

## **Feminist Opportunities Network (Fon) Project: The Certificate Course in Women's Studies**

Dilagini S

Coordinator, Certificate Course in Women's Studies, University of Jaffna

Corresponding email: [dilo.kuru@univ.jfn.ac.lk](mailto:dilo.kuru@univ.jfn.ac.lk)

**Introduction:** Sri Lanka faces persistent gender-based inequalities, particularly in rural and underserved communities where access to gender education remains limited. The Feminist Opportunities Network (FON) project, led by Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA), tackles gender inequities in underserved Sri Lankan communities through education and advocacy. Its flagship initiative, the Certificate Course in Women's Studies, launched on October 11, 2024, empowers participants to address gender issues and drive societal change, in collaboration with Women's Education & Research Centre (WERC), Centre for Gender Equity and Equality (CGEE), and Staff Development Centre (SDC) at the University of Jaffna.

**Project Implementation:** This six-month program blends academic and practical learning to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender equity. Weekly sessions cover key topics like gender analysis, feminist theories, and eco-feminism, complemented by field visits to advocacy groups and case studies addressing local and global issues. Participants, selected through an inclusive process, engage in real-world problem-solving, fostering critical thinking and advocacy skills.

**Impact Assessment:** The program has demonstrated transformative outcomes, with participants completing extended essay submission and evaluation. Impact evaluations, conducted through surveys and follow-up interviews, reveal substantial improvements in participants' knowledge and leadership abilities. Subjective evidence highlights the program's community-level impact; for example, participants organized a successful gender sensitivity program, initiating local discussions on women's empowerment. These outcomes underscore the course's effectiveness in building a network of gender advocates.

**Findings:** Key findings indicate that participants significantly enhanced their awareness of gender issues and their ability to advocate for equity. Many students have assumed leadership roles in their communities, contributing to local advocacy campaigns, promoting gender-sensitive policies, and driving discussions on social justice. The program has effectively fostered a network of empowered individuals actively engaged in gender mainstreaming and policy dialogue, creating ripple effects across various sectors.

**Recommendations:** To enhance future courses, it is recommended to expand the course's outreach to rural areas, extend the course duration for deeper engagement, and provide ongoing support for participants post-completion. Strengthening collaborations with government bodies and NGOs can offer additional resources, while regular assessments of long-term impacts will ensure continued relevance and effectiveness in promoting gender equity.

**Keywords:** Communities, Gender equity, Social empowerment, University of Jaffna, Women's studies