

IMPACT OF COVID-19: Rapid needs assessment for religious and faith leaders

Sri Lanka



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. OVERVIEW

a. Background

This report is the outcome of a survey conducted on: "Impact of COVID-19: Rapid Needs Assessment for Religious and Faith Leaders". The Survey was carried out by Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya in collaboration with UNICEF Sri Lanka and Arigatou International. The purpose of the survey was to understand the experiences and challenges faced by religious and faith leaders in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 crisis. This report aims to identify the way forward, to meaningfully support religious and faith leaders to engage with their followers and to mobilize religious communities to ensure the well-being of children in the current context.

b. Research Methodology

The survey was initially carried out by sharing the questionnaire in an outlook form on Internet based applications such as Email and WhatsApp. Due to the low rate of responses on online platforms, the questionnaire was thereafter distributed physically to religious and faith leaders.

The total number of religious leaders who participated in the survey was 2470. Their responses were then categorized separately according to 1.) the respective religious groups and 2.) the districts to which the religious and faith leaders belonged. Accordingly, in this report the responses to each question by the religious and faith leaders are compared across the four main religious groups as well as across the 25 districts in percentage values. In addition to the analysis of quantitative data, qualitative data has also been analyzed under the theme: "Observations made by Religious and Faith Leaders on the impact of COVID-19". Therefore, this report analyzes the views of religious and faith leaders about the impact of COVID-19, findings as to their status quo as well as the recommendations made by them.

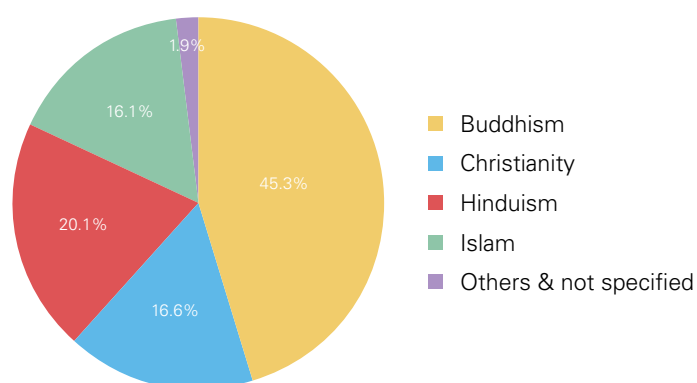
c. Distribution of Religious and Faith Leaders for the purpose of the survey

The Survey was carried out across the 25 districts in Sri Lanka among religious and faith leaders mainly following Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

The religious and faith leaders comprised of 45.26% following Buddhism, 20.12% following Hinduism, 16.64% following Christianity, 16.07% of Islamic faith and 1.9% following other faiths or faiths not specified.

The below figure 1 indicates the classification of religious and faith leaders who participated in the survey according to their respective religious and faith groups. The largest group of religious and faith leaders were followers of Buddhism whereas the smallest group belonged to the 'others and not specified' category.

FIGURE 1: Distribution of Religious and Faith Leaders according to their Religion/Faith



The Figure 2 and Table 1 below indicate the distribution of religious and faith leaders across the 25 districts in terms of percentage values and the number of leaders who took part in the survey.

FIGURE 2: Distribution of Religious and Faith Leaders across the 25 districts (as per percentage values)

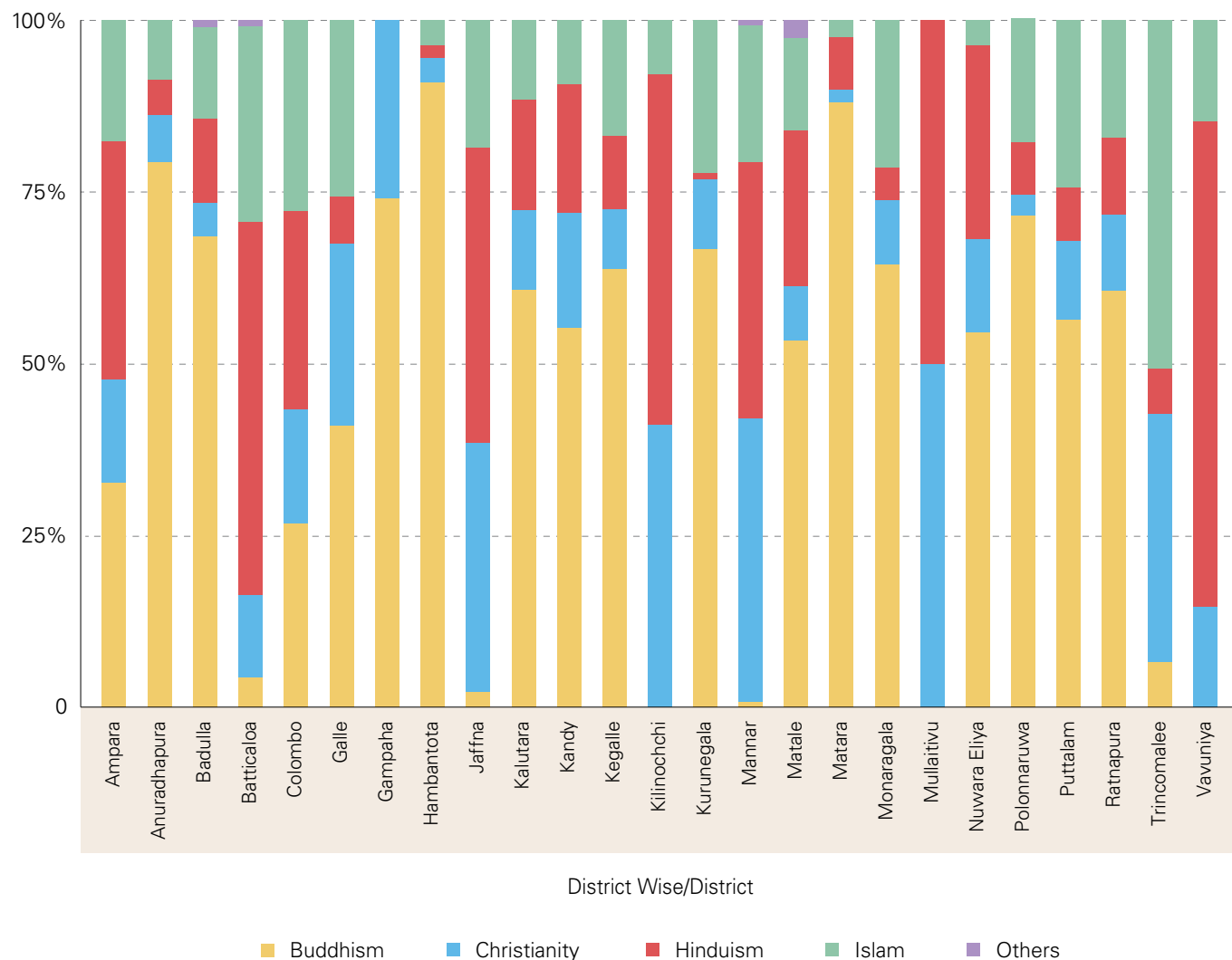


TABLE 1: Distribution of Religious and Faith Leaders across the 25 Districts (as per the number of participants)

	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Other	Total
Ampara	50	23	53	27		153
Anuradhapura	46	4	3	5		58
Badulla	72	5	13	14	1	105
Batticaloa	5	14	63	33	1	116
Colombo	26	16	28	27		97
Galle	53	34	9	33		129
Gampaha	60	21				81
Hambantota	50	2	1	2		55
Jaffna	3	49	58	25		135
Kalutara	42	8	11	8		69
Kandy	89	27	30	15		161
Kegalle	72	10	12	19		113

	Buddhism	Christianity	Hinduism	Islam	Other	Total
Kilinochchi		21	26	4		51
Kurunegala	72	11	1	24		108
Mannar	1	54	49	26	1	131
Matale	40	6	17	10	2	75
Matara	140	3	12	4		159
Monaragala	69	10	5	23		107
Mullaitivu		22	22			44
Nuwara Eliya	60	15	31	4		110
Polonnaruwa	48	2	5	12		67
Puttalam	44	9	6	19		78
Ratnapura	71	13	13	20		117
Trincomalee	5	27	5	38		75
Vavuniya		5	24	5		34

Accordingly, for the purpose of this report, Matara and Kandy can be identified as districts with the highest number of Buddhist religious leaders, Mannar and Jaffna as districts with the highest number of Christian religious leaders, Batticaloa and Jaffna as districts with the highest number of Hindu religious leaders and Trincomalee, Galle and Batticaloa as districts with the highest number of religious leaders following Islam.

d. Themes

The different themes explored in this report are related to the impact of COVID-19 on religious/faith leaders and their communities. These themes are: engagement of religious and faith leaders with their respective communities prior

to COVID-19 and during COVID-19, impact of curfew on religious institutions/ places of worship, responses of religious and faith leaders to COVID-19, ways of engagement with communities by religious and faith leaders, access to digital devices by religious and faith leaders and usage of internet based applications by them. The report further explores themes such as emerging challenges faced by religious and faith leaders during COVID-19, support required by them to overcome the specific challenges, current social challenges experienced by communities as a result of COVID-19 and how religious and faith leaders plan to adjust to the “new norm” during the aftermath of the pandemic.

2. KEY FINDINGS

- During the COVID-19 period, most of the religious and faith leaders have maintained a moderate level of engagement with their followers (i.e. engaged with 50-100 followers) which is 40.2% of leaders. High level of engagement (i.e. engaged with over 100 followers) and low-level engagement (i.e. engaged with less than 50 followers) were maintained respectively by 26.5% and 33.3% of leaders.
- Most of the religious and faith leaders representing Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism have maintained a moderate level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19, which was 42.3%, 38.7% and 41.5% of leaders respectively. However, most of the religious leaders representing Islam have maintained a high level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19, which was 39.6% of Islam leaders.
- Jaffna and Vavuniya were the districts where most of the religious and faith leaders maintained a high level of engagement, which was 61.5% and 57.6% of total leaders respectively. Gampaha, Kandy and Kalutara were the districts where most of the religious and faith leaders maintained a low level of engagement, which was 66.7%, 60% and 58% of total leaders respectively.
- Religious leaders of Hinduism and Islam who had a high level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19 (engaged with more than 100 people) has increased in comparison to the situation prior to COVID-19 by 2% and 13% respectively. However, there is a decrease in the percentages of religious leaders of Buddhism and Christianity who had a high level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19 in comparison to the situation prior to COVID-19 by 19% and 12% respectively.
- Religious leaders of Buddhism and Christianity who had a low level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19 (engaged with less than 50 people) has increased in comparison to the situation prior to COVID-19 by 8% and 1% respectively. However, leaders representing Hinduism and Islam who engaged on a low level with their followers during COVID-19 has decreased by 12% and 15% respectively compared to the situation prior to COVID-19.
- The most significant impact of the imposition of curfew on all religious institutions/ places of worship has been the halt of regular religious sermons which was 30.3% of the total responses. Difficulties in premise maintenance, closure of places of worship and loss of receipt of alms/ donations have been respectively recorded as 23.2%, 23.1% and 22.5% of the total impacts. Furthermore, other impacts of curfew have been recorded as 0.9% of the total impacts.
- The main response of the religious and faith leaders to the COVID-19 crisis has been providing advise/counseling to their followers, which was recorded as 29.2% of total responses. Distribution of dry ration packs (22.3%), sharing risk education messages via mass and social media (19.5%) and providing financial aid for humanitarian efforts (10.8%) were the other main ways of responding. From the total responses of religious and faith leaders, 6.1% have provided cooked food. Furthermore, 5% and 0.5% have not been able to support adequately and supported in other ways respectively.
- Majority of the religious and faith leaders from Buddhist and Christian religious groups have resorted to providing advice and counseling to their followers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as evident from the values 80% and 60% respectively. However, the highest percentages of religious and faith leaders of Hinduism and Islam have supported their religious communities by distributing dry ration packs, the values being 41% and 47% respectively.
- Religious and faith leaders of all religious groups have engaged with their followers during COVID-19 through online mediums (eg-online sermons, webinars, live streaming sessions, social media applications) and tra-

ditional mediums (eg-speakers, telephones). However, 3.2% of the religious and faith leaders have mentioned that they were not able to engage with their communities via above mediums.

- The most popular method of engagement across all the religious groups was making calls via telephones/mobile phones. 68%, 58%, 41% and 39% of the religious leaders following Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam respectively have selected making calls via telephones/mobile phones as a method of engagement with their communities. Furthermore, conducting sermons via speakers was the second most popular method of engagement resorted to by religious leaders following Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, as evident from the values 58%, 36% and 30% respectively. However, the second most popular method of engagement resorted to by leaders of Islamic faith was the use of social media applications as evident by 36%, whereas only 27% of them have used speakers.
- Considerable percentages of religious leaders of Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism have used social media applications to engage with their communities as evident from the values 28%, 35% and 28% respectively. Low percentages of leaders from all the religious groups have engaged with their communities through online mediums such as online sermons, live streams and webinars. The lowest number of religious and faith leaders using online sermons, webinars and online live streaming sessions were identified among leaders representing Buddhism as 6.8%, 1.0% and 3.9% respectively. Furthermore, 23.3%, 16.3% and 15.1% of the Christian religious leaders have used these mediums respectively. Among the Hindu religious leaders 22.6%, 16.5% and 14.9% have used these mediums. In addition, 19.1%, 17.4% and 12.6% of the religious leaders representing Islam have resorted to these methods to engage with their communities.
- Land phone or Basic mobile phone was the most commonly used device among religious and faith leaders compared to Computers and Smart phones, whereas leaders from all the religious groups had the least access to Dongles and WIFI Routers. Out of the total population of religious and faith leaders who were interviewed, 6% had access to a Dongle, 21% to a WIFI Router, 28% to a Computer, 55% to a Smartphone/ Tablet and 66% had access to a Land phone/ Basic mobile phone.
- From the leaders following Buddhism access to Computer, Smart phone /Tablet and Land phone/ Basic mobile phone was 26.8%, 57.4% and 70.5% respectively. Access rate among leaders following Hinduism was 24%, 45.7% and 65.6% respectively. Among leaders following Christianity access rate was 40.9%, 59.9% and 61.1% respectively. Furthermore, access rate among leaders following Islam was 18.6%, 50.4% and 58.7% respectively for Computer, Smart phone/ Tablet and Land phone/ Basic mobile phone.
- From the interviewed religious and faith leaders, majority (57.9%) have used WhatsApp/ Viber or IMO. Facebook/ Instagram was used by 47.4%, Email by 28.9% and Skype/Zoom/Microsoft Teams by 14.3% of religious and faith leaders. Furthermore, the most commonly used internet based applications across most of the districts were Whatsapp, Viber, IMO, Facebook and Instagram. However, Email was the most commonly used application in Hambantota (69%) and Puttalam districts (64%). Furthermore, most of the religious and faith leaders in Ampara (62%), Anuradhapura (40%), Colombo (69%), Galle (54%), Polonnaruwa (42%) and Trincomalee (73%) districts have used Facebook or Instagram in comparison to other Internet based applications. In addition, Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams were the least used internet-based applications by religious and faith leaders in most of the districts.
- The main challenge faced by religious and faith leaders due to COVID-19 has been the inability to conduct usual religious ceremonies and special religious occasions, which was noted as 13% of the total impacts. No access to communication technology (12.4%), lack of protective hygiene material (12%), limited financial as-

sistance to implement humanitarian efforts (9.6%) and limited access to communication technology (9.1%) were the other main challenges faced by religious and faith leaders. Furthermore, as per distribution according to religion and faith, significant percentages of religious leaders from all religious groups, Buddhism (53%), Christianity (48%), Hinduism (38%) and Islam (42%) have been challenged by the inability to conduct usual religious ceremonies on special occasions due to COVID-19.

- The main support required by religious and faith leaders to face the challenges has been the provision of technological equipment (e.g. smart phones and computers), which was noted as 18.0% of the total support required. Financial resources to conduct humanitarian efforts (17.7%), provision of personal hygiene material (14.4%) and training on using technology and applications to communicate with followers (14.2%) were the other main support required. Furthermore, as per distribution according to religion, significant amount of religious and faith leaders representing Buddhism (51.1%), Christianity (28.7%), Hinduism (35.6%) and Islam (36.0%) have identified training on using and applying technology to communicate with followers as a main support they require to overcome the challenges that emerged due to COVID-19.
- According to the religious and faith leaders, the main challenge faced by communities as a result of COVID-19 was increase in the level of multi-dimensional poverty, which has been recorded as 25.2% of the challenges. Increase in psychosocial distress within families (21.7%), increase in violence against women (14.0%), increase in online violence against children (13.9%) and increase in violence against children (13.8%) were the other main social challenges that communities have experienced as perceived by religious and faith leaders.
- Increase in multidimensional poverty was identified by majority of religious leaders representing Buddhism (71%), Christianity (65%) and Islam (58%) as the most commonly experienced social challenge of COVID-19. Increase in psychosocial distress within families was

the most commonly experienced social challenge identified by Hindu religious leaders (57.5%) whereas religious leaders of Buddhism (52%), Christianity (62%) and Islamic faith (50%) have identified it as the second most common social challenge.

- Although increase in ethnic tension among diverse communities was identified as the least common social challenge in comparison to other challenges by leaders of the four main religions and faiths, it was identified by significant number of religious leaders; Buddhism (26%), Christianity (28%), Hinduism (28%) and Islam (22%).
- The highest percentage of religious and faith leaders who felt that there was an increase in violence against children (59%) and increase in online violence against children (74%) due to COVID-19 belonged to Gampaha district. The lowest percentage of religious and faith leaders who felt that there was an increase in violence against children (18%) represented Kandy district. Furthermore, the lowest percentage of religious and faith leaders who felt that there was an increase in online violence against children due to COVID-19 (15%) were from Trincomalee district.
- The main way that religious and faith leaders plan to adjust in the new norm is by continuing to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures, which was noted as 34% of the total ways. Disseminating information related to COVID-19 (21.2%), advocating against violence against women and children (16%) and increasing the usage of ICT to engage and mobilize communities (16%) are the other main ways.
- Even according to the classification as per religion, 89% of the Buddhist religious leaders, 75% of the Christian religious leaders, 74% of the Hindu religious leaders and 78% of the religious leaders following Islam plan to continue practicing COVID-19 precautionary measures. Only 30% of religious and faith leaders plan to use ICT to conduct online sermons in the new norm (Buddhism - 30.7%, Christianity - 38.4%, Hinduism - 21.7% and Islam- 27.7%).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Raising awareness among religious and faith leaders in all districts about COVID-19, precautionary measures and new findings related to COVID-19 in Sinhalese and Tamil.
- Providing religious and faith leaders access to digital devices, specially Computers, WIFI-Routers and Dongles.
- Providing training and assistance to religious and faith leaders in order to enable them to make use of digital devices and Internet based applications. Special focus could be given on how to use applications such as Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams for conducting regular religious sermons or prayers.
- Incentivizing religious and faith leaders to engage with their communities by way of online sermons, live streaming sessions and webinars, for the purpose of providing their followers with mental relaxation and moral support. Specially in districts that have witnessed high percentages of increase in violence against children and women, online discussions could be of immense value.
- Devising a national level plan to support religious and faith leaders in terms of premise maintenance and other basic needs during a lockdown condition.
- Devising a national level plan to provide religious and faith leaders with protective hygiene material (eg- face masks, hand sanitizers) and other essentials for their daily consumption and use.
- Devising a national level strategy for the distribution of dry rations to communities affected by COVID-19 through their religious institutions.

MAIN THEMES

1. ENGAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES PRIOR TO COVID-19 AND DURING COVID-19

The survey enquired religious leaders as to their engagement with their respective communities on a normal week prior to COVID-19 and during COVID-19. Their engagement during COVID-19 was assessed based on three levels of engagement, high engagement (more than 100 people), moderate engagement (50-100 people) and low engagement (10-50 people).

Figure 3 indicates that during the COVID-19 period, most of the religious and faith leaders have maintained a moderate level of engagement with their followers (i.e. engaged with 50- 100 followers) which is 40.2% of leaders. High level of engagement (i.e. engaged with over 100 followers) and low-level engagement (i.e. engaged with less than 50 followers) were maintained respectively by 26.5% and 33.3% of leaders.

FIGURE 3: Comparison of High, Moderate and Low levels of engagement by Religious and Faith Leaders with their followers during COVID-19

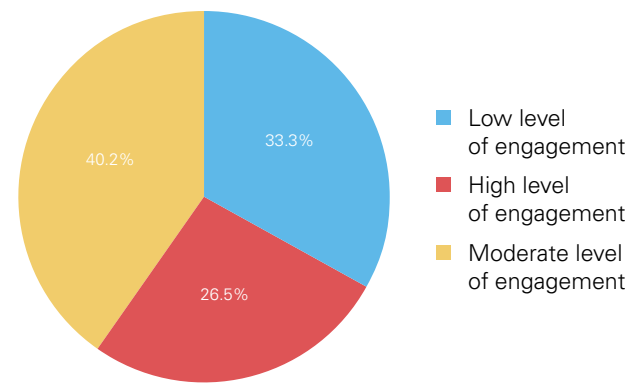


TABLE 2: Comparison of the levels of engagement by Religious and Faith Leaders with their communities prior to COVID-19 and during COVID-19

Religion	High level of engagement (Before COVID-19)	High level of engagement (During COVID-19)	Moderate level of engagement (Before COVID-19)	Moderate level of engagement (During COVID-19)	Low level of engagement (Before COVID-19)	Low level of engagement (During COVID-19)
Buddhism	37%	18%	31%	42%	32%	40%
Christianity	43%	31%	28%	39%	29%	30%
Hinduism	28%	30%	32%	42%	40%	28%
Islam	27%	40%	32%	35%	40%	25%

Table 2 indicates that during COVID-19, most of the religious and faith leaders representing Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism have maintained a moderate level of engagement with followers which is 42%, 39% and 42%

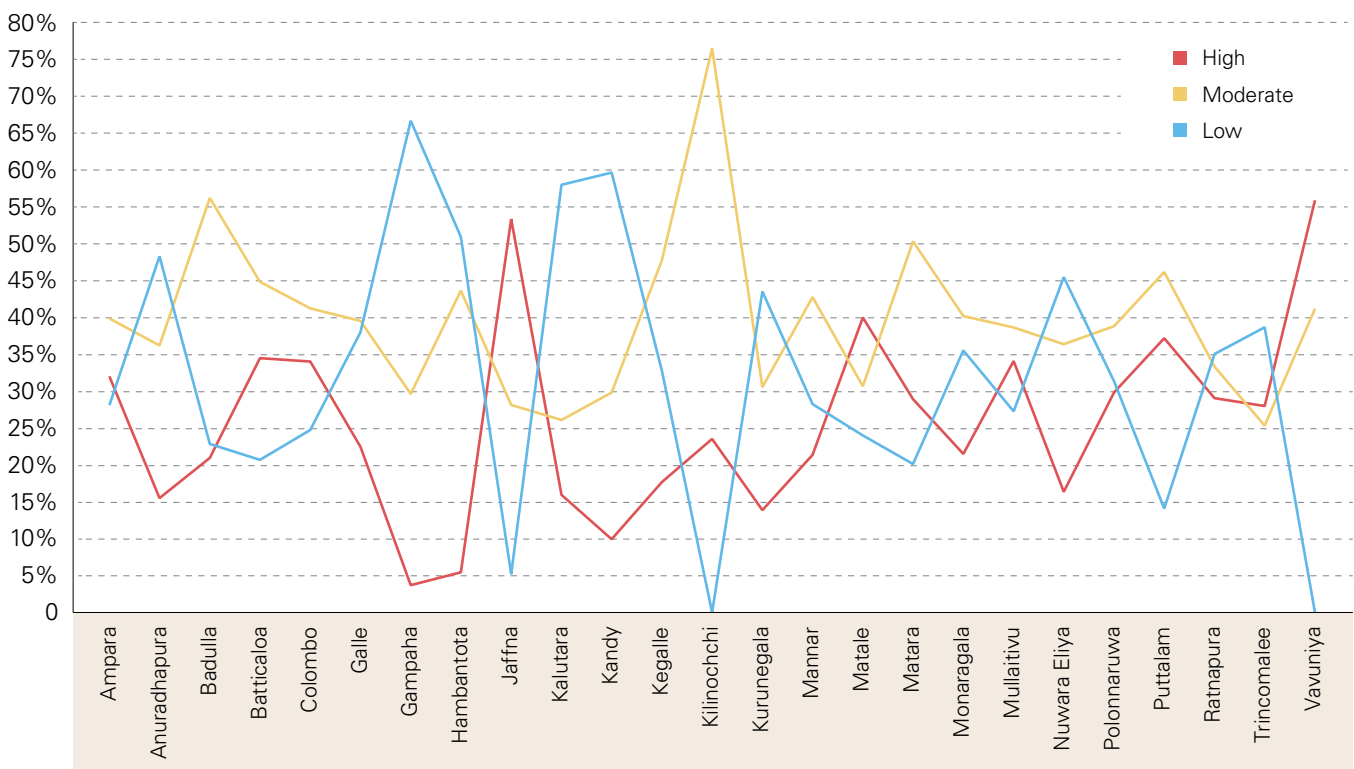
of leaders respectively. However, most of the religious leaders representing Islam have maintained a high level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19 which is 40% of Islam leaders.

Furthermore, as illustrated in Table 2, the percentages of religious leaders of Hinduism and Islam who have had a high level of engagement with their followers (engaged with more than 100 people) during COVID-19 has increased in comparison to the percentage of religious leaders of those religions who engaged on the same level prior to COVID-19 by 2% and 13% respectively. However, there is a decrease in the percentages of religious leaders of Buddhism and Christianity who have had a high level of engagement with their followers during COVID-19 by 19% and 12% respectively compared to their engagement prior to COVID-19.

The percentages of religious leaders of all religious groups

who have engaged on a moderate level with their followers (engaged with 50-100 people) has increased during COVID-19 compared to the situation prior to COVID-19 by 11%, 11%, 10% and 3% for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam respectively. In addition, the percentages of leaders representing Buddhism and Christianity who have engaged on a low level (less than 50 people) with their followers during COVID-19 has increased by 8% and 1% respectively compared to the situation prior to COVID-19. However, the percentages of leaders representing Hinduism and Islam who have engaged on a low level with their followers during COVID-19 has decreased by 12% and 15% respectively compared to the situation prior to COVID-19.

FIGURE 4: Levels of engagement by religious and faith leaders during COVID-19 (as per districts)



The above Figure 4 illustrates that the highest percentage of religious leaders who engaged with more than 100 people during COVID-19 were from Vavuniya district, which is 56% from the total religious leaders in the district. The highest percentage of religious leaders who engaged with 50-100 people during COVID-19 belonged to Kilinochchi

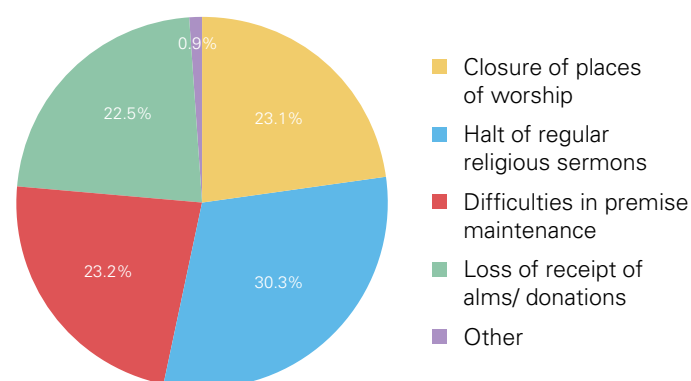
district, which is 76% from the total religious leaders in the district. Furthermore, the highest percentage of religious leaders who engaged with 10-50 people during COVID-19 belonged to Gampaha district, which is 67% from the total religious leaders in the district.

2. IMPACT OF CURFEW IMPOSED DUE TO COVID-19 ON RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS/ PLACES OF WORSHIP

Religious leaders were enquired about the impact of curfew on their religious institutions or places of worship. The purpose was to identify to which extent different occurrences such as halt of regular religious sermons, closure of places of worship, difficulties in premise maintenance and loss of receipt of alms or donations have impacted religious and faith leaders representing different religions and districts.

In addition, several other responses were given by religious and faith leaders that could also be identified as impacts of curfew. Changes in prayer times, lack of funds to carry out administrative work, reduction of bank interest for the maintenance of funds, inability to continue construction work, inability to provide guidelines and support for the public, inability to conduct annual festivals and religious rituals and the inability to continue Dhamma School were some of the other impacts identified. However, it was also stated by some religious and faith leaders that day to day routines remained unchanged despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

FIGURE 5: Impacts of curfew on Religious Institutions



As evident from figure 5, the most significant impact of the imposition of curfew on all religious institutions/ places of worship has been the halt of regular religious sermons, which is recorded as 30.3% of the total impacts. Difficulties in premise maintenance, closure of places of worship and loss of receipt of alms/ donations are respectively recorded as 23.2%, 23.1% and 22.5% of the total impacts. Furthermore, other impacts of curfew are recorded as 0.9% of the total impacts.

FIGURE 6: Impacts of curfew on Religious Institutions (classified according to the religious groups)



Figure 6 indicates the various impacts of curfew on religious institutions as per the analysis of responses of religious leaders according to their religious groups. It can be noted that all the religious institutions have been mostly affected by the halt of regular religious sermons, Buddhism (75%), Christianity (76%), Hinduism (63%) and Islam (67%). The second most significant impact on Buddhists has been the loss of receipt of alms or donations (64%) whereas

for religious leaders following Christianity, Hinduism and Islam it has been the closure of places of worship as evident from the values 64%, 48% and 62% respectively. Furthermore, religious leaders of all religious groups have encountered significant difficulties in maintaining their premises: Buddhism (63%), Christianity (56%), Hinduism (43%) and Islam (47%).

TABLE 3: Impacts of curfew on Religious Institutions (classified according to the districts)

	Closure of places of worship	Halt of regular religious sermons	Difficulties in premise maintenance	Loss of receipt of alms/donations
Ampara	45%	85%	45%	40%
Anuradhapura	74%	88%	57%	74%
Badulla	59%	77%	59%	90%
Batticaloa	40%	54%	34%	30%
Colombo	63%	65%	70%	70%
Galle	36%	67%	57%	52%
Gampaha	94%	93%	95%	91%
Hambantota	47%	64%	36%	64%
Jaffna	57%	61%	50%	46%
Kalutara	54%	64%	54%	58%
Kandy	60%	79%	59%	44%
Kegalle	41%	78%	65%	63%
Kilinochchi	75%	78%	67%	68%
Kurunegala	49%	66%	36%	26%
Mannar	73%	76%	50%	23%
Matale	57%	65%	53%	49%
Matara	51%	72%	57%	65%
Monaragala	48%	78%	61%	65%
Mullaitivu	75%	61%	68%	75%
Nuwara eliya	42%	67%	50%	39%
Polonnaruwa	31%	69%	55%	46%
Puttalam	72%	77%	76%	65%
Ratnapura	38%	79%	50%	50%
Trincomalee	79%	63%	49%	55%
Vavuniya	26%	26%	32%	29%

Figures are tabulated in Table 3, by dividing the number of occasions that the particular impact was reported, from the total number of religious leaders in that particular district. Accordingly, closure of places of worship, halt of regular religious sermons, difficulties in premise

maintenance and loss of receipt of alms/donations have mostly impacted religious institutions in Gampaha district as evident from the values 94%, 93%, 95% and 91% respectively.

3. RESPONSES OF RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Religious and faith leaders have responded to the COVID-19 crisis in different ways. As illustrated in figure 7, the main response of religious and faith leaders to the COVID-19 crisis was providing advice/counselling to their followers, which is recorded as 29.2% of the total responses. Distribution of dry ration packs (22.3%), sharing risk education messages via mass and social media (19.5%) and providing financial aid for humanitarian efforts (10.8%) were the other main ways of responding. From the total responses of religious and faith leaders, 6.1% have provided cooked food. Furthermore, 5% and 0.5% of religious and faith leaders have not been able to support adequately and supported in other ways respectively. The other means of providing support have been described as distribution of information leaflets, providing educational knowledge to students on the use of technology, praying for people suffering from COVID-19 and adherence to health guidelines.

FIGURE 7: The responses of Religious and Faith Leaders to the COVID-19 crisis

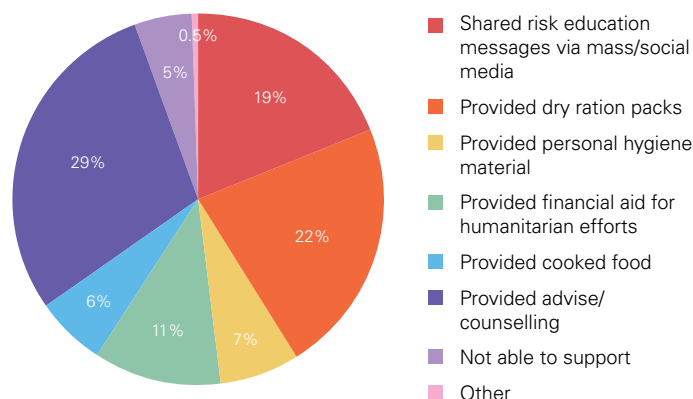


FIGURE 8: The responses of Religious and Faith Leaders to the COVID-19 crisis (classified according to religious groups)

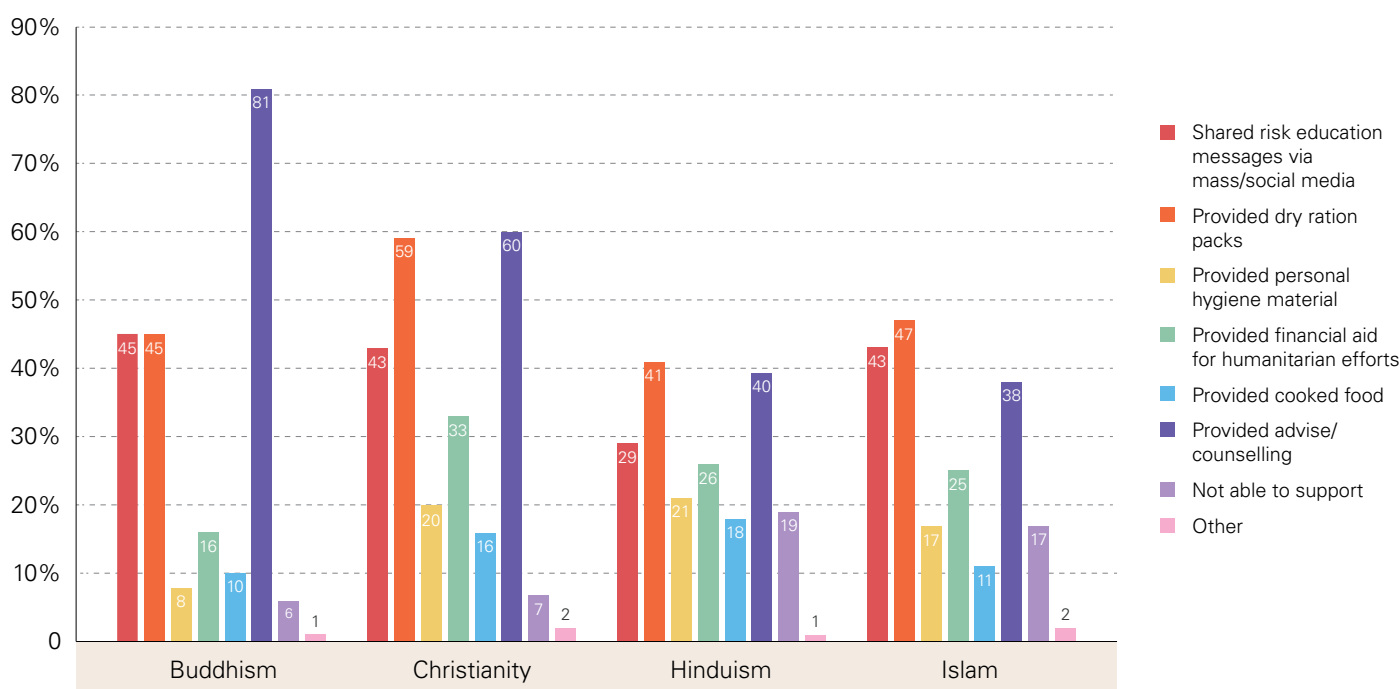


Figure 8 illustrates that the majority of the religious leaders from Buddhist and Christian religious groups have resorted to providing advice and counseling to their followers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as evident from the values 81% and 60% respectively. However, the highest percentages of religious leaders of Hinduism and Islamic faith have supported their religious communities by distributing dry ration packs, the values being 41% and 47% respectively. There is a similar trend in the distribution of protective hygiene material and in providing cooked

food, where Buddhist religious leaders have the lowest percentage of responses and Hindu religious leaders have the highest percentage of responses followed by Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, in respect to providing cooked food, 18% of the Hindu religious leaders have contributed, that being the highest percentage when compared to the other three religious groups. In respect to sharing risk education messages via social media/mass media, religious and faith leaders of all four religious groups have significantly contributed.

TABLE 4: The responses of religious and faith leaders to the COVID-19 pandemic (classified according to the districts)

	Shared risk education messages via mass/social media	Distributed ration packs	Distributed personal protective equipment	Provided financial aid for humanitarian efforts	Provided cooked food for those effected	Provided advise/counselling	Not able to support
Ampara	29%	35%	8%	9%	1 %	37%	24%
Anuradhapura	22%	53%	12%	16%	9%	71%	7%
Badulla	63%	26%	11%	22%	4%	85%	10%
Batticaloa	28%	38%	23%	22%	43%	31%	8%
Colombo	40%	61%	34%	37%	36%	47%	13%
Galle	47%	34%	7%	16%	5%	54%	9%
Gampaha	57%	75%	4%	9%	22%	89%	4%
Hambantota	60%	45%	9%	24%	7%	69%	13%
Jaffna	33%	33%	16%	28%	12%	45%	20%
Kalutara	42%	49%	16%	29%	20%	77%	12%
Kandy	35%	61%	18%	21%	8%	61%	15%
Kegalle	48%	59%	15%	46%	11%	80%	4%
Kilinochchi	35%	55%	10%	25%	14%	57%	8%
Kurunegala	56%	69%	15 %	23%	6%	82%	5%
Mannar	24%	53%	26%	43%	20%	44%	18%
Matale	60%	52%	9%	20%	11%	47%	11%
Matara	37%	33%	7%	13%	10%	80%	4%
Monaragala	48%	39%	4%	13%	10%	71%	12%
Mullaitivu	41%	48%	39%	30%	5%	59%	11%
Nuwara eliya	36%	37%	13%	19%	15%	66%	12%
Polonnaruwa	49%	49%	4%	21%	3%	70%	4%
Puttalam	51%	65%	18%	18%	23%	64%	13%
Ratnapura	38%	50%	11%	21%	9%	71%	6%
Trincomalee	19%	48%	5%	23%	7%	63%	1%
Vavuniya	44%	24%	29%	6%	9%	24%	3%

Figures are tabulated in Table 4, by dividing the number of occasions that the particular response was reported, from the total number of religious leaders in that particular district. It is evident that in 20 districts the most popular response of religious and faith leaders was the provision of advice and counselling to their followers. However,

the most popular response of religious and faith leaders in Batticaloa district was the provision of cooked food, in Colombo and Mannar districts was the provision of dry rations and in Matale and Vavuniya districts was the sharing of risk education messages via social media/mass media.

4. WAYS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS

The survey captured the different ways in which the religious and faith leaders engaged with their communities during COVID-19. Responses ranged from online means of engagement such as conducting online sermons, conducting webinars, conducting live stream sessions online and through social media applications (e.g. WhatsApp, Viber, skype) to more traditional means of engagement such as via Telephones or Speakers. In addition, other ways of engagement such as direct communication during funerals, leaflet distribution, through national level services such as Easter Sunday services were also mentioned by religious leaders. However, as evident from figure 9, 3.2% of the religious leaders representing all the religions have responded that they were not able to engage with their communities.

FIGURE 9: Ways of engagement with communities by religious and faith leaders

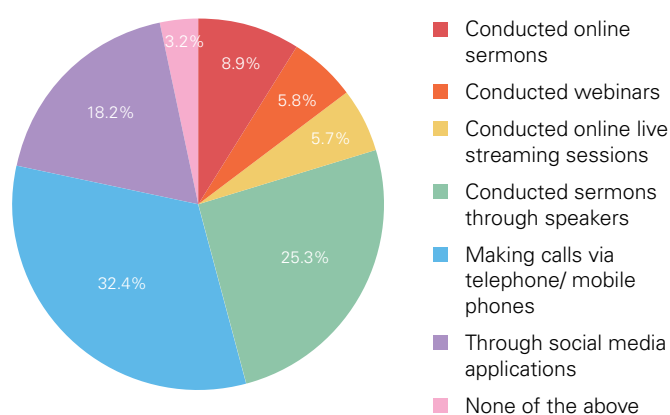


Figure 10 illustrates that the most popular method of engagement across all the religious groups was making calls via telephones/mobile phones. 68%, 58%, 41% and 39% of the religious leaders following Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam respectively have selected making calls via telephones/mobile phones as a method of engagement with their communities. Furthermore, conducting sermons via speakers was the second most popular method of engagement resorted to by religious leaders following Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, as evident from the values 58%, 36% and 30% respectively. However, the second most popular method of engagement resorted to by religious leaders of Islamic faith was the use of social media applications as 36% of them have used social media applications whereas only 28% have used speakers. In addition, considerable percentages of religious leaders from Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism have used social media applications as evident from the values 28%, 36% and 28% respectively.

It can also be observed from figure 10 that low percentages of religious leaders from all the religious groups have engaged with their communities through online mediums such as webinars, live streams and online sermons. The lowest number of leaders using online sermons, webinars and online live streaming sessions were identified among leaders representing Buddhism as 6.8%, 1.0% and 3.9% respectively.

FIGURE 10: Ways of engagement with communities by religious and faith leaders (categorized according to religious groups)

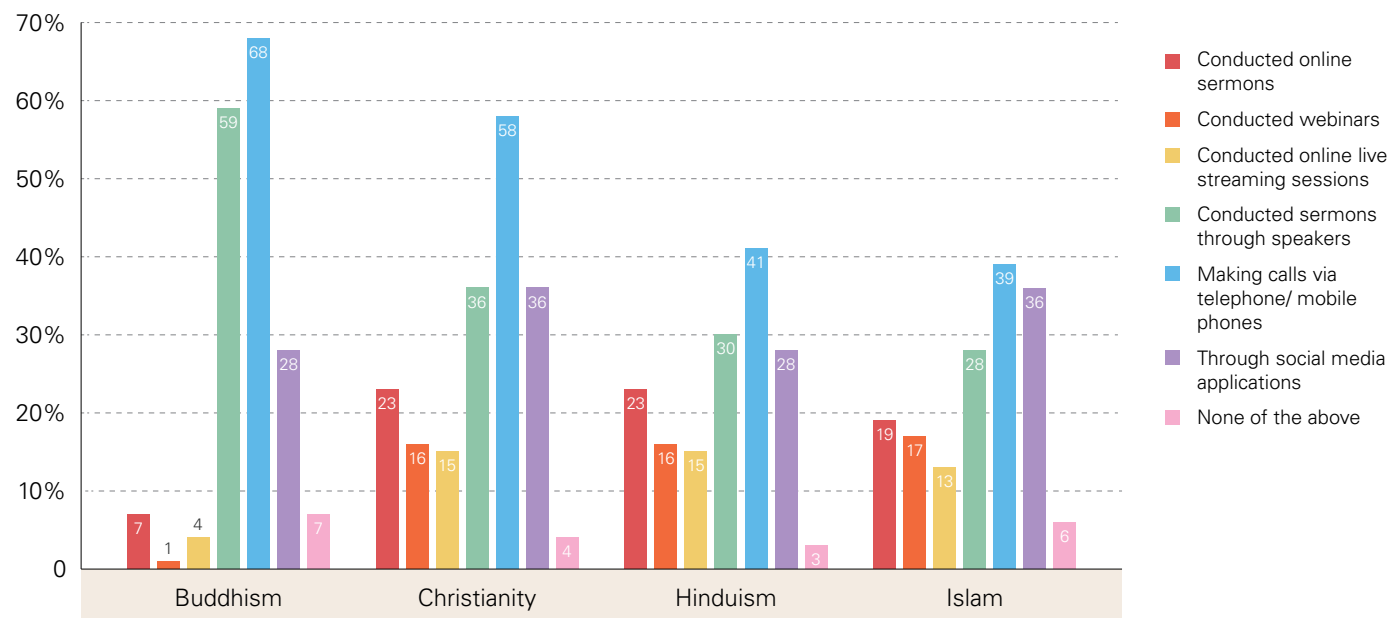


TABLE 5: Ways of engagement by religious and faith leaders (categorized according to districts)

	Conducted online sermons	Conducted webinars	Conducted online live streaming sessions	Conducted sermons through speakers	Making calls via telephone/mobile phones	Through social Media applications	None of such methods
Ampara	31%	4%	3%	62%	43%	27%	3%
Anuradhapura	7%	7%	5%	31%	72%	12%	16%
Badulla	13%	4%	8%	30%	77%	66%	4%
Batticaloa	21%	26%	33%	39%	49%	43%	3%
Colombo	35%	8%	19%	47%	52%	51%	5%
Galle	16%	1%	5%	31%	52%	26%	14%
Gampaha	4%		5%	59%	96%	12%	
Hambantota	9%		4%	29%	62%	36%	7%
Jaffna	8%	19%	6%	6%	60%	30%	1%
Kalutara	9%	4%	6%	57%	75%	29%	4%
Kandy	26%	16%	14%	45%	49%	43%	9%
Kegalle	8%	14%	5%	67%	66%	37%	1%
Kilinochchi	22%	6%	6%	25%	33%	45%	
Kurunegala	6%	1%	3%	40%	43%	37%	15%
Mannar	27%	37%	32%	50%	34%	18%	
Matale	17%	7%	13%	45%	45%	25%	7%
Matara	8%	1%	4%	72%	68%	24%	6%
Monaragala	8%		7%	47%	54%	20%	9%
Mullaitivu	30%	5%	14%	41%	68%	30%	
Nuwara Eliya	6%	6%	5%	35%	46%	25%	4%

	Conducted online sermons	Conducted webinars	Conducted online live streaming sessions	Conducted sermons through speakers	Making calls via telephone/mobile phones	Through social Media applications	None of such methods
Polonnaruwa	12%	1%	1%	61%	43%	22%	4%
Puttalam	12%	6%	4%	40%	65%	33%	14%
Ratnapura	4%	3%	2%	35%	66%	24%	5%
Trincomalee	5%	31%	8%	39%	53%	21%	3%
Vavuniya	21%	18%	29%	21%	15%	12%	

Figures are tabulated in Table 5, by dividing the number of occasions that the particular response was reported, from the total the number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district. Accordingly, it is evident that the highest percentage of religious leaders who conducted online seminars (35%) belonged to Colombo district whereas the highest percentage of religious leaders who conducted webinars (37%) belonged to Mannar district. Furthermore, the highest percentage of religious leaders who conducted live streaming sessions (33%) belonged to Batticaloa district. In addition, the highest percentage

of religious leaders who used social media applications (66%) represented Badulla district. The highest percentage of religious leaders who made calls via telephone/mobile phones and conducted sermons through speakers belonged to Gampaha district (96%) and Matara district (72%) respectively. It is also important to note that the highest percentage of religious leaders from all the districts, who did not engage with their communities in any of the above ways, were from Anuradhapura district (16%).

5. ACCESS TO DIGITAL DEVICES BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS

The survey was also aimed at collecting data on the access to digital devices such as Land phone or Basic Mobile phone, Smart phone or Tablet, Computer, WIFI Router and Dongle by religious and faith leaders. From figure 11, it can be observed that Land phone or basic mobile phone was the most accessible device whereas Dongle was the least accessible device among religious leaders of all the religious groups. Accordingly, out of the total population of religious leaders who were interviewed, 6% had access to a Dongle, 21% to a WIFI Router, 28% to a Computer, 55% to a Smartphone/ Tablet and 66% had access to a Land phone/ Basic mobile phone.

FIGURE 11: Access to Digital devices by Religious and Faith Leaders

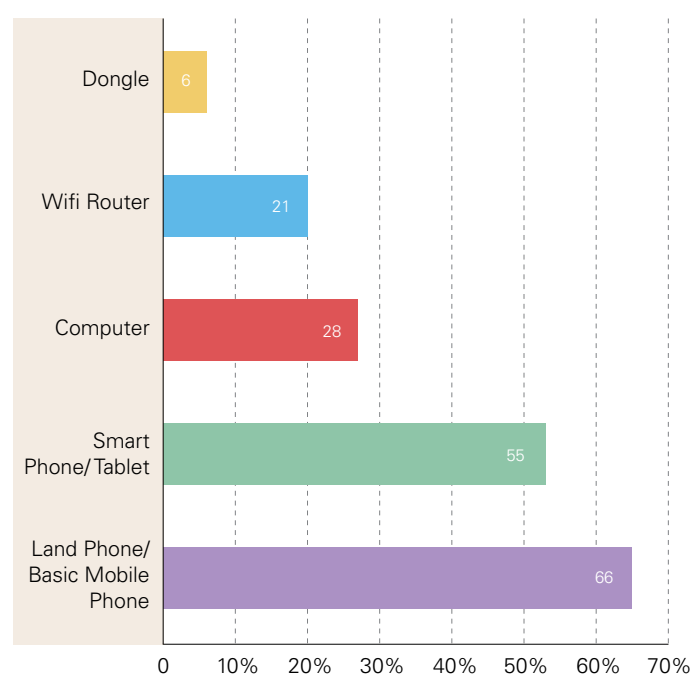


FIGURE 12: Access to Digital devices by Religious and Faith leaders (categorized according to religious groups)

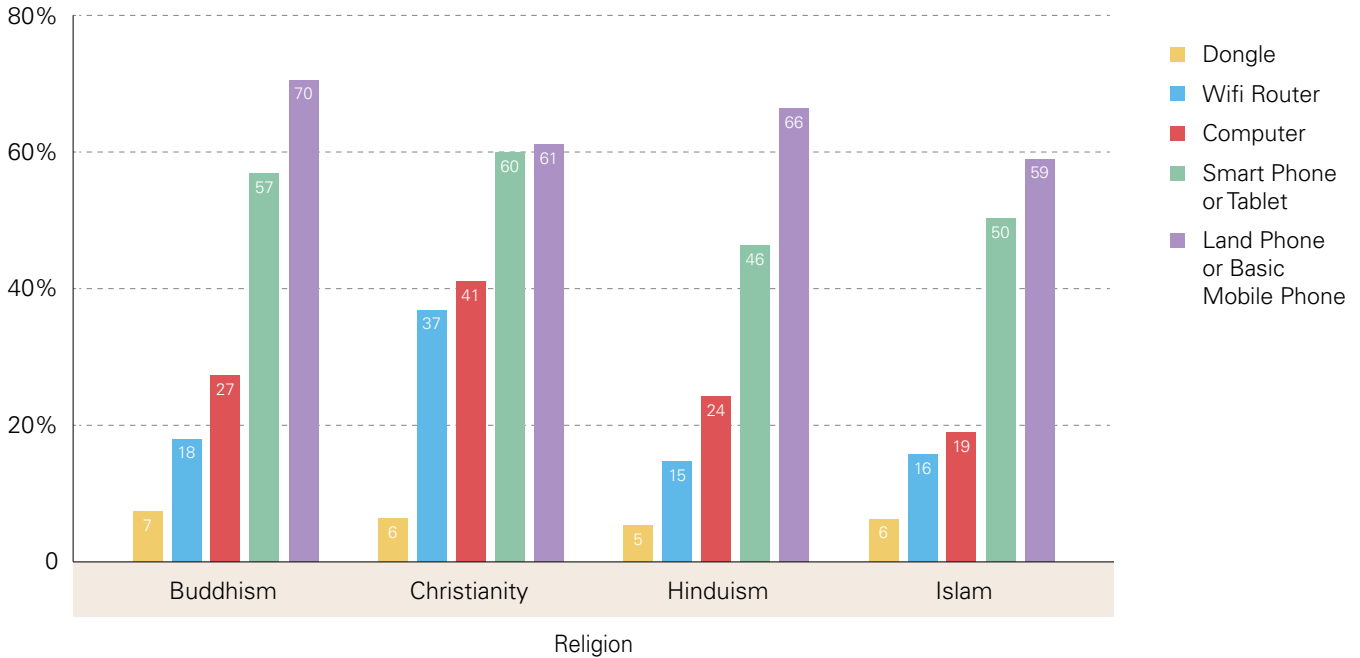


Figure 12 analyzes the responses of religious leaders to the question of access to digital devices according to their respective religious groups. From the leaders following Buddhism access to computer, smart phone /tablet and land phone/ basic mobile phone was 26.8%, 57.4% and 70.5% respectively. Access rate among leaders following Hinduism was 24%, 45.7% and 65.6% respectively. Furthermore, access rate among leaders following Christianity was 40.9%, 59.9% and 61.1%. In addition, access rate among leaders following Islam was 18.6%, 50.4% and 58.7% for computer, smart phone /tablet and land

phone/ basic mobile phone respectively.

It is further evident from figure 12 that the highest percentage of religious leaders who had access to a Land phone/ Basic mobile phone and Dongle being 70% and 7% respectively were all followers of Buddhism. It can also be observed that the highest percentage of religious leaders who had access to a WIFI Router, Computer and Smart phone/Tablet being 37%, 41% and 60% respectively, were all followers of Christianity.

TABLE 6: Access to digital devices by religious and faith leaders (categorized according to the districts)

	Dongle	WIFI Router	Computer	Smart phone/ Tablet	Land phone/Basic mobile phone
Ampara	3%	10%	11%	69%	58%
Anuradhapura	2%	10%	36%	38%	72%
Badulla	19%	24%	58%	73%	58%
Batticaloa	7%	27%	43%	50%	44%
Colombo	10%	38%	26%	63%	65%
Galle	5%	26%	21%	57%	59%
Gampaha	1%	7%	27%	81%	91%
Hambantota	9%	24%	18%	58%	47%
Jaffna	1%	28%	19%	36%	59%
Kalutara	1%	17%	20%	64%	88%
Kandy	7%	30%	33%	53%	45%
Kegalle	16%	26%	27%	51%	83%
Kilinochchi	8%	14%	18%	71%	76%
Kurunegala	6%	22%	26%	44%	85%
Mannar	8%	17%	49%	62%	50%
Matale	4%	24%	27%	51%	68%
Matara	6%	16%	25%	63%	78%
Monaragala	4%	5%	34%	45%	61%
Mullaitivu		23%	25%	70%	86%
Nuwara Eliya	7%	15%	20%	32%	77%
Polonnaruwa		16%	15%	49%	72%
Puttalam	5%	13%	24%	40%	73%
Ratnapura	10%	20%	26%	47%	72%
Trincomalee	3%	35%	19%	55%	55%
Vavuniya			15%	29%	62%

Figures are tabulated in Table 6, by dividing the number of occasions that access to a particular digital device was reported, from the total number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district.

6. USAGE OF INTERNET BASED APPLICATIONS BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS

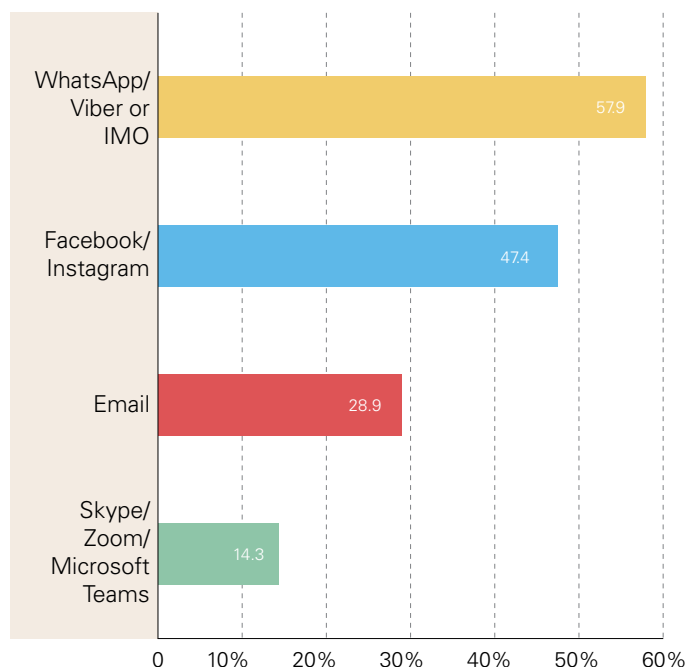
As illustrated in Table 7, the most commonly used internet based applications across most of the districts were WhatsApp, Viber and IMO. However, Email was the most commonly used application in Hambantota (69%) and Puttalam districts (64%). In addition, most of the religious and faith leaders in Ampara (62%), Anuradhapura (40%),

Colombo (69%), Galle (54%), Polonnaruwa (42%) and Trincomalee (73%) districts have used Facebook or Instagram in comparison to other Internet based applications. Furthermore, Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams were the least used internet-based applications by religious leaders in most of the districts.

TABLE 7: Usage of Internet based applications across the districts

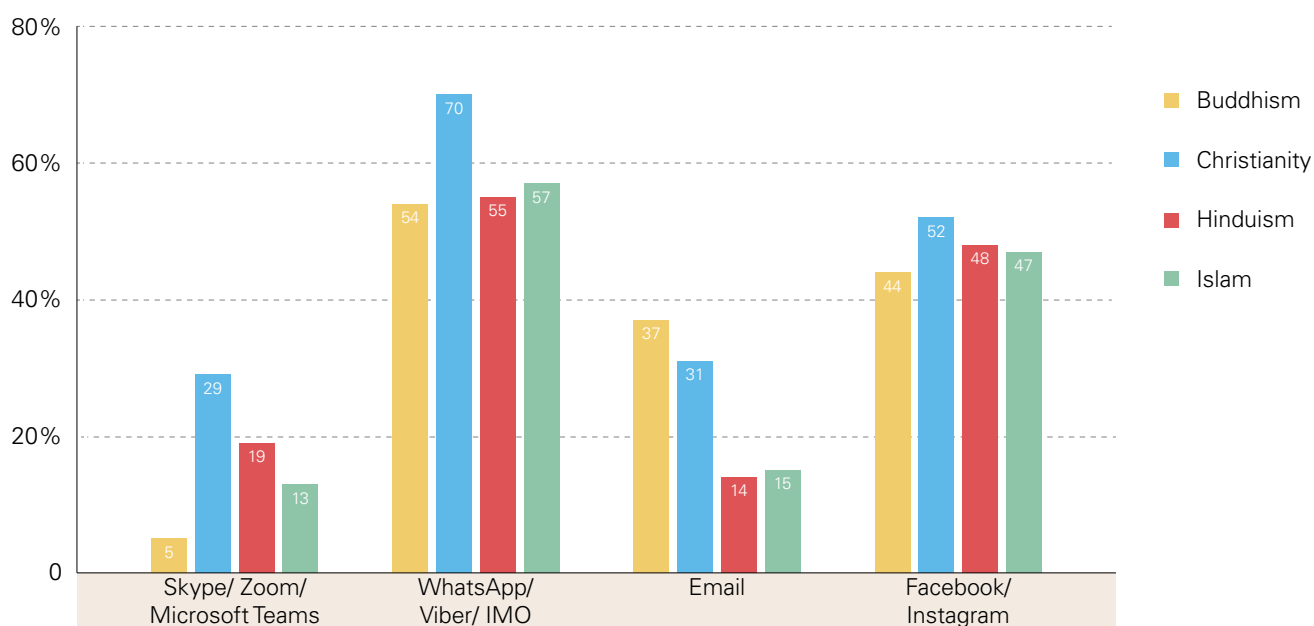
	Skype/Zoom/ Microsoft Teams	WhatsApp/Viber/IMO	Email	Facebook/Instagram
Ampara	11%	55%	8%	62%
Anuradhapura	7%	33%	16%	40%
Badulla	7%	72%	36%	64%
Batticaloa	29%	70%	13%	36%
Colombo	12%	52%	39%	69%
Galle	19%	36%	46%	54%
Gampaha		88%	12%	17%
Hambantota	5%	47%	69%	67%
Jaffna	19%	61%	13%	48%
Kalutara	9%	61%	5%	46%
Kandy	22%	75%	39%	44%
Kegalle	19%	58%	32%	41%
Kilinochchi	10%	88%	4%	61%
Kurunegala	8%	37%	23%	33%
Mannar	27%	68%	18%	38%
Matale	9%	63%	35%	45%
Matara	5%	55%	43%	55%
Monaragala	5%	44%	23%	30%
Mullaitivu	2%	84%	16%	84%
Nuwara eliya	7%	67%	18%	37%
Polonnaruwa	4%	37%	13%	42%
Puttalam	4%	33%	64%	29%
Ratnapura	8%	44%	26%	35%
Trincomalee	40%	51%	16%	73%
Vavuniya	18%	47%	6%	38%

FIGURE 13: Usage of Internet based applications by religious and faith leaders



As illustrated in Figure 13, From the interviewed religious and faith leaders, majority (57.9%) have used WhatsApp/ Viber or IMO. Facebook/ Instagram was used by 47.4%, Email by 28.9% and Skype/Zoom/Microsoft Teams by 14.3% of religious and faith leaders.

FIGURE 14: Usage of Internet based applications by religious and faith leaders (classified according to religious groups)



From figure 14 it is evident that the majority of leaders representing Buddhism (53.7%), Christianity (69.8%), Hinduism (54.9%) and Islam (57.1%) have used WhatsApp, Viber and IMO to engage with their communities during COVID-19.

7. EMERGING CHALLENGES FACED BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As evident from Figure 15, the main challenge faced by religious and faith leaders due to COVID-19 was the inability to conduct usual religious ceremonies and special religious occasions, which is noted as 13% of the total impacts. No access to communication technology (12.4%), lack of protective hygiene material (12%), limited financial assistance to implement humanitarian efforts (9.6%) and limited access to communication technology (9.1%) were the other main challenges faced by religious and faith leaders.

Religious and faith leaders have also identified Lack of

knowledge on using technology and online platforms (7.2%), limited knowledge on COVID-19 prevention and precautionary measures (5.2%), limited availability of COVID-19 related information and materials in Sinhala (4.4%), limited availability of COVID-19 related information and materials in Tamil (4.2%), limited availability of information on the current context in the country (5.0%), limited availability of human resources to implement humanitarian efforts (5.9%), lack of knowledge on referral systems (4.5%) and lack of guidance on reopening places of worship and religious institutions (7.6%) as some of the other emerging challenges.

FIGURE 15: Challenges faced by Religious and Faith Leaders due to the COVID-19 crisis

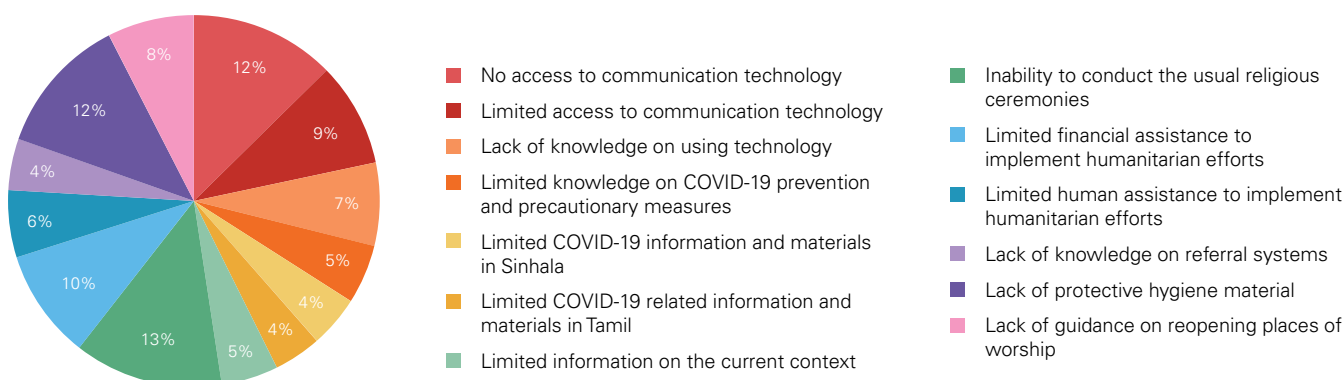
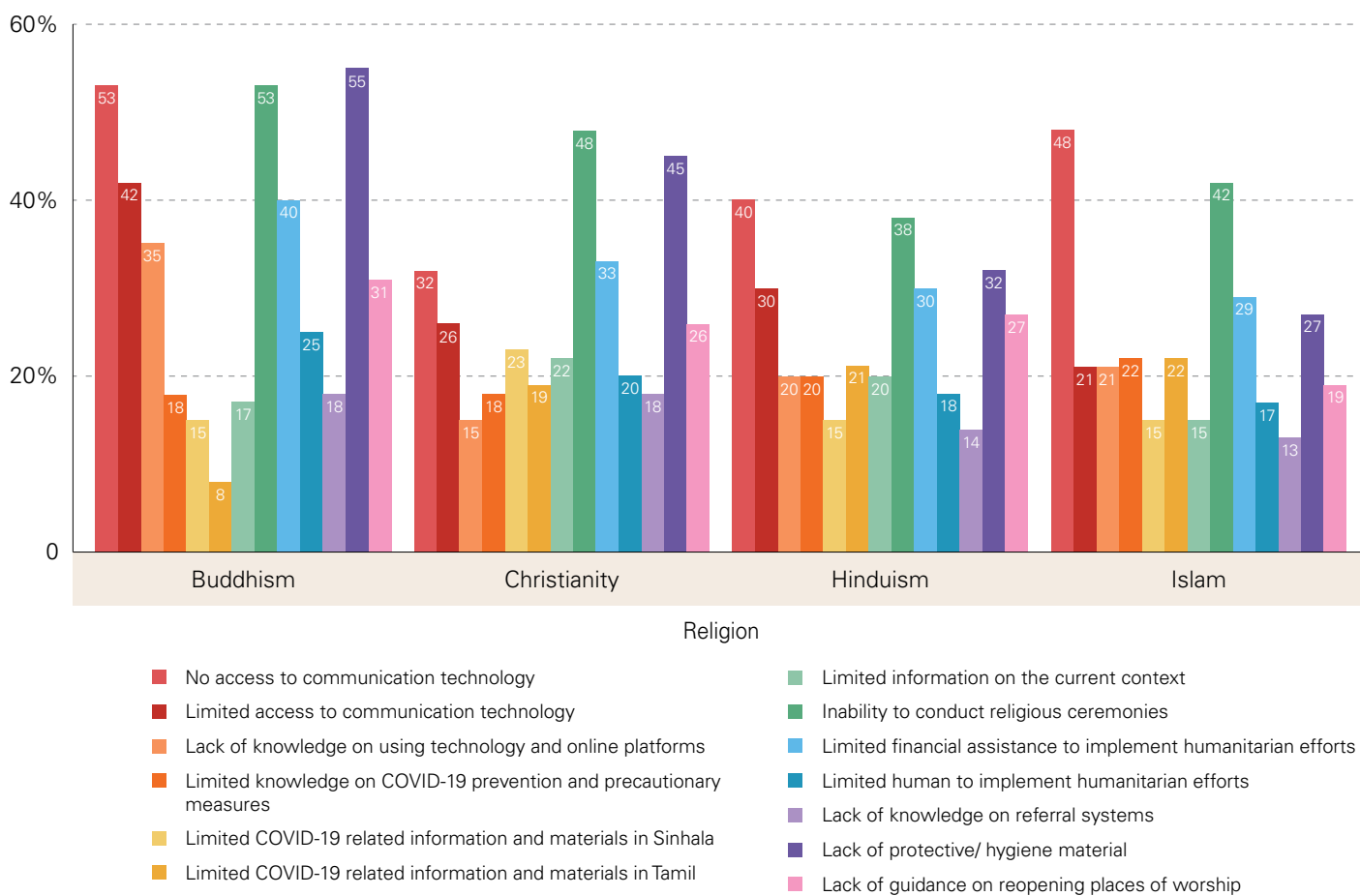


FIGURE 16: Challenges faced by Religious and Faith Leaders due to the COVID-19 crisis (classified according to Religious groups)



As evident from figure 16, no access to communication technology, inability to conduct religious ceremonies on special occasions and lack of protective hygiene material such as such as masks, hand sanitizers or disinfectants were the three prominent challenges faced by most of the religious leaders from Buddhist and Hindu communities. Most of the Christian religious leaders have been challenged by the inability to conduct religious ceremonies, lack of protective/hygiene material and limited

financial assistance. Furthermore, the three prominent challenges faced by most of the religious leaders of Islam were no access to communication technology, inability to conduct religious ceremonies and limited financial assistance. Accordingly, it can be observed that significant percentages of religious leaders of all religious groups, Buddhism-53%, Christianity-48%, Hinduism-38% and Islam-42% have been challenged by the inability to conduct usual religious ceremonies on special occasions.

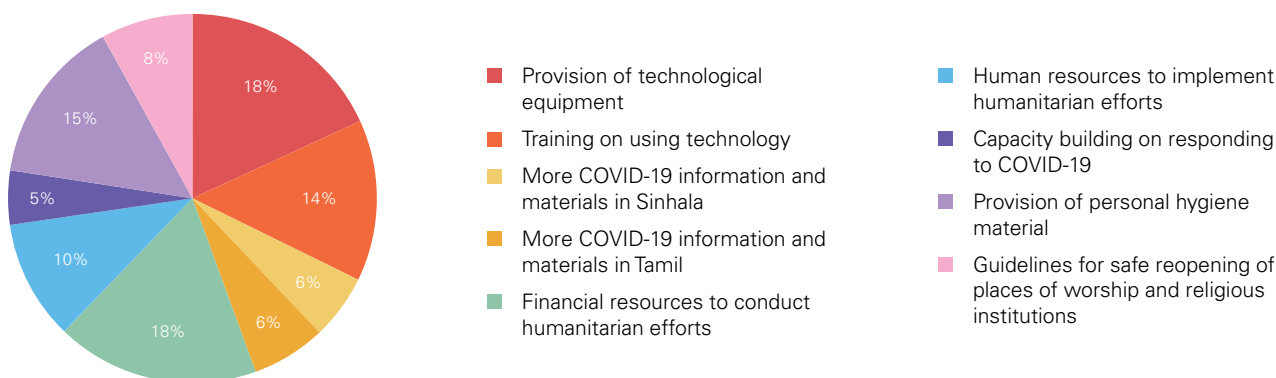
TABLE 8: Challenges faced by religious and faith leaders due to COVID-19 (classified according to districts)

	No access to ICT	Limited access to ICT	Lack of knowledge on using technology	Limited knowledge on COVID-19 prevention	Limited COVID-19 information in Sinhala	Limited COVID-19 information in Tamil	Limited information on the current context in the country	Inability to conduct the usual religious ceremonies	Limited financial assistance to implement humanitarian efforts	Limited human resources to implement humanitarian efforts	Lack of knowledge on referral systems	Lack of protective hygiene material	Lack of guidance on reopening places of worship
Ampara	59%	42%	10%	30%	8%	4%	6%	34%	31%	8%	28%	22%	30%
Anuradhapura	40%	62%	53%	47%	34%	36%	38%	50%	55%	38%	24%	69%	21%
Badulla	69%	30%	50%	17%	9%	14%	20%	58%	47%	25%	12%	71%	18%
Batticaloa	20%	23%	20%	22%	19%	32%	16%	31%	17%	16%	22%	15%	9%
Colombo	41%	30%	28%	38%	15%	37%	27%	38%	34%	23%	20%	32%	38%
Galle	48%	28%	22%	14%	12%	16%	26%	51%	27%	18%	17%	55%	34%
Gampaha	58%	49%	27%	6%		6%	7%	23%	4%	11%	27%	73%	33%
Hambantota	35%	40%	47%	7%	4%		33%	36%	47%	29%	15%	29%	25%
Jaffna	35%	19%	19%	14%	30%	19%	13%	23%	33%	19%	7%	27%	20%
Kalutara	17%	25%	17%	22%	13%	17%	35%	57%	41%	41%	20%	61%	12%
Kandy	61%	37%	24%	13%	16%	9%	15%	30%	34%	37%	12%	30%	24%
Kegalle	50%	39%	26%	12%	10%	13%	9%	57%	60%	23%	17%	58%	33%
Kilinochchi	27%	14%	14%	18%	14%	12%	12%	51%	45%	8%		16%	29%
Kurunegala	40%	27%	35%	26%	16%	6%	13%	59%	52%	34%	27%	37%	40%
Mannar	37%	39%	13%	37%	18%	27%	34%	44%	35%	15%	22%	49%	26%
Matale	56%	44%	23%	16%	16%	16%	13%	32%	25%	9%	11%	23%	28%
Matara	73%	55%	42%	11%	16%	8%	18%	62%	25%	19%	16%	66%	46%
Monaragala	32%	18%	21%	17%	20%	3%	19%	60%	37%	18%	9%	53%	37%
Mullaitivu	68%	27%	23%	9%	39%	43%	45%	89%	48%	30%	11%	73%	48%
Nuwara Eliya	50%	17%	19%	13%	20%	15%	12%	57%	29%	20%	14%	43%	21%
Polonnaruwa	49%	39%	36%	9%	10%	9%	4%	57%	39%	22%	3%	43%	27%
Puttalam	63%	41%	41%	27%	35%	13%	26%	59%	53%	32%	28%	63%	23%
Ratnapura	31%	31%	31%	15%	18%	12%	15%	62%	31%	20%	13%	49%	20%
Trincomalee	13%	7%	20%	9%	9%	13%	5%	55%	25%	16%	5%	21%	16%
Vavuniya	53%	32%	9%	9%	18%	21%	18%	29%	18%	9%	12%	29%	15%

Figures are tabulated in Table 8, by dividing the number of occasion that particular challenge was reported, from the total number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district.

8. SUPPORT REQUIRED BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS TO OVERCOME THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

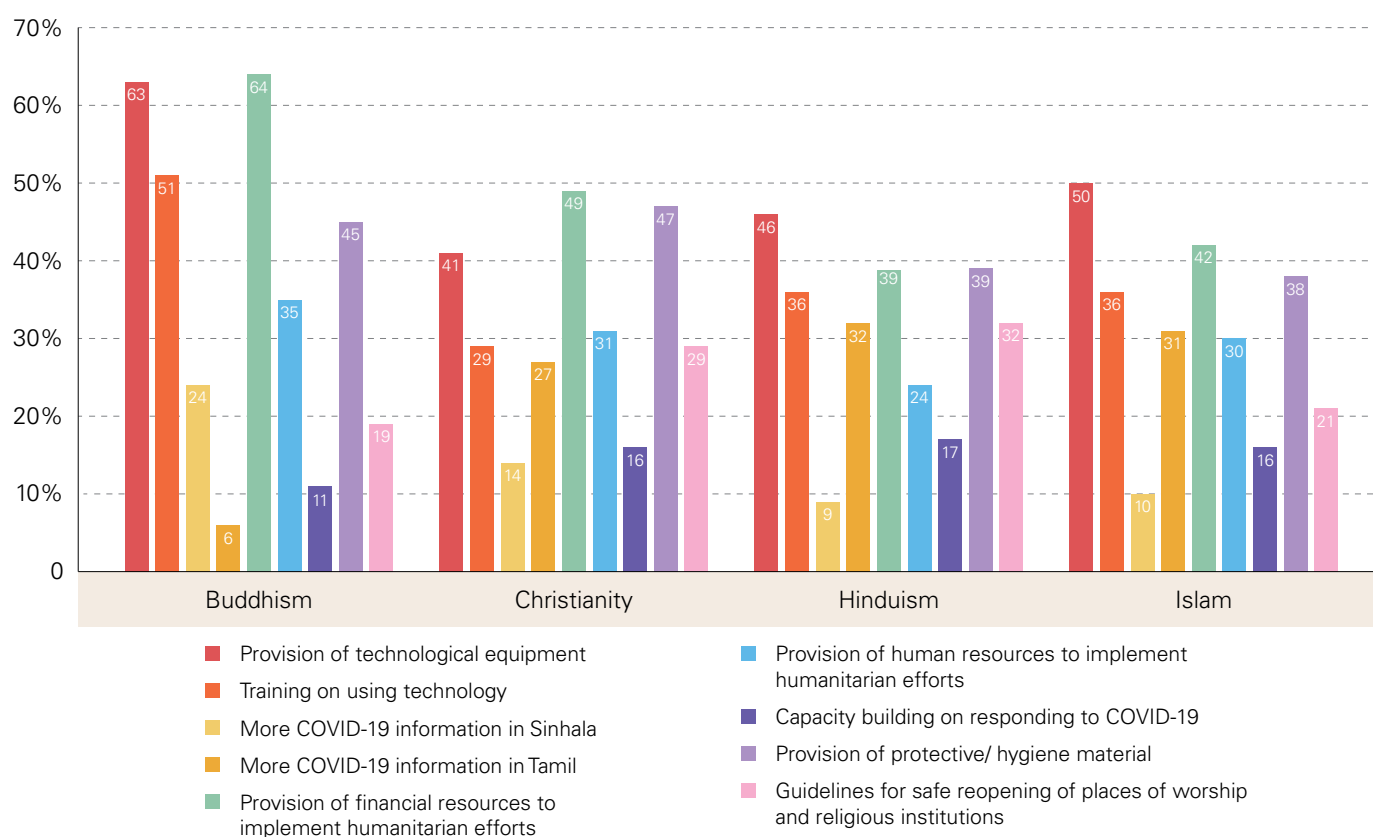
FIGURE 17: Methods of support required by religious and faith leaders to overcome the challenges that emerged due to COVID-19



The main support required by religious and faith leaders to face the challenges that emerged due to COVID-19, was the provision of technological equipment (e.g. smart phone and computer), which is noted as 18% of total support required. Provision of financial resources

to conduct humanitarian efforts (17.7%), provision of personal hygiene material (14.4%) and training on using technology and application to communicate with followers (14.2%) were the other main methods of support required by religious and faith leaders.

FIGURE 18: Support required by religious and faith leaders to overcome the challenges that emerged due to COVID-19 (classified according to religious groups)



Provision of technological equipment, provision of financial resources, provision of protective hygiene material such as masks, hand sanitizers and providing sufficient training on using technology to communicate with religious communities can be identified as the four most essential means of support required by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders to face the challenges encountered by them during COVID-19. The highest percentages of Christian religious leaders have also identified provision of financial resources, provision of protective hygiene material and provision of technological equipment as the three most preferred solutions. However, among Christian religious leaders, a higher percentage has required the provision of human resources to conduct humanitarian efforts over the provision of training on using technology.

It is also important to note that only 6% of the Buddhist religious leaders have identified provision of COVID-19 related information and materials in Tamil as support that is required by them to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19. Furthermore, 14% of leaders representing Christianity, 9% of Hindu religious leaders and 10% of Muslim religious leaders have required provision of COVID-19 related information and materials in Sinhala. Therefore, apart from these solutions for which a subjective approach may be taken in providing support, the other methods of providing support have been required by notable percentages of religious and faith leaders across all religious groups.

TABLE 9: Support required by religious and faith leaders to overcome the challenges that emerged due to COVID-19 (classified according to districts)

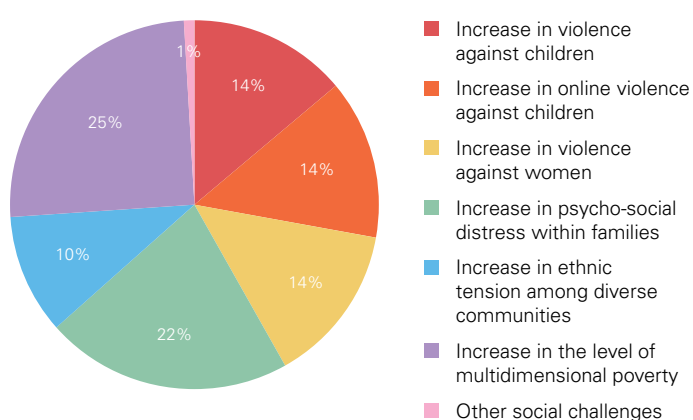
	Provision of technological equipment	Training on using technology to communicate with followers	More COVID-19 related information in Sinhala	More COVID-19 related information in Tamil	Financial resources to conduct humanitarian efforts	Human resources to implement humanitarian efforts	Capacity building on responding to COVID-19	Provision of protective hygiene material	Guidelines for safe reopening of places of worship
Ampara	59%	29%	16%	11%	31%	8%	16%	13%	16%
Anuradhapura	62%	36%	40%	34%	62%	31%	5%	28%	12%
Badulla	81%	58%	11%	19%	57%	30%	10%	70%	19%
Batticaloa	20%	42%	20%	28%	35%	28%	23%	23%	9%
Colombo	44%	35%	29%	30%	56%	42%	18%	28%	29%
Galle	60%	41%	19%	14%	42%	33%	15%	46%	29%
Gampaha	67%	81%	9%		7%	4%	1%	88%	19%
Hambantota	35%	69%	15%	2%	64%	31%	15%	27%	25%
Jaffna	35%	16%	4%	14%	41%	21%	9%	57%	44%
Kalutara	62%	48%	20%	23%	59%	33%	19%	58%	20%
Kandy	62%	38%	9%	11%	50%	58%	14%	24%	15%
Kegalle	63%	43%	9%	13%	76%	39%	19%	46%	21%
Kilinochchi	33%	27%	8%	31%	76%	14%	22%	25%	53%
Kurunegala	51%	47%	18%	10%	65%	48%	14%	31%	18%
Mannar	42%	27%	17%	37%	50%	44%	36%	54%	35%
Matale	57%	48%	23%	20%	48%	29%	11%	20%	28%
Matara	79%	66%	20%	8%	60%	31%	8%	50%	14%
Monaragala	44%	33%	30%	14%	65%	33%	4%	58%	28%
Mullaitivu	68%	48%	5%	89%	64%	52%	9%	84%	48%

	Provision of technological equipment	Training on using technology to communicate with followers	More COVID-19 related information in Sinhala	More COVID-19 related information in Tamil	Financial resources to conduct humanitarian efforts	Human resources to implement humanitarian efforts	Capacity building on responding to COVID-19	Provision of protective hygiene material	Guidelines for safe reopening of places of worship
Nuwara eliya	50%	35%	15%	23%	57%	30%	17%	55%	36%
Polonnaruwa	55%	49%	28%	12%	57%	24%	7%	36%	28%
Puttalam	63%	55%	21%	24%	77%	35%	17%	54%	15%
Ratnapura	49%	44%	25%	19%	52%	26%	9%	48%	17%
Trincomalee	37%	8%	1%	23%	53%	13%	9%	29%	19%
Vavuniya	32%	32%	12%	32%	24%	6%	18%	24%	21%

Figures are tabulated in Table 9, by dividing the occasions that a particular way of support was reported, from the total number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district.

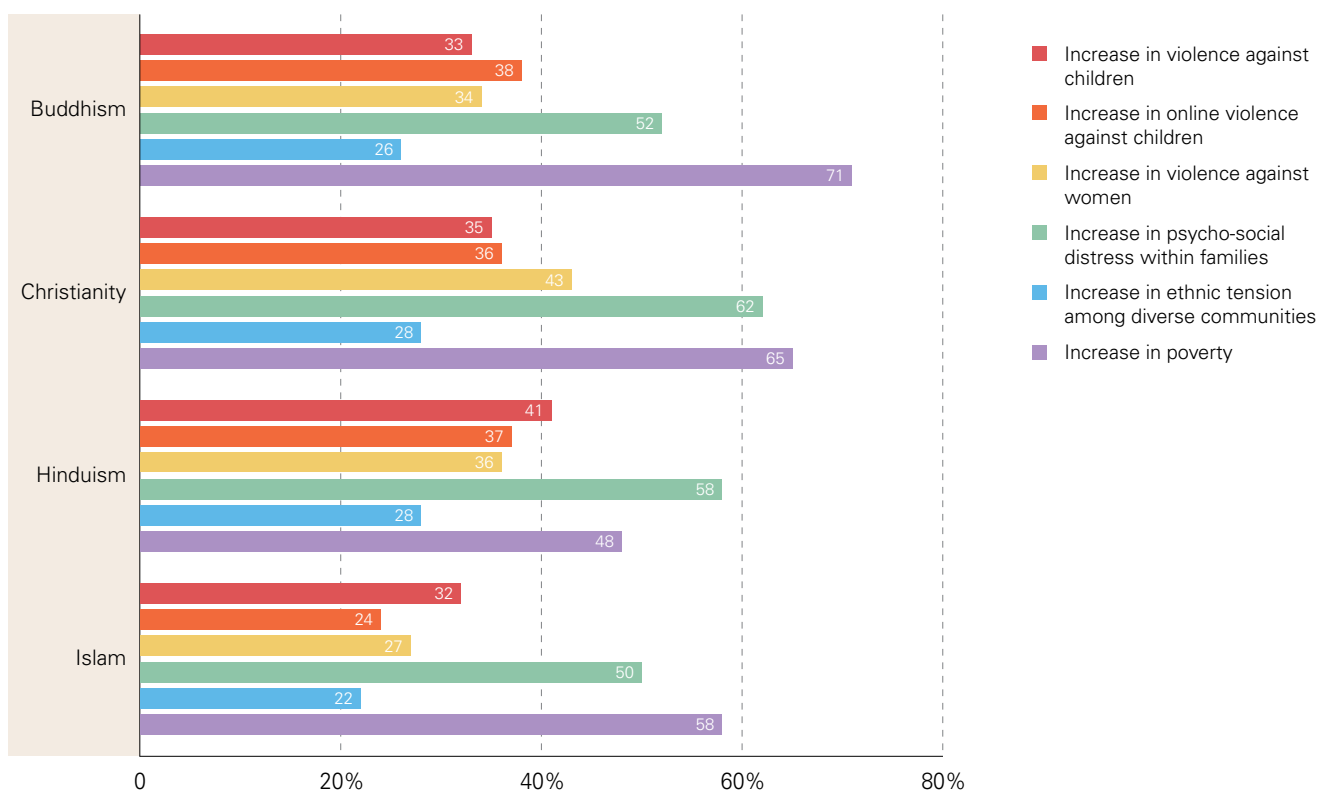
9. CURRENT SOCIAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY COMMUNITIES AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

FIGURE 19: Current social challenges experienced by communities due to COVID-19 as perceived by religious and faith leaders



According to the religious and faith leaders, the main challenge faced by communities as a result of COVID-19 was increase in the level of multi-dimensional poverty which is recorded as 25.2% of the challenges. Increase in psychosocial distress within families (21.7%), increase in violence against women (14.0%), increase in online violence against children (13.9%) and increase in violence against children (13.8%) were the other main social challenges that communities have experienced as perceived by religious and faith leaders. Furthermore, increase in ethnic tension among diverse communities (10.6%) was the least significant challenge faced by communities due to COVID-19. Some of the other social challenges faced by communities due to COVID-19 as identified by religious and faith leaders (0.9%) were increase in drug consumption, lack of employment opportunities, decrease in daily wages, increase in prices of consumables, inability to conduct academic activities, inability to host weddings and loss of religious faith.

FIGURE 20: Current social challenges experienced by communities due to COVID-19 as perceived by religious and faith leaders (classified according to religious groups)

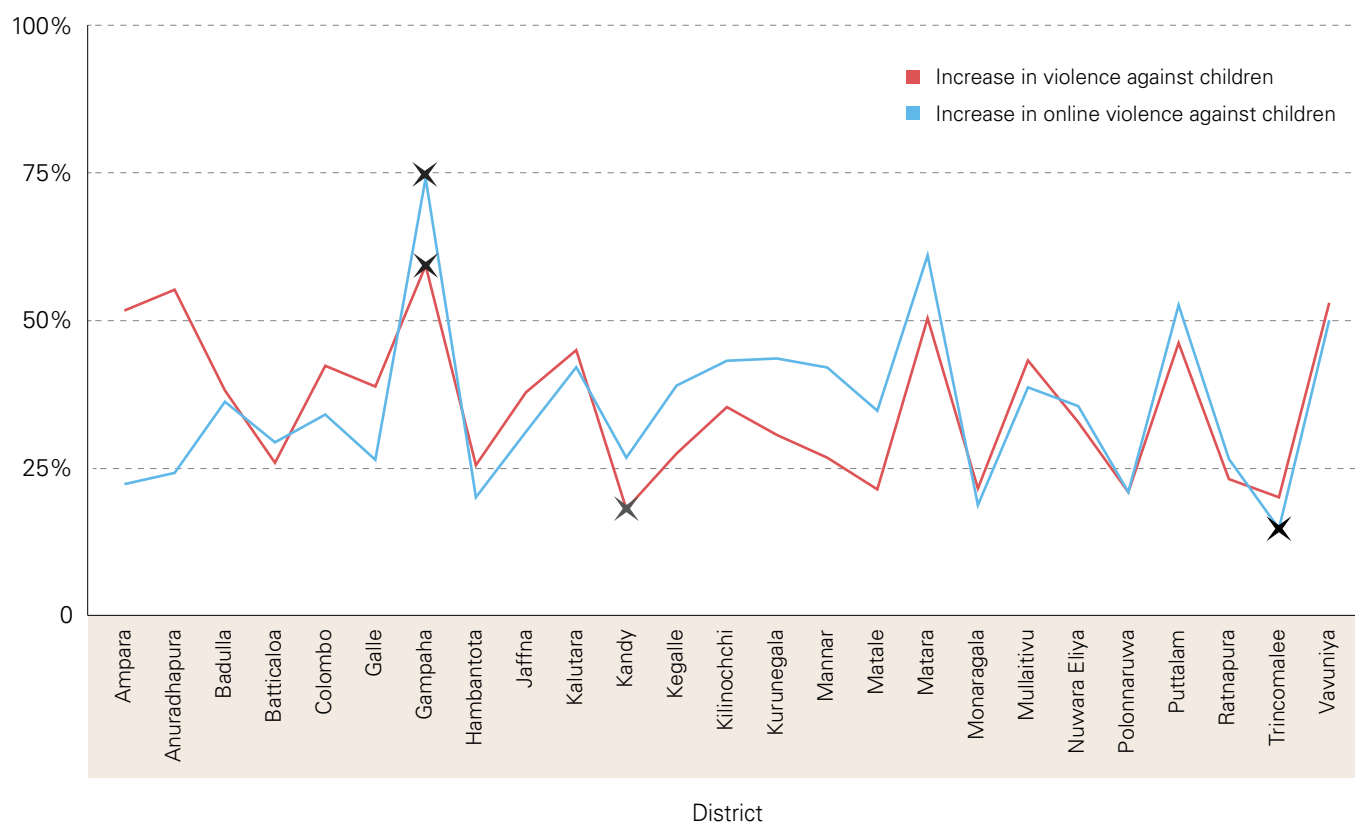


As a result of COVID-19, communities have experienced many social challenges as shown in Figures 19 and 20. Increase in multidimensional poverty was the most commonly experienced challenge as identified by majority of religious leaders of Buddhism (71%), Christianity (65%) and Islam (58%). Increase in psychosocial distress within families was the most commonly experienced social challenge identified by Hindu religious leaders (58%) whereas religious leaders of Buddhism (52%), Christianity (62%) and Islamic faith (50%) have identified it as the second most common social challenge. Increase in violence against women, increase in online violence against children and increase in violence against children

were some of the notable social challenges experienced by communities as recognized by leaders of all religions and faiths. Although increase in ethnic tension among diverse communities was identified as the least common social challenge in comparison to other challenges, it was identified by significant number of religious and faith leaders; Buddhism (26%), Christianity (28%), Hinduism (28%) and Islam (22%).

From the different social challenges faced by religious communities due to COVID-19, increase in violence and online violence against children are likely to have severe impacts on the society.

FIGURE 21: Increase in violence against Children and Increase in online violence against Children due to COVID-19 (classified according to districts)



The highest percentage of religious leaders who felt that there was an increase in violence against children (59%) and increase in online violence against children (74%) due to COVID-19 belonged to Gampaha district. The lowest percentage of religious leaders who felt that there was

an increase in violence against children (18%) represented Kandy district. Furthermore, the lowest percentage of religious leaders who felt that there was an increase in online violence against children due to COVID-19 (15%) were from Trincomalee district.

TABLE 10: Social challenges experienced by communities due to COVID-19 (classified according to districts)

	Increase in violence against children	Increase in online violence against children	Increase in violence against women	Increase in psycho-social distress within families	Increase in ethnic tension among diverse communities	Increase in the level of multidimensional poverty
Ampara	52%	22%	43%	48%	39%	40%
Anuradhapura	55%	24%	40%	57%	17%	57%
Badulla	38%	36%	35%	65%	25%	59%
Batticaloa	26%	29%	34%	41%	34%	33%
Colombo	42%	34%	28%	61%	26%	66%
Galle	39%	26%	39%	49%	28%	67%
Gampaha	59%	74%	44%	41%	7%	70%
Hambantota	25%	20%	42%	29%	27%	60%
Jaffna	38%	31%	42%	67%	24%	57%

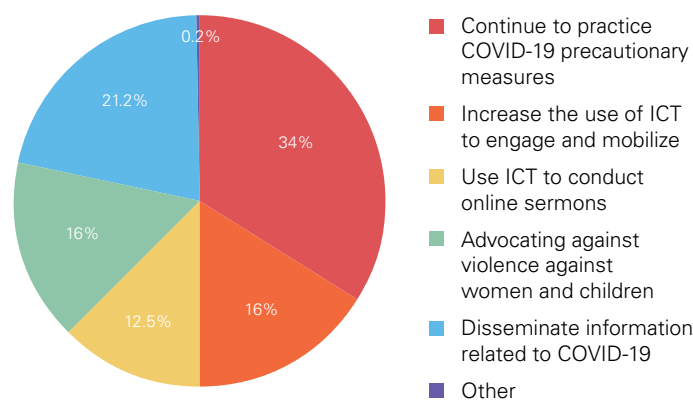
	Increase in violence against children	Increase in online violence against children	Increase in violence against women	Increase in psycho-social distress within families	Increase in ethnic tension among diverse communities	Increase in the level of multidimensional poverty
Kalutara	45%	42%	55%	61%	29%	67%
Kandy	18%	27%	52%	61%	39%	60%
Kegalle	27%	39%	26%	53%	26%	80%
Kilinochchi	35%	43%	47%	78%	39%	80%
Kurunegala	31%	44%	34%	44%	29%	69%
Mannar	27%	42%	31%	60%	35%	63%
Matale	21%	35%	17%	53%	31%	68%
Matara	50%	61%	28%	36%	13%	72%
Monaragala	21%	19%	24%	58%	24%	64%
Mullaitivu	43%	39%	45%	93%	5%	84%
Nuwara eliya	33%	35%	25%	60%	19%	63%
Polonnaruwa	21%	21%	22%	42%	19%	64%
Puttalam	46%	53%	42%	64%	37%	76%
Ratnapura	23%	26%	25%	51%	27%	66%
Trincomalee	20%	15%	19%	53%	9%	75%

Figures are tabulated in Table 10, by dividing the number of occasions a particular challenge was reported, from the total number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district.

10. HOW RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS’ PLAN TO ADJUST TO THE “NEW NORM” DURING THE AFTERMATH OF THE PANDEMIC

Religious and faith leaders like many other communities affected by COVID-19, have different aspirations to adjust to the “new norm” created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The figure 22 illustrates the different methods of responding to the challenges posed by COVID-19, such as by disseminating information related to COVID-19, advocating against violence against women and children, using Internet, using Communication and Technology (ICT) to conduct online sermons, using ICT to engage with followers and continuing to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures until the virus is eradicated from the country.

FIGURE 22: The methods in which Religious and Faith Leaders aspire to adjust to the “new norm”



The main way that religious and faith leaders plan to adjust in the new norm is by continuing to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures which is 34% of the total responses. Disseminating information related to COVID-19 (21.2%), advocating against violence against women and

children (16%) and increasing the usage of ICT to engage and mobilize communities (16%) are the other main ways as evident from figure 22.

FIGURE 23: The methods in which Religious and Faith Leaders' aspire to adjust to the "new norm" (classified according to Religious groups)

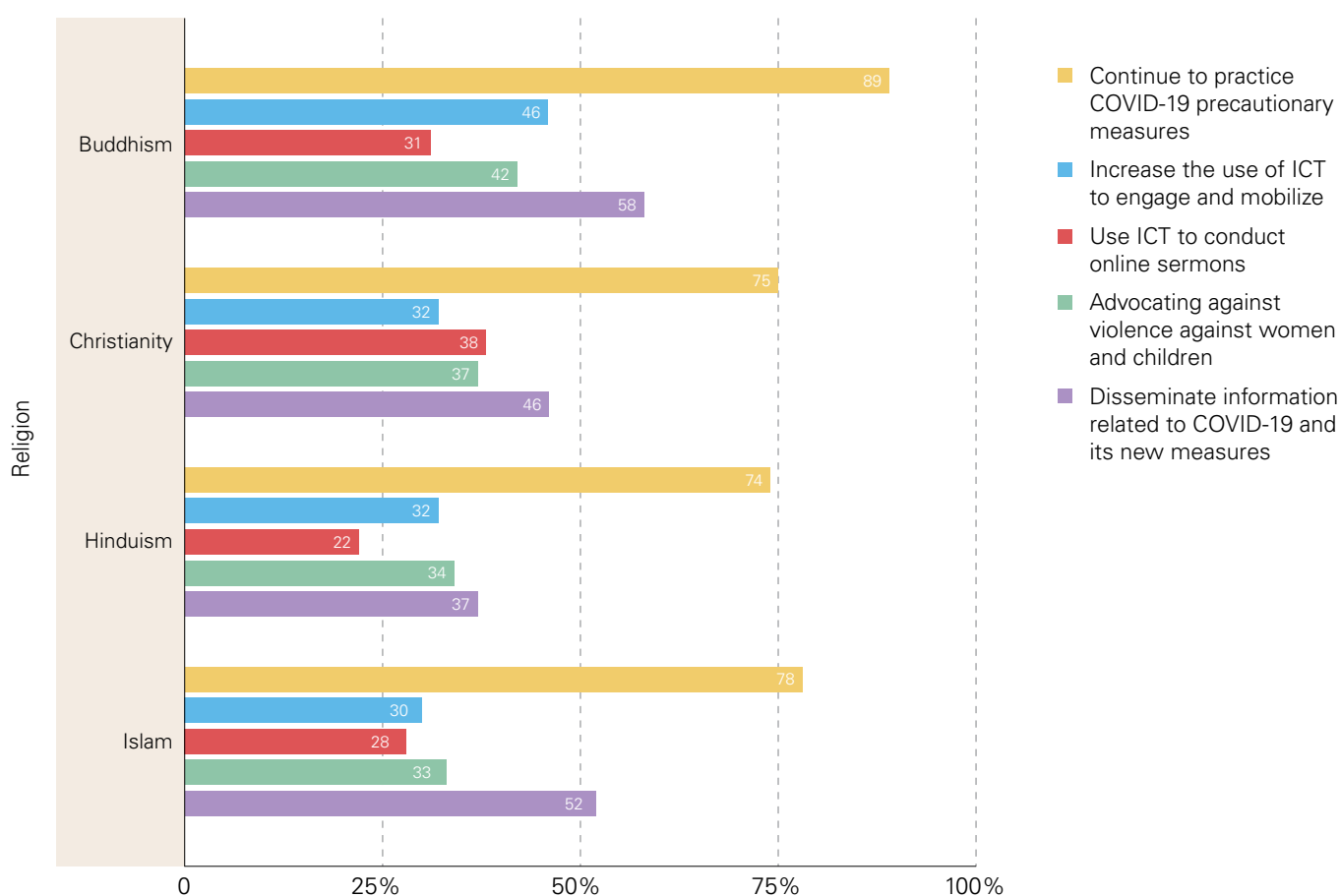


Figure 23 demonstrates that the most common plan among religious and faith leaders from all four main religious groups is to continue to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures as 89% of the Buddhist religious leaders, 75% of the Christian religious leaders, 74% of the Hindu religious leaders and 78% of the Islam religious leaders have responded as such. It further illustrates that the usage of ICT for the purpose of conducting online

sermons is the plan least envisaged by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders as evident from the values 31%, 22% and 28% respectively. The least envisaged plan among Christian religious leaders is the usage of ICT for engagement and mobilization purposes as it has been selected as the response by 32% (the lowest percentage) of Christian religious leaders.

TABLE 11: The methods in which religious and faith leaders aspire to adjust to the “new norm” (categorized according to districts)

	Continue to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures	Increase the use of ICT to engage and mobilize	Use ICT to conduct online sermons	Advocating against violence against women and children	Disseminating information related to COVID-19 and its new measures
Ampara	84%	25%	9%	39%	43%
Anuradhapura	83%	50%	48%	62%	52%
Badulla	77%	42%	40%	49%	48%
Batticaloa	51%	41%	26%	30%	34%
Colombo	88%	35%	48%	53%	58%
Galle	76%	39%	26%	39%	56%
Gampaha	95%	21%	16%	25%	65%
Hambantota	91%	31%	18%	29%	36%
Jaffna	49%	20%	21%	39%	32%
Kalutara	94%	57%	55%	51%	74%
Kandy	76%	32%	24%	35%	40%
Kegalle	94%	65%	45%	43%	61%
Kilinochchi	76%	12%	10%	22%	57%
Kurunegala	92%	50%	42%	32%	60%
Mannar	71%	46%	58%	37%	48%
Matale	81%	43%	31%	35%	36%
Matara	91%	38%	24%	44%	70%
Monaragala	93%	39%	23%	24%	69%
Mullaitivu	98%	30%	43%	39%	82%
Nuwara eliya	84%	42%	19%	46%	47%
Polonnaruwa	93%	54%	34%	27%	40%
Puttalam	90%	45%	32%	50%	62%
Ratnapura	92%	44%	26%	38%	54%
Trincomalee	89%	20%	8%	25%	24%
Vavuniya	53%	21%	29%	26%	6%

Figures are tabulated in In Table 11, by dividing the number of occasions a particular plan was reported, from the total number of religious and faith leaders in that particular district.

11. OTHER OBSERVATIONS MADE BY RELIGIOUS AND FAITH LEADERS ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

a. Observations on regular affairs of the general public

Religious and faith leaders have emphasized that wearing face masks and maintaining social distance should be practiced continuously until COVID-19 is eradicated. Furthermore, it has also been highlighted by a considerable number of the religious and faith leaders that home gardening should be encouraged and facilitated during this time and sustained even in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Religious and faith leaders also seem to believe that encouraging people to have faith in their respective religious teachings and beliefs will help them overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19 and manage the high levels of stress and anxiety. They have further observed that during this challenging time people should live in solidarity irrespective of their religious differences. Religious and faith leaders have also condemned ethnic violence, racial violence and violence against Children and Women.

b. Observations on Economic affairs

Religious and faith leaders have identified the economic issues associated with COVID-19 to be prominent. It has been recommended that the online banking system should be expanded across all the districts. They have also felt that the economy needs to be strengthened. Another solution to the current economic crisis that they

recommended was to support small business owners and promote local produce. Furthermore, religious and faith leaders have identified that encouraging self-employment could help people manage their increasing expenses during these unpredictable times.

c. Observations on State actions

Religious and faith leaders seem satisfied with how the government has contained the spread of COVID-19 so far. However, many affirmative actions have also been noted by them. For instance, most of the religious and faith leaders have recognized that raising awareness about COVID-19 is an important and essential step to contain it. They have also emphasized that the PCR test for COVID-19 should be made freely available and accessible by every person across the Island. It was further identified that a clear plan for the distribution of dry rations should be devised. Religious and faith leaders have also emphasized the importance of changing the education system to facilitate remote education in all schools. In addition, they have identified that fake news should be monitored by the State. The importance of the government incentivizing the creation of innovations in order to face the challenges posed by COVID-19 was another state action that was recommended by them.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that religious and faith leaders have faced many challenges during COVID-19 such as maintaining their premises, lack of finances, closure of religious institutions and difficulties in continuing the regular religious ceremonies and activities. Due to the difficulties in engaging with their followers directly, they have had to resort to online (eg- Webinar, Live streaming sessions, Social media applications) or traditional mediums (eg- Speakers and Telephones). However, when using online mediums to engage with communities, religious

and faith leaders have been hampered by the lack of access to digital devices such as Dongles, WiFi Routers and Computers. Furthermore, they lack training on how to use online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype to conduct online sermons, Sunday school lessons etc. Therefore, providing religious and faith leaders with access to digital devices and capacity building on the usage of such devices and online mediums could be of immense value to leaders as well as their communities when adjusting to the “new norm”.

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