be followed when using the BECK Centre. The video series will be developed in all three local languages: English, Sinhala and Tamil. The tutorials will aid service users to obtain the best results and services from the BECK Centre. It will also offer Sri Lankan students, practitioners, policy makers and academics to accumulate knowledge and engage in co- learning by sharing research findings with scholars around the world. The BECK Centre can be accessed freely on http://beck-erasmus.com/

As another initiative of the project, SPARC is introducing a course titled "Urbanization, Climate Change, Displacement and Relocation", as an initial development of a Massive Open Online Course. MOOC are innovative models for learning in the 21st century which deliver learning content on online platforms. MOOCs are unique as they do not demand compulsory attendance or advanced educational qualifications. This is the first time that a MOOC System on climate change education and energy efficiency will be developed in Sri Lanka to enhance the awareness of the general public on climate change and energy efficiency as it is a vital aspect of our day to day lives. The course will be offered for a period of three months in both Sinhala and English medium. The course discusses the impacts of climate change, displacement and relocation. In addition, it explores new trends of climate change and its impact on urban lives and livelihoods using concepts such as disaster-induced displacement, development-induced displacement, resettlement, sustainable livelihoods, vulnerability, disaster resilience and climate change mobility.

**Munasinghaghe Keshani Darsha**

# LIFE AFTER RELOCATION IN KEGALLE AND KILINOCHCHI

The Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC) recently compiled a community needs analysis: a country-specific literature review and a combined report and the first two outputs of the REbuildinG AfteR Displacement (REGARD) project. The project is co-funded by an EU Erasmus+ programme grant and will run for three years. The project is led by the Global Disaster Resilience Centre of University of Huddersfield, based in the UK. They are joined by a consortium of five higher education institutions from four countries in Europe and Asia.

The report consists of six sections; an executive summary, a country overview, a review of community needs in the context of Built Environment (BE) based on primary and secondary data, mapping of community needs within the BE aspects, a summary and conclusion. Dr. Nishara Fernando, Ms. Anuradha Senanayake and Ms. Maduri Wasana developed the report. The first three sections of the report examines literature on housing, socio-cultural, social-infrastructural, economic, physical infrastructural and governance needs in addition to the specific needs of communities with special needs and the host community in the context of BE. The fourth section is a community needs analysis based on the above given needs in the context of BE based on primary data. Primary data collection was conducted in the Kegalle and Kilinochchi districts with emphasis placed on disaster induced relocation and conflict induced resettlement projects. The mapping of community needs within BE mainly consisted of a summary of BE aspects gathered from both secondary and primary data.

The last section is a summary and conclusion of the overall report. The findings of the report reveal that there are significant gaps in the literature on relocation and resettlement. In addition, despite the large number of studies on relocation activities carried out in Sri Lanka, none have paid attention to the role of the built environment in facilitating successful relocation. There is also a lack of studies which focus on the relationship between the host community and the resettled community as well as the needs of the relocated communities in each stage of the relocation.

Moreover, failure of consulting displaced communities in the relocation process and restriction of policy decisions to the planning stage were identified as gaps during primary data collection in addition to disregarding the long term impact of relocation such as the economic, social and cultural needs. The research team submitted the final draft of the report to University of Huddersfield in November, 2019. The final report of the project titled "A Synthesis Report on the Role of the Built Environment in Enhancing Social Cohesion" published internationally in January , 2020 can be accessed on (https://drive.google.com/file/d/12za4vv0_uUWKmI8bki5HkKka-bAIe3os/view).

The output 3 of the project titled "A Guidance Note with Recommendations of Best Practices", based on the findings of the study, is about to be completed.



**Maduri Wasana**

# BEING BETTER PREPARED
## COVID 19 AS A DISASTER

The COVID-19 pandemic has been engulfing the entire world in the past few months recording over 90 million confirmed cases and exceeding 1.9 million deaths so far. In Sri Lanka, a total of 48,380 confirmed Corona virus cases and 232 deaths have been reported as of 11th January 2021. The pandemic was declared a global emergency taking into consideration its potency to dismantle not only a part of the world system but the entire world system including its social, economic and political aspects. Before the advent of the Corona virus, the world has been plagued by a number of outbreaks like the Spanish flu of 1918 and the Asian flu of 1957. Taking this into account, on 9th May 2020, the New York Times reported that the world should anticipate these types of outbreaks in the future investing in the improvement of preparedness for such outbreaks.

Owing to the capacity of COVID-19 and other pandemics to pose adverse health consequences but also cause a breakdown of economic systems cum social instability, preparedness for pandemics calls for addressing vulnerabilities and impacts that extend beyond the health sector. It is against this background that the project titled, "Improving COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness and response through the downstream of multi-hazard early warning systems" attempts to address two inter related challenges namely, 1) how to cope if a major natural hazard occurs during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) how pandemic preparedness can make use of the existing infrastructure for tackling other hazards. The project also seeks to improve early warning and preparedness for a natural hazard-pandemic hybrid scenario while simultaneously aiming at enhancing the availability of and access to Multi-Hazard Early Warning systems [MHEW] and disaster risk information that include pandemic/biological hazards, thereby addressing Target G of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction [SFDRR]. All these aspects are addressed by the project keeping in mind the importance of contextualizing pandemic preparedness to suit the local culture, governance, laws, risk perception and citizen behaviour.

This project has been funded by the United Kingdom Research and Innovation /Global Challenges Research Fund [UKRI/GCRF] Agile Response call to address COVID – 19 and constitutes a partnership among the Global Disaster Resilience Centre, School of Applied Sciences, University of Huddersfield, UK; University of Colombo, Sri Lanka; University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka; Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka; Disaster Management Centre, Sri Lanka; Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities, Sri Lanka; the Association of Disaster Risk Management Professionals of Sri Lanka (ADRiMP); the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Thailand; UNDRR (The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction) & ESTAG (Science & Technology Advisory Group) of UNDRR; Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), UK; Public Health, England and the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/IOTWMS) of The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOCUNESCO). The research will help Sri Lanka and the wider region to better prepare, respond and recover from disruptions caused

by pandemic threats. This project thus leverages collaboration among national and international, health and disaster management stakeholders to promptly address a contemporary global issue with contextual sensitivity.

While the project will be executed in six work packages, the University of Colombo will mainly contribute to work package 01; which involves the development of a conceptual framework on the key actors and processes involved in COVID-19 and other pandemic warning and dissemination processes, and work package 02; which involves exploring the extent to which pandemic threats are integrated within national and local DRR strategies, examining ongoing prevention and preparedness measures at the national and local level and developing recommendations to mainstream pandemics within national to local DRR strategies.

The planned outcomes pertaining to the mentioned work packages are:

1. To produce high quality, peer reviewed multi-institution, multi-disciplinary journal papers in high impact journals.

2. To give presentations based on the findings at international conferences, workshops and other events.

3. To produce a briefing paper and policy dialog on the current status and recommendations on the integration of pandemics within the national/local DRR strategies.

**Naduni Jayasinghe**

**Prof. Richard Haigh**
University of Huddersfield

**Dr. Nishara Fernando**
University of Colombo
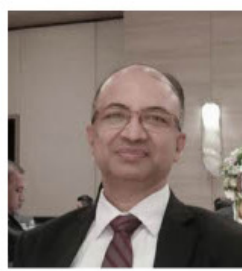
**Dr. Chandana Siriwardana**
University of Moratuwa

**Dr. Udara Abeysinghe**
Ministry of Health

**Prof. Dilanthi Amaratunga**
University of Huddersfield

**Dr. Prasad Ranaweera**
Ministry of Health

**Dr. Hemantha Herath**
Ministry of Health

**Ms. Kinkini Hemachandra**
University of Huddersfield