

Women: The Survivors of Civil War in Sri Lanka



*Women - The Survivors
of
Civil War in Sri Lanka*

*International Movement Against all forms of
Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)*

Women Workers Help Line (WWHL)

South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

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Executive Summary

Women are often among the first to call for an end to conflict and to strive for order and rebuilding. In post-war situations, whether in groups or individually, formally or informally, women probably contribute more than government authorities or international aid to reconciliation, reviving local economies and rebuilding social networks. This Overview Report explores the distinct ways that women are affected by armed conflict. It highlights the gender-specific disadvantages experienced by the women left out of conventional interpretations of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Women experience significant disadvantage in the course of armed conflict, but it does not necessarily follow that men are always the perpetrators and therefore the winners, and women the losers. Armed conflict exacerbates the inequalities in gender relations that exist in the pre-conflict period. Interventions in conflict must take account of local contexts and of the diverse realities of women, who may simultaneously play the roles of activists and parents, soldiers and victims.

Many displaced women, refugee women and girls experience violence by smugglers or traffickers, border guards, police and other law enforcement officers and sometimes even by other refugees. Women are often targeted for gang rape, abduction and sexual slavery by all sides in the conflict. Sexual harassment and violence at the hands of peacekeepers and aid workers is not uncommon. Also women are subject to gendered social roles,

cultural, social, economic, and political expectations and obligations in family and community.

Post war women often meet with open hostility and suspicion, Violation of social and gender roles, Experiences often marginalized. They also experience domestic abuse. As a result they may migrate or remain in exile.

Girl ex-combatants face abuse and rejection similar to boy soldiers. Additionally, they suffer sexual abuse such as Gynecological injuries, Psychosocial and sexual trauma and Pregnancy. If they are accepted home and give birth, their child may face abuse. They may find home environment hostile. Cut out of social networks, Difficulty finding help to rebuild homes, work fields, or childcare are other issues faced by them. Thus they may acquire new skills and confidence.

However, despite their active role in promoting peace, women tend to fade into the background when official peace negotiations begin and the consolidation of peace and rebuilding of the economy becomes a formal exercise. But it is not possible to return to pre-war mores; gender roles and social values have been deeply affected by the experience of war. Thus, the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions is an integral part of the challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies. It is important for policy-makers and operational actors in national governments and aid organizations to understand the complex ways gender and rebuilding interact.

Introduction

Women's contributions to war and peace have long been underestimated. In fact, women often contribute to the outbreak of violence and hostilities in many cases; they are instrumental in inciting men to defend group interests, honor, and collective livelihoods. Women also play a key role in preserving order and normalcy in the midst of chaos and destruction. In times of conflict, when men engage in war and are killed, disappear or take refuge outside their country's borders, it is women who are left with the burden of ensuring family livelihood. Women struggle to protect their families' health and safety, a task which rests on their ability to cope pragmatically with change and adversity.

It is therefore not surprising that women are also a driving force for peace. They are often among the first to call for an end to conflict and to strive for order and rebuilding. In post-war situations, whether in groups or individually, formally or informally, women probably contribute more than government authorities or international aid to reconciliation, reviving local economies and rebuilding social networks.

However, despite their active role in promoting peace, women tend to fade into the background when official peace negotiations begin and the consolidation of peace and rebuilding of the economy becomes a formal exercise. But it is not possible to return to pre-war mores; gender roles and social values have been deeply affected by the experience of war. Thus, the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions is an integral part

of the challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies. It is important for policy-makers and operational actors in national governments and aid organizations to understand the complex ways gender and rebuilding interact.

Women's role in armed conflict

Women have been intimately implicated in the war, and not only as victims and survivors. They have engaged in active combat and played important roles in the military, though not high level ones, and in coercive activities of the warring parties. Women in the Sri Lankan armed forces have engaged largely in supportive roles but sometimes in risk-filled work, such as checkpoint duty. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) deployed women cadres in frontline combat and as suicide bombers. The public acknowledgement of women as actors and agents has nevertheless been minimal during the conflict or in the peace negotiations. In Sri Lanka neither of the two negotiating teams in the peace process included women. Only after much lobbying by women's groups and other organizations the Sub-Committee on Gender Issues (SGI) was created at the end of 2002, as one of several sub-committees officially attending negotiations. It consisted of ten members, half appointed by the Government and half by the LTTE. The SGI's mandate was to ensure that a gender perspective and women's interests and concerns were represented in the peace process. However, it had little impact, in part because it could not develop an independent program or interventions. In 2008, the UNIFEM estimated that women constituted less than 10 percent of members in formal negotiating delegations, on average, and fewer than two percent of the signatories to peace agreements.

Evidence about women's active involvement as combatants in countries such as Angola, El Salvador, Eritrea, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Nicaragua, Uganda, Vietnam and Sri Lanka where all had female fighters, in some cases even holding high-level positions. The reasons women put forth for becoming combatants are as diverse as those of men and include forced recruitment, agreement with the goals of the war, or economic necessity, pointing to both political and socio-economic motives.

But even when political activities do not immediately improve women's situation, it is clear that they generate or reinforce women's awareness of the political dimension of conflicts and of their own political position, be it as victims of political violence or as a muted political group. The work for peace has also been identified by many women as a unique opportunity to become organized, an experience that can prove useful in other aspects of post-war rebuilding. And when such movements focus on women's shared social experiences, they may contribute both to counteracting dominant stereotypes of the "ethnic other" which are reinforced by war-time propaganda, and to generating greater solidarity among women across other lines of division. This has been true in Sri Lanka and many other countries (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1992; Family Rehabilitation Centre, 1993; Sharoni, 1995; War Report, 1995).

Another approach that has been adopted in recent analyses of women's situation is the so-called vulnerability approach. Basically it maintains the idea of women as particularly vulnerable victims in times of conflict. But rather than confirming this as a result of women's nature, this approach shifts the focus to the structures and mechanisms that turn women into victims in the first place, and that reproduce or even increase their vulnerability in times of crisis. The potential strength of the approach is that it combines structural, cultural and personal levels of reality, and that it incorporates both a

short and a long-term perspective. Although the term vulnerability has not been extensively used in this review, it has a similar orientation, and the discussion includes several examples of how the ongoing processes of post-war reconstruction may, despite initial gains, eventually result in women's marginalization.

Women's situation in post armed conflict

As elsewhere in South Asia, Sri Lankan society, across ethnic and class lines, constructs female respectability in terms of pre-marital virginity, marriage, motherhood and sexual chastity and rarely treats sexuality in an affirmative manner or accords it positive value. A sexually compromised woman or girl foregoes the chance of marrying. The sexual ordering of society is often times subverted in conditions of armed conflict, however, where the rule of law is largely suspended. Very young women, for example, including young teenage girls, have been forced into marriage by parents in the belief that marriage will provide protection against increased sexual vulnerability. This is a regression from a situation in which the age of marriage for women was increasing and signals a context of fear that effective familial and community sexual surveillance is less possible, both to discourage sexual activity in girls and provide them with protection against male sexual attention.

In the war zones and border terrains of Sri Lanka, although rape was not systematically used as an instrument of war, women, especially Tamil women, were vulnerable to sexual assault by government armed forces and non-LTTE paramilitaries. Checkpoints around the country were also sites of serious risk for Tamil women at the hands of the armed forces.

The violation of human rights by armed forces of the state, on the one hand, and armed groups contesting the state, on the

other, is familiar during such hostilities and present also in situations of ceasefire, even if less readily recognized. Such violations range from the suspension of basic civil and political rights, the imposition of military rule and the mass killing, injury and displacement of non-combatants, to abduction, torture, rape, and extra-judicial killings.

This is not to assume that for women, such a process is easy, unambivalent or always pleasurable, but rather to suggest that loss of male partners or husbands, kin, community, homes, possessions and secure and familiar value systems cannot be read exclusively as the complete disintegration of female subjectivity. The collapse of familiar support systems has propelled women into authoritative roles by default, including acting as primary breadwinner and head of household and making associated decisions, It also suggests that control over securing and deploying material resources could enable the means to make sexual choices other than by conventional social prescriptions, if women so chose.

Inform, a human rights documentation and advocacy organization that has a strong commitment to women's rights, is among the few that have opted to be supportive of the complex sexual choices women are negotiating within the frame of militarization and war. They has held national-level forums, targeting lawyers, medical professionals, the media and activists, to raise awareness of the right of women to resist marriage and to refuse sex in an environment where celibacy for women is unimaginable, and the right to engage in sexual activity de-linked from marriage or reproduction. The discussion of these interconnected concerns during a period of conflict is valuable not only to draw attention to the complexity of women's sexual choices and negotiations, but also to underscore that sexuality cannot be defined exclusively in terms of violation, even in a context dominated by violence.

Internally displaced women

One of the major challenges facing Sri Lanka today is related to the unresolved issue of the internally displaced. Unlike in other countries where civil conflict displaced thousands or millions the IDP displacement has become a political issue. As the war escalated in the first half of 2009 both national and international humanitarian agencies had to leave the conflict zone. Stories related to bombing and shelling displacing and injuring people came into both international and local media. While the government of Sri Lanka continuously stated that the numbers remaining inside the LTTE held district was only 70,000 UNHCR reported the number to be approximately 250,000. World concern was raised by the Diasporas and other human rights and humanitarian agencies re the plight of the un-armed civilians.

The mass exodus could not be coped by the Sri Lanka government. 259,000 IDPs were housed in several camps in Vavuniya and their movements were restricted. Humanitarian agency access was also restricted.



Both humanitarian and human rights issues of IDPs today have become a major issue. In Vavuniya camps the IDPs had no adequate supply of water and toilets. Medical supply was limited. Women IDPs had no privacy and there are reports of rape and sexual harassments. The war without witness has become an issue of governance without accountability.

Today the government has embarked on a resettlement program. GOSL has boasted of a rapid resettlement. Thousands have been taken back to Killinochchi and Mulathivu. While thousands have gone back to their villages; some others like the 35,000 people removed on 7th July remain in transit camps in Mulathivu. Families who lived in the high security areas are unable to go back to their villages. As an initial re-settlement grant an amount of Rs 5000 is given to them. They also receive 14 roofing sheets and 12 Tapolin covers to put up a temporary shelter. “We received this assistance. But we have to go to the jungle to cut trees to put them up. Then the soldiers will come and stop us. We have to open a bank account to receive the second installment of Rs 20,000. We have no livelihood therefore we have to borrow money to go to Killinochchi or Vavuniya to open a bank account. We are told that Rs 25,000 will be given as a livelihood grant” said one of the IDP women.

Those who have gone back to villages in Killinochchi experience lack of water and toilet facilities as the infrastructure is damaged during the war. There is also no electricity which leads to security concerns for women who are alone. Therefore in the nights several families come together to sleep. The resettlement process is done to reduce the visibility of the open camp site which drew international criticism. The basic principle related to IDP resettlement, the consultation with the affected has not taken place.

Both in North and East resettlement process the UN guiding principles have not been adhered to. People are taken in buses

and dumped in locations selected by the authorities. ‘We were told that we had been being taken to Vakarai. But we were taken to Killiveddi; just near our village and were told that it was now a designated high security zone. How can we live like beggars when we are farmers and fisherman?’ another person asked.

A large number, of more than 140,000 sent out of the camps, have not actually *returned* to their homes nor been *resettled*, but have been sent to and remain in “transit centers” in their home districts. In many cases these centers, located in churches, schools and other government buildings, are hours away from people’s homes, without adequate transport to and from their homes or livelihood opportunities.

It was shocking to meet with families who have lived an IDP life for over 23 years. These are families who have been displaced from Thellipalai and Kankasanthurai (Northern parts of Jaffna) as government took over these areas as high security zones. For 23 years, more than 3000 families have lived in these camps located near Thellaipallai. The camp manager told “He is now 45 years married and has 2 children. It is generation to generation living in IDP camps”. While we are talking about the recently displaced we have forgotten them for 23 years.

On the other hand there are the Muslim IDPS who were evicted from Jaffna in 1990. They remain scattered in Puttlam, Anuradhapura, Panadura and Negombo. Some families are going back to their original villages in the North, in Jaffna and Vavuniya but they did not receive any assistance from the government. Some in Vavuniya has received roofing assistance. On inquiry it was told that according to the recent contract signed with UNHCR only the Vanni IDPs are entitled to receive assistance.

Detention

A majority of the more than 12,000 people, who surrendered and were detained on suspicion of involvement with the LTTE, appear now to have been released from closed military camps. Thousands still remain in arbitrary and unmonitored detention, however, without access to legal counsel and many of those who have been released are still subject to frequent questioning by police and military. The absence of independent monitoring of either the detention or "reintegration" of suspected LTTE cadres remains very worrying. The International Committee of the Red Cross, previously blocked from monitoring the treatment of surrendered or suspected LTTE detainees, was ordered in November to close its remaining operations in the Northern Province. Its inability to carry out its traditional work of tracing the missing and reuniting separated families has been devastating for the hundreds of families who are still searching for their loved ones.

Security Concerns

The raping of two women recently in Vishmadu only reflects the tip of the iceberg. The hidden stories of sexual harassment remain unshared. Surrounded by security forces Tamil resettlement process is a hoax. How can resettlement be free when you are watched every day? In Mulathivu when groups came to discuss arrangements re housing constructions the security personnel stopped the meeting. When the families wanted to mourn their dead after one year they could not do so. Sri Lanka government has boasted at the Security Council sessions held on 7th July 2010 that they have resettled 90% of the IDPs. But the actual stories of the IDPs tells the re truth of further insecurity, mistreatment, violations and violence.

Widows

Women's Population in Sri Lanka is 52% of the total population. Women headed households as reported in the Report presented by the Government of Sri Lanka to the UN Committee on CEDAW stood at 23.4% as of 2006/07, with the highest (25%) in the urban sector. Of these, 81% are over 40 years of age and a majority (64.6%) is not in employment.

Drawing attention to and addressing the needs of widows in Sri Lanka has been the work of international humanitarian organizations, such as Oxfam and Save the Children Norway, as well as local non-governmental organizations. Reports from such organizations, press reports and studies by various researchers covering different parts of the country delineate the challenges faced by thousands of women widowed by the armed conflict. Central is the immense and unanticipated responsibility bestowed on them by the death or "disappearance" of their husband, who has often been the breadwinner. Women suddenly need to acquire the skills to support their families, since many did not previously work outside the home. They often face pressures and hostility from their dead husband's kin, including bids to acquire his source of income, eviction from the shared family home and deprivation of property.

The status of women as wives within most communities is largely one of material dependency and inequality. Marriage is seen as a means both to contain female sexuality and allow its expression within a controlled domain.



The death of a husband simultaneously marks the widow as inauspicious, sexually lacking, even indirectly responsible for his death, as well as potentially sexually transgressive, because there

is no man to control her. If a Hindu Tamil widow wears the red pottu on her forehead or flowers in her hair, as a married woman would whose husband is living, she is subjected to gossip and derogation by community members for signalling her sexual availability to men. Widowed women may decide not to remarry for a number of reasons--because they believe in one spouse for life, to avoid being further alienated from the community or to avoid the possibility that children may not fare well with a new father. This decision does not alleviate the possibility of sexual harassment, however. Displaced, widowed Tamil women's struggles to cope with disintegration while simultaneously securing extremely contested terrains of agency, and the need to recast widows in terms other than as "victims". Widows at the Siddambarapuram camp for displaced persons struggle to confront and reject the conventional nomination accorded to them as inauspicious beings doomed to social and cultural ostracism. Compelled to support their families and other dependants, they have refused to abandon wearing the red pottu. As Rajasingham-Senanayake points out, the particular challenge these women face is finding a cultural idiom in which they can express and affirm their empowerment and autonomy.

Wearing the red pottu allows them to "pass" as married women, holding at bay both ill-fortune and uninvited male sexual attention, while at the same time underscoring the lack in society of empowering cultural signs or markers for once-married women. In a transgressive (heterosexual) register, the pottu may also facilitate mobility and sexually autonomous agency--the capacity to be a "merry widow"--though with the attendant risks of communal censure, ostracism and even death for compromising communal honor or that of the emerging nation.

While newly widowed women learn how to negotiate between self-determination, responsibilities to dependants and community pressures, the Sri Lankan state appears committed to reasserting

normative gender roles and, through this, the sexual status quo. In regard to rehabilitating internally displaced persons, state officials have allocated land with little attention to local inheritance patterns or traditions of land ownership--which may be matrilineal or bilateral, rather than patrilineal or to the changed conditions of women's lives. Thus, wives are ignored as potential title-holders, and land is given in men's names only. A widow may inherit such land only if it can be proven that the male head of household is dead and that she was nominated before her husband's death to inherit land. Thus, while proven widows may have some recourse to the state's beneficence, conditional upon the husband's wishes, land inheritance is refused to women deserted by their husbands or where a husband's whereabouts are unknown, even if they are currently the head of household. Thus, the state ties together male privilege, sexual practice and material autonomy. It rewards women who are "properly" appended to a man and penalizes all others.

Post conflict setting

It is now widely recognized among social scientists and international organizations that women experience conflict differently than men. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action explicitly identifies “the effects of armed conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation” (Platform for Action and Beijing Declaration 1995: 34), as one of twelve critical areas of concern and focuses on their specific needs and vulnerabilities. On the other hand, however, it needs to be acknowledged that conflict and post-conflict settings can facilitate and can support women’s empowerment in political, legal, and social realms.

One of the most obvious shifts in gender relations that takes place during armed conflicts relates to women’s active participation in fighting. Although the majority of combatants are male, women do participate in conflict and may occupy central positions in the military. This behavior clearly bears a high level of risk and needs to be evaluated critically. Furthermore, the extent to which female “emancipation” is possible within military subcultures remains a topic of discussion among academics such as Jordan/Denov (Jordan/Denov 2007: 43). Nevertheless, empirical evidence exists that women are often not only trained in the use of arms, but also receive education in logistical and administrative affairs (see Meintjes, in Meintjes 2003: 65).

In addition, being part of the military means being part of a dominant group that symbolizes power and force. Clearly, this

has a significant impact on women's self-perception: being an active part of the armed forces has contributed to change women's traditional identity as mothers and wives to that of liberators and fighters for their country (see Bop, in Meintjes 2003: 21). A similar effect of increased self-consciousness can be observed when women engage in war-related activities such as the preparation of meals and provision of food nursing services for combatants. For example, the militant nationalist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which had been engaged in a conflict with the Sri Lankan Government for decades was well known for its active recruitment of women and girls. The group understood itself as 'liberatory', fighting for ideals including the emancipation of women from traditional female roles. Women accounted for approximately one third of the LTTE's fighting forces, took on positions in all units of the movement and experienced equal gender relations.

It is not clear however, whether this different role for women could be sustained outside of the context of armed conflict. The majority of people fleeing armed conflict are women and children. The negative consequences of displacement have been discussed in the previous section. Without disparaging the challenges women face during these situations, life as a refugee or internally displaced person can also offer opportunities for transformation. Since resources of any kind are usually in short supply in camps, women oftentimes begin to develop new skills and productive enterprises, take on new and additional responsibilities, create networks of survival and draw on inner, untapped resources to carve out new arenas of independence. Living in camps can relieve them from subservient traditions and some women emerge with a new sense of their own strength and capabilities. This effect is also likely to set in among non-displaced women when they extend their responsibilities to sustain the livelihood of their families and take over duties and jobs men used to do.

Finally, conflict can have a positive effect on women's participation in politics and strengthen their status in civil society. Conflict settings facilitate the opportunity for women to work together, learn leadership skills, and mobilize for liberation and peace (see Meintjes et al., in Meintjes et al. 2003: 10). As recent research shows, conflicts can also enhance women's chances to access and take part in political systems and processes. In fact, enduring, large-scale wars that change governments and contest hitherto unchallenged political systems bear the greatest potential for women's access to parliament.

Unfortunately, the conflict-induced challenges women face do not always end once fighting has stopped. In fact, evidence exists that once fighting dies down, the gender violence women are exposed to during conflict becomes even worse (see Pankhurst, in Pankhurst 2008: 3). Furthermore, achievements of empowerment are often difficult to sustain and may be reversed. On the other hand, however, the post-conflict period is one of transition, presenting further opportunities for positive changes and improvements. Hence, it is a period no less important than the actual period of fighting and needs to be analyzed and accounted for.

One pressing issue women face in the post-conflict period is gender-based violence. While the exposure to rapes and other crimes is not new, recent research demonstrates that violence at home and in the public intensifies after fighting has ended. In the aftermath of conflict, women still suffer from violence and abuse on their way to collect water, when they work in the fields, or in urban workplaces (see UNRISD 2005: 233). Reasons for this trend include, amongst others, the problems of reintegration of male ex-combatants into society and the simultaneous lack of necessary psychological support helping them deal with traumatic experiences and dissatisfaction (see Amnesty International USA 2009).

An additional problem specific to the post-conflict period is the relapse to prior gender inequalities. Examples of countries in which benefits and achievements gained during conflict could not be sustained are abundant. There are a number of reasons for this regression and backlash including communities trying to return to “normality”, men who seek their former jobs and responsibilities back, or governments which do not agree with the shift in gender roles. In some cases, these objections can even end in arrest, murder, or other violent assaults against women (see UNRISD 2005: 234). Most interestingly, evidence exists that calls for women to be tied to fields and kitchens occur even in countries where this was not the norm before the conflict had taken place (see UNRISD 2005: 234).

Closely related to the previous aspect is the systematic exclusion of women from peace negotiations and post-war planning. It is a common observation that although women represent the majority of the post-conflict population and hence have to provide for their families and communities, they are excluded from international negotiation tables (see ESCAP 2006: 8).

On the other hand, however, it is important to acknowledge that the period following ceasefire is characterized as one of tremendous change and as a period of transition, presents opportunities for positive changes and improvements. Just as women can gain from conflict, they can gain in post-conflict settings. Examples of positive trends include the participation of women in peace talks, the development of policies focusing on gender equity, the consolidation of civic and human rights, the formulation of laws targeting violence against women, higher levels of political participation and presence of women in the government, and gender mainstreaming activities (see Meintjes, in Meintjes et al. 2003: 63f.).

While the interlinking mechanisms are complex at times, it is clear that in conflicts that were based on some sort of liberation

struggle ending with the desire to build a new society, the chances of benefitting from conflict increased. Similarly, in cases where women received great attention during the conflict or where gender issues were raised as part of the political agenda of the conflict, the potential for improving women's legal rights beyond the pre-war situation may be greater (see Pankhurst, in Pankhurst 2008: 7)

As outlined in preceding sections, women in conflict and post-conflict settings have specific needs and face challenges which oftentimes differ from those of their male counterparts. Key international agreements or frameworks which explicitly highlight and address these issues include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which identifies women and armed conflict as one of twelve critical areas of concern; the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific (1994); Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000); the Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security (2005); and Security Council Resolution 1820 which recognizes sexual violence as a distinct security issue during and after armed conflicts.

A discussion paper prepared by ESCAP in 2000 which evaluates the regional situation regarding women and armed conflict states the following: "in reviewing the progress achieved in the promotion and protection of women and their rights in situations of armed conflict, it would appear that this area of concern has been given little attention by countries, including those where there is on-going conflict and in countries which border neighboring conflicts and Women's Participation in the Bougainville Peace Process. The conflict between the Papua New Guinea Defense Forces, the Bougainville Resistance

Forces, and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army about the control of the Panguna copper mine, the pollution it caused, and the demand of independence endured for almost a full decade. While women were hit hard by the crisis, they also played a pivotal role in the peace process: “Individual women used their high status in the family to negotiate peace in their communities and managed to use their influence as go-betweens with the warring factors to maintain constructive dialogues. In south and southwest Bougainville, women went into the jungle to negotiate with the local Bougainville Revolutionary Army leaders. Groups such as the Catholic Women’s Association and the Bougainville Community Integrated Development Agency run by Ruby Miringka, were the mainstay of humanitarian networks that provided food, clothing, and medicines to those in government and Bougainville Revolutionary Army-controlled areas. At the time, movement restrictions meant that these clandestine networks were the only source of emergency assistance. As restrictions eased, these groups became the backbone of development and peace building activities. Women’s groups and individual women’s leaders emerged as an important influence in the political arena” (Sister Lorraine Garasu, Member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth and Coordinator of the Bougainville Inter-Church Women’s Forum).

To where displaced populations have sought safe haven or refugee status. In national plans for action, the critical area of women and armed conflict has either been excluded by many countries or in other cases it has been amalgamated together with other critical areas of concern such as violence against women and women’s human rights. In case of the latter, this action has largely resulted in the specific concerns of women and armed conflict being overwhelmed, if not lost entirely in the broader debate of violence against women. This was not the intention of the Beijing Platform for Action or the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women” (ESCAP 2000: 32).

Four years later, in 2004, the “Beijing +10” global review took place. Summarizing the review of the regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its outcomes regarding the critical area of women and armed conflict, it can be concluded that refugee and internally displaced women and their well-being constituted a problem of particular concern: “Refugee women form a large group in the region and in countries such as Pakistan where the presence of large groups of refugees has taken a toll on meager resources as the changing international political climate has diverted funds to national security concerns; it is becoming increasingly complicated to address the situation of refugees. Meanwhile, women refugees continue to enter other countries from fear of persecution and violence. Not all their rights are met because of scant resources, security concerns and lack of political will. In Indonesia the total number of refugees at the end of 2002 was 1.3 million; the Government, in collaboration with international organizations, has coordinated relief supplies, relocation and provided housing for those willing to relocate. A National Coordination Agency on Natural Disasters and internally displaced persons operates at the national and provincial levels. Nongovernmental organizations in Indonesia are coordinating the empowerment of women who are victims of armed and ethnic conflicts and from different religious persuasions through training and assistance programs. This particular aspect of realizing women’s rights through interventions needs to be built upon” (ESCAP 2004: 18).

Issues to be addressed

The UN report with concluding observations presented to the GOSL in 2010 mentions “the establishment of national commissions on human rights to also address violations of women’s rights in situations of conflict as a positive policy measure” (ESCAP 2004: 19). Addressing “the institutional and structural causes of armed conflict” and recognizing “women’s roles in conflict resolution and peace building as stipulated in Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)” as well as taking steps “towards consulting and including them in negotiations for peace” were identified as specific needs in the region (ESCAP 2004:19).

The Committee expresses concern about the lack of independence of the National Human Rights Commission which was downgraded to B status, notably for this reason, by the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in December 2007. The Committee also notes with concern that posts on the National Human Rights Commission remain vacant and that the National Human Rights Commission is effectively in abeyance. Thus women who are threatened with post war human rights violations are unable to progress justice.

An issue for concern is malnutrition that affects nearly one-third of children and one quarter of women and that the nutrition status of internally displaced persons, especially children, remains an issue of serious concern. The mental health services remain insufficient to cope with widespread post-conflict mental

disorders. The 2007 draft Mental Health Act has still not been adopted.

In 2009 October the resettlement was commenced in Manthaiwest 1008 families with 5040 members were resettled in locations in Manthaiwest. These returned IDPs were depended on the Palamadhu hospital when it was functioning before the displacement. After these returnees settled down in their own areas they needed to go Mannar town hospital for medical treatment. To assist these returned IDPs a needs assessment was conducted by INGOs in early March 2010. Overall these villages were in urgent need of health services as none of them had their own hospitals and had to travel far distances to main hospitals in Mannar town and Murunkan towns. There was also the problem of communicable diseases brought in by the resettlers from Vanni and cases of spread were noted. Although not many cases of such diseases were identified at the time of the assessment, relevant government authorities and public health inspectors felt that it would soon become a problem if preventive action was not taken. Silavaturai hospital has not been functioning since 1990. The people in Musali DS are needed health mobile clinics.

Other problems faced by these communities and women and children in particular are environmental pollution caused by unoccupied spaces which are not cleaned up; these result in mosquito breeding. Alcoholism exists in some areas, along with the lack of toilets resulting in defecation in public spaces making the situation worse. Also responds should be given to the right of all people to a life of security, dignity and access to basic needs. Government and relevant parties should support the right to pursue a life that is without fear, persecution or personal deprivation.

Sri Lanka's war on terror reached a decisive phase, as it is characterized primarily by the displacement of civilians in the Wannai to Vavuniya and other boarder districts of wannai.

Vavuniya hosts close on 261372 displaced persons including those who have been conveyed injured by the time of implementation of this program. Conditions in the welfare camps trying A primary duty to prevent any more preventable deaths, disability and suffering is cast on the GoSL and partners working to meet humanitarian imperatives to lead people in peril to safety and security.

Apart from the loss of lives and property there are more long term social catastrophes that will add to the tragedy such as the increased number of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups such as single parented families, infants, children, and young adults left hopeless in these areas. Pregnant mothers affected by the disaster, living in welfare camps. The trauma they undergo, lack of proper nutrition and inadequate medical facilities will have a greater possibility for them to end up with a baby with malnutrition. Other concern would be the illnesses people suffer and diseases spreading in the camp sites which could lead to adverse conditions. All these would add up to make the number of IDPs a phenomenal figure if these issues are not addressed in the immediate relief efforts as well as the long-term prevention plans.

The situation would be the same among single parented families, children and young adults who have lost their breadwinners. Therefore the key issues of the more vulnerable groups in the long run, such as the persons with disabilities, women, children and single parented families should also be taken in to account in the immediate relief plans and in long term rebuilding and strengthening plans in order for them to relive their lives without being neglected in the overall development process. The survivors sustaining would also be in a depressed mental condition due to their situation and the feeling of they have become a burden to the remaining members of their families. They will require support to overcome the distress of the

dramatic change in their lives in addition to the medical services.

Due to the situation in Vavuniya is identified as the location for most amounts of needs. The sudden arrival of thousands of IDPs during this period is created more needs for shelter, toilets food, clean water, sanitation and medical care. Those who are arriving at these camps have nothing but the cloths on their backs and have taken refuge in make shift tarpaulin shelters, which has left them particularly at risk for chickenpox, diarrhea, viral fever, sore eyes and coughs. Without adequate shelter and open defecation is widespread due to the lack of toilet facilities. Health officials have expressed concern at the likelihood of outbreaks of waterborne disease, unless conditions are improved, particularly now with the prevailing weather. In addition many cases of malaria had been reported among the IDPs during last couple of months and authorities remain alert for possible additional disease outbreaks due to over crowd in camps. UN and other humanitarian agencies involved in health services in Vanni have warned on the increased risk of water-borne and respiratory diseases with the poor environmental health conditions.

There was urgent need to intervene for setting up toilets where IDPs are located at the Manic Farm. Even construction of semi permanent and immediate toilets were done by the organizations, the need of toilets was requested by the coordination bodies as its being damaged by the rain and heavy usage. Present sanitation facilities are also not adequate. Needed toilet materials, hygiene, cleanliness, water, etc are not sufficient. This would lead to a health crisis in the near future.

We believe survival through the emergency phase is not sufficient. In many cases, people affected by a disaster are not able to restart normal lives on their own when lives, houses, infrastructure and the economy are destroyed. The fact that

people displaced by a disaster can return to their homes or are relocated to a safe area does not mean that such solutions are automatically durable and sustainable. For a solution to be permanent, IDPs (and other affected persons) need in particular and must see:

- Reconstruction of destroyed property and/or restitution of/compensation for lost property and permanent housing, access to water etc.
- Access to services (health, education etc)
- Restoration of and access to livelihoods
- Restitution of lost/destroyed documents

The Total number who crossed since October 2008 to government controlled areas was 282,380 persons. At present Jaffna continues to host approximately 10,956; Mannar- 225, Trinco 6831 Vavuniya houses - 260,000 persons—in schools and relief villages divided into various zones. Shelter for these people is in the form of semi permanent structure in zone 0 and zone 1, and the rest seek refuge in tents, a small space shared by 1-2 families. The tents, meant to last 3-6 months are in a state of decay, need to be upgraded and people off loaded before the monsoon sets.

The priority areas for concern are to,

- Ensure that these people have a means to return home, prior to the break of the monsoons or as early as they possibly can.
- Centre stage their lives, ensure well-being and dignity of Sri Lankans through financial aid for repair, construction of shelters, sanitation facilities and a means to a sustainable livelihood, enabling recovery of property and possessions lost to them upon their displacement.

There is a pressing need for strengthened and coordinated efforts at national and international levels to prevent and respond to

sexual and gender-based violence. In situations of armed conflict, women are exposed to exacerbated violence, including the use of sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war to terrorize populations. Women and girls are abducted into sexual slavery or forced marriage and forced to exchange sex for survival. Horrific accounts of the brutality and scope of violence against women in situations of conflict all over the world have been recorded. Sexual violence during and after conflict continues to be inadequately addressed due to weak national mechanisms for protection and judicial redress and inadequate health and social support services. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence suffer from psychological trauma, permanent physical injury, and long-term health risks, including HIV/AIDS. There are many gaps in terms of services provided to survivors, including medical care, legal support and economic security required to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, stigma and fear continue to prevent women from seeking assistance and redress.

Even though governments and international organizations have developed guidelines and other support materials, discussion of gender equality issues is often absent from mainstream work on conflict prevention, peace negotiations and reconstruction. A challenge often raised is the lack of effective accountability and monitoring mechanisms to follow-up and drive more determined action on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 and other global commitments linked to the situation of women in armed conflict at international, regional and national levels. The inadequate availability of information and limited capacity to collect data and information at national level, including statistics disaggregated by sex and age, to inform reporting and to guide policy making and programs, remains a challenge. Without such data, the analysis of security situations, including violations of women's human rights, will be incomplete and

women's contributions to peace processes and their participation will continue to be challenged.

It is stressed that regular budgetary resources specifically allocated for both gender mainstreaming and initiatives targeted at women and girls are needed. The need for more secure funding for gender equality issues in post-conflict reconstruction, including for gender sensitive institution-building, legal reform, and women's economic empowerment and basic services, was also emphasized at the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In its agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality, the Commission emphasized the need to ensure adequate financing for women's full, equal and effective participation at all levels in conflict prevention, management and resolution, peace negotiations and peace building; to reduce excessive military expenditures in order permit the possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development, including for gender equality and the advancement of women; and to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for activities targeting persistent serious obstacles to the advancement of women.

Conclusion

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are used in armed conflicts to dehumanize women, as a form of torture to extract information and to control women and their communities. Whether asylum-seekers, refugees or internally displaced, for many women the violence doesn't stop when the armed conflict ends.

Many displaced women, refugee women and girls experience violence by smugglers or traffickers, border guards, police and other law enforcement officers and sometimes even by other refugees. Women are often targeted for gang rape, abduction and sexual slavery by all sides in the conflict. Sexual harassment and violence at the hands of peacekeepers and aid workers is not uncommon. Also women are subject to gendered social roles, cultural, social, economic, and political expectations and obligations in family and community.

Women are also finding it difficult to return back to their earlier positions during armed conflict, for instances it is impossible to return to earlier norms. Also armed conflict changes gender roles and social structures, it also reconfiguration of gender roles and positions is integral to reconstruction.

The importance of local people and specially women in post conflict peace building exercises are neglected. They contribute more than governments or international aid organizations to reconciliation processes. They are the key to reviving local

economies, rebuilding social networks, and achieving long-term sustainable peace.

In respect to gender and post conflict the following has to be addressed immediately.

- ✓ The right to vote
- ✓ Standing for election
- ✓ The constitution
- ✓ Education on rights
- ✓ Enforcement of rights;

One crucial aspect in the discussion of elections from a gender perspective is the right to vote. Most countries now have universal franchise by constitution in national and regional elections. In Somalia, for example, women have had the right to vote since the late 1950s, Sri Lanka can boast of having granted Sri Lankan women the right to vote in 1931, before most European countries.

Regarding gender and national peace negotiations, Women enter in two ways: Political mobilization/demand inclusion and UN or NGO-facilitated peace conferences.

In post conflict situations the equal access for both genders to resources are being neglected. Equal repatriation entitlements for both genders, however girls' access may be limited. Thus makes the re-integration process more difficult.

Post war women often meet with open hostility and suspicion, Violation of social and gender roles, Experiences often marginalized. They also experience domestic abuse. As a result they may migrate or remain in exile.

Girl ex-combatants face abuse and rejection similar to boy soldiers. Additionally, they suffer sexual abuse such as Gynecological injuries, Psychosocial and sexual trauma and Pregnancy. If they are accepted home and give birth, their child

may face abuse. They may find home environment hostile. Cut out of social networks, Difficulty finding help to rebuild homes, work fields, or childcare are other issues faced by them. Thus they may acquire new skills and confidence.

Sri Lankan authorities on 13 June 2010 conducted the marriages of 53 former rebels at a mass ceremony in Vavuniya. A total of 53 couples were issued marriage certificates in the northern district of Vavuniya, where they are being held in military custody



following the defeat of the Tamil Tiger separatist movement.

This was criticized by human rights defenders as this was done to help these couples kept in the camps or a political stunt by the government? Why are these couples with children still kept in these camps? Some see this as a major crime and violation of human rights.

War widows comprise a significant percentage of the population. They face problems specific to them such as not granted status of other widows. Rights to land, property, children are paramount.