

CCD-War Widow's Project join the World to Celebrate International Widows Day



In communities around the world widows face social-economic and political exclusion. Many are faced with economic burdens, cultural stigma and unable to justice systems to access inheritance rights and land rights. To raise awareness of the situation of widows War Widows Project, part of the Centre for Community Development held "The Plight of Widows" on the 24th June 2018. The event was held within the Kingston area in recognition of International Widows Day which falls on the 23rd of June each year. There was a diverse programme on the agenda this year with, speeches, spoken word performance, group discussions and a Q and A panel to fully engage and inform attendees on the plight of widows.

The event highlighted the plight of widows around the world with a focus on war widows in Illankai. Mrs Rajani Iqbal, Member of the Board of Directors of the Co-operative Initiative of Community-based Organisations in the U.K and former War Widows Project lead delivered an excellent speech sharing her knowledge and expertise of working with war-widows and setting up co-operatives in Illankai. Rajani shared her concerns over the understanding of how co-operatives work leading to a failure of projects, as well the need for an encompassing evidence base to develop effective support schemes for widows.

The Q and A panel included our key-note speaker Rajani Iqbal, Rachel Seighe, a Lecturer in criminology at the University of Middlesex who has recently published a book titled War, Denial and Nation – Building in Sri Lanka: After the end, and Iswarya Vidhyadaran a Tamil diaspora activist and Anthropology masters student at Sussex University. The panel discussion included reference to the need for robust co-operative schemes to provide economic security for widows and their dependents, the politically motivated denial of space for the war widows to grieve their losses for closure from the war and the necessity of collaborations between researchers, diaspora groups and individuals, as well as, grassroots organisations in order to effectively address the needs and advocate for justice for war widows.

Group discussions highlighted concerns over the next generation in Illankai (children of war widows), their vulnerabilities, lack of opportunities and the perpetuation of poverty. Also raised were concerns over psychosocial support for war widows, sustainability of support schemes and debt traps. The event drew to a close with War Widows Project renewing and advancing their commitments to advocate and support for widows by channelling resources through the co-operative initiative, international advocacy and demanding accountability of the Sri Lankan Government. Upskilling widows using diaspora skills