



Policy Brief: The aftermath of the Swiss Development and Peace Project Sri Lanka (DPSL)



Key Findings

- The Development and Peace Sri Lanka Project was successful in bringing different groups into conversation with each other. Research indicates the high degree of efficiency the project model has for fostering dialogue.
- The Project has a high degree of sustainability as the model is still being used by a local organisation for peacebuilding initiatives.
- Those who received training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution via the DPSL Helvetas project are still consulted on individual and case-by-case basis to resolve conflicts as they arise.
- The model of the Peace and Coexistence Committees (PCCs) and the Village Coexistence Committees (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.

SUMMARY

This Policy Brief discusses the key recommendations from field work on the aftermath of the HELVETAS “Development and Peace Sri Lanka” (DPSL) project, which was carried out in the East of Sri Lanka from 2000-2010, financed by Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). It summarizes the findings of a formative ex-post evaluation and highlights certain foci that would allow for the project to be taken forward on a local or a national level in the current context. This brief draws not only from the HELVETAS study but also from post-war development assessments conducted by CEPA, as well as the author’s own engagement with local level policymaking on reconciliation in Sri Lanka. This brief reflects on findings from fieldwork conducted in Ampara, in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka.

1. CONTEXT

Sri Lanka is still in a post-war situation, in which the government, civil society and associated actors are focussing on the best processes for reconciliation and transitional justice. Although the war ended in 2009, at the time of writing, this process is yet to make any substantial headway and is being further troubled by emergent communal tensions and economic inequalities.

The findings provided in this Policy Brief are based on the said study and are intended to contribute to policy recommendations for the creation of a future project that focusses on reconciliation at a national level.

“We really remember the coexistence work. We were scared to go in (to) 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.

2. KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE STUDY

Higher level takeaways

- A. The work on the local level could be expanded to involve DS offices and local inter-community federations: Collaborating with higher or district level voices would prove effective, especially when considering the structural issues that need to be addressed.
- B. Local and higher-level governance requires attention: Pressing structural issues related to (local) governance such as transparency and accountability require ongoing attention. Targeted enhancement of systems and empowerment of local government officials is essential to this process.

Lower level takeaways

- A. The DPSL committee model works effectively: The model of stimulating of the creation of PCCs and VCCs has proved useful in creating dialogue groups, and has been used by the local partner Peace and Community Action (PCA) for its continued work in the district. The administrative structures created by the project in the case of grower’s associations and VCCs seem to be rather robust.
- B. Combine hard and soft approaches: Practical solutions, such as the tying of a dam in Kuduivil that caused ethnic tensions, provide sustainable solutions. The project provided space for different communities to befriend and work with each other. Shared community projects created a platform for dialogue.
- C. Reduction of fear can be sustainable over time: The community interactions allowed for trust and friendship to be fostered, a memory that has lasted over the past ten years and sustained peace.
- D. External facilitation is crucial: For systematic and regular reconciliation activity to be sustained, external facilitation is crucial. There is no internal grassroots momentum beyond individual activities.

3. EMERGENT AND RESURFACING CONFLICTS

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. Fieldwork conducted by CEPA for other projects notes that similar issues trouble reconciliation and transitional justice in other parts of the country, as the recent anti-Muslim violence in the Central Province has shown.

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*. The second is the long duration necessary for individual disputes to be resolved at a local government level.

Caste

The resurfacing issue of caste is an urgent issue that requires serious attention and also a reframing of how peace work is done. 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.

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 various districts across the country is beset by a series of new conflicts, specifically growing cleavages between the Muslim and Sinhalese and the Tamil and Sinhalese. Much of this stems from a continued 'othering' of the Muslim community, a narrative that is also now extending to the Christian community. Some cleavages also still exist between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

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.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following constitute recommendations and ways for taking the DPSL project forward in both a local (Ampara) and national (Sri Lankan) context. It also highlights key actors for collaboration. It is key to note that there is no "quick, high impact" way in which to do reconciliation.

Key characteristics of a future plan:

- Constant, repetitive visits at the village level by the lead organisation for the reconciliation project
- Continuous awareness raising on reconciliation
- Grassroots level engagement
- Coordination of multiple actors, multiple voices

- An organic, flexible roll out
- Attention to horizontal inequalities

Key take-aways are as follows:

Recommendation 1:

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

- Access to and efficient functioning of local authorities (National)
- Disputes over land ownership (Ampara)
- Uneven development and paucity of infrastructure in some areas (North and East)
- Growing tensions between the Muslim community and the Sinhalese and Tamil populations (National)
- Youth unemployment issues, especially in the Eastern province (Eastern, Central and Northern Province)
- Politicization of ethnic tensions (National)
- Access to and improvements in higher education, vocational training and IT training (National)
- Rising levels of debt associated to micro-credit loans (National)

Think in long-term ways, and initiate dialogues with government authorities in order to effect such change. It would be necessary to recognize projects, such as FOKUS's engagement with female headed households, that are bringing marginalized voices into the national dialogue. Key Ministries: Land and Parliamentary Reforms, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation

Recommendation 2:

Continue the model of the PCCs and VCCs for national level peacebuilding work with a focus on combining hard and soft approaches. A key avenue for this will be through the District Reconciliation Forums being set up countrywide through the National ministry for Integration and Reconciliation.

Recommendation 3:

Conduct 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.

Recommendation 4:

Conduct 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. Key agents to work with on a national strategy would be the Secretariat for Coordination Reconciliation Mechanisms, Sarvodaya, and Search for Common Ground.

Recommendation 5:

Ensure the coordination and inclusion of multiplicity of actors is a necessary learning point. It is important to champion an interdisciplinary and multiple stakeholder led process for reconciliation that includes the government, civil society, international agents and, importantly, members of the public. Working with the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms and the National ministry for Integration and Reconciliation would allow for such coordination.

Recommendation 6:

Reflect on and craft of new methodologies for engendering and measuring reconciliation. Our current reconciliation discourses are framed too narrowly. This report would recommend championing a home-grown methodology, created through wide consultation with ministries, beneficiaries and, especially, local authorities. A national plan could include space for growing knowledge production in this regard by targeting think tanks and local civil society organisations.

Recommendation 7:

Target peacebuilding work that focusses on particularity of local context as well as total social and political transformation. This is especially important when we note that the area continues to exhibit old tensions, and also has a sense of emergent conflict. Key ministries for such a collaboration would be Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, National ministry for Integration and Reconciliation.

Recommendation 8:

This report also urges the advocacy of the establishment of an independent, apolitical commission that provides a stable base for reconciliation programming.

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REFERENCES/MORE INFORMATION

For more information please see “The Long and Winding Road: A report on the Aftermath of the Helvetas DPSL Project”, Finalised February 2018: (link)

For further information on post-war development findings referred to in this document, please visit www.cepta.lk

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