

PHOTOVOICE AS A METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE  
INFRASTRUCTURE: LESSONS FROM SRI LANKA



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MAY 2023

**CMRD REPORTS**

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ISSN 2706-0268

Printed by: Centre for Migration Research and Development

First published: 2023

Inclusive Urban Infrastructure is a project funded by UK Research and Innovation through the Global Challenges Research Fund under the title 'Towards Trajectories of Inclusion: Making infrastructure work for the most marginalised' (grant reference number ES/T008067/1).

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Front cover photograph: *Water sources captured by participant in Mahatenna, Sarnia, for the photovoice study (2023).*

## **Photovoice as a Method for Understanding Inclusive Infrastructure: Lessons from Sri Lanka**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the Centre for Migration Research and Development (CMRD) for the opportunity to conduct the photovoice study resulting in this publication. She is also thankful to Professor Michael Collyer, Principal Investigator and Dr. Danesh Jayatilaka, Co-Investigator of the Inclusive Urban Infrastructure (IUI) research study conducted in partnership with the University of Sussex and the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre. Appreciations go to Dr. Rajith Lakshman, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the CMRD research team including Dr. Alikhan Mohideen, Sakeena Alikhan, Abdhullah Azam, and Mr. Udeni Chularathna, Executive Director, SEVANATHA, and the SEVANATHA team, for their advice and assistance. The author wishes to thank the Research Assistants of the photovoice study Elamaran Dharshini, Kalani Shanika, Dinali Dabarera, and Fathima Sajeedha. The author is thankful to the kind support of the participants and residents of Sarnia and Nawagampura for the photovoice study.

The CMRD acknowledges the financial support provided by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) to conduct the IUI project.

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## Introduction

Photovoice was implemented by the Centre for Migration Research and Development (CMRD), Colombo, as a visual data gathering and storytelling method in two key field sites, as a component of the qualitative methodology of the Inclusive Urban Infrastructure (IUI) project of the University of Sussex<sup>1</sup>. The method was implemented in Sarnia in Badulla, an estate community in the hinterlands of Sri Lanka, and Nawagampura in Colombo, an underserved neighbourhood closer to the city centre of the commercial capital (see Alikhan 2022 a & b for community profiles of the field sites). The implementation of the method was carried out through October 2022 to February 2023. The objective was to device the photovoice method as a participatory and community-engaging method of visual storytelling, enabling potential interventions together with the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre for issues in service grids of water (Sarnia) and housing (Nawagampura).



*Image 1: Participants compiling photo collage stories: Nawagampura photovoice workshop*

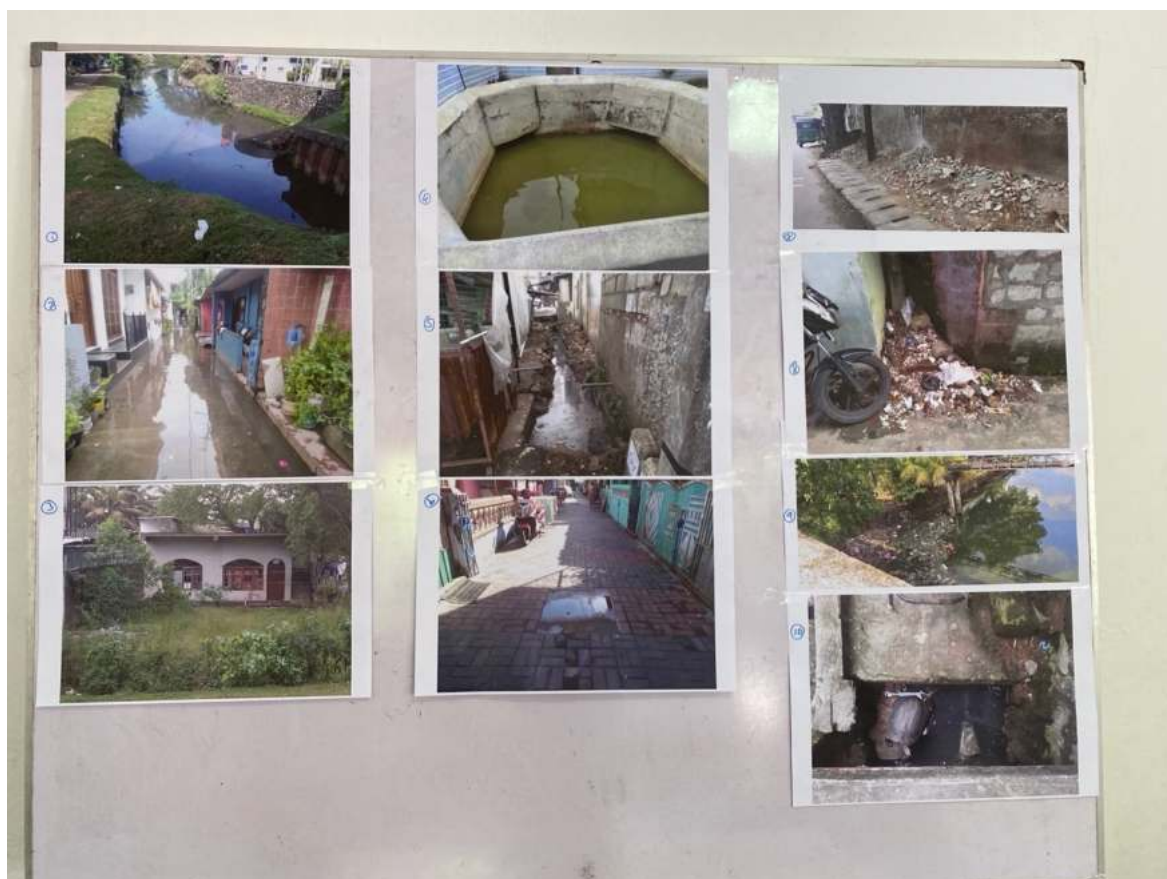
For this method, participants were trained in photo-taking techniques, enabling them to photograph issues they experienced relating to infrastructure in their communities. The process included phases of training (Research Assistants (RAs) and participants), photographing by participants, interviews with participants on select photos, and perspective-taking community workshops containing group discussions. Photovoice for the IUI project was used alongside a range of methods, such as community profiling, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, household surveys, and comics.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the IUI project see: <https://www.inclusiveinfrastructure.org/>

## About the method: the photo and the voice

The seminal work of Caroline Wang and Anne Burris (1997) was foundational to the development of photovoice as a visual method, which commenced with their work in women's health research in China. They identify three goals of photovoice: 1) recording and reflecting on community strengths and concerns, 2) promoting critical dialogue through large and small group discussions of photographs, and 3) reaching out to policymakers. Photovoice uses the immediacy and details of the visual image as well as participants' reflections on the photos that become vital elements for the analysis of those images, hence combining the elements of the **photo** and **voice** in the processes of documentation, data collection, and analysis.



*Image 2: A photo collage collectively compiled by participants: Nawagampura photovoice workshop*

In photovoice, participants are invited to take photographs using tools like mobile phones in ways to visually depict issues relating to their everyday lives. In the case of Sarnia, participants focused on photographing discrepancies with access to water. In Nawagampura, photographs captured related to issues in housing. Interviews with participants are then conducted using select images from their photo collections, further reflecting on the objects and environments in the photos and the intention of photographing those images. Participants are then invited to take part in a perspective-taking workshop where group exercises and discussion enable them to reflect on photographs taken through a community storytelling activity.

Photovoice is unique in the sense that the method not only enables participants to record and reflect on their own society but also promotes critical dialogue that could reach out to policymakers and the



development sector to initiate possible interventions and outcomes for the issues in the communities (Wang 2022). For instance, with the field sites in Colombo and Badulla, the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre were to carry out the potential interventions in the communities. The method had been widely applied in community-centred research, particularly when studying minority and marginalized communities, as a way of providing an active role for participants in both the data collection and analysis phases of the research through photographs and reflections on them, increasing inclusivity and agency in the research process (Brader and Luke 2013; Desyllas 2013; Hague & Eng 2011; Harris 2018; Mitchell, de Lange & Moletsane, 2017; Strack, Ewald & Orsini 2022; Wang 2022, 2006). The potential of arts-based methods such as videos for community engagement had been previously examined and implemented by researchers for the urban displacement project of IUI (Gamage and Jayatilaka 2022)<sup>2</sup>. Based in the methodological approaches of ethnography, photovoice is a method that expands visual ethnography from the more traditional observational perspective pioneered in early ethnographic film and documentary photography to serve the purpose of actively engaging participants in the research process (Booth and Booth 2002; Macdonald, Dew, & Boydell 2019; Wang, Cash & Powers 2000; Teti 2019), adding, in particular, opportunities for needs assessment in communities by working together with participants and enabling the creation of outputs that outlast the lifecycle of the research project.

### Training and participant recruitment

Prior to commencing the data collection, four RAs (Sarnia=1; Nawagampura=3) were provided training in the goals and processes of photovoice. The RAs were residents or community members from the field sites who had participated in the Systems of Provision (SoP) interviews<sup>3</sup>, and therefore had important field relationships with participants. A 1.5-hour session on Zoom was conducted with the RAs in October 2022. Training included ethics and consent, power relations in the field, utilising smart phones for photographing, training participants, providing instructions to participants, communication, timelines, and data sharing. The RAs had prior experience in conducting qualitative interviews and survey research but indicated this being their first time implementing photovoice. After this training, the RAs then carried out one-on-one training sessions and demonstrations of the use of smartphones for taking photos with participants who had consented to take part in photovoice.

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<sup>2</sup> See videos for community engagement: <http://www.cmr.d.lk/en/publications/videos.php>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Systems of Provision (SoP) see: <https://www.inclusiveinfrastructure.org/our-focus/key-concepts/systems-of-provision/>



*Image 3: Research team and research assistants in the field at Nawagamapura*

These participants comprised a purposive sample, basing on consent, availability, and the willingness and capacity to utilise smartphones for the process of photographing. The 30 participants from each site (20 residents and 10 agents)<sup>4</sup>, totalling 60, were selected based on the Qualitative Resident Interviews (QRI) and Systems of Provision (SoP) interviews. In Sarnia, 19 out of the 30 participants were female with overall participants being 26 to 53 years old. In Nawagamapura, 20 participants out of the 30 were female with overall participants being 30 to 68 years old. Participants engaged in the informal economy, self-employed in small businesses (i.e. sewing clothes, painter, shop assistant, three-wheel driver), and with most women working in their homes providing fulltime unpaid care work. Agents in Sarnia included 3 water distributors, a development officer, agricultural officer, Samurdhi (government) welfare officer, a midwife, estate welfare officer, and Grama Sevaka (government) officer. In Nawagamapura, agents included the Grama Sevaka (government) officer, treasurer and chairman of the Samurdhi welfare society (residents). As housing was the primary focus in Nawagamapura, participants with diverse ownership to the houses were selected. These included owners (n=2), renters (n=4), tax deeds (n=4), encroachment (n=1), and others.

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<sup>4</sup> Agents are those involved in the provision of the housing or water.



*Image 4: Photo by resident of using stored water from pipelines for washing in Sarnia*

## Photographing

One-on-one training of participants was conducted upon discussions with RAs, as RAs decided this to be more suitable for their communities, depending on the dispersion and availability of the residents taking part in photovoice, conducting smaller individual sessions was sensible rather than large training workshops. Considering that RAs, who were also community members, had developed prior rapport with participants, individual training sessions provided further opportunities to develop trust and relationships with participants in the field. The RAs provided basic instructions to participants (residents and agents) to photograph any issues they see relating to water (Sarnia) and housing (Nawagampura) in their homes and in the community. Participants were given one week to take 10 photographs. The RAs communicated with the participants throughout the week to obtain the photos and exchange clarifications about the process. The RAs also trained participants in photo-taking techniques, such as how to hold a camera phone, how to utilise its horizontal angles for capturing wider images, attention to lighting, and minimising camera shake. Interviews on selected photos were conducted parallelly as participants completed submitting their 10 photos. A total of 300 photos from each site were collected. This process was completed through November 2022 to January 2023.





*Image 5: Photo by agent, water distributor, of an outdated motor system to pump water in Sarnia*

## Interviewing

Participants selected three photos from the ten to reflect on during semi-structured interviews conducted with RAs. The SHOWED technique (Shaffer 1984; Wang 2022) was used focusing on:

What is **shown** here?

What is really **happening** here?

How does this relate to (y)our life?

Why are things this **way**?

How could this image **educate** people?

What should be **done** about it?

Participants and RAs referred to photos on smart phones while discussing these questions, the photos fulfilling the task of elicitation and reflection during the interviews. Interviews were conducted in Sinhala and Tamil, recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis.



*Image 6: Photo by agent, mid-wife, women washing clothes in communal tanks in Sarnia, far from their homes*

### Perspective-taking workshops

Two perspective-taking workshops were held in Sarnia on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 and in Nawagampura on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023. The selected three photos that were used for the photovoice interviews were printed for the workshops on A3 size paper (90 photos for each workshop). The 30 participants (20 residents and 10 agents) participated in the workshops. Research team members, SEVANATHA, and community leaders were also present at the workshop. Small groups were formed, and photos taken by their respective members were distributed to the groups. Purposive groups representing three teams of problem areas (Dotland, Mahatenna), and one 'dream team' (Kandededara) with a success story were compiled in Sarnia to reflect on accessing water. In Nawagampura, renters, owners, and encroachers compiled the groups. Formulating the groups accordingly enabled deeper insights and reflections on key issues pertaining to social, economic, and cultural dynamics of these groups. The groups were asked to place select photos on display boards that will enable them to narrate a story about their issues in the community through photos. Two group leaders then interpreted the photos and points discussed in the groups. After the group activity, the workshop was formed into a larger single group where residents, agents, and researchers discussed key themes from the smaller group discussions to identify issues and expectations of interventions. The discussions conducted in Sinhala and Tamil were recorded and translated into English.





*Image 7: Researchers and participants in conversation on making photo collages to voice community concerns at Nawagampura perspective-taking workshop*



*Image 8: Participants and agents take part in making and interpreting photo collages at Sarnia perspective-taking workshop*



## Challenges and limitations of the implementation of photovoice

There was a willingness from the selected participants to contribute to photovoice after the process was explained and individual trainings were conducted. Prior trust and rapport that researchers had developed with participants during QRI and SOP interviews enabled them to work closely with the community. A particular challenge was the delays in completing the task of taking photos within the given week. This required maintaining a continuous flow of communication among researchers and participants. These included phone calls, messages, and regular visits to homes as follow ups. Although a week was provided for the task, at times these issues resulted in an extended period for weeks or a month in some cases to complete the photographing task. Agents in particular had busier time schedules and occupied with work commitments, which required researchers to further follow up in order to collect the 10 photos from the agents. Reasons for these delays were other commitments (i.e. work, education), weather incidents such as heavy rain and floods, and issues with using smartphones. In particular, for older respondents who were not well-versed in technicalities of smartphone use, they requested assistance from younger family members to operate the devices. The RAs had continuous discussions and demonstrations with the participants to resolve any technicalities in using smartphones.



*Image 9: Issues with drainage in Nawagampura, captured by resident living on rent*

For example, in Dotland (Sarnia), an agent who was a water distributor was an essential stakeholder in the community and in the estate but did not possess a smartphone. As his son had a smartphone the participant could obtain it to take photos. This made the process longer, but the participant was able to provide insights over that longer time. In Nawagampura, the RAs had to negotiate trust issues when participants were seen photographing locations in the community, which made other residents suspicious of the activity. The RAs had conversations with those who held concerns about the activity to include them in the project to support residents who took photos. The RAs' own positionalities and

prior field relationships with residents provided a vital connection to resolve these issues of trust and rapport.

## Findings

Key findings in Sarnia revealed the necessity of clean and fenced or protected water sources along with attention to water quality, that currently resulted in negative health effects for residents. A preferred model was the successful case of the 'dream team' where the water supply was regulated by fixing individual meters and maintenance by the residents who had formed a SANASA committee<sup>5</sup>. Key issues pertaining to housing in Nawagampura were health and sanitation concerns with existing drainage systems, flooding of adjoining canal, waste management, overcrowding resulting in social issues, and issues with ownership to land. Both locations identified bureaucracy, haphazard planning, marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of intersectional inequalities as exacerbating issues pertaining to accessing basic services of water and housing.

## Sarnia, Badulla – Water

Photographs in Sarnia entailed images that captured insecure water sources, unclean water, water collection vessels and methods, water purifying methods, and water used in daily tasks (i.e. washing clothes). The lack of coverings for water sources at the start of these sources that tended to emerge from highlands and mountainous areas around the community compiled some of the central images of water sources photographed by the participants. The density of forestry, difficulty in reaching the sources, the uncleanliness of the water in the sources, the impact of rain on sources without cover had been photographed by residents. Photos taken by female participants (n=19) highlighted the significance of women's labour for reaching those sources and water collection for their homes.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on SANASA see: <https://sanasa.coop/what-is-sanasa/>



*Image 10: Women fetching water by travelling long distances to water sources in Sarnia captured by resident in Dotland*





*Image 11: Unclean water sources with sediments, captured by resident in Mahatenna*



*Image 12: Uncovered water sources, the remaining covers being too heavy for women to lift, captured by resident in Mahatenna*

Insufficient supply from water lines caused participants to collect water from sources or rainwater. Participants' photos show that collection of water in the homes using vessels, barrels, and cans meant that they needed constant refilling when fully utilised, which took, mostly women, several trips to the water sources. The vessels would be kept in the homes in places like kitchens and occupied a significant space in the homes. The photos demonstrated that much of the collected water needed a purification method to be able to utilise for drinking or washing. These purification methods were also mainly home-developed methods, for instance, using a piece of cloth to strain sediments, which was not able to fully clean the water, in particular rainy seasons causing a significant increase in sediments in the water. The water collected were rationed and utilised for purposes like washing.



*Image 13: A cloth used by a participant to strain sediments in water in Sarnia*





*Image 14: Water stored in cans and barrels in Sarnia captured by resident*



*Image 15: Stored water used for washing clothes in Sarnia, captured by resident*

In the interviews, using selected photos (3 out of the 10 from each participant), they further elaborated on these points. The photos enabled the participants to use visuals as a form of eliciting issues relating to access of water as well as to link to other everyday aspects connecting to these photos. Below are some excerpts from the interviews that highlight these issues.

A participant who took a photo 'in the forest' said that covering the water source and building covered tanks will be helpful to keep the water sources clean, as often dead animals were found in the sources and the residents had been consuming the water until someone found the carcasses during inspections. Participants emphasised how the water that is supplied through the pipelines for 2 to 3 times a week for 10 minutes was not sufficient for their utilisation, which resulted in them also collecting rainwater or water from sources. The water supplied were not fully clean and required home-developed methods for cleaning, which one participant explained as, 'We either use a cloth or a strainer. Sometimes I use the strainer that I use to strain flour. It is difficult to use cloth to filter water. So, I use a strainer and then I add salt or boil water to kill the germs in it.'

The participant who took the photo of the pot elaborated how dirt and other sediments were stored at the bottom of the vessel to which water was collected initially, and then a cloth was used to filter those sediments. She added, 'Sometimes, when we filter, the cloth piece will fall into the water and the dirt will be mixed with water,' pointing to the haphazard nature of their filtering systems. In another photo, a participant discusses how she had to take her husband in a three-wheeler to a fountain 200 metres away from their home. The participant says how she had done this because her husband has difficulty with walking. The scarcity of water is further demonstrated in this participant's statement, 'I give a bath to my youngest child once a week because we do not have water'.

Residents using water supply from the SANASA Development Association consisting of a collective of residents by paying for their water use that is regulated through water meters and tap valves to lines found this to be a positive solution to accessing water. In an interview, a participant who uses water from SANASA shows how the photo contains tap valves and water meters for receiving water, and the bill issued for the supply. This participant shows that, as a result, they have been able to get regular access (2 to 3 days) to a clean supply of water. The participant had been able to use water to cultivate mushrooms and do gardening. The participant emphasises how the active office-bearers in the committee were able to take initiative to solve the issue of water supply through the meter and billing system. The participant showed willingness to share their knowledge with other communities in forming a collective such as SANASA. Other participants also anticipated that one possible solution for the issue of lack of water supply was a meter system that had been implanted by SANASA: 'There is a meter system for water in the town and we have spoken with them. If we get 15 minutes of water supply from the meter system, that will be enough for us. We can store that water and keep it,' one participant iterated.



*Image 16: Metered water with tap access, captured by resident in Kandegedara, a potential solution*



*Image 17: Metered water with tap access, captured by resident in Kandegedara, a potential solution*





Image 18: Growing mushrooms with excess water in Kandegedara

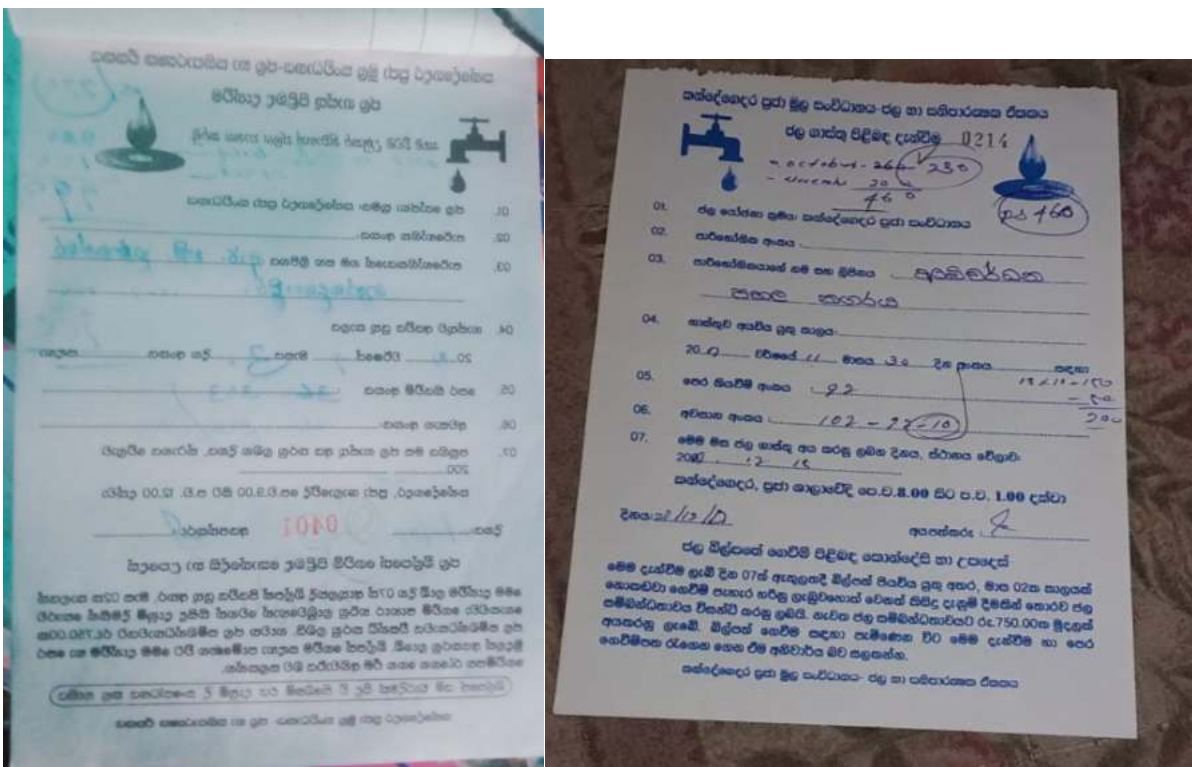


Image 19: Water billing system at Kandegedara captured by residents

These issues and potential solutions photographed and discussed in the interviews were further examined in community groups at the perspective-taking workshop. All participants, including agents, researchers, and community representatives took part in the perspective-taking workshop. Small

groups were formed according to the areas where participants experienced common issues and the SANASA group provided an alternative as a potential solution.

During the first activity small groups were asked to select 10 photos out of their collection of 50 and present the selected photos on a board. Two group leaders explained to the workshop what the photos signified. It was surprising to discover that all groups had selected and displayed the photos in a way to tell a story from the start (the water source) to the end use (using in the home).

Below are some statements mentioned by groups:

SANASA group:

'This picture shows that they close the tank properly, put locks to the valves and provide us with water in a safer way. In this picture, as many valves are located in one place anyone can operate the water and it isn't safe. In this picture, they show that they have provided valves near houses and people are able to access the water near their houses. The town people get water from two sources as SANASA and Local Council. This picture shows how people store and get water to their houses through those pipelines. This picture shows how people who don't have stock tanks store and get water. This picture shows how people use the water. People get water and have planted flowers. This picture is of growing mushrooms. People grow mushrooms using clean water. This picture tells us how people store the rainwater, filter them and use that when they don't have water. The next picture shows the unsafe water. As the Local Council water is unclean, people are unable to use that as drinking water. There is a water billing system, and this picture shows a water bill. They pay the bill to the SANASA office. We get clean water through the main pipeline, and we use the other one for other purposes like washing clothes.'

Problem areas group:

'These photographs show how our area, the new housing scheme, get water. The first photo shows an unsafe place from where we get the water ... There isn't any fence in that area. Animals can encroach. The spring originates from that sort of a place and there is a tank located there to store the water and the water has been stored in that tank. The second photo shows that the place where we get water is a muddy area. Mud has completely covered the place where the spring originates. This photo shows the mud which was removed from the tank. The water stored in that tank has mixed with the mud as shown in the picture. After the mud is removed the water reaches this tank. There are two tanks like this in that area to clean and store the water. The water which comes through an unsafe place in the forest reaches the tank located in our place. That tank is shown in this picture. The tank which stores the water is also an unsafe one. There aren't any coverings for the tank. Anyone is able to open the lid of that tank. Also, there is another distribution tank to supply the water from this tank to the settlements where anyone can open and get water. That is unsafe and the tank is open. If we look at that tank after 2 to 3 days, we observe mud and some snails, leeches and so on in that water. As we get the water to our houses directly from that, we filter the water using a white colour cloth. When we filter like that, we observe more mud in that water.'

### Nawagampura, Colombo – Housing

The focus of photographs in Nawagampura was on issues relating to housing. These included ownership, sanitation, flooding, hazardous structures, and community attitudes. The photographs captured by residents in Nawagampura were two-fold: within the households and outside the households. Photographs taken inside the homes highlighted the dilapidated nature of the structures while photographs taken outside the homes highlighted external factors that intensified challenges of living in the homes (i.e. flooding, drainage).

Participants had different types of ownership to housing in Nawagampura, and these include owners, renters, tax deeds, and encroachment. While it can be assumed that the agency of residents may be varied according to the types of ownership they experienced, the photographs inside the homes of participants who experienced these different types of ownership show common images of hazardous and unfit living conditions, suggesting that the degree of ownership had not made a difference to the conditions in which they lived. The photographs of residents in all types of housing show how they continued to live in structures with cracked walls, water leaks, dilapidated floors, unsanitary latrines, and non-standard electric fittings (i.e. fans, lights).

The lack of space in the homes in particular show the cluttered nature of furniture, utensils, clothes, other objects and organisation within the home had become difficult. The conditions show that the houses were not mainly fit for living, but participants tended to adapt to these conditions through temporary solutions. These solutions did not provide permanent results to the structural and external conditions. For example, while vessels had been placed on the floor to collect rainwater from leaking roofs, as photographs show, these were only temporary remedies that did not provide long-term solutions to the issue of leaking roofs.



*Image 20: Owner: deteriorating conditions in the home due to water leaks*





*Image 21: Renter: cracks on wall in a rental home*



*Image 22: Tax deed: cramped conditions of homeowners*



*Image 23: Encroached: inadequate space in the homes*

A key issue that residents had photographed outside the homes, as exacerbating their hazardous living conditions was the constant flooding of the adjoining canal and drainage lines, which brought water with mud, sewage, animals, and sediments into their homes. These conditions also impacted the residents despite their status of ownership to the houses. The regular flooding of the homes had compromised the structures further, as the photographs demonstrated. Photos showed uncovered drains that overflowed into the homes during flooding, creating unsanitary conditions for residents in the homes. Some photographs contained images of the canal itself as a vital factor that impacted the living conditions of the home. The images show the potential effects these living conditions may have on residents' health, in particular for vulnerable people like children and older adults.





*Image 24: Owner: Unsanitary drainage systems that overflow during floods*



*Image 25: Tax deed: Dirty water in drains*



*Image 26: Renter: Floods due to raining*



*Image 27: Encroached: Open drains prone to mosquito breeding*





*Image 28: Flooding neighbourhood in Nawagampura, captured by agent, Grama Sevaka Officer*



*Image 29: Blocked and overflowing drains, captured by agent, member of Samurdhi welfare society*

Agents also captured flooding and drainage issues as a key community matter that needed to be resolved, demonstrating an awareness of the issues happening in the community, but lacking authority to find permanent solutions.

In the interviews, participants further elaborated on the photos. A main reason they express as impacting regular repairs is the unaffordability of costs. An owner of a house who photographed a damaged roof explains that the roof had reached a near-collapsing situation and had been deteriorating for three years to a point that they were not able to send someone up to the roof to repair it. The participant emphasises the precarity of their income in the informal economy that had made it difficult to save for repairing the house: 'Even to save [money], my husband doesn't have work these days. They don't bring vegetables anymore. There is no petrol or fertilizer. So, my husband doesn't have work these days. In a situation like this, what should he spend on? Should he save money to repair the roof or to provide food for us?' This quote further highlights the economic and forex crisis that was unfolding in Sri Lanka at the time of the photovoice exercise, resulting in lack of essential goods, and the citizens' movement that had created a change of government, which in return had had an impact on the informal economy at the everyday level, as emphasised in this interview.

Renters living in similar conditions were aware of their owners' financial difficulties as preventing these repairs. In this instance, a participant describing a photo of a cracked wall says how the wall has also reached a state of near collapse: 'We have informed the owner of the house as well, but he can't afford to do anything about this wall. He also has financial difficulties,' she says. Participants mention that central to residents' choice of living in the neighbourhood was the proximity of the location to schools and work in main areas in Colombo, and the interviews show their dependency on work from the informal economy like day labour jobs.

Most families lived as extended families and included caring for elderly and family members with illnesses, further adding a strain on financial difficulties, also impairing the ability to get a loan to repair the houses, as this owner explained from a photo of an incomplete construction: 'No, I can't take a loan like that. My husband is sick. We should also take care of our parents. My husband's father is not well ... Mother is also the same. We pay for some of their expenses. Mother works in a cleaning service. They manage to fulfil their meals from it. That's why we can't get a loan.'

The cluster structure of the housing meant that each cluster had its own latrine and supply of water (Alikhan 2022 b). Nevertheless, the interviews emphasise the open drains and flooding of the nearby canal had a ripple effect on the houses despite having access to these latrine and water supply. These external conditions further impacted the health and safety of residents already living in precarious housing structures. Showing the photo of an open drain, a participant describes how heavy rain creates an overflow of water: 'Water will stay for hours. Because this house is situated on a slope, the water comes in when the vehicles go nearby.' Another participant explains how garbage had been washed by the canal and brought in with flood water, an issue that had been prevalent since 1994. The participant says how sand, pieces of cloth, children's diapers, pieces of sticks wash into the open drains with flood water. The participant explains the councils' interventions had been minimum in resolving the matter. This inaction by authorities is also seen as a main issue to existing problems in the neighbourhood.

These issues were further elaborated in the perspective-taking workshop where the four groups of renters and owners discussed these in detail. The photographs participants selected for the collages had been selected to emphasise the issues. Unlike in Sarnia, where a model was proposed as a potential solution, in Nawagampura the focus was on highlighting the issues in the neighbourhood.



Overcrowding and the increasing demand for housing in the neighbourhood, inaction by authorities to intervene in providing solutions, precarity of housing conditions, community attitudes towards cleanliness, external causes (i.e. canal, flooding, drains) exacerbating unsanitary living conditions were voiced in the community groups while navigating the photo collage participants had constructed collectively with select photos.

Below are some statements mentioned by groups:

Group 1 (renters):

'There are drains behind the houses. This is the block, where I live. This is the block C. So, if we consider this block, we have closed these drains and use them as toilets. Houses are built up to the edge of the drain. So, these drains are broken, and water gets blocked. Some people throw garbage into these drains. So, when it rains water comes onto the road. This is the drainage of our C block. There are about thirty housing units there. Wastewater from all these thirty houses comes to this drainage. There is a sewage pit. The discharge from that sewage pit also comes to this. So, it is blocked. Now, we repaired that. But, when people throw garbage from their houses into this drain, this drain gets blocked again. Even though we have a toilet in our house, we use the public toilet as well in order to reduce the water bill. However, people do not use the public toilet properly. They clean the toilets thoroughly before using it. But they do not clean them well after usage and throw various things into them. So, the public toilets are in a very bad condition.'

Group 2 (owners):

'The number of houses increased rapidly. Then, when the number of housing units increased, the drains started to overflow, and this well became very dirty. People did not have proper facilities. People do not have any resources to build a latrine. A proper drainage line is not there. People went to all the responsible places. People got electricity with so much difficulty. Some people had to spend a massive amount of money to get electricity for the first time. There are some government officers who take bribes. People even bribed such officials to get electricity. People got the water facility with so much difficulty.'

Group 3 (renters):

'This is a house. All the walls of this house are soaked from the rainwater that drops through the roof. This house is about to fall down. All the walls are damp, and the plaster comes off.

This is a drain in front of a house. This house has been built on the drain and the drain is inside the house. They do not clean it. Mud, soil and everything is inside this drain and even water ferns have grown there. These are the sheets of a roof. Walls are built around and the roof is not properly built. There is no way to repair this. There are holes and it has to be repaired. This is also a roof of a house made of metal sheets. Those planks have also decayed. They do not have any means to repair this. It has to be repaired. Water comes inside when it rains and if it is sunny, even sunlight comes in. Here, there is a staircase inside this house. It is difficult to climb up this. If a person climbs, he will fall. There is no way to build this. This is the road that we use. It is at the edge of the canal. It is the road which goes below at the bridge. This is where everyone enters. There are many nests of pigeons and many other dirty things such as baskets on this road. People have thrown them. Nobody cleans that. This

house is in this area and there is a drain flowing inside this house. This has been built with wood. They cook their meals also in front of this drain. They sleep there too.'

### Post reflection notes with RAs

In a post reflection workshop with the RAs, they mentioned that they had implemented the photovoice method for the first time and received confidence from the initial training. Although the time limit was set for the 10 photos as one week, it took longer and efforts from RAs part to collect the photos, as respondents had work, education, and social commitments. Rapport was key to engaging with participants, as with follow up with collecting photos, and interview processes took multiple visits to participants' homes and conversations/demonstrations over telephones. In Sarnia, a particular appreciation from participants were on the use of both Sinhala and Tamil to communicate with participants concurrently in the perspective-taking workshop. Participants from mainly Tamil backgrounds had been worried at first in expressing themselves in a workshop that contained researchers from Sinhala backgrounds and the UK. They had been most appreciative of the two-language communication, which they conveyed to the RAs as having enabled them to express their ideas.

### Risks and Limitations

The political nature of mobilising the community towards potential interventions had been a major concern of conducting photovoice as a community-engaging method (Wang & Burris 1997). The unpredictability and uncertainty of those interventions raise key concerns for participants. Involvement of agents in the method could potentially cause divisions and exacerbate power hierarchies in the process, once researchers have exited the field site. In Sarnia, the estate management having a key role in the welfare of residents and criticism of this major stakeholder posed potential threats to power relations between participants and agents. In Nawagampura, too, the agent-resident relationship could have faced potential fractures from discussions on the issues and inaction of authorities. One way of mitigating these issues was through conversation itself. The perspective-taking workshops provided opportunities for all parties to arrive at a consensus on existing issues and potential interventions through the CMRD and SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre. In Sarnia, the photovoice activity enabled to develop a positive relationship between the Grama Sevaka officer and the residents. The perspective-taking workshops enabled them to develop respect and connections. The activity of photo-taking and perspective-taking had helped to develop a vital link that was previously missing between residents and the government agents, as RAs revealed in the post-reflection workshop.

### Follow up

Following the photovoice workshops, CMRD and SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre had continued field visits to Sarnia and Nawagampura. Currently, steps are underway through further community consultations to implement potential interventions in the communities.

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