# CHAPTER SIX

# Strengthening Democratic Governance for Peace and Harmony in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the strengthening of democratic governance for peace and harmony in Sri Lanka. It researched community members and peace workers from two different districts, Jaffna and Kilinochchi, with different socio-cultural backgrounds to obtain useful insights into the cultural and contextual influences on peace and harmony. Qualitative and quantitative methods and Sequential Explanatory Strategy were employed in this study. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to ask respondents about three primary domains of their experience; how do you understand the 'term' peace and harmony, the present situation of peace in the post-conflict scenario and the importance of peace and harmony for Sri Lanka. This study had to depend on qualitative aspects because the participants provided descriptive responses expressing their opinions and feelings through

sentences and phrases. The analysis of data from all interviews and FGDs were undertaken by the researchers, both of whom have had experience working in the Northern Province. In addition, key phrases were noted while reading interview transcripts and thereafter labelled according to the themes that emerged from the discussion. Those themes were identified and coded using the manual for retrieving the data. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the Government of Sri Lanka should make a balanced and substantial investment in infrastructure development in the North. In order to achieve lasting peace and harmony, economic progress and equal opportunities for everyone should be ensured. The military presence was noted as one of the barriers to returning to normalcy. Therefore demilitarization should also be one of the most important steps undertaken through the reconciliation process.

**Key words**: *democratic governance, northern province, peace and harmony*

## 6.1 Introduction

Good governance involves processes used by public institutions to conduct public affairs and manage public resources. To strengthen the process of Democratic Governance for peace and harmony, strong governments are increasingly seen as essential building blocks. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka reached its final phase on the 18th of May 2009. During the conflict the skirmishes between the warring factions forced people to flee for their lives, multiple times, leading to multiple displacements. To meet the humanitarian needs and rehabilitate the affected people, a

stable and secure environment is necessary. The needs of the affected should be carefully formulated with proper advice. Peace is most effective when peace related skills are understood by the people in order to put them in to practice through government activities (Baldo & Fumiss, 1998). To achieve peace politicians and peace workers should take responsibility. Politician and peace workers must be able to foster positive social interactions among people who live in the conflict zone, and work towards establishing and maintaining positive collaborative relationships (Association of Childhood Education International, 1997). To achieve this, peace makers should understand the universal values of freedom, justice, human rights, gender equality, tolerance, and respect for the right to live. In order to achieve the objectives of peace building for harmony Sri Lankan bureaucrats have to be prepared for changes related to peace building. The peace workers need to provide opportunities for collaborative and interactive learning so that peace makers can make peace values part of their own personality. This study attempted to explore the perceptions of the people and the peace workers, particularly those in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

This paper provides an overview of the experiences and challenges associated with governance, decentralisation policies, and the strengthening of government within the context of peace building. State-building and post-conflict recovery efforts have stretched across three continents over the past two decades. Such experiences highlight the fact that harnessing the potential of governance in sensitive and volatile peace building processes requires addressing a series of significant challenges, and in particular recognising the dynamics of each conflict along with the concomitant power struggles involved. Failure to do

this adequately has led to mixed results. There are cases where policies (Association of Childhood Education International, 1997; Deveci, Yilmaz & Kardag, 2008) designed to address governance and strengthen sub-national government units have exacerbated tensions and/or fostered continued or renewed conflict.

## Peace and new culture

The traditional culture of peace, inherent in an industrial society, is a culture of the balance of power and military force. This balance is always unstable. It is directed towards not an exclusion of wars, but limiting them, or setting them aside to deter the arms race. Therefore, this culture has developed no effective actors and institutions for preventing wars and terrorism. The new culture of peace is a culture of harmonious peace, arising in an information society. Its foundation is an order of social harmony arising from a sustainable balance of social groups and ethnicities that give priority to children, parents and especially mothers (who carry the basic burden of care for children) and all caregivers. Only a new culture of peace which prioritises children, parents and caregivers, can be capable of overcoming self-destruction. The creation of a new culture of peace, on a foundation of social harmony, to prevent wars, terror, poverty and self-destruction, is impossible without this vast, peace-loving potential, which has not been claimed until now.

### *Peace and harmony - a new approach*

Baldo and Fumiss (1998) argue that peace is most effective when the skills of peace and conflict resolution are learned actively and are modelled by a human society in which people learn through government activities. Naturally, politician and other peace

workers are crucial actors, taking on the responsibility of achieving these values. Politician and peace workers must be able to foster positive social interactions among people who live in the conflict zone, and establish and maintain positive collaborative relationships with families and the larger community to support peoples' day-to-day activities while providing opportunities to practice and maintain their well-being (Deveci, Yilmaz & Kardag, 2008; Association of Childhood Education International, 1997)

Sri Lankan bureaucracy and its practice with and within the conflict society  has to be prepared for drastic changes, including setting new peace building  objectives, developing a new political system, (re)writing the 13[th]Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, developing instructional material, and providing a new environment  to create a peace climate that is conducive to peace milieu (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).Similarly, Brock-Utne (1989), Deutsch (1993),  Salomon (2002) and Weigert (1999) argue that peace workers who work with people to develop a more positive and detailed concept of peace, play a pivotal role in the peace approach. Bretherton, Weston, and Zbar (2010), eluded that while developing 'Peace Harmony' there should be a focus on using a different ethnic-centered, innovative, and participative new approach. They emphasise combining the approach with government reforms and involving peace workers and harnessing politician resources that are easy to use and written in basic language in Sri Lanka. They argue in favour of working in line with the existing systems rather than attempting to bring about change by working against the prevailing systems.

It appears that one has to consider the strategies to be followed carefully when wanting to foster peace in Sri Lanka.

It is the responsibility of every politician and peace worker to introduce experience-based environment sensitive, community based propaganda and desk discussion methods within the different ethnic community (Harris & Morrison, 2003; Bar-Tal, 2002). Peace workers should not dominate the desk discussion/talk, but rather promote an open climate for discussion in which people feel free to participate. People should learn to take up independent viewpoints and to make a contribution towards solving problems and resolving conflict situations. Thus politicians and peace workers take on the role of facilitators of discussion, rather than transmitters of knowledge on peace.

The pivotal different roles played by different ethnic groups, cultural and contextual realities and differences in peace and harmony have been frequently highlighted in contemporary research literature. Windmueller, Wayne and Botes (2009) report on a comparative case analysis in Tajikistan and demonstrate that the competences and approaches for peace and harmony are influenced by the local culture and context. Likewise, Abu-Nimer (2000) studied the perceptions of educators, scholars and researchers and their role, and the obstacles they face in the outcome of the post-conflict scenario in the Sri Lankan context.

Hence, this study aimed to explore the perceptions and leadership practices of peace and harmony by the peace workers and people in the multi-dialect and multi-cultural context of the Northern Province in Sri Lanka. The participants were from two different districts, Jaffna and Kilinochchi, with different socio-cultural backgrounds, thus providing useful insights into the cultural and contextual influences on peace and harmony.

As an integrated human society, while differences need be acknowledged society should be able to look past differences and find common ground with the entire world's people. In this critical situation, the paramount priority should be to understand how to minimise, prevent, or eliminate violence. Furthermore, if we wish to concentrate on peace, we as a society must learn how to suspend ourselves in the present and focus on the future we ultimately wish to work on together. The current consensus among peace theorists is that peace is not a state of being to be found somewhere in the future or at any time, but a reference to processes and qualities regarding our relationships with self and others, manifesting themselves in perception, reaction, affection, and action.

## 6.2 Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methods were chosen for the research. A Sequential Explanatory Strategy (Creswell, 2003, p.211) was employed for this study. Date was gathered by conducting a questionnaire, key informant interviews, and holding focus group discussions (FGDs). Questionnaires were randomly distributed and 100 were received from those who were willing to respond to this study (Mean = 43.45, SD=15.43). Ten key informant interviews (Mean = 47.00, SD = 8.37) were conducted. FGDs were conducted with selected participants - eight community leaders (Mean = 60.87, SD = 4.79), eight youth group members (Mean = 22.25, SD = 2.25), ten women who were engaged in peace work and development activities at community level (Mean=44.60, SD=10.01) and another twelve peace workers living in the community (Mean=47.08, SD=11.34). The snowball sampling method was adopted for selecting the

key informants. The FGDs were conducted in diverse settings, in the Community Centres in Jaffna District, using the primary language of each group. The FGDs included on average nine participants (ranging from 6 to 12 participants), who were eager respondents.

## Research tools

The interview schedule was prepared by the researchers familiar with the research area. To ensure the cultural appropriateness of the questions, the respondents from the Northern Province were consulted. Translations were also checked to make sure they reflected the original theme. The probes were revised on the basis of the feedback received. Key informant interviews and FGDs were developed for this study to ask respondents about three primary domains of their experience:  How do you understand the 'term'  peace and harmony, the present situation of peace in the post-conflict scenario and the importance of peace and harmony in Sri Lanka.  Interviewees were first asked, in an open-ended manner, to describe their life in each of the three periods. Further information about each of the three stages was elicited through the incorporation of specific prompts. These prompts referred to difficulties and worries about the peace and its experience, perceived safety of life, home grown practices for peace and harmony, the availability of support networks for further development of peace and harmony, as well as the current wishes and the typical daily practices for harmony within other ethnic group. (The interview schedule is available on request.)

**Analysis**

The data and information obtained from the different sources were processed using the computer package SPSS-21 for the quantitative analysis. This research gave more influenceto qualitative aspects, as the participants' phrases were important. To ensure the respondents' expression of their feelings in the post-conflict context of this study, analysis of all interviews was undertaken by the researches, both of whom had experience working in the Northern Province. Interview transcripts were read and key issues noted. Each of the key phrases were subsequently labelled according to the emergent theme they were thought to represent. Themes were identified and coded using the manual in the retrieval of the data.

## 6.3 Analysis of quantitative findings

The analysis of the quantitative data presented here was undertaken in an attempt to examine the problems related to the quality of relationships at all levels of living together for peace and harmony and examine the extent to which the people actively participate in community life and contribute to socio-economic development.

### 6.3.1 Perception of security, life satisfaction, expectations, and community participation

Questions asked from the participants (refer Table 6.1) were about their level of satisfaction with the perception of security, life satisfaction, expectations, and community participation. One of the questions was "How safe do you feel in your neighbourhood/ local area?". In this respect, 81% of the

respondents were satisfied with the safety feeling while 19% of the respondents were unsatisfied with the feeling of safety in their neighbourhood or local area. More than three fourths of the participants responded that they were satisfied when asked this question, stating that "I feel safe when walking alone in the village during the day", "I avoid using certain ways and do not go to certain areas that I think are dangerous", "My neighbourhood is peaceful overall", "People involve the socio-economic activities after the war" and "Peacefully visit all over the Sri Lanka". With regard to another two sentences - "I feel safe when walking alone in the village during the night" and "I feel safe from crime and violence when I am alone at home" - 94% and 93% of the respondents respectively reported to be unsatisfied. To another important sentence "The police are doing a good job", equal respondents reported to be satisfied and unsatisfied with the Police's performance. To another sentence, "Community members have opportunities to participate in community development activities in Northern Province" nearly 58% of the respondents were unsatisfied with the lack of avenues for community participation activities in community development activities that were launched by the Government and 42% of the respondents reported that they were unhappy with community participation.

**Table 6.1: Perception of security, life satisfaction, expectations, and community participation**

| Perception of security, life satisfaction, expectations and Community Participation | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How safe do you feel in your neighbourhood/ local area? | 8% | 73% | 12% | 5% | 2% |
| I feel safe when walking alone in the village during the day | 10% | 85% | 5% | 0% | 0% |
| I feel safe when walking alone in the village during the night | 0% | 6% | 94% | 0% | 0% |
| I feel safe from crime and violence when I am alone at home | 0% | 7% | 82% | 11% | 0% |
| I avoid using certain ways and do not go to certain areas that I think are dangerous | 65% | 22% | 13% | 0% | 0% |
| My neighbourhood is peaceful overall | 71% | 20% | 9% | 0% | 0% |
| The police is doing a good job | 5% | 45% | 29% | 15% | 6% |
| Peacefully visit all over Sri Lanka | 15% | 63% | 18% | 4% | 0% |
| Community members have opportunities to participate in community development activities in Northern Province | 0% | 42% | 51% | 7% | 0% |
| People involve the socio economic activities after the war | 15% | 70% | 11% | 4% | 0% |

Source: Questionnaire survey

## 6.3.2 People's expectation of peace - past and future

There were two significant questions asked from respondents (refer Table No. 6.2); "How peaceful is it in your area compared to previous years?" and "How peaceful do you expect your area to be over the next year?". These questions reflected people's expectation of peace compared to the past and in the future in the Northern Province. Approximately 65% of the respondents reported that time being terminating to conflict. Expectations regarding the future were for a general peaceful situation and unarmed unrest, which were 78% and 22% respectively.

**Table 6.2: People's expectation of peace (past and future)**

| People's expectation of peace – past and future | Return to conflict | Subsiding conflict | Sporadic armed violence | Unarmed unrest | Generally peaceful |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How peaceful is it in your area compared to previous years | 65% | 0% | 0% | 35% | 0% |
| How peaceful do you expect your area to be over the next year? | 0% | 0% | 0% | 22% | 78% |

Source: Field survey

### 6.3.3 Merging issues faced by communities

As portrayed in Table 6.3, this study revealed that 100% of the respondents had reported that army involvement is very high, and this is one of the emerging issues in the Northern Province.

The second most cited issue (90%) was that of high political involvement. The third major issue was that women are ostracised by the community (85%), as far as these women are concerned, their attendance at social ceremonies was very low. When attending special functions these women were being neglected even by their relatives. Even though they liked to participate in functions and public events, the bitter experiences, disheartening words and isolation they faced made them isolate themselves without appearing in public. The attitude of the society towards widows increased their suffering. Other issues, such as the lack of resettlement programmes (87%) and favouritism and nepotism among high level officers (65%) were reported as major issues by respondents.

**Table 6.3: Merging issues faced by community**

| What are the merging issues that you have been faced with in your community to live in peace and harmony (Multiple Response) | Percent age |
|---|---|
| Women are ostracised by the community | 85.0% |
| Higher political involvement | 90.0% |
| Lack of resettlement programmes | 87% |
| Less Development activities | 98% |
| Army involvement | 100% |
| Favouritism and nepotism among the high level officers | 65% |

Source: Field survey

## 6.3.4 Active involvement in community activities

Being involved in one's own community would eventually lead to a better society and world as a whole. Active involvement in one's own community would, inevitably, reflect a good overall image of the people who are involved in the community themselves. This study revealed (refer Table 6.4) that most of the respondents were actively participating in temple or church festivals (100%), religious or spiritual group or organisations (94%) and community welfare organisations (91%). More than half of the respondents were participating in service clubs (60%), social club/groups (56%), ethnic/multicultural group/clubs (55%) and sports or physical recreation groups (52%). Very few of them participated in trade unions/ professional/ technical associations (25%), human and civil rights group (21%) and political party (12%).

**Table 6.4: Involvement in community activities**

| Active involvement in community activities (Multiple Response) | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Religious or spiritual group or organisation | 94% |
| Sports or physical recreation group (i.e. played cricket, football, volley ball etc.) | 52% |
| Temple or church festivals | 100% |
| Ethnic/multicultural group/club | 55% |
| Social club/group (e.g. playing cards, going on organised trips) | 56% |
| Service clubs (e.g. Lions, Rotary) | 60% |
| Community welfare organisations (e.g. farmer organisation and other rural society ) | 91% |
| Trade union / professional / technical associations | 25% |
| Political party | 12% |
| Human and civil rights group | 21% |

Source: Field Survey

## 6.3.5 Reason for not being actively involved in community activities

The respondents also highlighted reasons for not being actively involved in community activities (refer Table No. 6.5). The two main reasons were that they were either not interested (80%) and/or had no time (76%). Other reasons cited were the lack of transport (65%), lack of groups in the local area that they knew of and they have a full time career (58%) and financial reasons (55%). Less than half of the respondents reported that they had no one to go with (45%), it was not convenient (35%), and the

family does not allow them to attend (28%) or they did not attend due to health reasons (21%).

**Table 6.5: Reason for not actively involved in community activities**

| Reason for not being actively involved in community activities | Percentage |
|---|---|
| No transport | 65% |
| Financial reasons | 55% |
| No one to go with | 45% |
| No groups in the local area that I know of and have a full time career | 58% |
| Family does not allow | 28% |
| Not convenient | 35% |
| Not interested | 80% |
| No time | 76% |
| Health reasons | 21% |

Source: Field Survey

This study also revealed that 15% of the respondents were extremely unhappy with their community life, 45% of them reported to be unhappy, 12% were neither happy nor unhappy, 21% of them were happy and 7% of them extremely happy (refer Figure 6.1). Therefore, this study also highlighted that most of the people were unhappy with their community life.

**Figure 6.1: Overall Impression of Community Life**
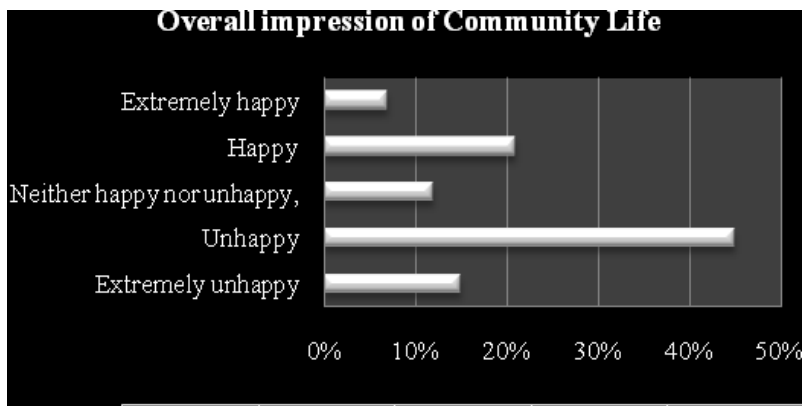


Source: Field Survey

## 6.4  Analysis of findings - Qualitative

### 6.4.1  Theme 1: The Concept of Peace and Harmony

In the Northern Province, the concept of peace was attributed by the FGD participants (Rural Development Society Members in Kilinochchi) to be the inculcation and development of positive thinking and positive attitudes among the participants in order to attain the ultimate goal of a better, more peaceful society for the future. While explaining peace, most of the respondents maintained that "*Peace is present right here and now... in ourselves and in everything we do and see…Every breath we take… every step we take…, can be filled with peace… joy…and serenity. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it… We need only to be awake… alive in the present moment.*"

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Another FGD conducted for the youth groups in Jaffna stated that, "*The downfall of the attempts of governments and leaders to unite to say this is peace…sometime is found in this- in the wrong message that we should see everyone as the same…."* This is the root of the failure of harmony. Because the truth is*, "We are all different…dress…culture…values…and way of life…let us show the difference to other people that we expect…and ask the government.…we do not ask separate state…that chapter is finished…that is Prabakaran's era….there is an another door…we like to open the door…there are differences between the people …look at these differences…accept it…these differences, learn from our previous experiences and expectations… We are not the same…we need to show our own identity."* In the quest for unity and peace, "*we cannot blind ourselves and expect to be all the same…we all have an underlying belief that everyone should be the same as us at some point… We are not on a journey to become the same or to be the same…But we are on a journey to see that in all of our differences…that is what makes us to show the differences…but we want to see the real peace."*

All the respondents highlighted the deeply rooted connection between holistic development and peaceful future for society. All of the respondents argued that the holistic development of people helps them to acquire a peaceful personality that ultimately leads to the cultivation of a positive and peaceful society for future generations.

In the Jaffna District, a high premium was placed on relationship mechanisms. Healthy relationships, a friendly environment, the absence of fear, and feelings of safety were marked as the prominent features of peace. Defining the concept, the peace

workers highlighted that: "*Peace means… we should have good attitude and behaviour toward each other…My behaviour with my ethnicity and other ethnicities should be positive and work friendly…I think this can be peace… In other words, we can say that peace means providing an environment for people in which they feel safe and secure to live…*"Another Peace worker highlighted "*the importance of healthy people-to-people, ethnic-to-ethnic and politician-to-politician….reciprocal relationships that are constructive and friendly…*"She explained that*, "Peace means living in peace, improving our relationships, and sharing our experience with each other in a constructive manner".*

Another Jaffna University Political department lecturer explained that, "*we often think of peace as the absence of war…that if the powerful ethnic [group] would reduce their weapon arsenals…we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons… we see our own minds- our own prejudices… fears and ignorance… Even if we transport all the bombs to the moon… the roots of war and the roots of bombs are still there… in our hearts and minds…and sooner or later we will make new bombs… To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of men and women… To prepare for war, to give millions of men and women the opportunity to practice killing day and night in their hearts, is to plant millions of seeds of violence… anger… frustration… and fear that will be passed on for generations to come.*"

## 6.4.2 Theme 2: Living Environment

In the Northern Province, the present situation emerged as a prominent influencing feature for initiating and strengthening the peace environment. One of the peace worker stated that

"*The Sri Lankan present situation is very important… nowadays people feel a bit of peace and harmony...It should be one of the main responsibilities of the all politicians and the government to cultivate a peaceful environment in the Northern Province...".* Similarly, another Rural Development Organization's President said that "… *related peace and harmony with the absence of fear in the environment…"* He maintained that *"For me it is a peaceful environment where there is no fear for going elsewhere in our country*". However, in the rural context, friendly relationships, a fearless environment, and democratic traditions should be considered the prominent features of a peaceful environment that is helpful for establishing and maintaining peace and harmony in Sri Lanka.

The community membersduring the FGD held in the Rural Women Society in Jaffna, maintained that in this "*We should have a friendly environment in our country. We do... things on democratic principles and make a friendly atmosphere in the overall rural village... We feel... first of all... our relationships are very important, and secondly, ....it is essential that there is no fear for the people to come to  Jaffna..., see many people from south use to come to...Nagadeepa, Nallur, other religious places and beach*." Further the participant explained that "*... the culture and context of the urban dwellers are more prone to socio-cultural and political unrest... therefore their participants are more sensitive and cautious about formally initiating peace and harmony."*

Everyone wants a peaceful and a friendly environment. Nevertheless, initiating peace and talking about peace can create troubles. People can give it a different meaning and you can face problems. One of the Key Informants said that*" I feel it is*

*because of political influences in our country which makes peace a challenging task*." Similar thoughts were shared by another Key Informant who said that, *"Our societal culture is full of turbulences based on economic, socio-cultural, political and religious grounds...this culture definitely exerts a huge influence on the politicians and peace workers...This also creates a problem for peace and harmony and cultivation of a peaceful and friendly environment in our county..."*

Indeed, the overall data reflects that these strategies for peace and harmony are employed whenever the community members and peace workers feel a need. These strategies are employed in an unorganised way and there is an absence of formal support structures for peace implementation. A Key Informant from a government department mentioned the need for the professional development of politicians and peace workers - that is initiating and sustaining peace and harmony in the community in which they live. A woman who is a community member stated that "... *politicians and peace workers need more knowledge on peace and harmony and training... If they understand what is peace...and how to make it... as part of their daily political activities...then they will be in a better position to implement their participation... in the real community set up."* Therefore, professional development is very important at all stages of political activity. She suggested that all politicians and peace workers should be given awareness through training programmes on how to integrate the concept of peace and harmony into their political activities and daily involvement.

As mentioned in the analysis section, all participants placed a strong emphasis on the prevalence of a cooperative and enabling political situation and it being a necessary change for peace and

harmony in Sri Lanka. They considered friendly relationships, an acceptable constitution, equality, maintaining human rights, security forces influences, a fear-free environment, and democratic traditions as some of the prominent features of a happy environment, which can help initiate and strengthen peace and harmony. The views of the participants are in line with the declarations of LLRC which is to help the government and people foster positive social interactions among different ethnic communities, and establish and maintain positive collaborative relationships with families and the community at large to support Sri Lankan peace and harmony.

### 6.4.3Theme 3: Military involvement

In the Jaffna peninsula there are approximately 40,000 army officers, a ratio of approximately 1:11 of military personnel to civilians (State of the World' s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011). The situation in the Vanni is much worse. "*We are always threatened by army... We don't have good memories of them... Now it is very difficult to live under their control…"* .According to members of community based organisations (CBO) and other peace workers that have access to villages in the North, no civil activity can take place without military scrutiny and consent. *"We fear doing anything...like our ritual events or cultural events...we should get permission even now…otherwise army CID definitely come and inquire..."* Respondents reported that any basic civil or social activity, reconstructions work, any movement of people in or out of the area also required military permission. One University Lecture said that "*...You can't move. Everywhere you turn there is a soldier."* In addition, government relief operations in the north and some development activities remain

under military control, thereby increasing military involvement in the everyday life of civilians.

*"Police and military police are quite well...the army. ... always an expectation that there will be problems for all."*The military is increasingly involved in a host of projects in the North, including building houses and agricultural projects. During a FGD in Jaffna the village members said *"The military people must move out of the villages into camps. It is ok to have one big camp in each area but why should there be so much army personnel all over the village… If this continues it will be a grave problem for the people who are living around the army camp."*

### 6.4.4  Theme 4: Development activities

Large-scale development projects can be seen in the North - particularly the building of roads and bridges. However, some respondents and peace workers are concerned by the lack of consultation and participation of local people in the projects, the undermining of local indigenous knowledge, and the politicisation and ethnicisation of the process.

Community leaders during the FGD said that "*...the way development is taking place appears to ignore indigenous knowledge and undermines local culture and traditions... For example, during road building, several Palmyrah trees have been cut down... These trees are integral to the northern… Tamil culture and every part of the tree is used by local women for their daily activities and livelihood.*"

Central Government influence in rural development is not uncommon in Sri Lanka, but in the North the situation is

different. First, in development projects in the North, Government involvement is at the highest level; second, the development projects are planned and implemented mostly by political leaders. Many civil society members expressed their frustration, saying they felt powerless to challenge any project because of the close involvement of top level people, and their advisors and the military, in the planning and implementation process.

> *"Development is happening in the Northern Province… the needs of the people in resettled areas have not been met. People are not consulted… issues seem to be identified and decided by the people in power (mostly political) and do not attempt to hear the voices of the people. … The presence of other ethnicities troubles and worries Tamils to a great extent…. which reduces the harmony within the other ethnic group. We are continuing…. to be discriminated [against] and ethnic divisions will further damage our lives. Unfortunately, that is what looks like is going to happen. With land grabbing Tamils lose their livelihood and a place to live. Sinhalese and Muslims get support from the police and the military. Tamils do not relate much to the police and the military. Therefore they lose their negotiating power. There is no one to speak for them. Once again people are suppressing their emotions and hardships."* Peace worker and activist in Jaffna.

Community members say that while major highways are being built in the north, "*…nothing is being done to develop the small roads in the villages*." As a result, "*...villagers have to travel long distances, sometimes on foot, in arduous conditions to access basic facilities... Little is being done to develop village markets*

*while plans are underway to create commercial hubs*." The main points raised by another community member who did not want to criticise the development that is taking place in Northern Province were that,

> "*Economic development can promote peace... The conflict in the North has taken a heavy toll on the resources of the country and has weakened investor confidence...Therefore, the promotion of a regionally balanced economic growth becomes necessary to secure peace and prosperity. For example Dayatakerula…spend [a] lot of money for their places….but here.... nothing more…As part of the regional development strategy of the Government…[there]should be a balanced and substantial investment on infrastructure development in the North….that will be reflected in the national growth strategy to promote lasting peace through economic progress and equal opportunities."*

## 6.4.5 Theme 5: Peace and harmony - a critical analysis

There were strong feeling regarding the lack of transparency in the Government of Sri Lanka's rehabilitation and detention system. People from Kilinochchi and Jaffna in the Northern Province used phrases, in a different tone, when referring to the term 'Peace and Harmony', such as stating that it is like a*"chronic wound"*, which *"no one thinks to solve quickly…otherwise…it takes long generation".* All members from the CBOs during the FGDs raised this question "What is happening here?" It is therefore essential to have a reconciliation process to answer this question. Any such process that does not do so would be seen as meaningless to these survivors.

The strongest demand expressed by the focus groups was the need for justice, which also leads to peace and harmony, because many people have been arrested by military personals but "…. *this government should tell us what happened to them… They have to tell [us] what exactly happened to them. We will not accept it if the government just tells us the truth...otherwise how can we address the peace and harmony with us*..." FGD participant.

The military presence in the Northern Province was one of the main barriers to the return to normal life in the province and demilitarization is one of the most important steps that could be taken towards reconciliation. "*All these army camps should be shifted only then can we live without fear*" stated a community leader form Jaffna.  In order to achieve lasting peace in Sri Lanka, the demands of the survivors of Sri Lanka's civil war must be met.  Those demands are for truth, justice, compensation, and acknowledgement. The survivors feel discriminated against and do not feel they have any stake in the Sri Lankan nation as currently constructed.

Yet survivors fear, with good reason, that once the report is published international attention will wane and that the question of accountability will be left to domestic mechanisms in which they have no confidence. Furthermore, while these domestic mechanisms undoubtedly have a role to play, here too pressure from the international community will be vital in ensuring that they undergo the reforms and cultural and structural changes that will be required to ensure that their impact is positive.

## 6.5 Conclusions

There are government and a few non-government organisations contributing to the development of the Northern Province in areas such as agriculture, housing, business, education, and health. However, none of them have specifically paid attention to the area of peace and harmony and peacemaking in this socio-culturally and politically diverse region. Particularly for the politicians, peace workers and younger generations at the higher learning institutions, an organised and planned effort to build peace and harmony by any organisation was not visible. Though those who make peace and harmony seems to understand the concept of peace  and explained some ways in which this is exercising at the rural level, they were unable to provide evidence of their practical work in a planned and organised manner. Therefore, such organisation should consider it as an opportunity and recognise the need for a peace and harmony intervention.

In light of study findings, it is suggested that the government department revisit its new strategy to incorporate and integrate a planned and organised component of peace at the grassroots level. The participants of this study seemed to be unsatisfied with the societal culture and were trying their best to avoid the communal culture and were trying to create their own environment in the Northern Province. Without including the Sinhalese community the efforts for peace may not give the desired results. Therefore it is suggested that, in particular, the integration of peace and politicians involvement in the comparatively urban and rural area may give fruitful results. Therefore, the local government in the region should consider including political involvement in peace in their development of

the urban context. However, such a programme will be beneficial and easy to install if it is integrated as part of the existing peace practices rather than aiming for drastic changes. Literature on peace and harmony in socio-cultural and politically diversified regions have also suggested in favour of working in line with the existing systems rather than attempting to bring about change by working against the prevailing systems (Bretherton, Weston, & Zbar, 2010). The initiation of planned and organised peace at the grassroots level involves a range of preparations such as setting up objectives, developing a contextual peace in different layer content package, training peace workers and providing awareness within the different ethnic community. The scale of this study is not large enough to provide rich insights for such a comprehensive peace and harmony overall in Sri Lanka. For that reason, a major study, covering all nine provinces of the country, may be conducted to gain more in-depth insights into the development of a comprehensive idea for peace and harmony.

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