

Namashya Ratnayaka shares her internship experience

I joined the Centre for Equality and Justice (CEJ) in June 2020 as an intern, when I was a third-year undergraduate at the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo. As a potential intern who was also a student, I was looking for two simple things, a worthwhile learning experience and sufficient flexibility to work around my academic schedule. Once I got in after being interviewed, whatever modest expectations I had were far exceeded by the actual experience.

This was a time when the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had hit the country. The heavy restrictions meant that I had to work from home much like the others. The team was disappointed at the inability to provide me with fieldwork experience which they were able to provide some of the interns before me. However, I did not feel its absence. The work tapped into fresh interests I never knew I had. A remarkable ongoing project I recall was on sexual bribery. A common practice that warranted attention but identified by few. CEJ was working tirelessly to raise awareness on the issue. I was learning about the daunting experiences from people at the grassroots level as well as the many measures CEJ was advocating for within the legal framework and at the policy-making level.

Because the team at CEJ is comparatively small, I quickly learnt that interns are closely supervised and mentored. This meant to me that the manner I was engaging in otherwise mundane work such as assistance in research, report-writing or coordination started improving. As the only intern amongst a well-seasoned CEJ team, I was a grateful recipient of focused attention and happily taking in the tips and tricks of how to do things more effectively and professionally.

When the restrictions were slightly lifted, a roster basis was put in place, and I was introduced to the office. I was deeply moved by how everyone I found myself with took an extra-effort to make sure I was comfortable. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised each time, the Executive Director, Mrs. Shyamala Gomez herself, walked up to me and inquired on how things were going. During the routine breaks for tea or lunch, I was part of conversations which soon revealed that a secret to the admirable work ethic of people around me was a strong passion towards the work that was being done. .

I left CEJ in December 2020. While I am glad that I was able to contribute to the work CEJ does in some way, admittedly I have had much more to take as every person I have worked with in the team has left me with something to learn and cherish for the future. Reflecting on my experience, I am glad that I made the choice to join CEJ, albeit for a short time, for it was nothing short of rewarding.