

The Ministry of Justice is establishing Mediation Boards in each DS division, which are empowered to mediate on community conflicts. The Mediation Commission invites recommendations of names of respected individuals and community leaders, from each Divisional Secretary (DS). The DS in turn obtains this list with the concurrence of the respective Grama Sevakas. The nominees are then invited by the Commission to appear at an interview where suitable candidates are selected to participate in the Mediation Boards. Thereafter, they are put through a comprehensive training on listening and mediating skills, also organized by the Ministry of Justice.

Such an excellent instrument for conflict mediation, mirroring our age old tradition of the village council and available totally free of charge, however, does not seem to have much women members. In fact, it is estimated that only 4% of the members of the Mediation Boards are women. And that even where women sit, they are not given importance and consulted on matters regarding the cases pending. Considering that most of the cases that come to the Mediation Boards are those related to divorce, desertion, alimony, domestic violence and sexual abuse which affect women, it is imperative that women mediators be present to understand the women side of the story.

Viluthu has begun to interact with the DSs in the areas where the call for names of mediators has been gazetted. While encouraging the officers to specifically look for recommending able women's names to the mediation Commission, we have also sent word around to the various women's CBOs to come forward and nominate suitable women through their respective Grama Sevakas. We have begun this campaign in the hope of making women's participation 50% one day.