

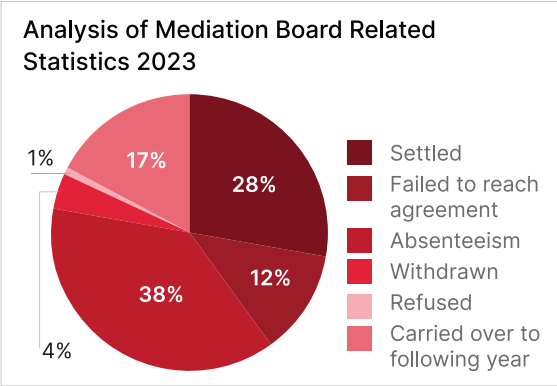
AN ISLAND-WIDE USER EXPERIENCE SURVEY IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY MEDIATION BOARDS

The Asia Foundation worked with Jinendra Kothalawala, an independent consultant to carry out a user experience survey with support from the Supporting Effective Dispute Resolution (SEDR) program implemented jointly by The Asia Foundation and British Council with support from the European Union. The survey was conducted with the aim of establishing key indicators¹ to better understand the user experience of Community Mediation Boards (CMB). The primary respondents included disputants and mediators, while Mediation Development Officers (MDOs) and Mediation Training Officers (MTOs) contributed valuable qualitative insights.

KEY FINDINGS

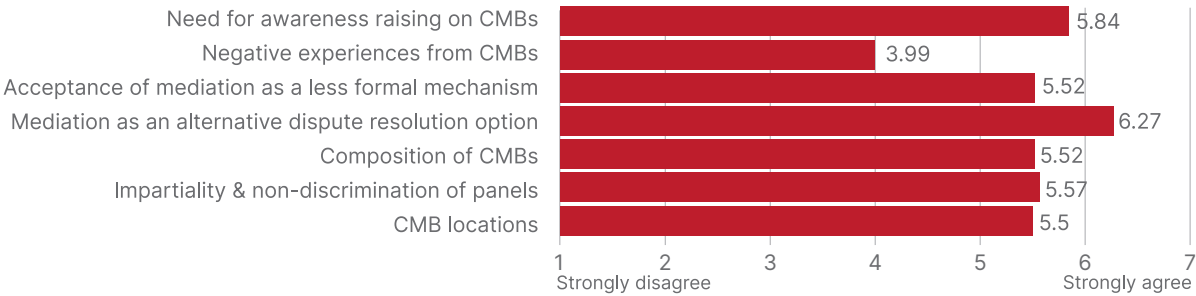
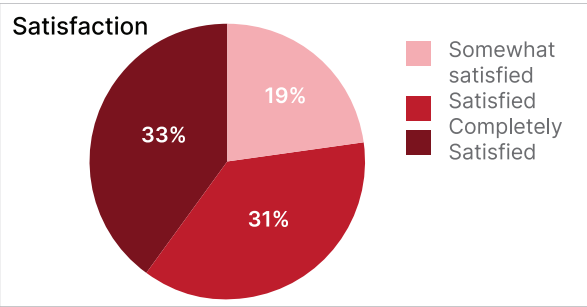
In 2023, Sri Lanka’s Community Mediation Boards handled 246,726 disputes². Of these, 67,751 were successfully settled and 30,623 were discussed but remained unresolved — meaning 98,374 cases were fully mediated. In total, 204,205 cases (83%) were finalized in some form.

Mediators face logistical and resource-related challenges that affect the smooth functioning of Community Mediation Boards which is also reflected in certain indicators of the user experience survey. Despite the logistical challenges, there is a steady and high level of acceptance and satisfaction with mediation as an effective model for resolving community disputes.



USER EXPERIENCE

Overall Satisfaction and Recommendations of Users: The study found that 83% of current mediation board users expressed satisfaction with the services provided. The average satisfaction score at the all-island level is 5.68 and 88% of users would recommend the Mediation Board to a friend to resolve disputes or conflicts in the future.



Users expressed a strong preference for CMBs over police and court processes, rating CMBs highly as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. Users also highlighted that mediation boards operate in a language familiar to them, with practices aligned to their race, religion, customs and culture more than when going to the police and courts. Users were in agreement that mediation panels were impartial and free from bias related to wealth, politics, or social status.

When it came to the conduct of mediators, users felt that mediators represented both sides fairly and listened attentively to all parties without interference, ensuring everyone was heard and given sufficient time to discuss. Overall, users had a good perception of mediators.

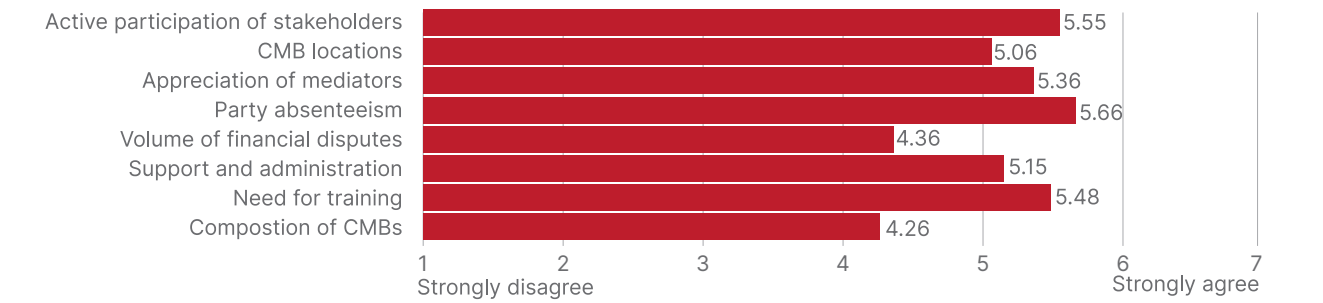
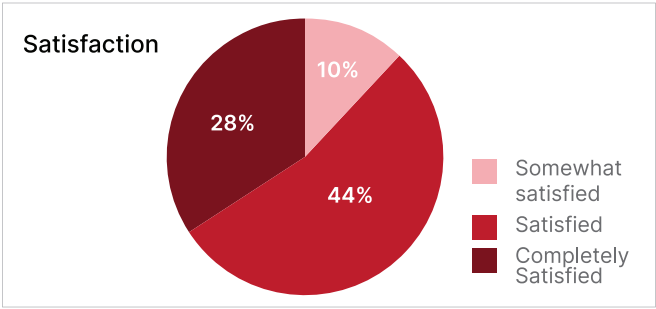
Users showed strong agreement that mediation is an effective, affordable, and time-saving alternative to court, particularly helpful for repairing relationships or avoid future conflicts. They strongly agree that mediation boards are good for solving disputes efficiently in comparison to courts, and accepted mediation boards as a dispute resolution mechanism.

¹ Satisfaction was assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). For disputants seven main indicators supported by 23 sub-indicators and for mediators, eight main indicators and 39 sub-indicators were developed to capture their experiences.

² All Island Level Case Statistics: 2023 taken as secondary data from the Mediation Boards Commission

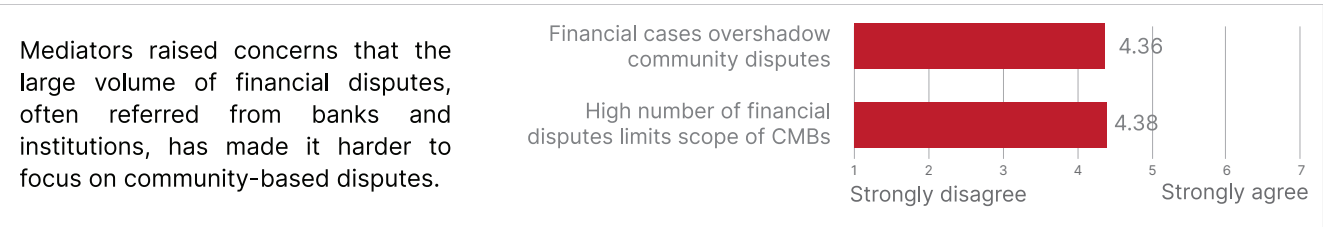
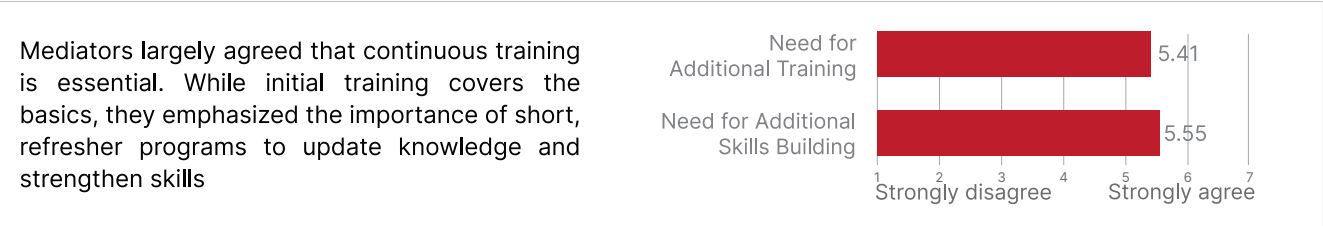
MEDIATOR EXPERIENCE

Overall Satisfaction: The study identified that 82% of the mediators are satisfied with their experience, the average satisfaction rating at the all-island level is 5.84, and 78% of the mediators recommended their friends or colleagues to become mediators.



SOME OF THE DIMENSIONS AND INDICATOR SCORES GIVEN BY MEDIATORS SHOW AREAS WITH POTENTIAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Satisfaction of mediators declined on composition of mediation boards with unfilled vacancies and absences causing daily challenges. Cultural and language barriers and gender representation were also flagged where 33% of Tamil mediators and 25% of mediators with Tamil language skills have dropped out over time.



Overall, the survey findings indicate a high level of user satisfaction and strong trust in mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. However, Mediation Boards are facing increasing absenteeism, with parties frequently failing to attend sessions. This trend threatens the intended role of mediation as an alternative to litigation. Absenteeism, non-delivery of calling letters, and persistent no-shows despite follow-ups were identified as key challenges pointed out by mediators and MBC data shows that absentees in 2003 was at 13% and in 2023 it is an alarming 38%. Mediators also recommend targeted awareness-raising on demographics and districts with lower dispute engagement. Nuwara Eliya and Colombo recorded the highest case discussion rates, reflecting strong engagement or higher case inflow. Whereas Mulaitivu reported no cases discussed, Vavuniya and Monaragala showed low discussion rates and dispute engagement, highlighting the need for targeted support and awareness-raising efforts. In an attempt to boost motivation it is also recommended that volunteer mediators are provided with some form of recognition for the valuable service rendered despite the various challenges.