

Post War Reconstruction and Peace Building in Sri Lanka: A Case Study of Jaffna

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Introduction

The Government of Sri Lanka [GoSL] has embarked upon a development project, in line with the “Mahinda Chinthana,” to uplift lives and build peace in war torn areas of Sri Lanka, particularly the North and the East since the dénouement of the ruthless ethnic conflict in 2009. Northern Spring [Uthuru Wasanthaya] and Eastern Revival [Negenahira Navodaya] are two main state-led development projects initiated in Northern and Eastern provinces with the aims of promoting reconstruction, rehabilitation and peacebuilding. However the author intends to discuss the theory of relative deprivation as one of the root causes to the conflict, the involvement of international donors in the peacebuilding process, lessons that could be assimilated into the Sri Lankan context from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the role played by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission in peacebuilding and how development in Jaffna promotes peace and ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka. It must also be realized that the development activities carried out by the GoSL in Jaffna may also promote positive peacebuilding in Sri Lanka by strengthening social harmony and integration. With the legislature passing the controversial “Divi Neguma” Bill the government will be able to accelerate the development process by giving the Minister of Economic Development, Honourable Basil Rajapaksa the authority to appoint special administrative zones. Furthermore the Secretary of Defence and Urban Planning Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa stresses the importance of abolishing the 13th amendment to the Constitution since it is nothing but an impediment to the post-war development process

in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless the government in power has been able to win the hearts and minds of majority of the Sri Lankans through such development projects. Undoubtedly Sri Lanka is a thriving democracy and the GoSL, having a supermajority juxtaposed with much needed political stability puts itself in a favourable position to carry out the development process in the North and the East unhindered.

1. Relative Deprivation

“To establish a more peaceful, prosperous, and secure world, poverty must be eliminated and income differentials reduced.”

Sadaka Ogata, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Kegley 2009)

Poverty is the primary ally of armed aggression and this is why most of the third world countries are plagued by intra-state conflicts. Such states may find peace if they address the root cause or the causes of armed conflicts. Relative deprivation may perhaps be one of the causes that may have a direct effect on peace and security of such a state. This is further justified by Lemke as “underdevelopment is a statistically significant predictor of war.” (Lemke 2003). Undoubtedly if groups of individuals or a community perceive that they are unfairly treated when they are also entitled to certain benefits it may in turn lead to frustration and the deprived resorting to violent or non-violent means of achieving such benefits. However “inequality between the wealth and status of individuals and groups, and the outrage of those at the bottom about their perceived exploitation by those at the top” (Kegley 2009) shall most probably lead to violence which can be clearly witnessed in many developing countries in Africa and South Asia. Therefore it is vital for states in conflicts to address the root causes of conflicts which shall pave way for a sustainable peace. Furthermore if the governments are able to give paramount importance to economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security (UNDP 1994) but not to national security, then such shall be governments

which will meet the expectations of not only the majority but also the minority as well. Therefore relative deprivation can be directly addressed by securing the above seven concepts of human security.

It is nevertheless possible to deduce the fact that the inception of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is primarily due to relative deprivation where the Tamil minority was under the perception that they belonged to groups that face some form of cultural exclusion and are disadvantaged or discriminated against relative to others in their country. The lack of community security led to the outbreak of an armed conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE. According to the UNDP since 1983 more than 14,000 people had died by 1994 in the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese thus re-establishing the fact that ethnic tensions are on the rise, often over limited access to opportunities (UNDP 1994). Subsequent to the military victory by government forces in 2009 Sri Lanka has now embarked upon a peacebuilding programme which may address almost all the root causes of the ethnic conflict thus preventing re-emergence of terrorism. The GoSL has clearly laid down an action plan to address and secure the seven concepts of human security as listed by the UNDP. This is why the government of the day had directed special attention not only to the South but also to the Jaffna peninsula ensuring that every Sri Lankan is treated equally. It is at this juncture the government should seek “to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Paris 1997).

2. Strategic Liberalization.

According to Roland Paris, liberal internationalism guides the work of most international agencies engaged in peacebuilding. However effectiveness of liberal peacebuilding as a method of preventing the recurrence of civil violence is doubtful because “political and economic liberalization has generated destabilizing side effects in war-shattered states, hindering the consolidation of peace and in some cases even

sparkling renewed fighting.” (Paris 1997) Therefore the question is whether such a conceptual foundation would safeguard peace in a post conflict Sri Lanka. Liberal peacebuilding model is somewhat contested because of the above and also due to the fact that it is based on economic liberalization and democratic principles. Paris suggests a hybrid of liberal nationalist goals and liberal internationalism. The main elements of this approach are:

- [1] Developing a more gradual and controlled process of democratization in war-shattered states-in particular, by delaying elections until passions have cooled, promoting citizen associations that cut across cleavage lines, excluding extremists from active politics, and controlling the promulgation of inflammatory propaganda;
- [2] Designing electoral arrangements that reward moderation rather than extremism;
- [3] Promoting equitable, growth-oriented adjustment policies rather than destabilizing austerity measures;
- [4] Creating effective, central coordinating bodies for peacebuilding operations; and
- [5] Extending the duration of peacebuilding operations from the current norm of one to three years, to approximately seven to nine years. (Paris 1997)

Paris’s declaration of such a new concept is supported by other leading scholars such as Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty in “A Post Liberal Peace” (Richmond 2011) and “International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance.” (Ginty 2011). Furthermore authoritarianism, if necessary, is encouraged by Paris in convincing the implausibility of the traditional peacebuilding approach. Building peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Timor Leste, Rwanda, Kosovo, Angola, Mozambique, and Cambodia are prime evidence for the failure of liberal peacebuilding where stable peace remains a hope rather than a reality. Moreover the short comings of this orthodox concept were experienced even by Sierra Leon and Guinea-Bissau because “foreigners find peacebuilding hard...war has destroyed the state: there is no one to collect taxes, administer justice or to carry out government policy. Last year Guinea-Bissau, for instance, slid back into political violence and assassination.” (The Economist 2009)

According to Richmond four main strands of thought combine to form liberal

peace model; “victor’s peace, institutional peace, constitutional peace, and the civil peace” (Richmond 2011). Albeit it is credible to promulgate that “the ethics of liberalism suggest the ‘good life’ where individual privileges denote freedom to act politically, economically and socially, within a liberal governance framework which constitutionally guarantees human rights” (Richmond 2011), what is suitable and is of contemporary relevance to Sri Lanka is peacebuilding through strategic liberalization. Because in contrast to the above post-conflict contexts a politically stable Sri Lanka engenders much needed autonomy and agency for peacebuilding.

A microscopic examination of the peacebuilding experiment in Bosnia would clearly expose the short comings of political liberalization. The Dayton Accord merely acted as a façade over ineffective elections, external influence from the United States and renewed low-level conflict among the parties. Nationalist political parties dominated the federal and regional legislative races as a direct effect of such liberal practices (Hedges 1996) thus further tearing the country apart. Ultimately it is a proven fact that liberal peace building is inherently flawed and Sri Lanka has associated neo-liberal practices in liberal peace governance.

3. A Case Study on Jaffna

[A] Development

The victorious People’s Alliance government under the leadership of His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa spear headed the development of all the war affected regions with particular emphasis on the Jaffna peninsula. In addition the GoSL identified the following areas with regard to reconciliation and peacebuilding:

[a] Reconstruction and economic development;

[b] Rapid resettlement of more than 430,000 displaced persons, including most of the nearly 300,000 Tamils who survived the final fighting in 2009 and were held in government-administered internment camps;

[c] “Rehabilitation” and “reintegration” of almost all the nearly 12,000 Tamils detained

at the end of the war on suspicion of involvement with the LTTE; and
[d] Return of democratic elections to the north and other steps toward “reconciliation.”
(International Crisis Group 2012)

The GoSL is spending over Rs.2000 million for the development of the North. (Media Center for National Development of Sri Lanka 2012) A region which suffered 30 years from war has now shown remarkable progress through a hasty recovery and return to normalcy. The government nevertheless has identified Jaffna as an integral contributor to the national economy and has laid down a 20 year development plan to develop the Jaffna municipal council area at a cost of Rs.37,898 billion. (Ministry of Defence and Urban Development 2010) Such a huge investment will be aimed at infrastructure development; development of Duraiappa Stadium, construction of Cultural Development Centre, development of Jaffna Teaching Hospital, construction of international cricket ground at Kalundai, construction of Northern Province Governor’s office and residence, reconstruction of Jaffna Railway Station, development work at Jaffna bus stand and Jaffna main market, construction of prison house in Jaffna, a housing scheme for low income group at Navanthurai and reconstructing damaged houses for the homeless and reconstruction of Vannankulam and Pullukulam in Jaffna. (Ministry of Defence and Urban Development 2010)

The Jaffna district consists of 15 District Secretariat Divisions, 435 Grama Niladhari Divisions, with a population of 191,422 in 1,025sqkm. (Ministry of Economic Development 2013) Furthermore Minister Basil Rajapaksa chairing the Jaffna District Coordinating Committee Meeting noted that the government will allocate Rs. 3,299.62 million for the development of economic and infrastructure facilities. The Ministry web site also provides that almost Rs. 128.74 million has already been spent for the reconstruction of rural roads, 68 Pradeshiya Sabha and municipal roads. Rs. 1 million has been allocated to renovate 36 drinking water wells. Moreover two villages were supplied electricity at a cost of Rs. 5.95 million while Rs. 26.67 million has been invested under the Valukkai Aru scheme. The Kankasanthurai harbour is to be developed at a cost of Rs. 983.26 million. Nevertheless in order to ensure food security the government has also invested heavily in livelihood

development through the construction of 10 agrarian service centres, by providing seeds and agricultural implements to farmers and the construction of Nargovil Market. It is also noteworthy that a number of government offices were completed under the “Gama Neguma” project.

In ensuring basic needs the government has also invested heavily in education, demining, resettlement, housing and health. With regard to demining, mine clearance has been completed in 59% of the total area and 44.4km from Eluthumaduwal to Kankasanthurai has been demined to rehabilitate the railway tracks. With regard to resettlement, 24,863 families were resettled in the Jaffna district where 2,150 houses will be reconstructed and provided with Indian assistance. Furthermore the Jaffna University Auditorium and the mini gymnasium have been constructed at a cost of Rs. 3.5 million while school buildings will be set up and furniture and books have been supplied at a cost of Rs 17.07 million. (Ministry of Economic Development 2013)

The Jaffna Peninsula has immensely benefited from the Uthuru Wasanthaya project. Similarly the islands surrounding the peninsula; Chankani, Chawakachcheri, Delft, Kareinagar, Karaweddi, Kites, Kopai, Maruthankarni, Point Pedro, Sandilipai, Thelippalei, Uduwil, and Welanai are also to be covered by this project. The Governor of the Northern Province stated that the government is planning to invest Rs. 1500 million for local government administration in Jaffna under the above development project. (Ministry of Defence and Urban Development 2013) According to Minister of Power and Energy Patalee Champika Ranawaka, the modernization and reconstruction of the power system in Jaffna is now complete. (Asian Mirror 2012) It is clearly evident that the GoSL has achieved extraordinary success with regard to reconstruction in the North within four years since the end of the conflict. According to Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe “roads, bridges, public buildings, schools, health facilities, water supply and the like have been rebuilt not just to replace what existed in the past but at a vastly improved level with an eye on the future needs of people in those areas. It may be noted that all these facilities, the entire railway network in particular, were completely destroyed by the LTTE.” (The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN 2011)

Moreover the GoSL has encouraged private sector investment in the North to invite competition and accelerate the drive towards development. At the “Biz PAct” (Daily News 2010) investment forum held in 2010 in Jaffna, of which the underlying objective was peacebuilding, the Business for Peace Association (BPA) had offered projects worth of almost Rs.367 million ranging from commodity businesses to fast moving consumer business segments that captured the interest of the Indian and Australian participants. Among some of the noteworthy ambitious projects which required investment were the establishment of a manufacturing plant for PET bottles, a tile manufacturing plant, an electric motor and car pump company and the establishment of the Atchuweli Industrial Zone. Another area which attracted the interest of the investors was the tourism industry in Jaffna. Jaffna can be developed to have a tourism identity of its own like Bali in Indonesia. “A point that needs to be highlighted is that in May 2009, there were only four small guest houses in the peninsula but today, there are over 19 hotels... May be a luxury yacht in the Jaffna lagoon can be offered to the discerning top end traveler.... just like in the Caribbean.” (Daily News 2010) Such moves will undoubtedly provide a large number of employment opportunities to the youth in the area.

[B] Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) has extensively discussed the issue of reconciliation under Chapter 8 of its report as “Issues impacting on post conflict reconciliation.” Resettlement and livelihood issues, numerous land issues arising due to the protracted conflict, the law and order situation in the North and the East and the continued existence of illegal armed groups, the status of development in the Northern and the Eastern provinces and apprehensions regarding changes to the demographic composition of the North and East are a few which may highlight the importance of reconciliation in the North. However the Commission further notes that “considering the protracted nature of the conflict spanning a period of thirty years, resolving all such issues would naturally take time and require significant resources and financing... The Government has in fact committed considerable funding and

resources to the North and East.... These actions of the Government demonstrate an acknowledgement on its part to ensure that citizens throughout the country are assisted with their basic needs and can share equally in economic dividends.” (Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt 2011) Even the Minister of External Affairs Professor Gamini Luxman Peiris addressing the diplomatic community in Colombo pointed out that “it was unreasonable for the international community to expect a complete remedy for all issues in the short span of two and a half years since the Lankan conflict ended.” (Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN 2011)

However the GoSL hopes to achieve sustainable peace and reconciliation through economic empowerment of the youth in the North, rapid settlement and infrastructure development. The government has also taken steps to encourage the civil society to participate in peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes while maintaining a dialogue with Tamil political parties.

4. Foreign assistance

Japan, India, the People’s Republic of China, the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are some of the major investors in peace in post conflict Sri Lanka. New Delhi granted Rs. 800 million of credit and logistical expertise to Sri Lanka for the rebuilding of the Northern railroad. India also assisted heavily in the reconstruction of the Kankasanthurai port, the expansion of the Palali airport and the rehabilitation of the Atchchuvveli industrial zone. (International Crisis Group 2012) India has further invested US\$ 270 million in building 50,000 houses in Jaffna in assisting rapid resettlement. Japan on the other hand has been providing US\$ 1 billion from 2003 to 2006 for peacebuilding since the Tokyo Donor Conference in June 2003. (Goodhand 2011) Furthermore the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has provided Rs. 2,877 million to reconstruct the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. (Media Center for National Development 2012) The Northern power grid and the Jaffna-Kilinochchi water and sanitation system are being improved with support from Japan and the ADB.

(International Crisis Group 2012) “China has provided US\$1 million as humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons and technical assistance for demining operations in Northern and Eastern provinces. Some 332km of roads inclusive of the Kandy-Jaffna A9 highway will be developed and modernized with Chinese funding of US\$ 355 million. (Sunday Times 2010)

5. Conclusion

Reconstruction and peacebuilding in the Jaffna peninsula is not without faults but the achievements Sri Lanka has gained within a very short period of time should be appreciated. The failure of liberal peacebuilding in Africa and Eastern Europe has prompted many of the scholars to suggest a hybrid peacebuilding mechanism which perfectly suits Sri Lanka.

However it is through peacebuilding and reconciliation that the GoSL will be able to win the hearts and minds of the people in the war affected regions. Implementing the recommendations forwarded by the LLRC shall be a step forward. Moreover empowering the youth in the North, inculcating a sense of ethnic inclusiveness and harmony, and enabling them to taste the fruits of economic development will alienate them from the idea of relative deprivation. In addition Minister Basil Rajapaksa’s pet project “Northern Spring” has begun to transform devastated north into a modern metropolis. Financial and technological assistance from Japan, China and India to rebuild the North are decisive in the current economic world order. In conclusion “Sri Lanka, like many post conflict societies, is going through a process of renewal and rebuilding. Our aim is a people who are economically empowered by the vast development initiatives, active in the democratic process and free to articulate grievances, hopes and dreams without fear of conflict and strife... There is a realistic hope of regaining of democratic space, healing and unity. This perhaps is our greatest victory.” (The Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN 2011)

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