

Viluthu achieves increased voter turnout in the North

Observing the low voter turnouts in the last three elections of the Jaffna Municipal Council elections, the Presidential and the Parliamentary elections, Viluthu began a voter education project in late February 2011. It used a study circle reader, a 20 minute short film titled “Speak through your Vote” as tools to raise awareness in view of the upcoming local government elections in the North.

62 study circles (approx 620 people) functioning in Jaffna were first approached to discuss the issue as well as view the film. The responses were extremely positive. “ We have never thought of our vote in this manner..” “We realized that each person has to think for him/herself and decide as to whom to vote rather than ask others and do exactly the same like a parrot..” “ We hardly think about whom to vote.. but this film showed that we should not only think but also act together in analyzing the most suitable candidates for us..”. All those members who viewed this film did not fail to request the film DVDs to enable them to show their friends relatives and neighbours. University students and A’Level students took it upon themselves to share this with their friends. 200 Nos of DVDs were thus shared. Viluthu also distributed thousands of pamphlets that gave the issue in a nutshell asking people to exercise their right to vote.

Although positive feedbacks were received from the people, there were also concerns that voter turnout maybe low due to, this being a local government elections, which are not considered as important by the people. In addition to this, the reports of election violence also discouraged some of us. Viluthu also collaborated with CAFFE in conducting election monitoring in Jaffna in order to ensure a free and fair elections. But on the day of the elections, in Jaffna district the voter turnout was 46%, almost 26% higher than all three previous elections. We were elated in the confidence that at least some of this would have been as a result of Viluthu’s interventions. In order to confirm this, we conducted a quick opinion gathering amongst our stakeholders.

People recounted as to how they had shared this video with most of their acquaintances. They said that since this was an interesting film, they were encouraged to share it and that many friends and relatives from the Vanni also viewed it. More importantly, this film had provoked lengthy discussions amongst the family members of those who viewed it. All this had led to the resolve that they should vote with responsibility.

This project demonstrates that a creative intervention made, even if it be a minute group of people, has the ability to spread to a mass of people.