

Post Conflict Reconstruction: Resettlement Issues and Challenges in the Peace-Building Process in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The protracted armed conflict in Sri Lanka between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) ended in May 2009. The three-decades-old conflict displaced over half a million people and devastated their lives; particularly during its final stage (2006–2009). Post-conflict resettlement initiatives are hardly considered the permanent resettlements of these displaced people in their traditional villages. This study sets out to explore the resettlement issues and challenges to the post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building process in Sri Lanka. The process of reconstruction and peace-building has come under several programs and projects. Nevertheless, the internal displacement has become a dreadful outcome of armed conflict in Sri Lanka and resettling IDPs in their places of origin became a prime task under the reconstruction programs to rebuild the peaceful life of the people. The study focuses on understanding the role of the various factors that negatively affected the resettlement of people in their original places of residence. The study has revealed a mixture of factors that have negatively influenced the entire process of return, resettlement, reconstruction and peace-building in conflict-affected areas. As a result, multiple factors need to be understood about the rebuilding of their normal lives in the respective areas. Fieldwork was carried out in villages in the district of Vavuniya. The paper is based on qualitative methods. Long interviews and key informant interviews were mainly used for the qualitative data.

Keywords: Return, resettlement, IDPs, challenges, original villages

Introduction

The past three decades have witnessed a worldwide increase in the frequency, spread and intensity of conflicts (particularly internal conflicts), which have resulted in a large increase in the number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The conflicts have resulted in devastating social and economic consequences at the individual, family, community and societal levels; and the collapse of development gains, which hampers countries' ability to achieve sustainable development. A number of these conflicts are now evolving into peace processes (with varying degrees of success). This change is a positive development, but also poses new challenges for humanitarian and development actors, who will have to complement each other's efforts to ensure sustainable post-conflict recovery. The UNHCR's mandate is to provide in collaboration with other actors, international protection to refugees and to assist them in finding permanent solutions through voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement. The UNHCR must also increasingly consider other groups affected by conflict, such as IDPs.¹ As a concept, resettlement of IDPs generally, becomes the main focus for the government of each particular state.

The three-decades-old internal conflict in Sri Lanka displaced over half a million people and devastated their lives, particularly during its final stage (2006–2009). The economic and social life in the main theatres of conflict was disarticulated. Damage to physical assets and the infrastructure of the economy was considerable. With the end of the conflict came the need for urgent reconstruction and rehabilitation of the lives of the people in these areas. The resettlement of the IDPs at their places of residence is a huge strain on the responsible bodies unless done properly. Therefore, this process needs international assistance to prevent those strains and to prevent further related conflicts. In the framework of the resettlement of conflict-induced IDPs, it is necessary to exercise basic

¹ See UNHCR, Internally Displaced Persons: The Role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (March 2000).

pre-conditions for the families before they are resettled. In most of the policy-oriented discussions and the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, attention was focused on the repatriation and return of displaced persons, and the resultant policy was to be implemented immediately after the cessation of conflict. In Sri Lanka, post-conflict resettlement initiatives are hardly considered the permanent resettlement of these displaced people in their traditional villages. However, the government's post-conflict resettlement and reconstruction initiatives were seriously challenged by many factors. This paper investigates the resettlement issues and challenges for the post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building processes in Sri Lanka.

The processes of reconstruction and peace-building have come under several programs and projects such as "Nothern Spring" ("*Uthuru Wasanthaya*") and "Eastern Revival" ("*Negenahira Udanaya*")². Nevertheless, internal displacement has become a dreadful outcome of armed conflict in Sri Lanka, and resettling IDPs in their places of origin became a prime task under the reconstruction programs. This study focuses on understanding the role of the various factors that negatively affect the resettlement of people in their original places of residence. Moreover, it is hoped that the understanding of the Sri Lankan situation gained in this study, will at least to some extent, be relevant to other contexts and contribute to a more extensive understanding of the general situation of the return and resettlement process.

Methodology

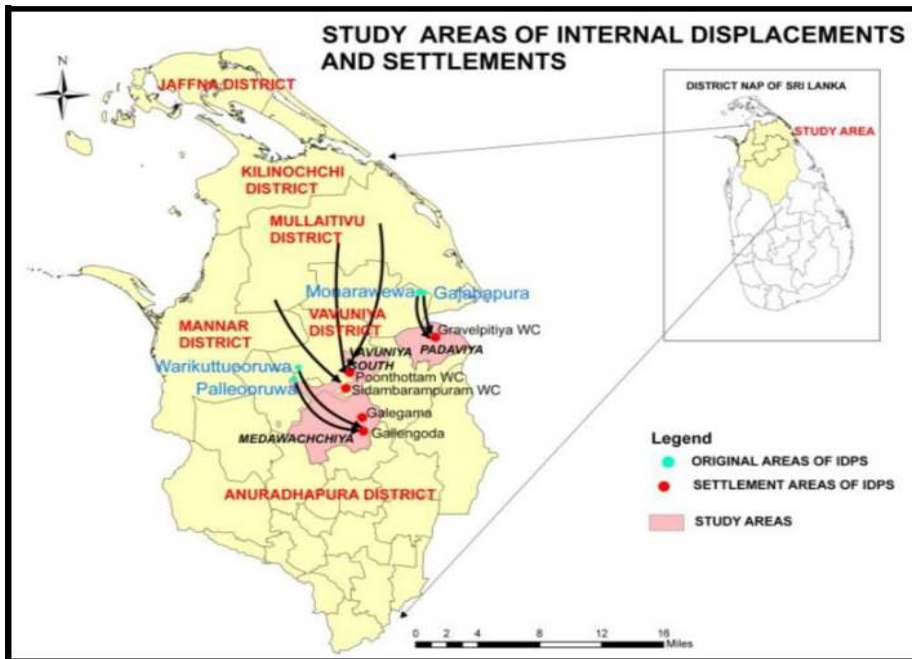
The study has mostly assumed a qualitative approach. Qualitative researchers are debatably more vigilant in explicating their perceptions, particularly as there are several approaches to such research, each with a different set of assumptions. For instance, both Miller and Rasco (2004) and Bracken (2001) are clear in demarcating their methodological

² Two main development projects initiated by the Sri Lanka government in Northern and Eastern provinces, named "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" and "*Negenahira Navodaya*." These two projects were initiated in the last phase of the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

assumptions on their refugee-related research. The reader is directed to more in-depth discussions on some of the more common perceptions of qualitative research, which mainly relate to research on refugees such as narrative analysis and qualitative research. This is an exploratory informed study, in the sense of collecting subjective meanings while seeing practically those who live them. For an understanding of the relevant factors, the research adopted an exploratory approach that aims at analyzing and understanding factors that are important in terms of settlement, resettlement and reconstruction processes in post-conflict Sri Lanka. Data for the research has been collected using primary as well as secondary sources. The qualitative data was collected mainly through interviews, including long interviews, key informant interviews and ethnographic observations. The aim was to understand the people's thoughts subjectively. Secondary sources have been used to help interpret the primary data. The study has used published materials such as books, research papers, journal articles, research reports, newspaper articles, and internet resources. All the data offer avenues toward uncovering and understanding the multiple interpretations and meanings of IDPs.

The main research techniques used for the study were long interviews with people settled in host areas and resettled in their original areas. The interviewees were selected using a combination of snowball, stratified, and random sampling. The rationale was to obtain a wide range of positions and to have a variation on aspects such as age, class, occupation, education, and time duration of displacement. Altogether, 15 long interviews were conducted: 07 with settled IDPs in host areas and, 08 with those resettled. Several persons made very useful contributions to this study as key informants. "Grama Niladari" (GN) and Samurdhi Niladari were the most important among them. The main purpose of using key informant interviews was to guide and explore information and to confirm and clarify some data collected through the long interviews.

Figure 1: Study Areas of Displacements and Settlements



Source: Wanninayake, S. (2017)

Vavuniya district was selected for the fieldwork of the study. It is one of the districts in the northern region which enormously suffered repeated displacements during the period of the conflict. Vavuniya suffered enormous displacement of families, homelessness and loss of livelihood during the period 1990 to 2009. The whole area of Vavuniya North, part of the Vavuniya and Vengalchettikulam divisions were affected seriously during the conflict. Most of the affected families of the Vavuniya North division and the cleared areas of the mainland North of Vavuniya fled to the south of Vavuniya. During the fieldwork, the "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" programme had been implemented in the area. This paper focuses attention on Sinhalese IDPs displaced from their original villages. This does not mean that the Tamil and Muslim communities were not living in the threatened villages. The majority of the affected communities in this study area were Sinhalese, and also the Sinhalese community was forgotten regarding the displacement and resettlement process affected by

the conflict. Nevertheless, in this study, some data was gathered from the Muslim and Tamil IDPs as well.

When analyzing the data of all the interviews, interview guides were followed regarding several main themes that were identified through previous literature. All the themes focused on were connected to the main research problem and aim, and they were elaborated on the design of interviews. All the written and recorded data was transcribed as a 'verbatim transcript'. In analyzing the transcripts, the aim was to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and to identify and expand central themes, concepts, and descriptions of the proceedings and processes in a way that could further help in understanding the role of factors affecting the resettlement and reconstruction processes.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed on post-conflict peace building and reconstruction and resettlement has highlighted post-conflict resettlement and reconstruction as important and urgent factors for peace-building in the country which faced a long-term civil conflict (United Nations, 2009). It has also been seen that the early stages of the post-conflict period are more crucial than later periods in terms of the establishment of long-term peace. The first step of the establishment of the reconstruction and peace building effort is to resettle people in the areas which they originally occupied. Successful resettlement and reconstruction processes are crucial factors for achieving post-conflict development and peace building.

“Peace-building”, according to the UNHCR, refers “to the process whereby national protection and the rule of law are re-established. More specially, it entails an absence of social and political violence, the establishment of effective judicial procedures, the introduction of pluralistic forms of government, and the equitable distribution of resources.” (UNHCR 1997, p.159). Likewise, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) has noted that “peace-building may involve the creation or strengthening of national institutions, monitoring elections, promoting

human rights, providing for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes and creating conditions for resumed development” (UN 1998, p.14).

Resettlement is one of the most misinterpreted concepts in the field of forced migration. The term has often been used interchangeably with other types of human movements such as return, relocation and repatriation, or even settlement, etc. Resettlement involves the planned and controlled relocation of populations from one physical location to another. It is different from the return, as it involves the relocation of individuals and even entire communities to a new place rather than going back to one's place of origin (Muggah, 2008). Though frequently conflated with the other forms of human movements such as migration, resettlement can occur only when the choice to remain in one's original place is fundamentally constrained by real or perceived coercion. It is coercion that distinguishes resettlement from voluntary relocation (Muggah, 2008). Furthermore, resettlement is a permanent process and indicates much more than physical movement. It is figured out and designed to catalyze self-sustaining and self-reliant communities, and it should in theory and practice, result in new communities which are permanent, self-reliant and self-sustaining (Muggah, 2008). The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement sets the normative framework and fundamental standards for the return and resettlement of IDPs in line with international standards and practices. Successful resettlement of conflict-affected populations must be administered so that the process is 'equitable and free of discrimination, accounting for the safety and dignity of beneficiaries, ensuring full compensation for lost land, income and assets, and involving the full participation of the internally displaced in public affairs (UNHCR, 2007).

In Sri Lanka, the term "resettlement" has been used to describe all movement from transit camps or places of temporary stay to either the original residence or to different parts of the country (Ariyaratne, 2011). As previously discussed, this ambiguity in the understanding and use of the term occurs in almost all key government documents, institutions and agencies relating to IDPs. Some Sri Lankan authors (Ariyaratne, 2011) believe the ambiguity around the term "Resettlement" is unavoidable

given the complex nature of the process and is therefore of no great significance or consequence. But others think the interchangeable way in which the terms "Return" and "Resettlement" are used means that the authorities assume the resettlement process is complete when IDPs return to their original district, even if they have not returned to their own homes or land (Fonseka, 2010).

In terms of Principle 28 of the UN Guiding Principles, competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions as well as to provide for the means, to allow the IDPs to return voluntarily, to their homes or places of habitual residence in safety and with dignity, or to settle voluntarily in other parts of the country. The principle says such authorities should facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled IDPs. As a member country of the United Nations, Sri Lanka is expected to comply with these normative standards relating to the resettlement of displaced persons (OCHA, 2004). However, literature shows that the issues and challenges related to returning and resettlement and reconstruction and peaceful life of the IDPs come out with practical problems such as socio-economic and many other related factors.

Factors of Return and Resettlement

Both policymakers and academics have primarily argued that return home at the end of the refugee cycle is a stable option as well as the ideal durable solution to refugee crises (Allen & Morsink, 1994). Studies of refugees and IDPs who had gone back "home" indicated the complexity of their experience, characterized by socio-economic, psychological and other difficulties (Bascom, 2005; Wanninayake, 2017). However, literature depicts various factors that negatively affect IDPs' returning and resettling in the original villages after the protracted displacement (Muggah, 2008; Fonseka, 2010; Kelegama, 2011; Shamini, 2012).

Discussing social settings among the conflict-induced displaced is important to examine the social relationship when they are resettled and reintegrated into the original areas. The degree of the strong social bonding and networks provide the attracting/displeasure people to

resettlement areas. IDPs to stay in the host community and weak relationship/network between the IDPs and the original villages (with other ethnic groups) is a factor that contributes to pushing people from the area/community (Wanninayake, 2017). According to recent experiences, social relations with relatives, kin, and friends have played a vital role in protecting the process of displacement and settlement (Evans, 2007; Wanninayake, 2017).

Economic relationships and livelihood situations are important and influential factors for the IDPs to determine the place of residence. It was found among the IDPs in Sri Lanka that economic and livelihood factors include access to land for cultivation and residential purposes, opportunities to continue former occupations, availability of infrastructural facilities, farming and trading, and financial aid and relief. The lack or poor conditions of the economic factors in the original areas of residence act as a key push factor or obstacle for returning (Muggah, 2008; Wanninayake, 2017).

Along with the previous concept, the resettlement of IDPs generally become the main focus for governments of each particular state. 'Resettlement' as it is termed by the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, means local integration in the areas in which IDPs initially take refuge or relocation to other parts of the country. Related to Sri Lanka's situation, where they have entered into the post-conflict phase, IDPs' issues are considered a vital factor in their peacebuilding, development and reconstruction processes. Usually, the resettlement of the IDPs at their places of residence causes huge strains for the responsible bodies unless done properly. Therefore, this process needs various forms of assistance to prevent those strains and to prevent further related conflicts. In the framework of the resettlement of conflict-induced IDPs, it is required to exercise basic pre-conditions for the resettling families before they are resettled. Hence, this paper explores and deals with the issues of IDP resettlement about their socio-economic and other various levels of infrastructure facilities and conditions for reconstruction and peace-building in the post-conflict society.

A brief sketch of the Resettlement Process in Sri Lanka

Resettlement is a vital tool, an international responsibility-sharing mechanism about the protection which can be a key element in comprehensive solution strategies. It aims to protect refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental human rights are at risk in their country of asylum (UNHCR, 2009). In this regard, IDP resettlement in Sri Lanka has nearly the same timeline as internal displacement history.

The protracted armed conflict between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) ended in May 2009. Decades of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is estimated to have left around 800,000 IDPs (Fonseka, 2010; IDMC, 2014). Some estimates put the figure at more than one million people. On average, one in every eighteen Sri Lankans was displaced, and in the Northern Province, it was one in every three persons. It appears that the majority of displaced people are from the northern and eastern provinces (IDMC, 2014). Displacement is not new to the nation as there have been a series of displacements, especially of ethnic Tamils following the anti-Tamil riots in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983. It also triggered the displacements of Muslims and Sinhalese, from predominantly Tamil areas (Brun, 2003). The IDPs were scattered mostly in the northern and eastern parts of the island and to a certain extent in the south.

However, with the end of the conflict in May 2009, displaced persons came under government control and were concentrated mainly in the northern and eastern regions. Displacement and resettlement issues have been on the agenda in the recent past because of the civil conflict that had a significant impact on Sri Lanka. The conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from 1983 to 2009, devastated lives and the livelihoods of people, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country.

Civil conflict in the country claimed the lives of an estimated 1.7 million people who were displaced at different periods between 1983 and 2009 (IDMC, 2014). According to many studies and the situation of the

country as observed, the issue of displacement continues to remain a matter of concern although the conflict ended more than a decade ago. Both policy-makers and academics initially expected that when refugees returned to their homes, the problem of displacement would be over. Thus, some policy-oriented studies such as by the UNHCR and other policy-makers have argued that internal displacement ends only upon the reversal of displacement, that is, upon the IDPs return to their places of origin (Cuny and Stein, 1990; UNHCR, 2012).

Early in the civil conflict, the Sri Lankan Government policy was voluntary resettlement, and no compulsion was exerted to resettle the IDPs. They were at liberty to choose the proper time for resettlement. If they did not wish to resettle, they stayed in the Welfare Centers (WCs), and the government had to look after their needs. After the end of the civil conflict, the government embarked on an ambitious program of resettlement and reconstruction to rebuild normalcy in the areas. Hence, the government and other organizations initially paid some attention to the IDPs return and resettlement; however, with time, they changed their position about resettlement, self-settlement, and relocation of the IDPs.

Resettlement and reconstruction Programs

Specifically, the Government of Sri Lanka implemented some programs, in the post-conflict period infrastructure development initiatives. These include "*Randora*" (national-level infrastructure development) and two initiatives which focus on the North & East: "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" and "*Neganahira Udanaya*" that provided incentives for the IDPs to return to their original villages³ (Kelegama, 2011; Shamini, 2012). However, in reality, the prevailing environment discouraged this return. Return was not always possible or even desired by the IDPs. The major issue faced by the Sri Lankan government was, how to support the IDPs and find a

³ The rehabilitation of roads and tanks are a primary focus of these programmes. In the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, which covers the five districts of Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi and Jaffna, resettlement commenced in 2009 under the "Northern Spring" (*Uthuru Wasanthaya*) program which was launched to resettle people.

durable solution for their problems. In this process, one key responsibility was to resettle a majority of the people with the long-term objective of resettling all IDPs and ensuring their welfare after they are resettled.

The return and resettlement process varied in complexity in the Sri Lankan context during the post-conflict period. Return and resettlement in the North commenced in 2009 and has been steadily moving forward. Over 300,000 new IDPs were living in camps, with host families and other places for several months, creating a huge financial burden for the Government, the UN, INGOs and donors. With IDPs trickling in from the Vanni since 2008, the Government created closed camps and depended on the UN and INGOs for assistance (UNHCR, 2012). The expenses in maintaining and upgrading camps and helping IDPs had to be factored in by donors and agencies who were facing fund slashes. Coupled with the Government's inability to provide comprehensive care for all affected communities, this resulted in speedy return and resettlement. Another key political development that impacted the speedy return and resettlement in the north was the presidential election in January 2010. The sudden relaxation of the closed camp model combined with return and resettlement drives in December 2009 raised questions as to whether it was politically motivated, with the politicians having a sudden change of heart to reach out to potential voters (Shamini, 2012). The combination of the above resulted in thousands suddenly being moved from closed camps to their districts of the origin or being resettled.

Nevertheless, the resettlement process was not implemented properly as expected by the government and other agencies due to many reasons (Godagama, 2011; Wanninayake, 2017). Resettlement was part of the rehabilitation of the IDPs and others who were affected. Many programs were required for those resettled to regain their lost status and enter mainstream society. The productive and socio-economic infrastructure had been very badly affected in the areas of conflict. Human rehabilitation is linked to rehabilitation and reconstruction of the infrastructure. Public services such as health, education, and administration were not functioning as desired mainly due to a lack of staff. Many displaced people were unable to return. Their houses and

surrounding areas were occupied by armed forces or paramilitary groups or by other displaced persons because their homes were partially or fully destroyed (IDMC, 2014).

The government of Sri Lanka made efforts to find durable solutions for the IDPs immediately after the end of the civil conflict between the two parties. However, a lot more need to be done. Initially, in response to the humanitarian crisis, the government launched measures such as mobilizing international aid for providing basic amenities to displaced persons residing in various camps. The packages for returning IDPs comprised of building materials, cash grants with additional subsidies for farmers, and a six-month food supply, including USAID commodities distributed by the UN World Food Program (WFP) (USAID (2009)). The government assured the international community of resettling all the displaced within 180 days. With the liberation of the Eastern Province in July 2007 from the LTTE, the government under the *Negenahira Navodaya* programme initiated the return, resettlement, rehabilitation, rebuilding, and reconstruction. However, the effectiveness of the government's response has been limited by organizational difficulties. The Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief is the nominated focal point, but the overlapping mandates and responsibilities of ministries and agencies have led to delays, poor coordination and duplication of activities (Fonseka, 2010).

However, it appears that in Sri Lanka, IDPs had faced many practical problems for which no solution could be given by any party. It was clear that in the protracted situation of the conflict, they would not be able to go back to their original villages easily. This is despite some issues having been resolved by the government as well as by some NGOs. In the process, the NRC, FORUT and WB were engaged in providing some facilities such as shelter for resettled people. The government continued to provide health, water, dry rations, education facilities and other facilities. However, while the entire country has suffered, as a result, districts of the North and the East have been devastated to a large extent. Families have been displaced on multiple occasions, often having been forced to leave their homes for many years. When people eventually

returned, most of their houses had been either badly damaged or destroyed. As the majority of people affected are relatively poor with marginal income and with little or no savings, they have been unable to sustain major financial shocks such as loss of livelihood and housing. To respond to these challenges, the international community in Sri Lanka formulated strategies to provide comprehensive and coherent responses to the many problems faced by IDPs when they return and resettle in their original places of residence. This research is mainly focused on determining the main factors that affected their proper resettlement when they return to their former residential areas after 15-20 years of displacement.

Empirical Findings

When the resettlement program was initiated by the government in 2010, all IDPs in the Vavuniya district were expected to be resettled before the end of 2011 in their places of origin. The villages in Vavuniya South were occupied by some Sinhalese and Tamil returnees more or less, and some of the villages consisted of only Tamil newcomers who were resettled after displacement from areas originally occupied by them during the conflict period; some of the villages consisted of both Tamil and Sinhalese people as newcomers. Some of the paddy lands were cultivated by the newcomers, while some lands had been abandoned because there were only a very few persons in the area. The highland was overgrown with natural vegetation, and to facilitate resettlement some lands had been cleared under the *Uthuru Wasanthaya* programme. Hence, it was difficult to identify the boundaries of individuals' lands because they had disappeared and the ruins of some houses were observed. Most of the other houses had perished. However, there was a complex situation regarding the return and resettlement process.

According to the responses of those resettled regarding the efforts implemented under the "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" program, more than half of the respondents felt that their lives improved after they resettled in their traditional homelands compared with their previous life in the Vavuniya district. However, those responses clearly showed that physical

resettlement did not gain satisfaction even though they remained in their places. The long interviews and key informant interviews revealed their sense and feeling regarding the resettlement situation and the ongoing process in the areas of the original residence. The problems and issues they were facing could be explained as follows:

Social Setting

In our village, there were more than 300 families. We were all relatives. Many of them were married among their relatives. Hence, we had a good relationship with each other. People worked together in our paddy field and exchanged labour mutually as "attama"⁴, and we participated and helped each other in every activity. But now, only a few families have returned while others are still scattered. The mutual relationship has vanished and we feel lonely now (Int.7).

One farmer aged 58 from Vavuniya South has responded as above and shows displeasure regarding the social environment of the resettled area. One of the main issues was the poor arrival of the resettled people in the original village, which is the main obstacle for re-building their social relationships. Generally, the scattered individuals become alienated and isolated. In the same way as the former relationships, networks had disappeared, and when they returned for settlement, they had to face and develop a new lifestyle. Agricultural and labour-based lifestyles need to have reciprocal relationships among them to continue their lives in the area.

According to some of the respondents, the Sinhalese, Tamil, and other ethnic groups were not discriminated against based on ethnicity, and they had maintained links and social relationships, networks, reciprocity such as economic transactions and also cultural and political affiliations.

⁴ "Attama" is a labour exchange pattern practised by peasantry who lived in Sri Lankan traditional villages. Agricultural and labour-based lifestyles need to have reciprocal relationships among them to continue their lives. It is a way of working in harmony and sharing the necessary labour among the group members.

According to many people, although these problems existed earlier, they helped to form positive attitudes toward social life. But often, fleeing from the village and having been away for 20 years – rebuilding those relationships to a level of confidence and trust, is an enormous challenge. One 60-year old farmer from Vavuniya North who was rich before being displaced, responded as follows:

The conflict has demolished everything. We lost our land, house, and other property as well as people and our mutual relationships. We need at least our land and other property that remains here. In my case, one family has taken our land (Int. 8).

About this statement, there are two problems that they had to face as returnees in their original villages. One was losing their physical property and the other was losing social property or capital along with the other ethnic groups. It is indicated that trust between the two groups of people was lost and distrust has widened. Since a large part of the land previously owned by the IDPs is now occupied by new residents (most probably they are also IDPs from other areas), the issue of ownership is further complicated. While discussing with most of the displaced persons, they recalled those events and state that going back to their original land with this new situation may not be possible.

Distressed Livelihoods

Rural societies in war-affected areas can be described as experiencing 'distressed livelihoods': they experience a dramatic increase in risk and uncertainty (Korf, 2002, p 10).

The civil conflict is not a temporary crisis, but a long-enduring feature. Rural societies in the war-affected areas are characterized by "distressed livelihoods" or "livelihoods at risk". (Korf 2002). People who resettled in Vavuniya's resettled villages had faced multiple risks and uncertainties caused by many factors. The loss of economic assets due to displacement and the conflict is huge, and the majority of the returnees need to restart their livelihoods from scratch. In addition to lost revenue due to

displacement, the situation was as follows: Farmers have lost their livestock – cattle, goats, chicken – agricultural implements, tractors, carts, fertilizer, seeds, harvest, etc. Forests have engulfed the land, and it needs reconditioning before it can be used for agricultural purposes. Coconut plantations have been devastated by aerial bombings and shelling. Businesspersons have lost their equipment, property, and business leases.

In many of the border villages in the entire area, many of the Sinhalese men depended on working as home guards for their livelihoods. However, according to the majority of the IDPs, all the earlier livelihood activities had been under a frame of constrained conditions in the original villages. Hence, it can be called a situation of *distressed livelihood*.

Our village was big and rich compared with other villages in the area and we had a small town that is where Lionel mudalali (a businessman) had his trade centre. Now everything has vanished. We grew vegetables using groundwater through agro-wells. Our village was a very fertile one those days. Everything was sent to the Colombo market from here. Now that attraction has disappeared (Int. 10).

Paddy cultivation was the most important livelihood source. The chena cultivation and growing other field crops due to seasonal variations or when the rainfall is not sufficient was also done before they were displaced from the area. Some of them were engaged in vegetable production, particularly using groundwater through agro-wells. Banana, chillies, shallots (red onions), beans, and cabbage were the main crops for highland cultivation. In these villages, several persons had been engaged in small-scale businesses; there were also traders, and a few people were occupied with businesses. In addition, there were also a few who were occupied in the state sector with middle-class jobs in the villages.

When they returned during the post-conflict period, they had found that all the economic conditions, properties, and facilities had been lost. The land had been engulfed by overgrowth. They could not identify their

paddy lands, and could not locate where they were, and there was no evidence of fences or hedges that separated their lands. All the houses and buildings were ruined, and almost everything in the area had been demolished. The temple, school, hospital, market, shops, roads, and other properties and facilities had vanished from the area at that time. All these facts pointed out that the resettled people were not happy with the situation that had been prepared by the government and other agencies.

Landlessness and joblessness

Those who resettled are asking for deeds. For the convenience of those who have lost these documents, we have to survey issuing them (new) documents. Many of them have lost their legal documents. It's very difficult to find a proper owner of the land. (Key informant int.1).

The above response was given by one of the Grama Niladaris who was involved in issues regarding the division of lands. Land issues are at the heart of many of the difficulties faced by IDPs when returning to their areas of origin, and it often delays the resettlement process. Access and ownership of land in a context of protracted displacement is fundamental to regaining normalcy. Some major legal difficulties have occurred as time goes on and more land becomes re-occupied. Many problems are arising out of the legal and practical issues with land rights are possible, such as disputes over land boundaries, identifying property for second-generation IDPs, former homes having been occupied by new tenants, as well as tensions among the resettled families. However, regardless of whether a person wants to resettle, cultivate, or sell the land, it is important to be able to prove ownership by presenting legally acceptable documents. A follow-up survey by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees (MRRR) and the UNHCR, conducted during the ceasefire period in early 2004 in the Vavuniya District, identified landlessness and joblessness as the main reasons for people not to return home. (MRRR & UNHCR, 2004).

Another major issue is the inability to identify the boundaries of the land to claim ownership, as the fences had disappeared. Some people claim

that their lands had been included in security zones. The Additional District Secretary Vavuniya said that 'we would not be able to return because our lands are still in the High-Security Zone (Key informant Int. 2). Both the government forces and the LTTE had separated land as their security zones in the northern areas. An important problem was identified regarding the present land mine-removal activities. Safe land is urgently needed for them, not only for their secure residence but also for cultivation since it is their means of income generation. However, no one was reported to have had the experience of dealing with landmines. Hence, the establishment of high-security zones was one of the main obstacles to poor accessibility to the former lands.

Property Damage and Homelessness

Many people in this district have experienced loss and damage of assets as well as movable and immovable properties. After they were resettled, they could not generate enough income and as a result, they were facing more challenges and problems regarding their survival. Due to multiple reasons⁵ most of them were not satisfied with the restitution and compensation for repair or reconstruction provided by the government for their lost, damaged or destroyed properties. The assistance provided to them was given in a step-by-step process and couldn't be received as a lump sum. Therefore, repair or reconstruction was delayed until the entire amount was received. In addition to this, some of them only received an initial compensation sum of Rs. 25,000 which was not enough even for a partial repair or reconstruction. At the same time, a few re-settlers applied for compensation; but there was no improvement in the actions taken by the government regarding their requests. Even though many re-settlers received some amount, they did not feel that the amount received was enough for them to recover from the losses.

However, people were not satisfied with their housing facilities and environment and these factors pushed them to resettle in their original villages. A majority of self-settled people in the area had constructed

⁵ See Situation report September 2010, (2010) Vavuniya: District Secretariat, p.29

their own houses in the host area and also collected other necessities. When they use the term “*my house,*” or “*our house,*” (Int.12), it often refers to his/her house in the host area, and it supports their feelings about the permanent place and future decisions as to where they are going to stay further and permanently. This event shows that the settlement processes were being used and practised by some people as part of their lifestyle. They were trying to prove their residence at two places. It can be called a “dual residence.” They used to travel to the resettled area (original villages) and stay for a few days and then return occasionally to the host area. The IDPs who settled in the original villages, in particular, would be beneficiaries of aid, relief, and assistance provided by the government, INGOs, and NGOs. The consequence of all these issues was that those IDPs tended to live in both places of “present house” and the “resettled house.”

Insecurity

The absence of violence and threats still needs strong emphasis. Before they were displaced from their places of origin, the armed conflict was highly prevalent and their lives were insecure. Therefore, people did not have freedom of movement. Moreover, forced recruitment to the armed groups, abductions of people, and robbery were also common issues faced by the people.⁶

Another important problem was identified regarding the present landmine removal activities. However, even though persons have been resettled, these areas are still scattered with landmines. Safe land is urgently needed for them not only for their secure residence but also for their use for cultivation since it is their means of income generation.⁷ In terms of the presence of rule of law and law enforcement, the majority of those resettled were satisfied with the current effectiveness of the law and legal actions. Only a limited number of abductions were reported while there were no tax restrictions, a reduction of killings and robbery, and death

⁶ See the district study on children – with special attention to Vavuniya District (demography profile), Norway, Vavuniya: Save the children, p.1-5

⁷ Situation report September 2010, (2010) Vavuniya: District Secretariat, p.29

threats were rare. This was because after the LTTE was defeated, all the areas came under the control of the Sri Lanka government. The reason for dissatisfaction if any was due to the presence and interventions of para-military groups in some regular activities of those re-settled.

Poverty and Unemployment

The conflict has affected all facets of Sri Lankan life, but the worst cases of poverty and unemployment exist in the north and the east and the adjoining conflict-affected districts. Frequent dry spells and drought exacerbate the situation in many areas within the northern and eastern parts of the country. In addition to lost revenue due to displacement, farmers had lost their livestock and agricultural implements, etc.

Apart from these issues, a high level of unemployment, lack of job opportunities or means of income generation and low wages, made them more vulnerable even though they were resettled in their places of origin. Although they received assistance from the government, the economic problems faced by the families were highly observable during the field study. People expected the government to provide self-employment opportunities to overcome these struggles of day-to-day life. The Samurdhi Poverty Alleviation Programme (the main poverty alleviation programme of the government) was not operational in Killinochchi, Mannar, and Mullativu districts before the liberation of those areas due to the collapse of the administrative structure. Population displacement together with asset depletion leads to a new form of social inequality. These deteriorating conditions limited the capacity of the vulnerable households to maintain adequate food security and caused unprecedented poverty, and it had badly affected the return and resettlement process, particularly in the northern districts.

Nevertheless, agricultural supplies from the North and the East to the rest of the country were blocked off during the conflict, due to factors such as government-imposed trade embargoes, taxes imposed by the militant groups and the breakdown of the North-South road and railway connectivity. The end of the conflict is thus expected to generate

increases in both the demand for and supply of agricultural products from the North and the East. Given the high incidence of poverty among agricultural workers, developments in agriculture are very important to the goal of poverty alleviation – over 75% of the rural labour force works in agriculture, and agricultural households represent almost 50% of the poorest households in the country (Kelegama, 2011). In the beginning, all these factors had badly affected the resettlement process.

Subsequently, considerable numbers of people were resettled in their original residential places, although they may or may not take up permanent residence in their original village due to several factors. They expected both further assistance in the future for house construction and also some degree of security. Some people said that their children attend school in the host area and that some of them have property within the settled places such as lands, vehicles, and others. Some families had constructed middle-class-level houses in the host community. Hence, it seems that there are other expectations. The effort to build houses in the original villages, though not for their resettlement for other purposes, maybe to keep the land for themselves or to give it to their children. However, these events prove that many factors push people from the original village.

Poor Access to Educational and Health Facilities

Problems identified about education throughout the field study were the lack of educational facilities such as the shortage of educational, physical and human resources, over-crowded schools and in some cases, inadequate buildings. Due to the conflict, the education of most students in the conflict-affected areas was disrupted due to displacement, loss of family members, psychological impacts, loss of school materials, and the destruction of school buildings and infrastructure. However, for some families, while the educational facilities in the new location were relatively inferior when compared with those in their original villages, for some others, these facilities for children were far better than those available in their original village. Under such conditions, when families

think of resettlement, the educational facilities were a major consideration and concern for the parents.

We should give priority to our children's education. Their future depends on education. We had a school in our village before displacement, but now it is in ruins. The government has now given many building facilities, playgrounds, etc. But we don't have good teachers here. No one is willing to bring their children here [...] (Int. 4).

In Sri Lanka, “educational facility or opportunity” is a concept that is highly complicated. When considered on a regional basis, the differences are complex. In terms of facilities, there are differences between the rural and urban schools. There are also differences among rural schools, urban schools, and national schools. Moreover, the general public classifies schools as big schools and small schools (Lindberg 2005). There are differences in terms of the facilities available in all these categorizations. Therefore, it can be seen that in terms of educational facilities in the different areas, there are disparities, gaps, and differences. Further, it was observed that the differences in the availability of facilities were quite varied. However, the people had access to small rural schools where facilities were available at a minimum. Additionally, the number of schools with adequate facilities was few. Accordingly, it can be seen that in the case of the IDPs, the educational facilities for their children, whether in the original villages of the present host areas, were likely to be at a relatively low level, compared to the other urban areas in the country. However, several issues need to be considered in providing basic education services for conflict-affected groups. These include reintegrating into the school curriculum, dealing with child ex-combatants, providing educational infrastructure (essential materials such as furniture, teaching and learning aids), ensuring adequate human resources, and psycho-social support.

In the areas where clashes occur as well as in the border villages, public-sector health services play a very important role. Sri Lanka has been able to maintain overall health indicators at satisfactory levels despite its

economic downturns over time. But there are regional disparities in health indicators and they are compounded in the conflict-affected districts. The maternal mortality rate is five times higher than that at the national level. Returned IDPs are making a greater demand for health services, can create new epidemiological challenges, including a higher probability of epidemics (Kelegama, 2011)⁸. However, it remains unclear as to what benefit the poorest people in conflict-affected areas would derive from private healthcare. Significant changes need to be made to the country's health systems to successfully manage new epidemiological challenges resulting from the return of IDPs, etc.

Issues Related to Infrastructural Facilities

As stated previously, the *Uthuru Wasanthaya* is the government's large-scale, public sector-led development programme for the North including the Vavuniya district. The development programme includes several macro-level infrastructure projects on irrigation systems, power grids, telecommunications, waste-water management and town centres development, but is largely focused on the construction of highways and roads (Central Bank, 2012). The GoSL's rationale for prioritizing infrastructure development in the North is driven by a goal of maintaining and strengthening national security (Radhakrishnan, 2011). Construction of highways and roads to and in the North seems to be a fundamental aspect of strengthening the state's national security apparatus. An improved and expanded road network is said to 'enhance national security and solidarity (IMF, 2010). However, the problem was development priorities for the area not including the need for micro-level infrastructure such as community buildings, transport facilities for people, trade and human rights, etc. Much of the support has been carried out by a few INGOs or multi-lateral agencies. (Herath, 2012)

⁸ The government has allocated special funds (US\$ 4.4 million) under the "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" programme to improve health facilities in the Jaffna peninsula. (Kelegama, 2011).

Moreover, infrastructure facilities in the rural areas were not properly developed under these macro-level projects. Hence, the majority of the poor rural people suffer from the scarcity of basic infrastructure services and micro-level facilities in the newly resettled areas.

"We had a public bus service from our village before we were displaced from the area. Now, there are no public transport facilities in the village yet. We have to use our vehicles or others to go to the town. If there is an emergency, no transport facility is there in our village" (Int.7).

This is influenced by the fact that public transport services provided by the government had ceased in remote areas, and the government could not have properly maintained the roads and other services due to the conflict. Hence, poor transport services are likely to be another powerful disincentive for resettlement. However, some people remarked that transport facilities were available during the daytime to some areas, but in an emergency and particularly at night, transport facilities were non-existent, which was a problem not only within the village but also in the area.

The development of infrastructure facilities is an indication of the quality of living standards in a community. The availability or lack of pipe-borne water, electricity, a network of good roads, and communication facilities, significantly affects the value of the land. Deficiencies in the infrastructural facilities tend to reduce the attention of people wanting to return to that area. Lack of attention by the public sector and inadequacy of services are likely to retard development activities and also deprive other services to that area. The majority of the border areas in Vavuniya South, and the Vavuniya North area also suffered from this issue. Low availability of roads and transport facilities from the urban areas to the villages can adversely affect services supplied to a village.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study examined the resettlement issues and challenges for the post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building processes in Sri Lanka. The

process of reconstruction and peace-building has been envisaged under several programs and projects following the end of the 26-year old civil conflict. Resettling IDPs in their original places of residence became a prime task under the reconstruction programs to rebuild the peaceful life of the people. Hence, the study is focused on understanding the role of the various factors that negatively affected the resettlement process in the original areas of residence in the district of Vavuniya.

The key finding was that the resettlement approach adopted by the government was ad-hoc and ineffective resulting in a lack of positive impacts on the quality of life of the resettled IDPs. However, it is still not too late to revisit the resettlement process and provide solutions to the unmet needs of the IDPs which are presented and analyzed in this research.

The study showed the challenges from the government as the responsible authority to fulfil all needs of the resettlers before and after they were resettled. To conclude this analysis, although the rapid resettlement started following the end of the conflict, due to many causes, a gap remains between the measures undertaken by the government about resettlement and the reality on the ground. The gap between these two sides can be overcome by meeting the challenges in the implementation process. Results of this research clearly show that people would not be satisfied with physical resettlement even if they have their own homes unless there is a properly provided material system. In the absence of durable solutions for this serious issue of resettlers, the reconstruction and peace building-process would be a huge challenge to the government and peace-makers.

All these factors are very complex and influence one another. Consequently, one of the main arguments is that multiple factors need to be understood about the situation of the return and resettlement process of the IDPs. The study has revealed that various combinations of factors have negatively influenced the whole process of return, resettlement, reconstruction and peace-building process while the major resettlement project was implemented.

To overcome these issues, the study proposes areas that need to be developed and improved such as investments in education and skill development. These must be made in a manner that generates skills that are in demand in these areas. Such investments must be made equitably and speedily, as uneven treatment and delays could give rise to new conflicts within these communities. Measures must be taken to re-develop the business environment to create long-term employment opportunities, this involves attracting private sector investments which thus far, has proved difficult. In addition to replacing infrastructure, there is a need for investment in new technologies (and training communities to use them) to ensure competitiveness in the marketplace. A lack of employment and education data makes assessing progress difficult. There is thus a significant need for monitoring and evaluation processes.

Therefore, when offering solutions for these problems, concepts can be extracted by studying the specific events during a given period, adequately and carefully. Reconciliation and reconstruction projects should also draw long-term plans based on those considerations. Accordingly, such an effort must be approached based on the basic problems and efforts, to analyze the problems. It can also be stated that this is a common challenge to be faced by researchers in future research.

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