

ESAF Global Summary Report 2025



The Livable Cities initiative in Sri Lanka continued in 2025 to transform open public spaces, streets and markets into inclusive, accessible community spaces.

Open Public Spaces

Well-designed parks offer people a place to relax, exercise, and spend time with family and friends. In many cities, parks are one of the few shared spaces available to all, regardless of age or income. By improving these spaces, we make our neighbourhoods more livable, inclusive, and vibrant.

In 2025, our efforts mainly focused on improving and activating public parks and open spaces in Jaffna. The Open Garden Initiative was implemented at Pannai Park to promote ownership of green spaces, where the responsibility for maintaining and nurturing the plants lay on the park users. Instead of a one-time planting activity, the approach focused on long-term care and ownership by the community. As part of this initiative, a total of 22 fruit-bearing trees were planted, and are now maintained by the local vendors and users. Fruit trees were chosen as they add an extra benefit beyond shade and greenery, they provide food and make the space more useful and engaging. People, especially children get to see, touch, and taste what grows there. We believe that when people see something they can use and value, they are more likely to care for it.

On World Environment Day (June 5, 2025), a clean-up drive was carried out in the Beach Road Park. The team cleaned the entire area, washed and repainted benches, cleared overgrown grass and thorns, and sprayed antibacterial solutions to improve hygiene. Since the park is located near a hospital, these efforts helped in improving public space hygiene and created a more welcoming place for visitors.





From April to November 2025, one play and physical well-being program was organized per month (8 total) to encourage children to take part in outdoor activities. Each session had more than 30 children participating in sports such as volleyball, badminton, and football. Coaching support was provided by trainers from the Jaffna Athletic Federation. The program helped to change Sangiliyan Park, into an active community space for children, parents, and local residents. Monthly play sessions are expected to continue to keep the park active and encourage regular community use.

At the Healing Park, 2 aerobics and physical wellness sessions were held in 2025. Each session brought together about 15 women, including both young and elderly participants. They took part in aerobic exercises and participants received guidance on healthy lifestyles and long-term well-being. The sessions were organized in partnership with the Alliance Development Trust and the Jaffna Municipal Council.

Streets

Streets constitute the largest share of public space in urban areas; however, they are mostly used for vehicular movement. Reallocating street space for people can improve their function as inclusive public spaces that support social interaction, safety, and overall urban livability.

To demonstrate this potential, the first Open Street event in Jaffna was organized in February 2025. The event temporarily restricted traffic and converted the street into a pedestrian-only space. People of all ages and abilities used the space for walking, play, and social interaction, offering an alternative option for how streets are normally used.

The event was organized in collaboration with local partners and the Jaffna Municipal Council which attracted over 300 participants, including both adults and children. It supported physical activity and created opportunities for play and community interaction. There were many activities for everyone to enjoy, including traditional coconut leaf weaving games, tug of war, unity walks on wood, and musical chairs. Families also enjoyed food stalls and face painting. Yoga professionals led simple sessions to promote physical well-being, and the event also featured local music and song performances, adding to the lively and joyful atmosphere.





Feedback from parents indicated strong interest in organizing such events on a regular basis, highlighting benefits for children’s activity levels and overall well-being, as well as reduced stress for caregivers. The Municipal Commissioner, Mr. Krishnendrarajah, expressed interest in expanding similar initiatives across community centres under the Jaffna Municipal Council to further strengthen community engagement. Participants, including youth and media professionals, also suggested expanding the range of activities to include programs such as music, yoga, and related training sessions and competitions to increase participation and engagement.





Markets

One of the most impactful initiatives that we did in 2025 was the Farmers Market that was organized on August 23, 2025. The initiative aimed to improve market access for small-scale farmers and home-based producers living within a 10 km radius of Jaffna town.

Many farmers and women-led households in rural areas face difficulties accessing urban markets. To address this challenge, the project provided several forms of support, including:

- Transportation for farmers and their produce
- Allocation of market stalls in the Jaffna Town Market
- Payment of government taxes required for market space
- Seed funding to support transportation and business registration

The market brought 14 new vendors: vegetable farmers, fruit producers, and small-scale food and handcraft sellers. They sold fresh produce like bananas and papaya, organic vegetables, traditional snacks, fruit juices, and handmade household items. Around 80% of the products were sold, and we continue to support vendors in accessing the formal markets.

A counselling stall was also introduced during the market to provide guidance on mental wellbeing and healthy living in partnership with Jaffna Hospital. Visitors received free advice on mental health and lifestyle improvement, making the market a space for community support and wellbeing in addition to economic exchange.



Impacts

Community-led events played an important role in influencing local action and improving public spaces. Through regular engagement with the Jaffna Municipal Council, gaps in facilities at Pannai Park were addressed. As a result, funds were allocated to construct a public toilet with water access, and a separate budget was approved for 2026 under the “Clean Sri Lanka” initiative. The government has initiated the development of coastal leisure parks in the Northern Province which includes an allocation of Rs. 2.6 million (USD 8,500) for selected sites in Jaffna. We will be following up the implementation of the planned improvements that include a 100-meter-long and 20-meter-wide walking path and the installation of 26 benches in Pannai Park.

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