

Challenges of IDP Resettlement: Post conflict Return and Resettlement Process in Sri Lanaka

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The paper examines the challenges and obstacles related to return and resettle IDPs during the ceasefire period and in the post-conflict resettlement process after end the three decades of civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009². Internal displacement has become a tragic consequence of almost three decade of armed conflict in Sri Lanka. In the ceasefire period in 2002-2006 and after declaring the military victory against LTTE by the government of Sri Lanka in May 2009, the process of peace building has been envisaged under several programs and projects. Resettling IDPs in their places of origin became a prime task under the resettlement programs to rebuild the normalcy life of displaced people. It is equated with the achievement of a sustainable return and the ability of the IDPs to secure social, economical, and political conditions needed for their livelihoods. The aim is to understand the role of the socioeconomic and security factors that affect as obstacles to resettle people in the original places. The study has revealed various factors that have influenced the IDPs decision to return to their original villages or remain in the host communities. The study has found that the answer is not that simple. On the contrary, the factors are complex and interrelated. Consequently, one of the main findings is that multiple factors need to be understood in relation to the situation of the return and resettlement of IDPs. Qualitative data for the study were collected mainly through interviews, including long interviews, key informant interviews Extensive field research was undertaken at villages in the districts of Vavuniya and Anuradhapura.

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

INTRODUCTION

With a global crisis millions of people internally displaced and resettled from all over the world every year as consequences of development projects, natural disasters and civil conflicts. Hence, over the past three decades resettlement has come to be designated by the international community of states and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the solution to the global refugee and internal displace persons (IDP) problem. Local integration and resettlement in a new location have been de-emphasized and they concerned return to original places would be the better solution for the displacement problem. Owing to the various causes and consequences of population displacement, government and non-government sector involved in resettling them in their original places, and the multiple conceptual and disciplinary approaches to framing these issues. As a concept, resettlement of IDPs generally, becomes 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 another part of the country³.

This paper mainly explore the reasons why and how majority of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) reluctance to go back to their original villages. The paper has provided an empirical analysis on the role of social, economic factors that have worked as obstacles to resettle the IDPs back to the original villages. The study has

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² First part of the study was carried out in the year 2006 for the Doctoral Thesis on "Making a Home: Internal Displacement and Resettlement Processes in Sri Lanka 2002-2006. PhD Thesis, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. 2017, published by the University of Gothenburg. The study conducted again in 2014 by the author after end of the armed conflict in 2009. The actual hosts village names are not disclosed with a view to protect anonymity.

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007b), 'Benchmarks for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons', Washington DC, p.2, Lang Hazel & Knudsen Anita (2008 June) Protracted Conflict: Protection Challenges and Humanitarian Agencies, Accessed from <<http://www.austcare.org.au/media/56973/arcslankabp-lowres.pdf>> on (08.09.2010)

focused mainly on the IDPs who self-settled in the host communities and stayed in the Welfare Centres (WCs) during the ceasefire period and post conflict period in Sri Lanka from 2009.

Related to Sri Lanka's situation, where they have entered into the post-war phase, IDPs' issues are considered a vital factor in their peace building, development and reconstruction processes. Usually, the resettlement of the IDPs at their places of residence causes huge strains for the responsible bodies unless done in a proper manner. Therefore, this process needs international assistance in order 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 re-settling families before they are resettled. In most of the policy-oriented discussions and United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement principle, attention was focused on repatriation and return of displaced persons, and the resultant policy was to be implemented immediately after the cessation of war. Although arrangements were streamlined to enable the IDPs to return to their original places of residence, their interest to do so appeared to gradually diminish, with a great majority refraining from moving out of their temporary places of residence. Some of them openly expressed their unwillingness to go back.

The aim is to understand the role of the socioeconomic factors that affect as obstacles to resettle people in the original places compared with the IDPs host communities. To explore this central question, this paper examines three main factors: social relationships, economic relationships. The paper explores how the IDPs maintain social relationships amidst with original areas and the roles of their kinship, friendship, and other networks in building new lives and considers livelihood and livelihood strategies as economic activities. Further, the study focuses on the fear and insecurities among the IDPs in the situation when returned to their original villages. In sum, this paper establishes how these factors operated as obstacles for them to return to their original villages.

METHODOLOGY

The study has primarily adopted a qualitative approach. Data for the research have been collected using primary as well as secondary sources of data. The qualitative data in this study were collected mainly through interviews, including long interviews, key informant interviews, ethnographic observations and focus group interviews. 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, book chapters, 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.

For the field work of the study selected the districts of Anuradhapura and Vavuniya. The majority of the residents in the threatened Sinhalese villages in *Vavuniya South* and *Weli-Oya* in districts of Vavuniya and Anuradhapura respectively. This paper focuses attention on Sinhalese IDPs displaced from their threatened 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 communities were the forgotten community regarding the displacement and resettlement process affected by the war. Nevertheless, in this study some data were gathered from the Muslim and Tamil IDPs.

RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement of IDPs generally, becomes the main focus for governments of each particular state. However, it is one of the more diffuse and misunderstood concepts in field of forced migration. Resettlement has long been construed for the background for social engineering and an opportunity to establish political, economic, and demographic transformation. Chambers (1969: 34) described resettlement schemes as 'experiments in nation-building in miniature' while Scudder (1973) introduced the concept of 'ecological imperialism' to highlight the ways in which resettlement schemes represented an extension of the international economic system into new domains. However, most scholars arrived at critical conclusions regarding their outcomes: resettlement exhibited

immense destructive potential in relation to human lives and livelihoods. Sutton (1977) and Scudder (1973) observed that resettlement often faltered precisely because it was not initiated 'from within' (or below) but rather by social actors who negated complexity. They attributed poor returns to the inability of resettlement planners to reconcile modern and 'traditional' value-systems. Forced migration scholars critically examined the effects of resettlement – particularly on minority and indigenous groups – and in some cases identified strategies to mitigate and reverse the pathologies that frequently accompanied the process (Grabska and Mehta 2009).

Although repeated and documented failures of resettlement to create 'durable solutions' for those involved, expectations of the potential dividends expanded in the intervening decades (Cernea and Mathur 2008; Cernea 1999). Although less optimistic than the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) (1998) observed that successful resettlement of conflict and disaster affected populations could be administered in such a way that was equitable and free of discrimination, accounted for the safety and dignity of the 'beneficiaries', ensured fair compensation for lost land, income, and assets and involved the 'full participation of the [internally] displaced in public affairs.'² These criteria, they also argued, formed the basis of durable solutions.

If displacement is supposed as temporary dislocation, resettlement is envisioned as a permanent process of relocation. In the case of conflict and natural disaster induced internal displacement and resettlement, planned relocation is designed in such a way as to ensure a permanent solution. But practices and experience frequently deviate from expectations. In theory, resettlement is designed in such a way as to (re)produce self-sustaining or self-reliant communities. Despite the unfamiliar (social and geographic) layout of the new schemes and surrounding area – resettlement planners expect that they will lead to durable solutions if prepared adequately in advance and in consultation with affected populations. Paradoxically, resettlement schemes only occasionally contribute to the emergence of successive generations of viable self-reliant or productive communities (Cernea and McDowell 2000). Rather, planned resettlement schemes are often prematurely abandoned by project implementers and resettlers a short-time after they are established .

Both policy makers 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 the refugee crises (Cuny and Stein, 1990; Allen and Morsink, 1994). Yet, at the end of the 1990s, the idea that return was the ultimate point of the cycle where refugees could be restored back 'home' was questioned (Black and Koser, 1999). Studies of refugees who had gone back 'home' indicated the complexity of their experience, characterized by economic, psychological, and social difficulties as obstacles to return (Ghanem, 2003; Bascom, 2005).

Research on going back could be perceived as covering two main trends: imagining the return and the reality of post-return. Return is an imagination, through concepts like the meaning of home and belonging and remembering of the past (Said, 2000; McMichael, 2002; Schulz, 2003) and the major concept of the myth of return (Al-Rasheed, 1994; Zetter, 1999; Israel, 2000). Return has been represented as a complete ideological system and an image of the future, and it is the only end-solution to the existing issue (Schulz, 2003). But the reality of post-return focuses attention on challenges like those researched in the contexts of post-conflict reconciliation and re-integration (Dona, 1995; Kumar, 1996; Long and Oxfeld, 2004; Arowolo, 2000). The gap between pre- and post-return is connected by studies that emphasize the impact of return on exiles (Farwell 2001; Rousseau et al., 2001), return as one period of ongoing migration (Ossman, 2004), and the experience of a visit home (Israel 2000; Barnes 2001) as a 'provisional return' (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006). The return of the IDPs has also been studied as 'fluid'; IDPs may reside in "dual residences, "home and the host community (Wanninayake, 2017). In some cases the family members remained in the host area, whenever the head of the household visited the original village. It was only one or two adults from the family who went to the original area while the young and children stayed in the host area. However, the head of the household had to be present in the original village when the government officials or NGO field staff inspected the village for registration or to provide assistance (Wanninayake, 2017).

Push and Pull Perspective and Displacement, Return and Resettlement

The push and pull perspective has played a vital role in research related to labor migration, and to some extent in refugee and displacement movements (Sorensen, 1996). They differ from the other factors discussed in relation to the structural causes of movement rather than on the impacts of displacement and resettlement. These highlight the motivations and expectations of migrants or displaced persons. In the last century, a large number of people moved from rural to urban areas. The push and pull model aims to identify those socioeconomic and political factors that force people to leave their hometowns, on the one hand, as well as the factors that attract people to the new locations, on the other hand. Push-pull factors suggest that circumstances at the original place of residence push people out to other places that exert a positive attraction or pull. This model can be approached from two different angles. First, it concentrates on the institutional factors in the socioeconomic and political context in which the specific conditions of the various regions are shaped. Second, from the perspective of individual migrants, it focuses on the decision-making process in which the different push and pull factors are assessed and acted upon (Assal, 2007).

When it comes to trying to specify the particular reasons for flight, particularly in the context of war-induced forced displacement, the pressures mainly include discrimination, violence, real or feared discrimination, and experiences of suffering. For many people, the decision to start in a new area is not a result of growing local pressures and fear alone. However, it should also be seen as a response to the attractions and promises that the place of destination presents. Among the most regular or common pull factors mentioned in the literature is demand for labor, availability of land, and good economic opportunities (Castless and Miller, 1993). For refugees or IDPs, the hope of getting asylum and being able to live a peaceful life are common factors pulling them across borders.

According to some scholars, a push and pull perspective or framework was combined with the sociological and anthropological approaches that gave more emphasis to the integration processes and to the role of social networks based on kinship relationships or other links with people (Van Hear, 1994; Assal, 2007). However, later, many scholars used it to identify the transnational networks among migrant refugees through the relationships with relatives and friends (Assal, 2007).

This model draws our attention to the importance of considering the motivation and expectations of migrants, which are closely linked to the experiences and reactions of people displaced or to be displaced in their movement. This framework can be used in analyzing the resettlement issues, as it emphasizes the linkages that exist between the IDPs original villages and the host community (destination), but this dimension, which is very important, has been neglected by researchers (Sorensen 1996). Particularly in the issue of war-induced displacement, mainly in the internal displacement context, the push factors can be approached from two different ways.

BRIFE DESCRIPTION OF RESETTLEMENT PROCESS IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is a small country of around 20 million people off the Southern coast of India. While the world hopes that the long civil war in Sri Lanka is coming to an end and the needs and rights of the approximately 600,000 displaced will be addressed, it is helpful to consider the lessons of a country that faced and continues to face massive settlement and resettlement issues. Displacement and resettlement issues have been on the agenda in the recent past because of civil war that have had a significant impact on Sri Lanka. The war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), from 1983 to 2009, devastated lives and livelihoods of people, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country.

The war claimed the lives of an estimated more than 100,000 people and uprooted more than one million people, often several times, with the large majority internally displaced in the island (IDMC, 2012). It has been estimated that up to 1.7 million people were displaced at different periods between 1983 and 2009 (IDMC, 2012). There were many programs that regarding return and resettlement have been implemented by the Sri Lanka government and international and local non-government organizations during the peace agreement in 2002-2006 and post conflict from 2009. According to many studies and practical situation of the country, in spite of the fact that more than ten years has broke out the armed conflict, resettlement issue are still awake with the displaced people during the armed conflict and post conflict in 2009 in the displacement areas in the country. 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 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 war, 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 civil conflict, the government embarked on an ambitious program of resettlement and reconstruction. The government and other organizations initially paid some attention to the IDPs return and resettlement; however, with time, they changed their position with regard to resettlement, self-settlement, and relocation of the IDPs. Specifically, the Government of Sri Lanka implemented some programs (“Uthuru Wasanthaya” “Neganahira Udanaya”) that provided incentives for the IDPs to return to their original villages (Wanninayake, 2017). However, in reality, the prevailing environment discouraged this return. Return was not always possible or even desired by the IDPs. It depended on the situation in both the original villages and the host communities (Wanninayake, 2017).

Return and resettlement process are varying complex in Sri Lankan context during the ceasefire period and even the post war period. Protracted conflict often creates new environments in the process of return and resettlement. 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, 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. A combination of issues including the global economic crisis, other conflicts and natural disasters and the inability for many internationals to work in Sri Lanka due to stringent bureaucracy resulted in funding being slashed for humanitarian work. The expenses in maintaining and upgrading camps and providing assistance to IDPs had to be factored in by donors and agencies who were facing funding cuts. This coupled with the Government’s inability to provide comprehensive care for all affected communities, resulted in speedy return and resettlement. Another key political development that impacted speedy return and resettlement in the North was the Presidential elections 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. The combination of the above resulted in thousands suddenly being moved from closed camps to their districts of origin or being resettled.

However, the resettlement process was not activated properly as wished by the government and other agencies due to many reasons. Resettlement was part of the rehabilitation of the IDPs and others who were affected. Many programs were required for the resettlers to regain their lost status and enter the mainstream society. The productive and socioeconomic 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 due mainly to lack of staff. Many displaced people

were unable to return because their houses and surrounding areas were occupied by armed forces or paramilitary groups or by other displaced persons or because their homes were partially or fully destroyed. Many areas were contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnances. Lack of humanitarian assistance and continuing human rights violations were major factors affecting the return of the IDPs (IDMC, 2012).

EMPRICAL FINDINGS

It appears that in Sri Lanka, IDPs had faced many practical problems for a long time in making decisions on their settlements. It is clear that in the protracted situation of the conflict, they would never be able to go back to their original villages easily. Although, some issues had been solved by the people through their own initiative and efforts, some problems remained. However, the governmental as well as NGOs had opened some opportunities in this direction. The protracted conflict situation either renewed or intensified this problem from time to time. Varying types of factors act as *push* factors from the original villages, which can have various effects on the unwillingness of the IDPs to return and resettle in their original villages. These factors can function as obstacles for the IDPs to return and resettle in the original villages and prevent them from attaining normalcy in the living conditions in the area. When the fieldwork for this study was being done, a few of the IDPs had already gone back to their original villages in all three of the locations that we have considered in this study. A small minority of them expressed their willingness to stay in their original villages, but they say that the majority of the people who lived in the area had not gone back to their original villages from the host area where they settled down after being displaced.

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 replaced 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 by 'caterpillars.' 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. Observations were initiated at the end of 2005, to provide background information of the area. However, there was a complex situation regarding the return and resettlement process.

However, in the case of the IDPs in the Vavuniya and Weli-Oya area, their past lost represents the physical loss of houses and other property in their original villages. According to the fieldwork data, after 15-20 years of displacement, the situation in the original villages was nothing like it had been before and most of it had vanished, with poor living conditions and few facilities remaining in the area.

However, there were varying *obstacles* that prevented families from resettling in the original villages in the first two types of resettlement villages besides the last type of resettlement village. The reality can be gauged by identifying each of the obstacles separately and discussing them one by one. This will help to clarify the reasons why some IDPs were reluctant to resettle in their original villages., Resettlement programs were being implemented in this manner at varying levels. The decision-making regarding the arrival of people to settle down, the failures and successes in resettlement, as well as the desire to continue to stay in the same location, together with misuse influenced IDPs to settle down in the area in a direct manner.

Lack of Social Relationships/Networks and Reciprocity

After being displaced for several years, those who returned to their original villages, to some extent, had been deprived of the social relationships that had existed earlier. When families were displaced, the entire

relationships and networks were disrupted and restoring them to the earlier state was viewed as extremely challenging.

People showed that number of relationships and networks that had been built among the villagers, some based on kinship and friendship and others based on marriage. They also shared self-help initiatives and mutual labor exchanges. It is a cooperative norm called reciprocity. These cooperative norms encourage people to get together, engage in collective action, share knowledge, preserve common resources, and share labor. A very common example of sharing labor in the village level is the *aththam* (mutual help) system. It is a traditional practice of shared labor, particularly in farming activities. As one resettled farmer said “when we used to work in the paddy fields in the early days, we often practiced *aththam*, but now no work is done here even on a daily basis.” As a community, they had practiced various types of mutual exchange patterns, not only for labor, but also for food, farming tools, money, and other needs in daily life.

As a new community, they could practice new social relationships and build networks, but the problem was the poor arrival of the resettled people in the original village, which is the main obstacle for re-building their 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 labor-based lifestyles need to have reciprocal relationships among them to continue their lives in the area.

Adopting or attracting people in to the host area is another obstacle to the resettlement process in the original villages. Many people are looking for their former community and former relationships. Hence, the resettlement process in the village was not perceived as successful. Many people had kept their relationships with those in the host area. However, it does not mean that the resettlement process for all of the villages in the area was a failure because of only a few or weak social relationships or networks among the people or with the resettlement area. A few villages were successful for particular reasons. Two NGOs, namely, NRC and DRC, had implemented a housing and sanitation scheme and also a project to provide credit to the re-settlers. Based on this reintegration program, the structure of the village had evolved.

In addition, according to some other key informants, there was another reason behind their return and resettlement. The village was very poor, and lower-caste Tamils lived in the isolated village in the border area. When they were displaced, they had the option to go somewhere and self-settle or stay with their relatives, as the other villages consisted of higher-caste Tamil people. Hence, they had to stay in the WCs during their displacement. And for them, living in the border area did not mean too many security threats from the LTTE, as they were Tamil civilians living there.

According to some of the respondents, the Sinhalese, Tamil, and other ethnic groups did not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, and they had maintained various forms of linkages and social relationships, networks, reciprocity such as economic transactions and also cultural and political affiliations. All of these forms existed earlier. According to many people, although there were certain kinds of problems, 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. To those who were reluctant to go back after the long-term absence, it appears as a challenge.

War has demolished everything: we lost our land, house, and other property as well as people and their mutual relationships (Int80/MS/R/VS).

In relation to this statement, there are two problems 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. 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.

We were displaced from our land from Vavuniya North. We will pay later for this land; if they sell or if they return ,we will return the land and the house (Relocated Tamil person - Vavuniya South).

The study revealed that several issues in the original areas regarding their social relationships. When the IDPs return to their original villages, some of the land and houses were occupied by newcomers. The newcomers cultivated some of the paddy lands, while some of the land had been abandoned and had overgrown with natural vegetation. Then there were some conflicts between the returnees and the newcomers instead of rebuilding their relationship. In preparation for resettlement, the condition of the villages differed from village to village. Lack of social relationships/networks and reciprocity and lack of inter-ethnic relations were the main factors for affecting the reintegration of people into the new environment in the original villages.

Lack of economic Relations and Distressed Livelihoods

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

According to Benedikt Korf, the civil war 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.' The people face multiple risks and uncertainties caused by many factors. The loss of economic assets due to displacement and conflict is huge, and the majority of returnees need to restart their livelihoods from scratch. In addition to lost revenue due to displacement, the situation is 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. Fishermen have lost their boats, motors, nets, and other fishing equipment. Business persons have lost their equipment, property, and business leases. Korf's above statement describes the consequences of the protracted civil war, the background situation of the war-torn area, and the livelihood situation of the people in the area. These chapters make an effort to show almost all these factors that influence the IDPs reluctance to return to, or *push* people from, their place of origin. For this purpose, the study discusses the economic factors under selected sub-themes. Hence, this chapter is concerned with *distressed livelihood* and *livelihood strategies, poor farming and agricultural activities, lack of access to the former land and occupation, food insecurity, poor education, health facilities and other infrastructure facilities*, in short the economic situation in the IDPs original villages.

Livelihood strategies, nevertheless, have quite a different impact on each of the three research locations. In some locations in Vavuniya South, villagers pursue their existing traditional livelihood activities and farming systems, even though under a frame of constrained conditions. In other locations, such as Weli-Oya and Vavuniya North, the conflict has forced the villagers to leave traditional resources behind and go in search of alternative livelihood options. In Tamil- resettled villages in Vavuniya South, farmers have opted for new opportunities, that is, leaving traditional paddy cultivation behind, they now earn considerable cash income from highland cultivation and from engaging in wage labor, thus, putting them into a comparative economic advantage over traditional tenant paddy cultivators. In many of the border villages in the entire area, many of the Sinhalese males depend 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*.

Paddy cultivation was the most important livelihood source before they displaced from the area, while doing chena cultivation and growing other field crops due to seasonal variations or when the rainfall is not sufficient for regular paddy cultivation. However, earlier people followed both cultivation methods; in addition, a few people in the area had been attached to some other occupation as their livelihood strategies. Some of them were engaged in vegetable production, particularly, using groundwater through agro-wells. Banana, chilies, shallots (red onions), beans, and cabbage were the main crops for the highland cultivation. In these villages, there were several persons who had been engaged in small-scale businesses; there were also traders, and a few people were occupied with businesses, for instance, buying and selling goods, fishing, and doing wage labor. In addition, there were a very few persons who were occupied in the state sector with middle-class jobs in the villages, and all these people had been engaged in paddy cultivation as their main livelihood strategy.

I was able to place my foot on my land after 20 years. I am surprised at what I see. I wonder whether it is my village. Our village was a very fertile one those days. Now that attraction has disappeared. There is jungle all around. That is where Lionel *mudalali* (a businessman) had his trade center. Those days, many vehicles were parked there (Int10/MS/ID/GMw).

When they returned in post war 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 individual 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.

Poor Accessibility to Former Land and Occupation

I came here because of the 'Land Kachechi⁴.' It has given a plot of land to my father. But *this* block of land was not my father's property. It was owned by someone else. My father's land is beyond this property (Int40/MT/R/VS).

The main problem of being unable to return and resettle in their original villages was difficulties to access their former lands. The duration of absence from the area is one important factor for the conditions and the situation of the lands. Most of the abandoned land had been overgrown and the jungle had taken over. The continuous problem of the remaining landmines also affects the possibilities of using the land. Further, it is a difficult task to clearly identify specific land areas, as well as ownership of land. Since a large part of the land previously owned by the IDPs is now occupied by new residents (they are most probably also IDPs from other areas), the issue of ownership is further complicated.

Those who resettled are asking for deeds. For the convenience of those who have lost these documents, we have to do a survey before issuing them documents. Now all the land is engulfed in the jungle.....(KIint5/MS/H/VS).

Some major legal difficulties have occurred as time goes on and more land becomes reoccupied. Many problems 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 (NRC, April 2005, p. 25). 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.

Another major issues 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. Both the government forces and the LTTE have separated some lands as their security zones in the northern areas. Hence, the establishment of high security zones was one of the main obstacles to poor accessibility to the former land (Int74/MT/ID/SW).

⁴ Land Kachechi "means a meeting held in the prescribed manner for the purpose of alienating State land.

The major income source from the area was rice production. Almost every family in these villages owned 5 to 15 acres of paddy land or even larger. Those paddy lands were cultivated during both *maha* and *yala* seasons, and a large amount of rice was harvested. However, the jungle covered the tank that provides irrigation water to the paddy lands, and the irrigational channels were dysfunctional. The damage to the tank has reduced its water storage capacity.

In my former village, I had two agro-wells. I had more than 250 coconut trees in the beginning. If I was living there, I would have been economically well off by now. Then, how can I build my life again? All the coconut trees have been destroyed by the wild elephants and sometimes by bombing and shelling (Int2/MS/ID/GMw).

Another aspect of the people's livelihood strategy before they were displaced was highland cultivation. Through cultivation of vegetables, the people had created an additional income source. The uses of agro-wells to irrigate the vegetables became a widely adopted method. However, the agro-wells used by the farmers before had become damaged; however, regardless of the condition, some were being used by other newcomers (farmers) to irrigate their lands.

A follow-up survey by the MRRR and the UNHCR, conducted in 2004 in the WCs in the Vavuniya District, identified '*landlessness*' as the main reason for people not to return home. The same conclusion was reached in Mannar, where 30% of the respondents cited landlessness in their place of origin as the key obstacle to return, followed by "*House in high security zone or occupied by the security forces*" (19%) and "*Joblessness in place of origin*" (17%). However, only 36% of those who cited landlessness and 18% of those who cited joblessness said they would be willing to return home if these problems were resolved. These results suggest that people were far less willing to return home if they had only little prior to their displacement (MRRR & UNHCR, 2004; UNHCR, Colombo office, August 2005). The study shows that the major issues are landlessness and joblessness.

Poor Living Conditions and Homelessness

The means of living in the original villages, current livelihood situation, and food security in the area are more important factors for IDPs. The conflict has affected all facets of Sri Lankan life, but the worst cases of poverty and food insecurity exist in the north and east and 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 – cattle, goats, chicken – agricultural implements, etc. As mentioned earlier, the land has been engulfed by overgrowth and needs re-conditioning before it can be used for agricultural purposes. All the other income-generating avenues have collapsed. Subsequent to the CFA, the A-9 north-south highway opened up the former LTTE-controlled areas after two decades of separation, revealing large-scale destruction of private property and infrastructure. Samurdhi poverty alleviation programme (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 assets depletion leads to a new form of social inequality.

The conflict had seriously affected the livelihoods and food security of the rural families in the Vavuniya South Division. Displacement and denial of access to agriculture, farm animals, forest assets, and opportunities had led to loss of production, income, and employment; large tracts of agricultural land had been rendered inaccessible by landmines or had deteriorated into the bushes. Farming equipment and infrastructure, including irrigation tanks, were in need of repair or rehabilitation. 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.

One 58-year-old man, who was living in the Poonthodam WC, explained his experience of the living conditions and occupations, which they did in their original villages:

“When we lived in Kilinochchi, our income was very low. We weren’t in any way getting a permanent income. All the time, I worked as a laborer for a little wage. {...} Most of our meals were from our own garden. We had no extra income or assistance”.

Many IDPs who are living in the Welfare Centers (WCs) in Vavuniya are badly affected by the war and the poor quality of the living conditions within the area where their original residence was in the northern part of the country even before their displacement. They often talked about their fear about food insecurity, joblessness, landlessness, and other difficulties in the original villages. According to Rajasingham-Senanayake, there are ‘*hidden economies*’ of the war. Sometimes civilians become tools of war. In the border areas and in the conflict regions, paramilitary groups have developed various systems for the taxation of traders and civilians through control of the main transport routes (and the movement of persons and goods), exercising an economy based on terror, scarcity, and fear. In the Sri Lankan conflict, the LTTE pioneered a system of taxation on the movement of people and goods (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999).

Nevertheless, during the conflict, agricultural supplies from the North & East to the rest of the country were blocked off due to factors such as government-imposed trade embargos, taxes imposed by the militant groups, breakdown of the North-South road connectivity and railway. The end of the conflict is thus expected to generate increases in both the demand for and supply of North & East agricultural products. 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). At the beginning, these all the situations have been badly affected their resettlement process.

On the other hand, there were some other reasons had influenced to make decision regarding their resettlement in the original areas.

{...} the materials I received for the house construction are still stored in “my house” (in the host area). If I get assistance, I would construct a permanent house here (Int13/MS/ID/GMw).

The above statements show some several factors regarding the construction of the houses in the original villages. Subsequently, they were resettled, but may or may not take permanent residence in their original village on the basis of several factors. Some of them use assistance for the house construction. 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 some properties within the settled places such as lands, vehicles, and some other properties. 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 but another purpose, may be to keep the land that belongs to them or to give it to their children. However, these events prove that many factors push people from the original village, so that they do not remain as resettled people.

Another point was that during the ceasefire period, and even post conflict period many resettlement programs were started, such as some INGOs and UNHCR initiated some programe and in the post war period infrastructure development initiatives by the government include ‘Randora’ (national-level infrastructure

development) and two initiatives which focus on the North & East : ‘Negenahira Navodaya’ and ‘Uthuru Wasanthaya’⁵.

However, people were not satisfied with their housing facilities and environment and these factors were pushed to resettle in the original villages. Majority of self-settled people in the area had constructed their own houses in the host area along with collecting other necessities for their life. When they use the term “*my house,*” or “*our house,*” (Int12/MS/ID/GMw), 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 there settlement processes were being used and practiced 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. These forces push the IDPs from the original villages. 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.”

Lack of Educational Opportunities

The paper considered as the original villages, another factor that influenced the IDPs unwillingness to return was the existing educational facilities, particularly, the state of the school system, availability of teachers, and the quality of the education provided. Due to the conflict, education of the most of the students of the conflict-affected areas was disrupted due to displacement, loss of family members, psychological impact, loss of school materials, and the destruction of school buildings and infrastructure. In the case of the self-settled families living within a host community, the IDPs had tried to build their basic facilities within the host community; those who had lived in the WCs amidst various problems had also found alternatives, to some extent, within the area of their host community. 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 existing in that area were a major consideration and concern for the parents. Therefore, the quality of the educational environment for the children was a factor that influenced the IDPs willingness to resettle in their former village.

In Sri Lanka, “educational facility or opportunity” is a concept that is highly complicated. When considered on a regional basis, the differences are highly complicated. In terms of facilities, there are differences between the rural and urban schools. There are also differences between the classified schools, in the categories of rural schools, urban schools, and national schools. Moreover, the general public classifies schools as big schools and small schools (Lindberg 2005). In all these categorizations, there are differences in terms of the facilities available. 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 available were 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 or in the present host areas, were likely to be at a relatively low level, compared to the other urban areas in the country.

We should give first priority for our children’s education. Their future depends on education. We had a school in our village before displacement, but now it is in ruins {...}(Int4/MS/ID/GMw).

⁵ The rehabilitation of harbours, roads and tanks are a primary focus of these programmes. In the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, which covers five districts Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi and Jaffna, 29 resettlement commenced in 2009 under the ‘Northern Spring’ (Uthuru wasanthaya) program which was launched to resettle people.

However, there are several issues which need to be considered in providing basic educational services for the conflict affected groups: reintegrating to school curriculum, dealing with ex-child-combatants, providing educational infrastructure (essential materials such as furniture, teaching and learning aids), ensuring adequate human resources, psycho social support.

Lack of Health Facilities

Free health service is available in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, even at the rural level, common health facilities are available to everyone. However, the problem is whether everyone could have access to the welfare facility at the same level as others without any interruption. This section tries to explore the situation of health facilities in the war-torn border areas. Sri Lanka has been able to maintain overall health indicators at satisfactory level despite of its economic downturns over time. There are regional disparities in health indicators and they are compounded in the conflict-affected districts. Maternal mortality rate is five times higher than those of at national level. Returned refugees are making a greater demand for health services, can create new epidemiological challenges, including a higher probability of epidemics (Kelegama, 2011)⁶. However, a major challenge associated with rebuilding hospitals and other health-related infrastructure is the long time periods involved in their construction. Therefore, there is clearly a need for private sector involvement in healthcare provision, but it remains unclear how much benefit the poorest people in conflict areas would derive from private healthcare. Significant changes need to be made to the country's health systems in order to successfully manage new epidemiological challenges resulting from the return of IDPs etc. Government financial allocations are crucial.

Lack of Infrastructural Facilities

Another factor considered by the IDPs with regard to resettlement in their original villages was the creation of infrastructural facilities in the resettlement area. When resettling, the returnees usually tended to compare the infrastructural and welfare facilities available in the host community and the original village. The returnees therefore attempted to see whether the infrastructural facilities available in their "host" area were also available within the resettlement area. The improvement or deprivation of infrastructure is influenced by the length of period that the area had been abandoned and the level to which the infrastructural facilities had been improved under the resettlement programs. However, both the Tamil and Sinhalese IDPs who self-settled as well as those lived in the WCs referred to the infrastructural facilities that were available in their original villages and the present situation. The study basically considered transport facilities, conditions of roads, electric power, water for farming and drinking, and telecommunication as infrastructural facilities.

One of the important problems confronting resettlers is the unavailability of an adequate public transport service.

"We had a public bus service from our village before we were displaced from the area. Now, there are no public transport facilities from the village. We have to supply our own vehicles or other private vehicles for transport. If there is an emergency, there are no transport facilities" (Interview 7).

This is influenced by the fact that public transport services provided by the government had ceased, and the government did not maintain the roads. Hence, poor and inadequate transport services are likely to be another powerful disincentive for resettlement. However, some people mentioned how they could find good transport facilities in the resettled area. The majority of border villages in Vavuniya South, the Weli-Oya divisions, and the northern areas in Vavuniya lack transport facilities. Although it was a major problem, some respondents remarked that transport facilities were available during the daytime, but in an emergency and particularly at

⁶ Government has allocated special funds (US\$ 4.4 million) under the 'Uthuru Wasanthaya' programme to improve health facilities in Jaffna peninsula (Kelegama, 2011).

night, transport facilities were virtually nonexistent, which was a problem not only within the village but also in the area.

Development of infrastructural facilities is an indication of the quality of living standards in a community. The availability or lack thereof pipe-borne water, electric power supply, a network of good roads, and communication facilities significantly affect 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, the Weli-Oya Division 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. This, in turn, influences the poor living standards, fewer economic activities, poor livelihoods, and fewer employment opportunities available to the people in an unfavorable manner. However, all these factors negatively affect the IDPs decision whether to return and resettle, and act to push people away from the original villages.

CONCLUSION

The paper examines the challenges and obstacles related to return and resettle in the post-conflict resettlement process after the end of the three decades of civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009. The aim of the paper is to understand the role of the socioeconomic factors that affect as obstacles to resettle people in the original places. The study was to understand how these particular factors acted as obstacles against settlement (*push*) back to the original villages. The paper has provided an empirical analysis on the role of social, economic factors that have worked as obstacles to resettle the IDPs back to the original villages.

The study identified that lack of social relationships/networks and reciprocity as well as lack of inter-ethnic relations were the main factors for negatively affecting the reintegration of people into the new environment and their resettlement process in the original villages. The study identified the extent to economic factor contributed to become a push factor for the IDPs to return to their original villages. All three of the original villages had almost the same situation with the economic related factors. Issues were related to, for example, accessibility of land, many parts of the land being under a shrub jungle, or occupied by others, an inability to identify the boundaries, lack of clear deeds to show ownership, lands included in the high security zones, and buried landmines. In addition, the condition of the houses and other property that belonged to them before being displaced as well as the temporary houses had totally been destroyed, but those made of brick with cement still remained. Some of houses included within the high security zone were inaccessible. Some parts of houses had been stolen, and other IDPs had began to occupy a few of the houses. During their return, a few of the returnees had been receiving dry rations and assistance from the government and the NGOs. In addition, the study found that school buildings and other facilities in the school were totally destroyed. This, together with the lack of teachers, poor-quality of transport, poor quality of health facilities directly affected the IDPs willingness to return and stay in the original villages or remain in the host communities.

However, There are several issues which need to be considered in providing basic educational services for the conflict affected groups: reintegrating to school curriculum, dealing with ex-child-combatants, providing educational infrastructure (essential materials such as furniture, teaching and learning aids), ensuring adequate human resources, psycho social support for the development of social conditions and success to the resettlement process.

To overcome these challenges study propose that need to be developed and improved many of sections such as investments in education and skill development 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 treatments and delays could give rise to new conflicts within these communities. Measures must be taken to re-develop the business environment in order 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) in order to ensure competitiveness in the market place. A lack of employment and education data makes assessing progress difficult. There is thus a significant need for monitoring and evaluation processes.

The study identified that a major challenge associated with rebuilding hospitals and other health-related infrastructure is the long time periods involved in their construction. Although there are some national projects in the area for development, these projects may not meet the health needs of the population in the present or even in the near future. Hence, significant changes need to be made to the country's health systems in order to successfully manage new epidemiological challenges resulting from the return of IDPs etc.

Productivity of the agricultural sector is low, due to a variety of reasons such as capital shortages, credit constraints, a lack of access to agricultural inputs and technology and persistently low levels of agricultural research. Private sector participation could help to develop value chains, but government involvement is necessary in order to ensure that the poorest farmers do not find themselves excluded from such processes. The improvement of market linkages and relaxation of barriers is desirable in order to induce growth in the agricultural sector.

Infrastructure development in the free conflict area is crucial, not only for medium- to long-term economic growth prospects, but also to improve livelihood opportunities in the short-term. Current infrastructure development initiatives by the government include 'Randora' (national-level infrastructure development) and two initiatives which focus on the areas: 'Negenahira Navodaya' and 'Uthuru Wasanthaya'. These projects were primary focus on the rehabilitation of harbours, roads and tanks. Foreign assistance is mostly in line with government priorities (eg. road-building), and less attention is paid to capital investment in health and education by these sources. Private sector participation has been sluggish. How to encourage private sector investment in infrastructure is the challenge. The government's policy framework has many programmes to address these challenges but there are some loose ends. Moreover, there is no integrated strategy to address the issues to generate more inclusive growth.

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