



JULY

NEWSLETTER

2024



HELP-O
SRI LANKA

www.helpo-srilanka.org

ABOUT US

HELP-O is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1992 to serve the local community by making it a better, happier place to live in harmony with nature.

The vision of the organization is "Equitable Economic Development, Social Justice, and a Safer Environment for All," while the mission is "To identify the risks confronted by Sri Lankan communities and implement effective solutions through proven integrated approaches with the participation of stakeholders."

The five strategies HELP-O adopts in achieving its mission include empowering the marginalized community socially and economically, recognizing the importance of community participation and leadership, dedicating efforts to protecting the environment through an integrated process, safeguarding human rights and justice, and ensuring sustainable development.


Our programs and projects mainly focus on community empowerment, rehabilitation, relief assistance, protecting human rights, community participation in local governance, community financing, livelihood development, economic resource mobilization, nurturing biodiversity, mitigating the impact of climate change, pollution prevention, waste management, optimal utilization of marine resources, and optimal utilization of forest products.

Our organization is dedicated to making a sustainable positive impact on the environment and the lives of people in Sri Lanka through a multisectoral approach in different sectors.

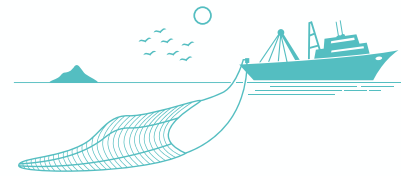




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REVIVING THE FISHING NETS: EMPOWERING SCHOOL CHILDREN TO TRANSFORM DISCARDED FISHING NETS INTO SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES FOR A GREENER FUTURE



On July 2nd, 2024, HELP-O organized a workshop at Dangedara Jayawardena College to educate school students about the recycling of discarded fishing nets. The workshop was led by a group of university students from abroad, volunteering with HELP-O through the AISEC. Their initiative was driven by the pressing issue of marine pollution, particularly the growing threat of microplastics released into the coastal environment by discarded fishing nets, which also pose significant harm to aquatic organisms.

During the event, the volunteers delivered presentations on marine conservation, emphasizing the harmful effects of abandoned fishing nets and the urgent need to upcycle these materials. They guided the students in creating handcrafts using yarns made from twisted fishing nets. This hands-on activity not only taught the students about recycling but also sparked their creativity and nurtured a sense of environmental responsibility.

The workshop began with a presentation on marine conservation, highlighting the importance of protecting ocean ecosystems and the detrimental impact of marine debris.

The students learned about the ecological damage caused by discarded fishing nets, including the entanglement of marine life and the disruption of habitats. The presenters emphasized the need for sustainable fishing practices and the role of recycling in mitigating these environmental issues.

Following the presentation, the students participated in a practical session where they learned to create handcrafts using yarns made from fishing nets. The volunteers demonstrated the process of twisting fishing nets into yarns and guided the students in making various handcrafts such as bracelets, keychains, and small bags. This activity not only provided a creative outlet for the students but also reinforced the concept of upcycling and the value of repurposing waste materials.

The workshop concluded with a discussion on the broader implications of recycling and the importance of individual actions in promoting environmental sustainability. The students were encouraged to share their newfound knowledge with their peers and families, fostering a community-wide awareness of marine conservation and recycling practices.

In conclusion, the initiative to collect, clean, and process discarded fishing nets was a significant step towards sustainability and environmental protection. The efforts of HELP-O, in collaboration with volunteers and various organizations, highlighted the importance of managing fishing net waste effectively. The educational workshop further amplified this impact by empowering the next generation with the knowledge and skills to contribute to environmental conservation. With the planned expansion and continued coordination, this initiative will contribute to a cleaner and more sustainable fishing industry and a more informed and proactive community.

Written by - Supun Suranjith

(Project Officer- HELP-O)



Your Council, Now at Your Fingertips: e-Sabha Revolutionizes Southern Province Communication



The Southern Province has taken a significant step towards enhancing citizen engagement with the launch of the e-Sabha mobile application. This innovative platform provides residents with direct access to their local authority, revolutionizing the way citizens interact with their government.

On July 12, 2024, a pivotal meeting was convened at the Galle Rockfort Hotel under the leadership of Chief Secretary Mr. Sumith Alahakon. The event aimed to equip government officials and stakeholders with the knowledge to effectively utilize the e-Sabha application.

This program, held under the second phase of the Right to Voice Project, marks a significant milestone in fostering citizen engagement. The second phase of the Right to Voice Project is funded by The Asia Foundation through the support of Pact International, under the Bolstering Civil Society Program with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



Key Figures in Attendance:

- Mr. Sumith Alahakon, Chief Secretary of the Southern Province
- Mr. Krishantha Mahendra, Secretary of the Chief Ministry of the Southern Province
- Mr. A.U. Welarathna, Secretary of the Southern Province Ministry of Agriculture
- Secretaries of Provincial Ministries
- Deputy Chief Secretaries of Southern Province
- Heads of Departments, Southern Province
- Local Government Commissioner
- Divisional Secretaries
- Assistant Local Government Commissioners
- Municipal Commissioners
- Heads of Government Institutions
- Heads of Security Forces
- Representatives from Stakeholder Organizations

Special Guests:

- Mrs. Siranti Jayathilaka, Deputy Head of the Bolstering Civil Society program
- Mr. Mohamed Ziad, Program Manager for Bolstering Civil Society

A Collaborative Effort:

The success of this program is a testament to the combined efforts of:

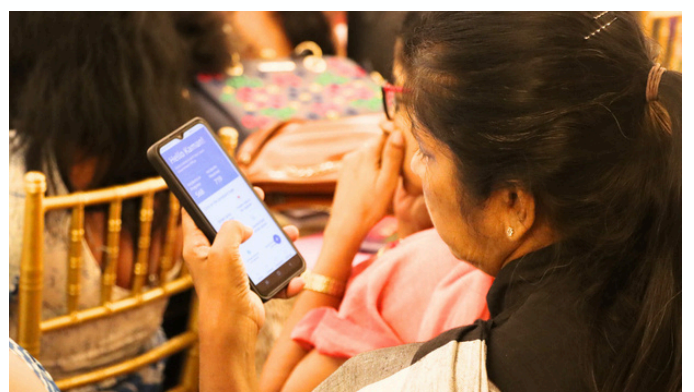
- Help-O CEO, Mr. Chatura Welivitiya
- Project Consultant and former Ministry Secretary, Mr. Ashoka Siriwardena
- Project Manager, Lahiru Maduranga
- The dedicated Help-O staff

The Power of e-Sabha:

The e-Sabha app empowers citizens to directly report issues, offer feedback, and stay informed about local government initiatives. This streamlines communication and fosters a more transparent and accountable governance structure. Stay tuned for further updates on how e-Sabha is revolutionizing citizen engagement in the Southern Province!

Written by - Lahiru Madhuranga

(Project Manager - HELP-O)



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NATIONAL

NEWSPAPER

ARTICLES

Diwaina Newspaper article English translate

e-Sabha is a mobile application designed to allow citizens to easily and efficiently submit their issues and requests to local government authorities. This app embodies the concept of having "your council at your fingertips."

Traditionally, to address various issues such as public facilities, citizens had to visit local government offices, often resulting in taking time off from work and other inconveniences. However, in today's busy world, the ability to submit complaints from home, complete with photos or videos, and direct them to the appropriate district is highly beneficial. If responses are received within the same day, it becomes even more valuable.

The E-Sabha initiative began during the COVID-19 period in the Galle district with 10 selected local government institutions. According to Dr. Chathura Weliwitiya, chairman of HELP-O (an environmental organization in Galle), the program's progress has exceeded initial expectations.

Currently, e-Sabha operates in all local government institutions in the Galle district, five institutions in the Matara district, and five in the Hambantota district, covering 30 institutions in the Southern Province. Additionally, it is active in the Puttalam district of the North Western Province. A notable feature is that the actions taken on complaints are visible to the Provincial Commissioner of Local Government, ensuring accountability.

The program aims to eventually cover all local government institutions in the Southern Province, extending to 49 institutions in total. This initiative was recently discussed at a meeting chaired by Southern Province Secretary Sumith Alahakoon, with participation from various officials and representatives.

Mr. Sumith Alahakoon and Dr. Chathura Weliwitiya both affirm that e-Sabha should be implemented nationwide, emphasizing its role in facilitating citizen participation in governance. It allows citizens to submit complaints without knowing the specific jurisdiction, and local authorities ensure these complaints are directed to the relevant body. e-Sabha enhances trust in local government and enables citizens to contribute to governance through digital technology.

By implementing e-Sabha across all local government institutions, it can significantly streamline complaint management and improve government responsiveness. The initiative supports a governance model that involves citizens actively, aligning with global trends.



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Right to Voice Project Launches e-Sabha App in Hambanthota District

Hambanthota, Sri Lanka – On Month July 2024, the Right to Voice Project marked a significant milestone with the introduction of the e-Sabha mobile application in five programs held at five Local Authorities in Hambanthota District. First program was at Beliaththa PS on 06th of June, second one was at Katuwana PS at 7th of June. The next two programs were at Tangalle PS and Tangalle Urban council on 12th & 13th of June. The final program was at Hambanthota Municipal council on the 4th of July. The events, aimed at enhancing community engagement and streamlining the complaint management process for local government authorities, witnessed enthusiastic participation from local officials and community members. The meetings commenced with a welcome speech by an officer of each LA, who introduced the officers present. This was followed by an introduction to the program and the trainers by Mr. Lahiru Maduranga, the Project Manager of the Right to Voice Project. The events commenced with a warm welcome speech by each Secretary LA and Commissioner of Municipal council, who introduced the assembly to the officers of the Sabha, setting the stage for a day of insightful discussions and demonstrations.



Program Highlights and Key Presentations

Mr. Lahiru Maduranga, Project Manager of the Right to Voice Project, introduced the objectives and plan of the program, ensuring the trainees were well-acquainted with the goals and the trainers who would guide them through the process. His speech underscored the transformative potential of the e-Sabha app in fostering a more responsive and efficient local government. Dr. Chathura Welivitiya, CEO of HELP-O, captivated the audience with a detailed introduction to the e-Sabha app. He shared compelling success stories and highlighted the app's capabilities:

- **Convenient Complaint Lodging:** Citizens can now file complaints without physically visiting local government offices, saving time and resources.
- **Enhanced Reporting:** The app supports multimedia submissions, allowing users to include photos and videos with their complaints.
- **Reduced Administrative Burden:** Public and private employees can lodge complaints without taking leave, minimizing workplace disruptions.
- **Prompt Responses:** Local authorities can respond to complaints quickly, improving service delivery.
- **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** The app facilitates communication between local governments and utility providers, ensuring swift resolution of issues such as water leaks and power outages.
- **Universal Accessibility:** Complaints can be lodged by anyone, regardless of their residence, and in any of the three official languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

Mr. N.A. Dharmasiri, Former Deputy Commissioner of the Western Province Local Government Department, outlined the responsibilities of local authorities in managing the e-Sabha app. He emphasized the importance of:

- **Active Engagement:** Encouraging public participation in local governance.
- **Efficient Management:** Local authorities must appoint dedicated admins to manage complaints and maintain transparent records.
- **Responsive Governance:** The app's features ensure transparency and accountability, fostering trust between citizens and local governments.

Dr. Ashoka Siriwardhana, Project Consultant for the Right to Voice Project, highlighted the strategic benefits of the e-Sabha app:

- **Digital Transformation:** The app aligns with the global trend towards technology-driven governance, bridging the digital gap in Sri Lanka.
- **Resource Efficiency:** It reduces the need for physical visits to government offices, cutting costs and saving time.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** By making complaint handling transparent, the app boosts public confidence in local authorities.
- **Corruption Reduction:** The app's transparency features help combat corruption and improve service delivery.

Mr. Lahiru Maduranga conducted a comprehensive demonstration of the e-Sabha app, detailing the download, registration, and complaint submission processes. He walked participants through:

- **App Interface:** Navigating the app's user-friendly interface.
- **Complaint Submission:** Steps to lodge a complaint with photos, videos, and location details.
- **Administrative Functions:** Managing complaints, generating reports, and using the SMS notification system for public announcements.



The event concluded with the official appointment of e-Sabha admins for the Beliaththa Pradeshiya Sabha, as recommended by the Secretary/Commissioner ensuring dedicated management of the app's operations. The event received positive feedback from participants. Some of the officials of Local Authorities, praised the new system and expressed gratitude for its implementation. Some of the participants acknowledged the app's potential and suggested further enhancements for categorizing complaints. In his closing remarks, the community development officer of each LA extended heartfelt thanks to all participants and stakeholders, recognizing the e-Sabha app's potential to revolutionize local governance.

The launch of the e-Sabha app is a significant leap towards modernizing local governance in Sri Lanka, fostering a more engaged and responsive community. The Right to Voice Project continues to lead the charge in leveraging technology for social good, paving the way for a brighter, more connected future

Written by - Vinodani Tharanga

(Project Officer- HELP-O)



Meeting at Akmeemana Pradeshiya Sabha on e-Sabha Mobile Application Updates

On July 29, 2024, the Akmeemana Pradeshiya Sabha convened a meeting to inform its staff about the latest updates to the e-Sabha mobile application. During the meeting, the staff agreed to reactivate the e-Sabha process and decided to ensure that all complaints are logged into the e-Sabha system. The program was led by the Secretary of the Akmeemana Pradeshiya Sabha and was attended by Right to Voice Project Manager Lahiru Maduranga along with several members of the HELP-O. This initiative aims to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of the local government's complaint management system through the use of updated digital tools.

Written by - Lahiru Madhuranga

(Project Manager - HELP-O)



Workshop on Change Management: Embracing the e-Sabha Mobile Application

On July 25 and 26, 2024, the Wakwella Management Development & Training Institute hosted an impactful workshop on Change Management, spearheaded by Dr. Asoka Siriwardana, Consultant of HELP-O. This workshop aimed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate and manage change effectively within their organizations.

A highlight of the event was the team activity assigned to Mr. Bandara from the Southern Province Local Government Assistant Commissioner's Office. The focus of their task was to explore the topic: "The e-Sabha Mobile Application as a Complaint Management Tool and How to Overcome the Challenges Arising When Using the App."



CITYNET National Chapter Meeting of Sri Lanka Highlights e-Governance Initiatives



The CITYNET National Chapter meeting of Sri Lanka convened at the Colombo Municipal Council Committee Meeting Hall, under the leadership of Colombo Municipal Commissioner Mrs. Bhadrani Jayawardena. The event saw active participation from representatives of various municipalities, including Kandy, Negombo, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, Moratuwa, and Galle, alongside their respective Municipal Commissioners. Additionally, notable presence was observed from representatives of SEVANTHA, HELP-O, and the GDF, contributing to the robust discourse on urban governance and development.

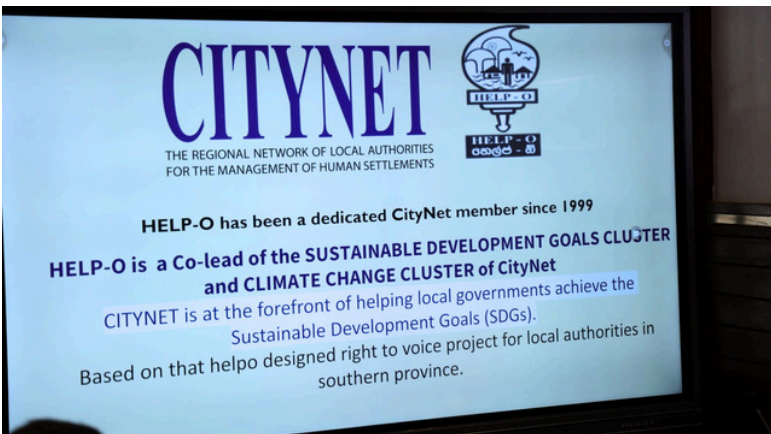


A significant highlight of the meeting was the insightful presentation by Dr. Chathura Weliwitiya, CEO of HELP-O. Dr. Weliwitiya underscored the pivotal role of the e-Sabha application in streamlining local government operations. His address elaborated on the functionality of e-Sabha, emphasizing its potential to revolutionize public administration through enhanced transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement.

Dr. Weliwitiya articulated how the e-Sabha application serves as a digital platform facilitating seamless interaction between citizens and municipal authorities. He highlighted its features, which include real-time updates on municipal activities, easy access to public services, and a user-friendly interface for lodging complaints and feedback. By leveraging this technology, municipalities can ensure more responsive governance and improved service delivery.



The meeting also provided a platform for municipal representatives to share their experiences and discuss collaborative strategies for urban development. The participants explored various avenues for integrating digital tools into their administrative frameworks, aiming to foster more inclusive and participatory governance models.



Mrs. Bhadrani Jayawardena, in her concluding remarks, reiterated the importance of embracing technological advancements in municipal governance. She commended the efforts of HELP-O and other organizations in driving the digital transformation of local government operations. The Commissioner also encouraged municipalities to adopt innovative solutions like e-Sabha to enhance their operational efficiency and better serve their communities.



The CITYNET National Chapter meeting in Sri Lanka marks a significant step towards modernizing local government practices through the adoption of digital tools. The collaboration between municipal authorities and organizations like HELP-O is poised to pave the way for more effective and accountable governance, ultimately benefiting the citizens they serve.





SWARANAPURA 2024: NATIONAL AWARDS CEREMONY RECOGNIZES EXCELLENCE IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The prestigious Swaranapura 2024 National Awards Ceremony, dedicated to evaluating and honoring Local Government Institutions, took place at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH). Among the celebrated entities, the Halawatha (Chilaw) Urban Council was distinguished for its successful implementation of the e-Sabha initiative.

Attending on behalf of the council, Dr. Chathura Welivitiya, Executive Director of the HELP-O , and Lahiru Maduranga, Manager of the "Right to Voice" project at HELP-O, were present to accept the award. Their leadership and commitment to enhancing local governance through innovative solutions were key factors in achieving this recognition.



Empowering Change: A Month of Environmental Stewardship

In July, we had the pleasure of working with eight dedicated volunteers who significantly contributed to our ongoing efforts. The volunteers were Mert Atay, Kerek Sirtikizil, Enes Turkoglu, Doga Caliskan, Doga Kurtoglu, and Emrehan Ozay from Turkey, Fredrick Lung from Australia, and Luca Meneghini from Italy. Their diverse backgrounds and skills brought a wealth of knowledge and energy to our projects. The volunteers provided essential support to our office operations, ensuring smooth day-to-day activities and assisting in administrative tasks. Their efforts were vital in maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of our work.

In addition to supporting office work, the volunteers played a crucial role in creating comprehensive proposals on waste management. These proposals will be instrumental in our future projects and initiatives, helping us to develop and implement more effective waste management strategies.

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In addition to supporting office work, the volunteers played a crucial role in creating comprehensive proposals on waste management. These proposals will be instrumental in our future projects and initiatives, helping us to develop and implement more effective waste management strategies.

Another significant contribution was the educational workshops on marine conservation conducted for school children. On July 2nd, HELP-O organized a workshop at Dangedara Jayawardena College to educate students about the recycling of discarded fishing nets. This event featured presentations on marine conservation, the harmful effects of discarded fishing nets, and ways to upcycle these nets. The volunteers trained students to make handcrafts using yarns made by twisting fishing nets, instilling creativity and environmental responsibility.

The workshop highlighted the importance of protecting ocean ecosystems, sustainable fishing practices, and the role of recycling in mitigating environmental issues. The students participated in hands-on activities, creating items like bracelets and keychains, which reinforced the concept of upcycling.

The volunteers also took part in a beach cleanup program, demonstrating their commitment to environmental protection. They worked tirelessly to remove debris and litter from the beaches, contributing to the cleanliness and beauty of the local coastal areas. This initiative not only improved the local environment but also raised awareness about the importance of keeping our beaches clean.

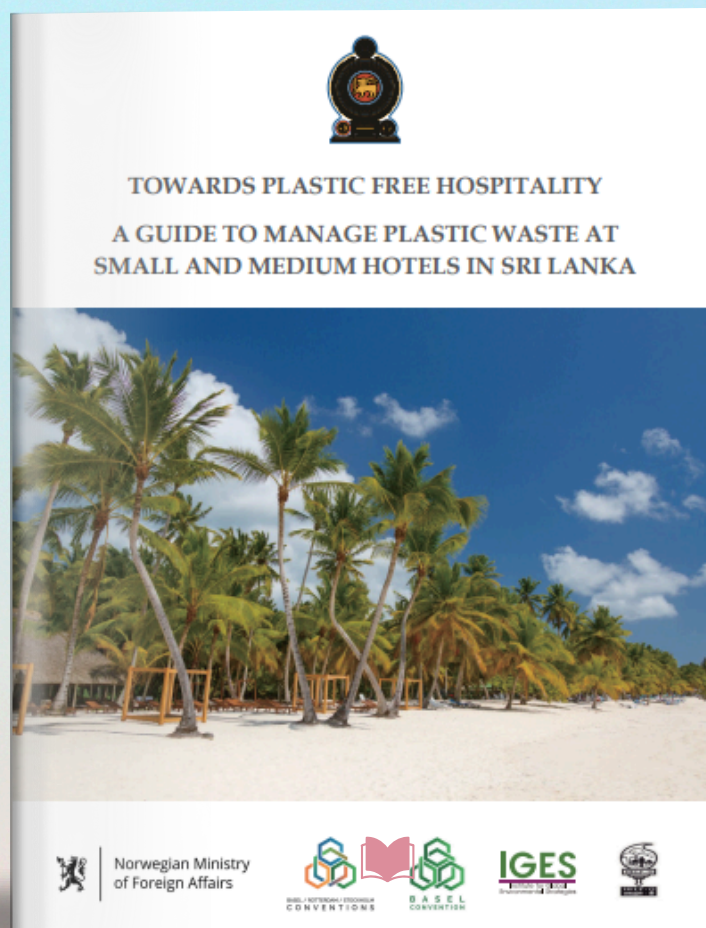
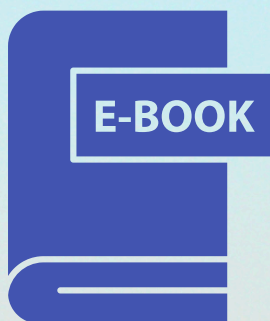
Additionally, the volunteers participated in the Right to Voice Project Pocket meetings with local authorities. During these meetings, they contributed their perspectives and ideas to enhance community engagement and environmental policies. Their involvement was key in bridging the gap between the community and local authorities, promoting collaborative efforts towards environmental sustainability. We are immensely grateful for the hard work and dedication of these volunteers. Their contributions have been crucial in advancing our mission to make Galle City plastic waste-free. We look forward to their continued involvement in our projects and initiatives.



TOWARDS PLASTIC FREE HOSPITALITY

A GUIDE TO MANAGE PLASTIC WASTE AT SMALL AND MEDIUM HOTELS IN SRI LANKA

The "A GUIDE TO MANAGE PLASTIC WASTE AT SMALL AND MEDIUM HOTELS IN SRI LANKA" book, which has been collaboratively developed by Help-O, the Ministry of Environment, IGES, NORAD, and BRS, has now been published.



Download - [Click](#)

USEFUL RESOURCES



Upcoming



CITYNET

THE REGIONAL NETWORK OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES
FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Programs

International Disaster Cluster Seminar

Hosted by Taipei City and members of Disaster Cluster, the four-day program will feature technical sessions, live drill demonstrations, and panel discussions on disaster data governance, mainstreaming GEDSI (gender equality, disability, and social inclusion) in disaster programs and plans, and disaster-climate change risks mitigation.

Another highlight is another round of cities to be signed-up into the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Making Cities Resilience 2030. Partner CityNet Members: Taipei City (Host City), Makati City (Disaster Cluster Lead) Colombo Municipal Council, Matsuyama City,

Quezon City Government, Taoyuan City Government, Ahmedabad Study Action Group (ASAG), National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET) and Plus Arts (Disaster Cluster Co-Leads).

(17-22 September Taipei)

For more information, email programs2@citynet-ap.org

Capacity Building Program for High-Level City Officials

CityNet will organize a high-level learning program with its partners in China fostering international urban cooperation and benchmarking urban innovations. The program will focus on low-carbon, climate change adaptation and mitigation. Invited cities will present their best practices on low carbon green cities and apply the lessons learned.

For more information, email programs2@citynet-ap.org



44th Executive Committee Meeting

The Executive Committee is responsible for the execution of policies established by the General Council. CityNet holds the Executive Committee Meeting at least once every two years for the Executive Committee to convene and discuss the direction of the organization.

(18-20 November Iloilo)



NEWSLETTER JULY 2024 HELP-O SRI LANKA

CHIEF ADVISIOR

Dr.Chathura Welivitiya

ADVISIORS

Dr.Asoka Siriwardana
Dr.Rohana Rathnayake
Sirisena Deshapriya
Padmasiri Moonamale
P.A. Gunathilaka
Lasitha Udaya

EDITORS

Lahiru Udumalagala
Chandhi Devaki
Anoja Jeewanthi
Chamoth Teran
Supun Suranjith
Chathura Rajitha
Yasitha Iresha


DESIGN BY


Chamoth Teran





HELP-O

No.364/18A,Samagi Mw,
Dangedara , Galle, Sri Lanka

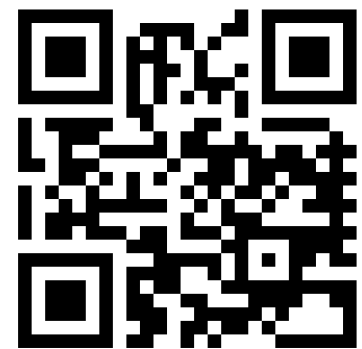
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 Whatsapp - 94 77 373 7834

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