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"FROM FEAR TO COLLABORATION!"

Helvetas' experience with conflict transformation and peace building in Sri Lanka

The civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan governmental armed forces lasted more than 20 years and ended in May 2009. The rural economy nearly collapsed in the conflict affected areas which led to a high poverty incidence. Along with this, mistrust between the different ethnicities is a serious issue. Addressing the consequences of the conflict with a two-pillar approach, Helvetas' Development and Peace in Sri Lanka (DPSL) project successfully contributes to conflict transformation and peace building.

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CONTEXT

The civil war in Sri Lanka has various deeply rooted reasons. The discrimination of the Tamil-speaking population (including Tamils and Muslims) led to the politicisation of ethnic differences. Democracy, the protection of human rights and the guarantee for the Rule of Law are not fully institutionalised. Armed groups were formed to fight for minority rights and greater participation. The two main consequences of the armed violence are the collapse of the rural economy which led to a poverty incidence of 60-90%, and an ethnic segregation accompanied by fear and mistrust.

Fact Box DPSL

- Project: Development and Peace In Sri Lanka (DPSL)
- Donor: Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation- SDC
- Implementation organisations: Swisscontact and Helvetas in two different districts (Batticaloa and Ampara respectively). This document focuses only on the interventions of Helvetas.
- Duration: 2000 – 2010 (in four project phases)
- Budget Phase IV: 2 Mio. CHF

STRATEGY & THEORIES OF CHANGE

How can peace be fostered in this specific conflict situation? According to our analysis there are contributing and driving factors of the conflict. The project is addressing this by a two pillar approach. The first pillar is an entry point and a means of building trust. The second addresses conflict issues in a more direct way.

1) Addressing the economical needs of people in an inclusive way leads to empowerment, raised consciousness and enhanced (food) security.
2) Strengthening local capacities in conflict transformation leads to increased incidences of conflict resolution without violence.

By addressing the economic context as well as attitudes and behaviour, this two pillar approach leads to sustainable conflict transformation and social change.

Economic Change	DPSL promotes organic agriculture to enhance food security. *Support livelihood → enhance food security and empowerment → reduce tensions*
	DPSL encourages common inter-ethnic initiatives (livelihood and conflict resolution). *Common initiatives → build up trust → reduce violence*
Social Change	DPSL offers trainings in non-violent conflict resolution skills *Trainings → change of attitudes and behaviour → conflict transformation*

Theories of Change of DPSL

FROM FARMER'S ORGANISATIONS TO PEACE COMMITTEES

The technical support in organic agriculture is embedded in the formation and strengthening of **farmer's organisations** (**FOs**) in order to increase people's ability to tackle challenges by themselves. A platform for dialogue is provided by sharing experiences between different FOs. Building the FOs and addressing daily needs builds trust and frees capacities to tackle other – more sensitive – issues.

In the same communities and as a kind of follow-up, DPSL facilitates the formation of **village co-existence committees** (**VCCs**), consisting of members of FOs, other village people, and local authorities. The VCC is coached to identify and analyse conflicts within and between different communities.

The **peace and co-existence committees** (**PCCs**) are the key institutions of DPSL. PCCs are multi-ethnic bodies, composed of members from several VCCs. The main purpose is to resolve the conflicts identified by the VCCs through *common initiatives*. In order to carry out these events successfully, the PCC members receive training in conflict transformation.

	Economic Change	Social Change
FO	Increased food security through organic farming	Exchange of cultivation practices between the ethnic communities
VCC	Identification of common needs	Conflict analysis Change of attitudes towards inclusiveness and non-violence
PCC	Development initiatives to address common needs and prevent conflicts caused by unequal access to resources	Interaction between ethnic communities Change of attitudes and behaviour Conflict transformation

Implementation Structure of DPSL

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Common initiative: Moving a boarder fence to improve access to a well

COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES FOR INTER-ETHNIC TRUST BUILDING

As all project components are eventually assumed to increase interaction and build trust between the different ethnic communities, so-called *common initiatives* play a major role in linking the two pillars. The PCCs decide which activities might be relevant/ effective/ efficient/ sustainable for the local peace building context or which conflict needs to be addressed immediately.

DPSL acts as a facilitator to organise and conduct the respective activity and provides capacity building On non-violent conflict resolutions. In the aftermath, reflection on the outcome is facilitated.

GOOD PRACTICES & LESSONS LEARNED

Local Institutions for conflict transformation
Most of the issues addressed in common initiatives had already occupied the people for quite some time, but none could be resolved successfully before the formation of local committees (VCCs and PCCs). More than two decades of civil war have broken almost all ties between the different communities. Thus no traditional cross-community institutions exist anymore. Against this background, the relevance of institutionalising common platforms becomes evident. As they consist of members from different communities, the PCCs provide a platform, where inter-ethnic concerns – either existing disputes or common development issues – can be addressed.

Coaching and facilitation for conflict transformation and peace building
Besides providing a general platform for discussions, DPSL offers trainings in conflict transformation and peace building. People are encouraged to examine the root causes of conflicts while paying attention to contradictory values and interests amongst the conflict parties and to jointly identify strategies and important stakeholders for a solution. Continuous coaching during field visits and regular meetings are complemented by reflection and dialogue with a regional constituency as well as linking local actors with specialized expertise to tackle particular problems (e.g. lawyers for land issues).

Example

Using everyday life examples in the trainings enables the participants to react adequately once the situation occurs. In Ampara, vigilantism in case of road accidents is common. Once, a Singhalese driver knocked down a Muslim girl and got beaten up by the crowd. In vengeance, an angry Singhalese mob approached the village Majeedpuram. The PCC of Majeedpuram sought dialogue with the parties and managed to deescalate the situation.

"We gained a lot of knowledge during the trainings on how to handle such situations in a non-violent manner. This has influenced our thinking patterns and the way we act" says the chairperson of the PCC of Majeedpuram/Newguna.

Inclusion
The violent conflict in Sri Lanka has not only divided the society along ethnic boundaries, but has also created a huge gap between the "normal" citizens on one side and political as well as armed actors on the other side. Most people consider the outbreak of the civil war as a consequence of bad governance and therefore regard politicians with suspicion, while the arbitrary use of violence is mainly linked to armed actors. Based on this awareness, peace building activities in the Sri Lankan context will not be sustainable as long as they only focus on the relationship between different ethnic communities. It is crucial to include all stakeholders, especially the ones who often acted as "dividers" in the past. The DPSL project meets this claim by continuously encouraging its beneficiaries to include all actors in their common initiatives.

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Example

Convenient access to public transport is especially relevant for women. They have less access to private transport but at the same time, they are responsible for many tasks that require mobility. In Colony 4, a common initiative was launched to move the bus stop from a Singhalese area more towards the centre of town, where also Tamils and Muslims could reach it more easily. This initiative required close cooperation between the chairman of the Pradeshiya Sabha (regional council), the police and the PCC members. The success of the initiative reduced mistrust among all stakeholders and is considered a huge achievement.

"Proper transport facilities are very important with regard to the future development of Ampara. They increase the living conditions and strengthen the co-existence between the communities" says the chairman of the Pradeshiya Sabha of Navinthanveli.

A Tamil person from Colony 4 complements: *"Past is past. We can not change it anymore. That's why we should focus on our future."*

PEACE BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT

"Development and peace are interdependent" – this finding might be one of the major lessons learnt of the last decade of international development cooperation. At the same time it characterises the slogan and comprehensive approach of the DPSL project. On one hand it is obvious that efforts to improve people's socio-economical living conditions will run the risk to fail as long as people are trapped in a circle of violence. On the other hand, experience has shown that peace will not be sustainable, as long as economic competition coincides with ethnic divisions and major inequalities regarding the access to essential resources.

Therefore the peace building approach of Helvetas consists not only of activities that promote non-violent behaviour and a peaceful interaction, but tries to link this with socio-economic activities. Improving livelihoods with sustainable income generation activities is also a trust bridge-building measure and an entry point for conflict transformation.

In a context with ongoing or latent conflicts which lack a framework for the inclusion of minorities, it is necessary to create the space for deliberation as a first step. Facilitating dialogue about peace and reconciliation is then built on a solid base. However the desired change in people's attitudes and behaviour will be substantially higher if people have the opportunity to experience commonality in everyday life, as it is the case when they are working together in common initiatives.

Example

The common initiative of cleaning the badly polluted minor reservoir, which is used for irrigation and bathing in Colony 10, strengthened the relationship between the communities. At the same time it had a substantial impact on people's living conditions by improving their access to irrigation water and public bathing places. It has to be assumed, that for most of the more than 800 attendees, the expected development impact was the crucial factor for their participation. The meeting with members of other ethnic communities and the increased awareness about their needs and perceptions, which is crucial for building up group relationships, was an additional and very welcome outcome.

„I had serious doubts about this Shramadana. I thought, we would never be able to clean this whole reservoir with our hands. At least some machines would have been necessary, to remove all this vegetation. But with the support of so many people, almost everything is possible. All together, we could do it!" says a member of the PCC.

"I am sure, that this initiative strengthens the relationship between our three communities. We have avoided each other for such a long time, but today everybody was working together and had a tea afterwards. That was really nice!" added another person from Colony 10.

(see picture on the front page)

CONTACT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact the "Civil Society and the State" working area desk under css@helvetas.org

This fact sheet is based on the following report which is available on request.

Sarah Niemeyer (2010), *Peace Building and Development. Sharing Experiences from Sri Lanka.*