

**The long and winding road to reconciliation:  
A report on the aftermath of the Helvetas DPSL project**

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## Executive Summary

During the period 2000 to 2010, the Helvetas project, Development and Peace Sri Lanka (DPSL), focused on the districts of Ampara and Batticaloa using the entry points of livelihood recovery, building local capacity, infrastructure repair and vocational training as ways in which to engender dialogue and thereby build co-existence between the Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil communities in the region. Working alongside a local implementing partner, Peace and Community Action (PCA), the project brought communities together to build necessary infrastructure such as dams, bus shelters or irrigation pipes, in the hope that such work would create dialogue and friendship amongst the three ethnicities.

In 2017, Helvetas commissioned the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) to study the aftermath of the project, paying keen attention to the ways in which the project had sustained itself through the continued use of reconciliation forums. Our team was also asked to ascertain if it was possible to track attitudinal changes that could be attributed to the DPSL project. The study also hoped to elicit, where possible, a workable model for engendering reconciliation at the national level. The project also allowed for a more macro-level discussion of the state of reconciliation in the Ampara district, which emphasized **emergent and resurfacing conflicts** that would have relevance for any further stage of this project. Section 1.4 in this document briefly sketches out some of these conflicts, and the final sections of this document also re-engage with these issues also. With regards to the DPSL Helvetas project, our findings noted a high degree of **sustainability**, and **efficiency**.

Key points with regards to the Helvetas DPSL model are as follows:

- The DPSL Helvetas Project was successful in bringing communities together in dialogue through shared work on practical projects. It is notable that these practical projects were often remarked upon in fieldwork interviews, highlighting the **efficiency** with which shared projects can create and foster dialogue.
- The Peace and Coexistence Committees (PCCs) and Village Coexistence Committees (VCCs) were successful in fostering dialogue between different communities. The same model is currently

being used by Peace and Community Action, a local grassroots organization in their continued work on reconciliation in Ampara district. Therefore, the committee based model has a high degree of **sustainability**.

- Those who received training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution via the DPSL Helvetas project are still consulted on individual and case-by-case bases to resolve conflicts as they arise. This, too, points to the **sustainability** of the project, as well as the practical **efficiency** of the model of training provided.

## Context and Concept

### 1.1 Context and Rationale for the Study

In 2000, within a context of escalating violence, and sensing a need open up possibilities for conflict transformation and peace-building, Helvetas implemented a project in Ampara and Batticaloa, known as “Development and Peace in Sri Lanka” (DPSL). This initiative was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development Corporation (SDC). The project anchored itself to the following question: Can peace be fostered in this specific conflict situation? Noting the contributing and driving factors of the conflict, the project addressed peacebuilding through 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. They are as follows:

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

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

After the launch of the primary project in 2000, DPSL focussed its orientation very strongly on identifying and addressing the root causes of conflicts and creating linkages between the different ethnic communities. The attention at this initial time was enhancing food security and livelihood stability as entry points for reconciliation work, while building strong capacities of local actors on Do No Harm, negotiation, problem solving, peace education and co-existence. These activities were used as a vehicle for inter-ethnic trust building by organising street theatres, joint work on demonstration fields and exposure visits. Following political and context related changes, the project then up-scaled its peace-

building activities, while continuing its earlier activities on enhancing food security (addressing economic grievances), and inter-ethnic trust building (addressing attitudes and behaviours). The project then intensified its work towards conflict transformation (addressing the context, attitudes and behaviours) (Niemeyer 2010,) building on the earlier ground level work of preparing the stakeholders for increased, shared and systematic activities across the divides.

Within this structure, Helvetas facilitated and set up inter-ethnic farmer organisations, formed village co-existence committees (VCCs), and Peace and Co-existence Committees (PCCs). The paragraphs below describe the concepts for the PCCs, VCCs and Growers Associations (Farmer’s Organisations), as defined in the Helvetas report “From Fear to Collaboration”.

**Grower’s Associations:** The technical support in organic agriculture was embedded in the formation and strengthening of grower’s associations (Farmer’s Organisations) in order to increase people’s ability to tackle challenges by themselves. A **platform for dialogue** was provided by sharing experiences between different FOs. Building the FOs and addressing daily needs built trust and freed capacities to tackle other – more sensitive – issues.

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

**Peace and Co-existence Committees:** The peace and co-existence committees (PCCs) were the key institutions of DPSL. PCCs are multi-ethnic bodies, composed of members from several VCCs. The main purpose was to **resolve conflicts or disputes** identified by the VCCs through common initiatives. In order to carry out these events successfully, the PCC members received training in conflict transformation. The table below shows the Theory of Change emphasised by the Helvetas DPSL project.

	<b>Economic Change</b>	<b>Social Change</b>
Grower’s Association	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

During a follow-up visit to Ampara in November 2015, Helvetas staff and the former local implementing partner, Peace and Community Action (PCA) discussed pertinent peacebuilding activities of the former Village Co-existence Committees (VCCs) and Peace and Co-existence Committees (PCCs), which had transformed into Divisional Reconciliation Forums (DRF), including a district level network in Ampara. Prior to this visit, Helvetas had received information that hinted that some DPSL activities were ongoing.

After this visit, the HELVETAS team concluded that it would be crucial to learn from this experience to inform future interventions and revisit the results and after-effects in a detailed and systematic manner. Thus providing an understanding of what has remained from the former DPSL-induced dynamics and achievements and how initiatives have been further developed by local actors, which initiatives survived, which were unsuccessful and why this was so. Helvetas then approached CEPA to carry out a study on ‘what happened after?’, especially within a post-war context wherein the conversation surrounding reconciliation and transitional justice was gaining significant traction. Using the lessons learned from this study, Helvetas would then consider the possibilities of using the DPSL model for other local or national projects that engender reconciliation. As such, CEPA was tasked with studying the interactions created and facilitated by the DPSL project, how these interactions have been sustained, and if they have any significance in the post-war context. Importantly, CEPA’s role was to ascertain if there were possibilities for replicating or adapting the DPSL project for use in other parts of Sri Lanka, and how the lessons of the DPSL project could speak to the national context.

## 1.2 Methodology

The objective of this summative and formative assessment of the Development and Peace Project Sri Lanka (DPSL) hopes to have both analytical and policy related outcomes. This study was, in essence, a summative and formative evaluation of the DPSL project, albeit several years after the project ended. This study hinges very particularly on the second pillar of the DPSL project, which sought to affect social change. In asking ‘what happened’, the methodology essentially aimed at building a narrative of the kinds of social change that were created and stimulated by the DPSL project. Measuring peace and social cohesion is not an easy task, as these are phenomena that are often difficult to quantify. As researchers we could observe attitudinal changes, infrastructure, interactions and other complex change processes

(Scharbatke–Church 2011) that surround peacebuilding efforts, all the while being aware that studying such a project would not easily yield “outcomes-based” indicators (Church and Rogers 2006).

Broadly, the study assessed the DPSL project’s sustainability in relation to the broader idea of sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation, and chose to focus on Irakkaman, Uhana, Sammanthura, and Navithannvely DS divisions in Ampara. These are areas in which the DPSL project was present for all phases. As a point of departure, the research was especially mindful of the four lessons learned identified in Sarah Niemeyer’s 2010 report on the DPSL project, measuring if these are part of the continuing context in which the District Reconciliation Forums occur, or if new lessons appear. Four key areas noted Niemeyer’s report are:

1. Institution building,
2. Continuous and ongoing training in conflict transformation and peace-building,
3. Inclusiveness,
4. The influence of the project outcomes and activities on reconciliation and transitional justice.

**Provided below are the key focus areas of the study, as well as the research methods that were deployed.**

#### Step one: Macro context analysis, project review and actor mapping

In this first stage, which is a combination of desk review and interviews, the study built a broad based analysis of the context of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Ampara District. Following this, the principal investigator had several conversations with Peace and Community Action (PCA), which, complemented by desk research built an assumptive map of those actors and agencies that are currently working on reconciliation in the district. This guided the framing for the field research and guided our creation of a list of Key Person Interviews. This mapping was further fleshed out during the period of field work. Bringing this review together with the content from the final DPSL reports, we then generated the research tool. This consisted of a focus group discussion guide, a questionnaire for in-depth interviews, as well as a separate questionnaire for Key Person Interviews (KPIs).

#### Step two: Fieldwork and in-depth study; reviewing and recording experiences

In this next step, the study team went into the field in order to chart the aftermath of the DPSL project. We asked questions in individual interviews and in the focus group discussions as to the evolution of the



VCCs and PCCs into DRFs, specifically how past learning was integrated into current transitional justice efforts. We were as intentional as possible in capturing various experiences of those who belong to different genders, caste identities, age groups etc. The research tool also contained a question that asked respondents to provide us with the words, images or phrases that they associated with the terms “reconciliation” and “social cohesion.” This question was so that we could capture attitudes towards transitional justice and reconciliation, especially to gauge if and how attitudes changed through the DPSL. This step was a key part of our process in identifying elements that can inform transitional justice efforts in Sri Lanka’s broader national picture, and allowing for us to suggest a schema through which the DPSL project can be transposed to the national level.

A further and intentional part of the methodology was to work inductively. Quite often, during an interview, we would allow the session to have a level of “free-flow” so that we could elicit anecdotes, phrases and memories that would weave for us the narrative of the post-war climate in the Ampara District. Such anecdotes and memories also illustrate easily the shifts in a subject’s attitudes towards their social ‘other’. Quite often, this technique allowed us to engage the interviewee for as long as an hour and a half. As an example, one Sinhala subject interviewed in Uhana district, responded formally that he had no disputes with his Tamil neighbours or with the surrounding Tamil community. Indeed, his responses to us were quite brief and stilted. Once we changed the tone of the interview and entered into a conversation where he could speak more freely, the inferences of his phrasing, and the narration of his personal story vividly painted for us a clear picture of his own understanding and entrance into the socio-political life of the community.

During our field visit, we also utilised observational techniques to understand the different communities we were studying. This allowed us to not only garner some additional interviews, but to also observe visual culture such as the language of signage, cultural markers for communities, hoardings, and the natural interactions between the community in a quotidian space. Using such a combination of observation, association and formal interview was important due to the length of time since the end of the DPSL project. As the project ended in 2010, the seven year gap proved a challenge to the accuracy of the data that could be collected.

As such, our study thought in narrative terms and hoped to build indicative stories that would allow us to sketch a historical picture of the aftermath of the DPSL project.

***The Role of Peace and Community Action:***

As PCA was the implementing partner for the DPSL project, we worked with them to be our guide for the field work. We requested their support to set up: focus group discussions, arrange for us to observe one DRF, as well as assist us to identify an individual for an in-depth interview. We also consulted with PCA in order to identify local government and community leadership who had some involvement with the DPSL project. As different members of staff were involved with the project at various levels, we interviewed 3 field officers, as well as the Coordinator for the area. **An attached annexe details the interviews as conducted on the ground.**

With the exception of the focus group of religious leaders, all our focus groups contained a mix of male and female persons. The Tamil speaking group in Navithanvely were primarily split between Muslim and Hindu persons, with two Christian participants. The Tamil Focus Group in Irakkamam was also split between Muslim and Hindu persons, whilst the group from Deegavapiya were Sinhalese Buddhists. In these groups, the primary occupations were based in agriculture, with education and local government also represented. The group from Deegavapiya were primarily engaged in police or security or kept home gardens. Three of our in-depth interviews were with female persons, one a District Secretary, the other a PCA staffer, and the third a PCA volunteer. The following schema was used in designing the fieldwork and accompanying tools:

	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>District</b>
Process of change	Was there an incremental or gradual change in perception and understanding as a result of the DPSL project?  What particular behaviours were affected, and are they still sustained today?	Was change affected abruptly or gradually?  What rhetoric is most closely allied to these changes?  What kinds of communal transformation took place? What kinds of power relationships were affected? How is inclusiveness still understood and implemented?	What effect has there been on a district level? If on a gradual level, can we see clear affect from DPSL or is the change more diffused, and a result of a conglomeration of actors working in peacebuilding? What kinds of broader transformation and interruption have taken place?
Result of change	Has there been continuity (a kind of reproduction of	What kinds of continuity can we note manifesting?	What kinds of precise changes can we see at

	adaptation?) How did certain attitudes survive? What changes have been discontinued?	Did the community replicate the PCCs and VCCs exactly? How was adaptation negotiated? What has been discontinued?	the district level? Is the DPSL model being deployed at this level or is it effective only in fragments?
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**1.3 Limitations in the field**

The research acknowledges the following that limited the extent of the fieldwork:

- **The seven year gap** (2010- 2017) between the formal end of the project and the fieldwork.
- **An issue with regards to attribution.** Many of the focus groups were organised through Peace and Community Action, and, therefore, most of our respondents had some affiliation or connection to this organisation and its ongoing projects. The research is mindful that some evaluations may be handicapped in terms of objectivity as there is a high chance of certain biases seeping through.
- **Further issues of attribution** that arise due to the surfeit of actors who have been working on peacebuilding and reconciliation since the end of the war, often adopting models similar to Helvetas DPSL.
- **A limited reach.** Due to logistical variations, we were unable to conduct, as planned, focus group interviews in Uhana or Sammanthurai. As such, we were only able to conduct individual interviews pertaining to each of these areas. Due to a low response rate from government officials, we were also unable to meet with as many local authorities as we had hoped.

It should be noted that the work done by Helvetas DPSL is often referred to as PCA’s work by the respondents, especially those we encountered in Navithanvely. Upon further investigation with the PCA field officer, we were able to ascertain that when references are made to projects or training in the period 2000-2010, it is a reference to the DPSL project. One of the difficulties in the fieldwork was that, for the respondents, quite often the DPSL project was seen as synonymous with the work done by PCA during that time. As we drove around the district, we constantly encountered large structures that marked the boundary between communities, with the particular faith or culture prominently displayed. An example is provided on the right. This picture was taken in the Divisional Secretariat (DS) of Kalmunai, the division is itself administratively split between Muslims and Tamils, underscoring deep communal divides.

#### 1.4 Post-war Ampara: Development and reconciliation

In 2017, seven years after the formal end of the Helvetas DPSL project, Sri Lanka is a country that seeks a new identity, looking in many directions for the meaning of its existence without a decades long war. Although the war ended in 2009, and the direct violence of war has ended, many of the underlying issues, which led to and perpetuated the conflict, are yet to be addressed. These issues are not only related to the economy, but also to national policy on languages, secondary and tertiary education, a lack of a cohesive transitional justice process, and a widespread militarization that manifested in the immediate aftermath of the war. Since 2015, the lack of dynamism from the coalition government to move forward with institutions to address reparations, the missing and disappeared and to address the sustained release of captured land to populations in the North and the East have bolstered intercommunal tensions. Ideological debates, thereby, abound, and the crux of these debates circles the tensions between development and reconciliation. In particular, the rise of the Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalist voice, from 2009-2015, and the anti-Muslim campaigning that resulted from this is of particular import to Eastern districts where all three communities have significant presence. Respondents spoke to us of the tensions between the Sinhala and Muslim communities, and we encountered Tamil and Sinhala persons who spoke with deep anger and distrust of the Muslim community. Similarly, we also spoke to Tamil and Muslim persons who showed anger and fear of the Sinhala Buddhist community. It should be noted that most of these conversations took place in more urban than rural contexts.



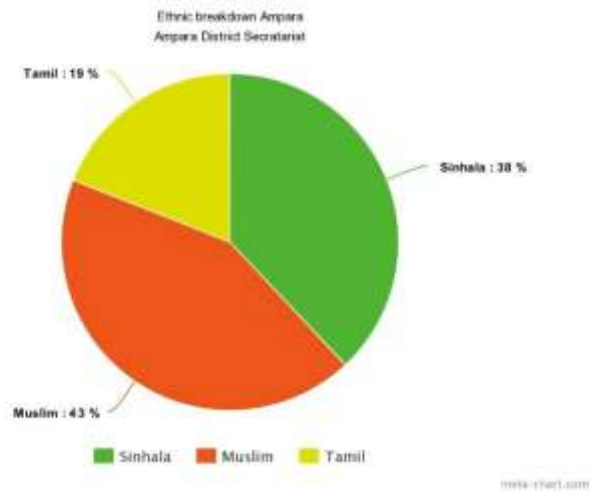
Economically speaking, with the stabilization of the North and the East, the conditions are ripe for capitalist growth, and for fully incorporating these districts into the larger national economy. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the country received what may arguably be termed as an artificial bump in growth, with economic growth above 8% for the years 2010 and 2011, before holding steady at 6.7% through 2013 (World Bank 2016). The demand driven private sector flourished, due to an increasing culture of private consumption and investment, bolstered by agricultural development in the North and East. Indeed, part of the ‘bump’ was the immediate effect caused by the war-affected provinces of the North and the East beginning to contribute to national economic figures. The main livelihood in the district is

agriculture or agriculture-based, with most persons engaged in paddy cultivation<sup>1</sup>. Other livelihoods consist of fisheries, rice milling, brick-making, ready-made garments, metal crushing, carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, enterprise, and other cottage based industries. Fishing is the second most prevalent livelihood in the district. In the post-war economy, tourism and associated industries have also begun to have a significant boom within the district.

As such, for both the previous and current regimes, the North and the East became significant points of focus for development, under the banner that economic development would also organically promote a much-needed reconciliatory process. A brief sketch of the current situation in the district of Ampara highlights this well.

<sup>1</sup> The highest production of 14,844,000 bushels (309,733 MT) of paddy in the 2016-2017 was reported from Ampara District. Paddy production in Ampara District accounted for about 21% of paddy production of the country during the 2016/17 Maha season (Paddy Statistics, Department of Census and Statistics 2016-2017)

The district of Ampara, is spread across 4415 square kilometres of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka (The figure on the left is an administrative map of Ampara district). Ampara was initially part of the southeastern area of the Batticaloa District and was created as a separate entity in 1961. The adjacent chart shows the ethnic breakdown in Ampara as of the last census taken in 2014. Ampara is of particular curiosity for social cohesion as this is a district in which all three major ethnic groups have a presence. The majority ethnic group are the Muslim community, with the Sinhalese second and the Tamils third. The table on the right shows this breakdown. During the war, all three populations were subject to harassment, violence and displacement from both the Armed forces and the LTTE. A



A significant issue in this area is the lack of access to lands and land deeds. From the experience that we had in the field, this is a cross-communal issue, exacerbated by the networks of patrony where government officials favour those communities that they belong to. Other administrative problems also exacerbate this issue. As an example, the Sinhala Village of Deegavapiya, whilst geographically in Ampara district, is administratively placed in Trincomalee district. As such, villagers have to make special arrangements to go to Trincomalee in order to chase up issues with their land deeds and any other bureaucratic challenge. Additionally, caste disparities that had been silenced during the war are now resurfacing, specifically as issues that cause disharmony *within* discrete communities.

As a district identified as significantly conflict affected during the civil war, post-war Ampara has been a target for many urban and rural development initiatives. During the civil war, agriculture, fishing, livelihoods and tourism were severally affected, and various waves of displacement in the 1990s further affected the ability of livelihoods to thrive in the district. In the post-war period, many efforts were made towards economic recovery in the East by both government and non-government agents. NGOs and INGOs are also heavily involved in these development schemes.

(During the war )

Peace, coexistence, சமாதானம், சகவாழ்வு, ஐமல், ஐனலீவகல்

(Immediate post-war period)

Social co-existence and Unity சகவாழ்வு, ஒற்றுமை, ஐனலீவகல், ஐமலீவ

Current context (*Yahapalanaya*)

In terms of peacebuilding work, there are many initiatives such as the MercyCorps' programme for peace and reconciliation through sport, CAFOD's 'Equal and Active Voices' project, the National Peace Council's work to address religious tensions, the HerStories project of which the Ampara activity is conducted through the Akkaraipatthu Women Development Foundation, community based interfaith work through the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, ONUR's work on reconciliation through arts and culture, and the British Council's Active Citizenship Programme, amongst many others. This is exclusive of efforts from the Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Resettlement, efforts from the offices of the President and the Prime Minister and local projects initiated by the District and Divisional Secretariats<sup>2</sup>. There are also local interfaith and ecumenical networks of lay and religious leaders that have been active on issues of coexistence, peacebuilding and reconciliation for several decades. There is, therefore, **a surfeit of actors** working on peacebuilding and reconciliation, especially in the North and the East.

*"After this government came into power, we hear the term reconciliation the most. This government is all about reconciliation. Before we said peacebuilding."*

– Female Respondent, FGD Irrakkamam.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these last are funded through ONUR

Reconciliation is itself is now ubiquitous in the discourse surrounding Sri Lanka's post-war period, with the corresponding terms of *nallinakkam* (Tamil) and *sanhidiyawa* (Sinhala), being readily recognized amongst those persons that we interviewed, as well as being frequently deployed in the media. (See table above)

## Evaluation of the Helvetas DPSL Project.

Our work in the field yielded a wide range of insights with regards to the Helvetas project, as well as the challenges for reconciliation in Ampara. As the Reflecting on Peacebuilding Practices schema notes,

### A damn that built bridges

The building of a dam that then channelled water equally between the different communities is a significant point of note for this report. Prior to this, the Tamil community in the area did not receive an equal share of natural resources, and, as such, a practical solution provided better inter-ethnic feeling. The building of this dam was mentioned not only by those persons in the affected area, but also by some community leaders and respondents from other DS divisions. This is also indicative of the fact that, during the Helvetas project, communities moved and worked between DS divisions. In the Sinhala village, the solution provided to the water at Kuduvil was mentioned several times as an excellent way by which social cohesion was worked towards. This showcases **how a practical, shared project, that speaks directly to contextual needs builds peace and effects reconciliation.**

such evaluation essentially seeks to understand what worked, and what did not work, and what requires reframing (Ricigliano 2015). In order to ascertain this, and to isolate lessons learned and best practices, these findings are broken down by describing the **sustainability**, and **efficiency** of the project as evidenced by field interviews. Once again, it is important to reiterate that within Ampara district, however, we continually faced the challenge of attribution when trying to determine the sustainable impact of reconciliatory projects. This is, in part, due to the fact that there are many actors present in the region, many of whom have a more recent presence than Helvetas DPSL. Each 4 of these projects champions their own model for a "peace committee", and, as noted above, it is difficult to separate agent from the simple reference to "peace committee." Actors are directly remembered or referenced mostly when a beneficiary speaks about material assistance.



## 2.1 Efficiency

The theory of change deployed by Helvetas DPSL, as well as the models used for the deployment of and training for the various committees has a high degree of efficiency to its design, especially in terms of effecting its theory of change. During the course of our fieldwork, we frequently received two answers when we inquired after Helvetas DPSL. The first was related to the **technical assistance provided by the project**. There were respondents who could list, from memory, the items that they received through the Grower's Association. Respondents also often alluded to the building of a bus stops, a damn, and short loans given for agriculture. The training that Helvetas provided for boosting agriculture, and assisting those who had traditionally been employed in the now defunct sugar mills was often noted. Respondents also praised Helvetas' organizing of farmer's associations and the livelihood training that such projects engendered. We were frequently presented with reviews of the kinds of livelihood training that was offered through Helvetas DPSL. Respondents noted that shared training programmes were particularly helpful as well as encountering each other at sports competitions, and being encouraged to go to funerals and weddings. The Muslims issued invitations for *ifthar* programmes, and the Sinhala villages were visited for the *poson* festivities. Most agree that the relationships and connections, especially, between the three communities in the DS, Deegavapiya, Manikkamadu and Kuduvil, in the DS of Irrakamam were forged by Helvetas DPSL.

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The second response that we received described the **ability of the model to bring participants into dialogue with one another**, and, thereby, forge inter-ethnic friendships. In this way, over the course of the project, Helvetas DPSL can be said to have brought incremental changes in increasing levels of trust between the communities. The two responses below, from respondents in neighbouring villages, showcase sentiments with regards to the efficiency of the project in fostering dialogue:



*“We really remember the coexistence work. We were scared to go in those other villages before, then when we were friendly, we found it easier. We do Pooja in the manikamam kovil. We really appreciated the projects. We used to be very angry and have fear [sic] of them [Tamils]. Even if we hear Tamil language we were scared.”* – **Female Sinhalese respondent, Deegavapiya**

*“The Tamil and Muslim relations are good now. It was there even during the war in this place. [But] we had a fear of the Sinhalese. Helvetas helped us to demystify that fear. We have a lot of friends in Deegavapiya now.”*

– **Female Tamil respondent, Manikkamadu.**

The focus group in Navithanvely was also very affirming of the peace committees<sup>3</sup>, especially the strong administrative structure that it had provided. Interestingly, one respondent referred to the work done by the peace committee as “reconciliatory” work. He also provided us with an anecdote to describe what he meant by reconciliatory. What the anecdote illustrates well is that the peace committee model provided the space for confident dialogue and the diffusion of interethnic fear:

*“From a Tamil village, a cow went to a Sinhala village. The Sinhalese tied up the cow. The Tamil people in our village, could not even go and get the cow or ask for the release of the cow because they did not have dialogue with those Sinhalese. Because the peace committee existed, we had the confidence to go with them, and have the cow released.”* – **Male respondent, Navithanvely.**

A crucial contributor to this efficiency also, is that the projects and meetings were mobile, meeting in different villages and DS divisions, so that participants were encouraged to cross physical boundaries to interact with each other. Such movement is important as, throughout Ampara district, we noticed cultural boundary markers, such as the one depicted above.

## 2.2 Sustainability

We place sustainability and adaptability under one section in order to describe certain nuances surrounding the longevity of the Helvetas DPSL project. As the section above notes, our fieldwork found that the training programmes, projects and engagement through the PCCs and VCCs were successful in fostering dialogue and inter-ethnic friendships. Several years



*Peacebuilding Mural at cultural centre in Navithanvely*

later, however, while similar committees are still in existence, they are not brought together by the different communities themselves. Instead, they are often organized and convened by Peace and

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<sup>3</sup> This is another instance in which the respondent referred to the project as “peace committee” or PCA interchangeably.

Community Action. This organization has effectively used the same model for the PCCs and the VCCs for reconciliation projects. While the field officer was not able to suggest if there were any differences to the Helvetas model, he noted that what was changed in the present moment were the terms and discourses such as the concept of “reconciliation” rather than the concept of “peacebuilding”. As such, when these committees convene, they are referred to programmatically as “District Reconciliation Forums.” This is explained by the fact that not because the communities do not wish to work on peacebuilding, but simply because they rely on the organization to provide the financial, logistical and capacities to bring people together. Respondents, as well as PCA field officers noted that reconciliatory activity is not something that communities engage in individually. Additionally, as PCA is involved in reconciliation activities commissioned by or funded through other organisations, they have continued to use the Helvetas model for convening committees as they find the model to be particularly efficient.

*“Yes, the work we did with Helvetas, we are still doing some of that. But we do not do it as much as we did before. If PCA calls us then we go. The [PCA field officer] is the one who calls us the most. We go and talk about peace, how we can solve problems.”* **Male respondent, Uhana**

*“Before we got together and did lots of work. But little by little that has gone away. Now there is no committee. After they left it and came, then the committee easily disbanded. In 2010 in continued for a bit after they left we did it, more socially. Then the works stopped and the members dwindled.”* – **Male respondent, Kuduivil**

*Bus stop built by Helvetas DPSL in Irrakamam DS*



ongoing, practical needs.

The reason why these groups do not meet as often as they do is isolated to the fact that they require an organization that takes charge of the activity, to encourage the community to come together to have these conversations. Respondents noted that they preferred to have someone who could coordinate the effort, provide funding, and systematically mobilize. Respondents often said that people meet easily socially, or for social matters, but not for organizational needs. The exception are the Grower’s Associations, as these coalesce around

The lesson that this provides in terms of sustainability is that it highlights the dependence driven nature of reconciliation work. Respondents highlighting of a need for an organization to take charge of a peacebuilding activity underscores this dependence. In Ampara, especially, the surfeit of actors working on reconciliation can have the effect of diffusing grassroots level mobilization to work for peace. As one of our respondents noted, there are ‘reconciliatory thoughts’, but, in order to ensure responsible reporting, this paper recommends that in terms of future project design, the following questions be asked:

- **Is there reconciliatory momentum?**
- **How should project funding and assistance be reorganized in order to ensure that a politics of dependence is not sustained?**

It was clear, especially when viewed from the stance of efficiency, that there was a measurable impact in how attitudes were affected by the dialogue within communities. The longer lasting impacts have been from practical projects, such as building a dam, that not only brought communities into dialogue, but also **solved an everyday issue that was causing ethnic strife**. This is a key takeaway for further peacebuilding efforts.

*“No, no we don’t have any ethnic conflicts right now. Before [ with the Helvetas project] we got to know the others. Now we are a little far from each other. We have reconciliatory thoughts but we don’t meet because we don’t do projects together.” – Male Respondent, Deegavapiya*

The Helvetas DPSL model has also had a longer life in terms of the training that was provided to various members. Whilst these persons no longer operate within a committee, as the local community is aware that they have training in conflict resolution, they are often approached to solve small disputes on a case by case basis. As these persons are known to have taken the training, they are trusted to impartially arbitrate a conflict. This is a significant point in terms of understanding what elements of a peacebuilding project can have longevity, and points again to ensure that donor funding continues to aim at assisting with practical, context based, workable solutions.

### 2.3 Emergent and resurfacing conflicts and other barriers to reconciliation

Whilst it is true that there is a high degree of sustainability, efficiency, and adaptability to be found when evaluating the aftermath of the Helvetas DPSL project, there are also emergent and resurfacing issues that trouble reconciliation in the district of Ampara. They are discussed in the paragraphs below.

*“Outsiders are causing many issues. The main problem is land grab. People from Akkaraipattu and Sammanthurai are encroaching on our land. We are trying to work with the DS to change this.”* Female FGD respondent, Irrakamam.

**Governance:** The dysfunctional nature of local government is seen as a main barrier to sustainable reconciliation. This problem manifests in two different ways. The first is patrony, or perceived patrony. It was noted that local government officials and local ministers often only provide assistance and relief to the communities that they hail from. As an example, we were told that a Tamil District Secretary favours the local Tamil community, whilst the most powerful politician in the area, being a Muslim, creates opportunities for Muslim persons. Similarly, it was noted by the local PCA field officer that during the war, Sinhalese government officials openly favoured development and aid to the Sinhalese villages. As such, development becomes uneven. Many of the key persons interviewed agreed that it was important for local government to have measures that demonstrated transparency and accountability in order to ensure that such practices are not only thwarted, but also so that communities do not perceive that such preferential treatment occurs. The second way in which dysfunction in local government affects reconciliation is when these officials are unequipped or unable to attend to disputes in a timely and effective manner. This is especially true in terms of the land disputes and land grabs that continue to occur in Ampara district. We were repetitively told that, if the local government official was able to work efficiently, then many issues in obtaining land deeds, or ascertaining ownership would be solved. The long duration of such unsolved disputes is also causing inter and intra community tensions.

**Caste:** The resurfacing issue of caste is an urgent issue that requires serious attention and also a reframing of how peace work is done. Many of the key persons that we interviewed in the Tamil community were deeply aggrieved by this and spoke of moves they were making to address caste based divisions. It must be said that this finding on caste based divisions is one that continues to appear in work on the North and the East, and which is also now recognized by those actors collecting data for government organizations. Two responses describing this issue are directly quoted below:

*“Caste: this is greatly exacerbated and made definite in the kovils and religious places. The divisions appear clearly here. Kali kovila, has administration issues. The people in navithanvely have administrative issues, but the people here go there. There have been actual issues of violence. This happened during the kovil festival. Now the police often have to be around for peacekeeping during the festivals. Even during the kovil parade, we need the police for security. So here within one caste, there are 2 groups and they fight each other.”* **PCA field officer, Ampara**

*“The kovils are split amongst caste. Caste, religion, language, ethnicity, these are barriers for reconciliation. Sometimes they don’t allow interethnic renting either. Christian people are without lands. The kovil here has a lot of empty land. There was a poor Christian family, and they are low caste when they tried to purchase some land, the kovil wouldn’t sell to them because they cannot let Christians live there. Low caste also is a huge challenge to reconciliation.”* **Divisional Secretary Karaithivu.**

**Muslim versus Sinhala and Tamil relations:** There are growing tensions between the Muslim community and the Sinhalese and Tamil populations. It is evident that social cohesion in the district is beset by a series of new conflicts, specifically growing cleavages between the Muslim and Sinhalese and the Tamil and Sinhalese. Some cleavages also still exist between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Further to this, intra-communal issues, religious or caste-based divisions must also be attended to.

**Challenges in terms of economic development:** Uneven development and complex issues of poverty remain an ongoing source of tension, and are conflating emergent conflicts. There is a clear paucity of infrastructure in many areas, especially in terms of a lack of proper roads, and access to education. Often,

*“Lots of development has happened, but not all the things [developments] have happened. Sometimes only the town has received development, this has not extended into the villages, it’s difficult to say it has.”* – **Male FGD respondent, Navithanvely**

we would pass through a very highly developed area, with a significantly underdeveloped area in the very next village. Many respondents also noted that the high interest rates associated to microcredit schemes, and unethical practices by loan companies were creating new challenges for local communities. There are also many local challenges due to poor capacity in local government, poor facilities for education, infrastructural improvements, and other essential services, such as medicine and communication that require

development. Development is also highly politicized, with certain groups benefiting if a member of their community is in a position of political power. Economic development must have a simultaneous and symbiotic relationship with the transformational work of reconciliation, but this relationship, too, must be attuned to reflect local realities and tailored to different districts. When speaking of economic challenges, many note the long-running issue of a lack of land deeds, a lack of quality educational facilities,

and the monopoly of markets by war time entrepreneurs, the dysfunction of local and national government authorities in allowing for this economic development to continue at a steady pace. To another end, what we also noted and were made aware of through interviews is that long-term structural issues are not addressed by the organisations - governmental or non-governmental - that are championing peacebuilding and reconciliation. There is a need at both local and national level that attends to these needs; specifically forward and tangible action with such initiatives as the office for missing persons, measures to ensure good governance at the local level, and attending to horizontal inequalities such as caste, class and religious tensions in both inter and intra communal settings.

## Key Conclusions

When looking at the overall picture of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Ampara District, this report finds that the DPSL project was successful in bringing different groups into conversation with each other. This sparked friendships and assisted with dispelling previously held suspicions and fears. Whilst these friendships and dialogues are remembered, not all of them continue to this day. Some of this is due to the changing socio-political context of the area, but it can also be attributed to the fact that **communities are reliant on organisations to bring them together for these dialogues to occur. The peace committee model that does continue is under the aegis of the local organisation Peace and Community Action, and uses the structure of the Helvetas mdoel.** Where Helvetas was most successful is in such projects as the tying of the dam at Kuduivil, where, a water shortage was creating inter-communal dispute. The dam project took away the reason for conflict and thereby occasioned more harmonious coexistence. **Helvetas DPSL is also explicitly remembered for the material assistance and assistance for livelihoods and training provided.** To fully understand the lessons learned and results of the study it is important to differentiate between a higher and structural level, and a lower or local level.

### Overall takeaway:

The model of the PCCs and the VCCs may prove beneficial as part of a national project but would need to be adapted to the post-war climate, and attentive to the long-term needs of each local context. A policy paper to this end will be produced by CEPA. If the DPSL project were to be revived, it would need to take a step further than bringing communities into dialogue, but would be attuned to social and political transformation. Reconciliation in the current climate is being hampered by deep



politicization of ethnic tensions, and little willingness to situate policy in historical understanding. Additionally, it is important to have, continuous awareness raising on reconciliation, grassroots level engagement, coordination of multiple actors, multiple voices, an organic, flexible roll out, and attention to horizontal inequalities.

### **Key higher level takeaways:**

1. Local level focus could be expanded to involve DS offices and local inter-community federations: The DPSL very much focused on the local level, and therefore it is difficult to ascertain effects at the higher levels. Collaborating with higher or district level voices would prove effective, especially when considering the structural issues that need to be addressed.
2. Local governance requires attention: Pressing structural issues related to (local) governance such as transparency and accountability require ongoing attention. Targeted empowerment and improvement of local government officials is also essential to this process.

### **➤ Recommendation**

Any further programmatic or policy work in the same vein as DPSL would need to attend to long-term and structural issues which include:

1. Access to and efficient functioning of local authorities.
2. Disputes over land ownership.
3. Uneven development and paucity of infrastructure in some areas.
4. Growing tensions between the Muslim community and the Sinhalese and Tamil populations.
5. Youth unemployment issues, especially in the Eastern province.
6. Politicization of ethnic tensions.
7. Access to and improvements in higher education, vocational training and IT training.
8. Addressing rising levels of debt associated to micro-credit loans.

### **Local level takeaways:**

1. The committee model works effectively : The model for the PCCs and VCCs has proved useful in creating dialogue groups, and has been used by PCA for its continued work in the district.. The



administrative structures created by the project in the case of growers associations and Village Co-existence committees seem to be rather robust.

➤ **Recommendation**

The model of the PCCs and the VCCs may prove beneficial as part of a national project but would need to be adapted to the post-war climate, and attentive to the long-term needs of each local context. A policy paper to this end is being produced CEPA.

2. Combine hard and soft approaches: As with the example of the tying of the dam at Kuduvil, where the Helevetas DPSL project brought the community together to implement a practical solution to a situation that was causing ethnic tension. The project provided space for different communities to befriend and work with each other. Shared community projects created a platform for dialogue

➤ **Recommendation**

Constant, repetitive visits at the local level that allow for understanding of sources of inter-communal tension, and working with the community to address these issues directly. Consider to moving away from stand-alone Peace projects and address the conflicts in an integrated and equally professional manner. Understanding grassroots level dividers and co-designing and implementing solutions are high impact ways in which to build social cohesion.

3. Reduction of fear can be sustainable over time: As proved by our interviews, the community interactions allowed for trust and friendship to be fostered, a memory that has lasted over the past ten years. Additionally, respondents noted that they no longer felt fear traversing areas belonging to other communities.

➤ **Recommendation**

Repetitive engagement at the local level, “reunion” meetings can help to continue this feeling, especially against resurfacing and emergent conflicts. Intergenerational sharing of meeting and interacting with members of other communities is also recommended.

4. External facilitation is crucial: For PCCs to continue, external facilitation was crucial. There is no internal grassroots momentum.

➤ **Recommendation**

Continuous awareness raising on reconciliation, in particular engaging the community in building “what reconciliation means to you.” Continuous community based education and learning that raises awareness on reconciliation and peacebuilding measures is necessary. This is especially important when we note that the drive for reconciliation is mostly programmatic, it does not come from the communities. An example of community learning is found in Sarvodaya’s current higher education model.

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