



Women's empowerment project



This project's primary goal is to **equip impoverished rural Sri Lankan women with much-needed English language and life skills** so they can grow personally, boost their confidence and self-esteem, interact with their families and children more effectively at home, and become more employable in the future. For a variety of social and economic reasons, most of these women have never had the chance to acquire these skills and pursue a successful career; therefore, it is imperative that this service be made available to them to support their development and well-being.

Availability: Full availability for 12 months of the year (Jan, Feb, March, April, May, June, July, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov and Dec); partial availability for 3 months of the year (Jan, April & Dec) – **please check with us to confirm exact dates for bookings made in these months.**

Project Start & End Days: Saturdays

Project Work Days: Monday to Fridays (weekends are free)

Support Provided: Program Manager provides detailed introduction and culture training on arrival. Area orientation tour provided within 1-2 days of arrival. Education Coordinator provides project-specific training and supervises classes daily, and also acts as a bridge between the volunteers and local women students, if necessary. Our staff also assist participants with lesson planning, guiding them on the specific curriculum to follow each day and conducting regular meetings with them to monitor progress. Participants also have access to our in-house teaching library consisting of manuals, books and various teaching materials to help with lesson planning and providing general guidance. Local transportation to and from the project is also included each day.

Age Requirement: Must be between **18-60** years. (Females only)

Nearest Airport: Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport

Location of Project: The project is run at AASHA Community Centre. Classes are generally conducted at a local school (15 minutes from the volunteer house) and occasionally, at other locations based on local conditions and project requirements at the time.

Meals Provided: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Background to this Program: We typically work with rural Muslim women who are easily some of the most vulnerable sections of Sri Lankan society, where the need for support is greatest. The situation of these women has been shaped heavily by its traditional culture, colonial history and post-independence policies.

It is no secret that gender stereotypes adversely impact women, particularly in rural communities of developing countries like Sri Lanka. Women here continue to be seen as “dependent wives” or “supplementary earners” at best. Traditional familial responsibilities of a woman, especially as a mother/wife/homemaker, constrain them in their choice of employment, as do her family’s and society’s attitudes towards certain types of employment.

Most women in Sri Lanka are literate in Sinhala and/or Tamil, the two main local languages in the country. This is because in the 1950s, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, including university education, was made free and converted from English medium to the local languages. This led to a rapid expansion of educational opportunities amongst females. Parents no longer had to choose whether to invest in the education of sons or daughters. Educational participation rates rose rapidly amongst women and gender differences declined sharply by the 1960s.

Despite this, dropout rates were higher among females, especially in low-income neighbourhoods, settlements, and backward villages and particularly amongst rural Muslim communities.

In 1983, a massive civil war broke out in Sri Lanka, which lasted for 26 years ending in 2009. This led to substantial social dislocation and trauma. Social sector expenditure was cut back by the increasing financial cost of the war in the late 1980s and 1990s. As a result, there was a deterioration in the quality of health and education services which negatively impacted the quality of life for women and their families. Many women were pushed out of stable employment in the formal sector to marginal economic activities, and to unviable self-employment. Various studies have shown that for poor rural women, quality of life and employment conditions deteriorated the most during the last three decades and pushed them into unemployment or low-skilled jobs. The tsunami of 2004 was also instrumental in bringing large scale damage to the region, which further deteriorated employment prospects and quality of life for women and their families.

Women's empowerment can come in many forms and we have chosen to focus on 'English Education' as a tool to equip women with more confidence and make them more employable, while developing their basic life and language skills. The women we work with come from poor to lower-middle income families and mostly from the Muslim communities, which have suffered the most during the turbulent times of the recent past. Most have had early marriages and have been denied the opportunity to pursue a viable career in order to raise families. A lot of these women are keen to learn English to enhance their personal growth, increase their self-esteem and confidence, and enable them to become more employable in the future. For many, conversing with our volunteers is also a welcome break from their mundane daily routine.

What our Volunteers do on the Project: Volunteers will be teaching English at basic level to women in small to mid-sized groups. Sessions will be held from Mon-Fri either in the mornings or afternoons, for about 2 hours each. Each session will be conducted in a close-knit, comfortable environment with small groups of 5-20 of rural women. Daily preparation (1-2 hours per day) is expected from volunteers to plan for these sessions, since the classes are run entirely by the volunteers (with some assistance from our local staff as needed).

The classes are scheduled **4 days a week** and one specific day is dedicated for lesson planning where the volunteers plan the sessions and get the needed lesson materials prepared in advance. It is important to adapt to the ground circumstances and be flexible.

Volunteers can also get help from our staff on planning for topics / lessons and creative ways to teach, but lesson planning and teaching are ultimately the responsibility of the volunteers themselves. The classes are generally conducted at the local school (where many of the children of these women attend). Classes will focus more on spoken English (to maximise impact) and will also include basic grammar sessions. We employ various techniques, such as roleplay, in order to maximise the practical impact of this initiative.

This project is a good fit for anyone who is keen to help and has a **minimum intermediate level of English skills**. Prior **teaching experience**, while helpful, is not required.

We encourage you to **bring a notebook** and a pen to make necessary notes and records along with laptops or tablets for lesson planning.

Recommended Attire: A conservative dress code needs to be adhered to while at the project. Knees and shoulders must be covered, as well as any tattoos or body art. It is mandatory to wear our blue cotton teaching coats during sessions which we provide. The rest of the clothing can be comfortable and casual.