



Partnering for Progress

The Business for Peace Alliance

Sri Lanka's Regional Chambers of Commerce Network for Conflict Transformation, Reconciliation, Regional Empowerment & Corporate Social Responsibility

<http://www.bpa-srilanka.com>

Suresh D. deMel

Immediate Past Chairman

Address: 9, Jesswell Place,
Mirihana,
Nugegoda 10250
Sri Lanka

Mobile: 071 222 1888 / 072 222 1888
Fax: 011 285 2035
E-mail: sureshdelmel@bpa-srilanka.com
Skype: sureshdelmel

PRESS RELEASE - January 2012

BPA says, "Together We CAN!"

Let's Win the Peace in 2012 by giving a "Hand Up" to Sri Lanka's Regional SME's

The BPA which came together 9 years ago, has grown to a network of 30 Regional Chambers of Commerce that represent a vast number of SME's across Sri Lanka. During the first 4 years (2002-2006), a group of volunteers, nominated by the regional chambers themselves and supported by UNDP and International Alert, were mandated to give "**Regional Business Leadership for National Unity**".

Our main activities at the time included:

1. Travelling throughout Sri Lanka networking with counterparts in every District of the country.
2. Networking with Government institutions, and other Colombo based organizations – NGO's, INGO's, Donors and Corporate entities.
3. Conducting Regional Empowerment Workshops to develop Communication & Presentation Skills, Conflict Transformation Skills and Peace Building.
4. Conducting Domestic Investors and Policy Makers Dialogs to lobby for regional aspirations.
5. Publishing Sri Lanka's first Regional Business Directory.

In 2006 we formalized BPA as "**Sri Lanka's Regional Chambers of Commerce Network for Conflict Transformation, Reconciliation, Regional Empowerment & Corporate Social Responsibility**".

In 2006 we also formed a Secretariat with a mandate to promote networking among the regions as well as between the regions and Colombo, for business and peace. From 2006 to 2010, in addition to the activities listed above, BPA spearheaded many successful and high profile programs that included:

1. Networking Regional Chambers for Conflict Transformation & Reconciliation, "**BizNet4CT**".
2. Developing the "**Voice of Regions**" Newsletter.
3. Publishing Sri Lanka's first Compendium of Small and Medium Regional Producers, "**Pride of the Regions**" Directory.
4. Empowering Young Leaders from the Regions thru the "**Learn and Lead**" Scholarship Program.
5. Giving Regional SME's a "hand-up" through Context Sensitive Investment Promotion Events, "**BizPact**".
6. Showcasing Regional Opportunities at a Mega Event, "**Sri Lanka Unveiled – Importing Wealth**".
7. Lobbying for regional and SME aspirations at various public and private forums.

With the end of the war and Sri Lanka being declared a middle income country, BPA's funding to maintain a Secretariat came to an end in the later part of 2010. Simultaneously, the regional chambers themselves were struggling with sustainability issues and finding it impossible to maintain offices and provide adequate services to its members. Years of "top down" and "exclusive" relationships, total donor dependence and unsustainable practices had developed to an extent where the Chambers did not have confidence in their own capacity to sustain these institutions. Even the BPA network was looked upon as a source for donor assistance, and managing expectations became increasingly cumbersome.

We believe in Public, Private, People Partnerships & the People, Planet, Profit business model.

Although reconciliation is a high priority in the aftermath of the conflict, **the BPA now needed to support its membership to gain sustainability.** Therefore, BPA's Working Committee, together with leadership from the Hambantota Chamber, took to the road, to reconsider and reconfirm BPA's mandate. With a concept to prepare a 5-year Regional Chamber Development Program, BPA consulted with all 30 Regional Chambers, at meetings held in 5 cluster locations around the country. BPA received a unanimous thumbs-up to develop a proposal that will attract good partners and donors for a **"bottom-up"** and **"inclusive"** 5-year program.

Concurrently, BPA held meetings with strategic local and international partners to support this concept. Subsequently, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC), Sri Lanka's Pioneer, and 173 year old Chamber came forward to take on the challenge to collaborate with BPA to support the Regional Chambers.

On the occasion of BPA's 5th AGM on December 11th 2011, in Kandy this year, CCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with BPA to provide BPA with Secretariat Capacity. CCC will work together with BPA in order that the work of the two organizations could be better coordinated to serve the needs of the Regional Chambers for the mutual benefit of both organizations. The strengths of BPA and CCC will complement each other in providing services and the implementation of projects and other regional economic development initiatives. The recognition that a powerful organization such as CCC has given BPA must be seen as a great achievement of the BPA and for the Regional Chambers themselves.

Furthermore, those of us who have untiringly lobbied for regional and SME aspirations over the years are happy to see that the 2012 National Budget affords many opportunities for SME's, especially from the regions. H.E. the President has been loud and clear in his statement that, **"SME's are the backbone of our Economy"**.

In order to derive benefits equitably from these opportunities, **our regional business community and the SME's in Sri Lanka have to be empowered – have to come in line with the opportunities.** BPA is our own network and platform for empowerment. Our close association with CCC will give us access to powerful networks that can make a difference for us. CCC is the focal point for business contacts both locally and abroad and has specialized committees, affiliated associations and bilateral business councils. The CCC membership ranging from the sole proprietor to the multinational, encompasses virtually every sphere of economic activity in Sri Lanka - industry, import, export, agriculture, banking, hire-purchase, leasing, tourism, shipping, engineering, mining, consultancy services, wholesale, retail, financial services legal and other services. CCC also functions as an effective spokesman of the business sector. Its members serve on various institutions and committees set up by the Government as well as the private sector, either as CCC nominees or in their personal capacities. The CCC Solutions (Pvt) Ltd, the project arm of CCC, implements projects that benefit the regions. Some of these projects have a specific output within geographical concentration and are implemented through the Regional Chambers already.

We strongly believe that **powerful multi-stakeholder networks must be leveraged to fast track regional development** – to transfer information, technology and investment to our regions, to develop appropriate local policy, to practice good governance, to empower SME's and to sustain the Regional Chambers. To leverage these networks we must participate and play a proactive role in networking. Resourceful stakeholders must give our SME's a "hand up" (not a "hand out"). **Regional Chambers must be empowered to be the "voice of the regions" and lead local SME's. Membership value and institutional sustainability must be the goal.**

An old Gaelic Proverb says that, "There are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened".

BPA Members aspire to be the ones to make things happen!

PEACE & HAPPINESS in the NEW YEAR to all our stakeholders! Please join us to help win the Peace in Sri Lanka in 2012 by giving a "Hand Up" to Regional SME's. Together we CAN!

We believe in Public, Private, People Partnerships & the People, Planet, Profit business model.