

COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE SITUATION OF CONFLICT RELATED IDPs AND TSUNAMI
RELATED IDPs IN SRI LANKA

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Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are “persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations or generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised border¹.” The present Sri Lankan context experiences IDPs of two of the kinds that are outlined in this definition. The first group are the ‘conflict’ IDPs who have been displaced from their places of residence due to the protracted ethnic conflict that has been going on mainly in the Northern and the Eastern parts of the country. This group of people have been in IDP camps for over a decade though in 2002 after the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE, some of them returned to their villages. The word ‘some’ has to be stressed here because the majority of people, who were made to be IDP due to the ethnic conflict and the ensuing war, are still very much left in IDP camps. Following the devastating tsunami that hit the Northern, Eastern and the Southern sea belt of the country, a new range of IDPs were instantly created and they are the group of people who are now called ‘tsunami IDPs’. In simple terms, the differentiation between the IDP categories that exist in Sri Lanka at present is done on causal basis of becoming IDPs. In reality though this differentiation tend to become somewhat blurred as some of the conflict IDPs who returned to their places of residence after the CFA, were affected by tsunami as well. There are striking similarities and differences between the conflict IDPs and tsunami IDPs in the country in terms of their experiences of displacement, assistance provided for them by the GoSL, armed groups and humanitarian agencies as well as legal provisions and safeguards. This term paper aims to explore the situation of conflict IDPs and tsunami IDPs, looking at their present situations from these three angles. The paper will attempt to be as factual as possible while supporting certain case studies with visuals where possible.

¹ Definition in ‘Guiding Principles’ as quoted in *Addressing Internal Displacement: A Framework for National Responsibility*. The Brookings Institution-University of Bern. April 2005

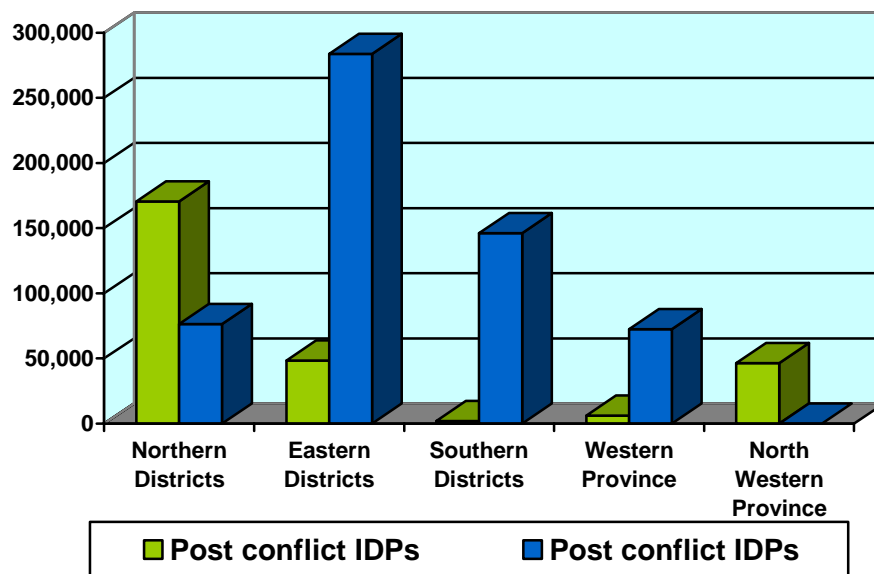
EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACEMENT: CONFLICT IDPs AND TSUNAMI IDPs

At a cursory glance the experiences of displacement between the conflict IDPs and tsunami IDPs may be seemingly different. This conclusion can be reached taking into consideration that internal displacement owing to conflict took place nearly a decade ago. Internal displacement due to tsunami on the one hand was caused by a natural disaster (as opposed to the ethnic conflict being caused by the actions of human beings) and on the other hand, took place in 2005.

The following table taken from the IDP Newsletter² quotes the present statistics concerning IDPs in Sri Lanka.

| Category | Northern Districts | Eastern Districts | Southern Districts | Western Province | North Western Province |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Post conflict IDPs | 170,467 | 48,318 | 2,025 | 6,091 | 46,526 |
| Post tsunami IDPs | 76,426 | 283,766 | 146,295 | 72,456 | 66 |
| Total IDPs | 246,893 | 332,084 | 148,320 | 78,547 | 46,592 |

Statistics of post-conflict and post-tsunami IDPs in Sri Lanka



The table shows that the geographic concentration of IDPs in Sri Lanka. The Northern and the Eastern districts have slower growth compared to the other areas owing to the prolonged war and the highest number of IDPs is concentrated in these areas. This makes the development strategy in Sri Lanka seemingly unbalanced as focus is mostly upon Northeast development. However, there are no accurate and accepted figures in terms of all affected IDPs, aggregated statistics

² IDP Newsletter. Vol-1, July 2005. A collaborative effort by CHA, CPA and NPDS for IDPs Project

concerning women, children and disabled persons in IDP camps etc. The lack of information and figures in this regard tends to question the effectiveness of the approaches taken by all actors in solving the problems faced by all IDPs.

³International assistance through donors and other actors have been channelled to the people who have been affected by the prolonged war situation as well as the by the tsunami disaster. At present, heated debate and discussions are taking place both within and outside the humanitarian community with regard to the conditions



of the people who have been for about 10 months uprooted from their dwellings with their lifestyles destroyed while large numbers of war affected people continue to live in IDP camps for over 15 years. The case of the Nilaweli War IDP Camp holds proof to this fact. According to the reporting of the CHA Trincomalee District Office, there are 140 families who have been living in cadjan huts, as seen in the picture, for over 15 years. The people are from different locations in Trincomalee. The land that they occupied prior to displacement is either occupied by security forces or has not been cleared of mines. The welfare camp is at present supported by UNHCR but the conditions in which the people live in

are not even basic. Lack of sanitation, not having enough toilets, etc are some of the grave issues that camp dwellers encounter in their daily lives. The list of requirements of camps such as these would undoubtedly be longer than the length of this report for sure. The most alarming of these grievances is the large number of school drop-outs reported from the camp as well as the increased number of non-schooling children. The gravity of this issue requires no poetic language in expressing it. While people have been living in less than basic conditions, they are not able to support themselves, nor are they able support their children in

³ This section is largely drawn from CHA's Human Security Report 3rd Quarter- October 2005

education. Research shows that in Sri Lanka, education is considered by people to be a means of upward social mobility not only for the individual concerned but also immediate family members as well. Therefore, the question about not having fully reached out to the needs of the people who were affected by war over a period of 15 years becomes a comment in itself about the activities of the humanitarian community." This case study is a good example to point out the stark reality of the fate of conflict-affected. It is the very existence of conflict-affected IDPs in Sri Lanka for about 15 years that has made the situation far too complex to be solved with quick remedies. Conflict IDP camps are homes to a generation of children who have not known a life or a life style outside the camps. Though there are many working groups governmental and non-governmental- local and international, activists & lobbyists, international codes of conducts and guiding principles; Sri Lanka does not seem any closer to resolving the plight of conflict-IDPs than it was fifteen years ago. This, however, is not the case of tsunami affected IDPs, who issues and considerations are given more attention than the conflict IDPs ever have been. The reasons for these are many; the foremost being that tsunami was a natural disaster that has drawn a lot of international media attention and thereby international philanthropy.

A tragedy that is shared by both categories of IDPs is the manner in which the people became 'IDPs'. Both the conflict-affected IDPs and the tsunami IDPs had no early warning as to what their plight would be either in the hands of an illegal armed group or in the hands of nature. The tsunami affected had less than 10 minutes when their lives' work was swept into the sea while the conflict affected had to leave behind their lives' work within a matter of two hours. Lives lost, families torn apart, etc are similar experiences shared by the conflict-IDPs and tsunami-IDPs. However, the manner in which they have been received by the rest of the population, GoSL, humanitarian and armed groups, in the face of their tragedies have been largely different. This differential treatment may undoubtedly contribute to the change lives' course for many IDPs in Sri Lanka.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FOR IDPS: COURSE OF ACTION BY VARIOUS ACTORS

The total number of displaced in the country is estimated to be over 850,000 at present. While the Government and the humanitarian sector are involved in an ongoing process of assisting both conflict IDPs and tsunami IDPs; many crucial issues still remain to be dealt with if they are to be given the opportunity to regain their previous quality of life. A lack of co-ordination and information-sharing amongst the actors involved in issues related to the displaced, has often led to the duplication of efforts, the loss of opportunities for collaboration and has impeded development, recovery and reconstruction.

It is believed that approximately 70,000 persons who were displaced by the conflict remain in welfare camps while many more are with friends and relatives. Those in welfare camps are provided with dry-food rations worth Rs. 1, 260 for a family of five members and also through the Unified Assistance Scheme (for which one is required to own a piece of land) an individual receives a grant of Rs. 25, 000 to start-up their lives and a grant of Rs. 75, 000 allocated as a housing allowance upon resettlement. Additionally, through the proposed Northeast Housing Reconstruction Programme (NEHRP) conflict-affected families earning less than Rs. 2, 500 a month will receive a grant of Rs. 110, 000 to help repair their damaged houses.

During the months that followed the tsunami, entering into the period of 'rehabilitation and development', there was a feeling of non-equity and the claims that those affected by the tsunami were receiving better care and attention in comparison to those displaced by the conflict. The tsunami has also seen an increase in the number of NGOs serving in the tsunami-affected areas, suggesting that they are receiving more support than those affected by the conflict.

Following the tsunami, the Government promised assistance of a weekly sum of Rs. 375 worth of food rations, Rs. 5, 000 worth of cash per family for whose homes were destroyed, Rs. 2, 500 per family for the purchase of kitchen utensils, a grant of Rs. 250, 000 given in instalments has been promised for those whose houses have been destroyed outside the buffer zone, a grant of Rs. 100,000 given in instalments

for those whose houses have been partially destroyed and entrepreneurs are eligible for loans of up to five million rupees at a six percent interest rate.

Furthermore, the Tsunami Act passed in May 2005, addresses several issues that have arisen as a result of the disaster such as the issuance of death certificates, prescription, foster care and adoption to name a few. While the Tsunami Act addresses the needs of all people affected by the Tsunami, conflict-affected persons who have similar concerns have no such safeguards. This highlights a disparity in treatment between the two groups. The Sri Lankan law places a great emphasis on the residence of a person in the provision of national identity cards, birth/death/marriage certificates, school enrolment and access to other welfare benefits. Those affected by tsunami, through the passing of the Tsunami Act have been somewhat pacified in terms of their basic documentation unlike the conflict affected IDPs.

The following extract from the above cited IDP Newsletter is self-explanatory in terms of the government mechanisms that exist to protect conflict-IDPs and tsunami IDPs.

| Government Mechanisms to Protect conflict affected IDPs | Government Mechanism to Protect tsunami- affected IDPs |
|---|--|
| <p>The Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (MRRR): MRRR comes under the portfolio of the President, this Ministry that deals with IDP-related issues. Under the new government, the post of Director-General was introduced at MRRR to oversee the activities of the ministry.</p> <p>The MRRR is mandated to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design policies & formulate and implement special programs for war-affected, displaced people • reconstruct & rehabilitate properties in the North-East. <p>The Ministry collaborates with other bodies that were created to assist the process: the Ministry of Resettlement and Rehabilitation Authority of the North (RRAN); the Office of the Commissioner General for Co-ordinating of the Relief, Rehabilitation and</p> | <p>The Centre for National Operations (CNO): The Centre for National Operations (CNO) was established on December 26, 2004, less than 24 hours after Her Excellency the President directed the setting up a body to co-ordinate the rescue and relief operations in a cohesive and efficient manner. The mandate of CNO was to monitor and coordinate all initiatives taken by government ministries, agencies and other institutions relating to post-tsunami relief efforts. The purpose of CNO was to ensure that each effort helped achieve the overall objectives of the Government relief programme, prevented the duplication of tasks and maximized the efficient utilization of resources.</p> <p>The CNO's highest priority was to ensure that relief measures were directed to those most affected, identifying their needs and matching them up with the available resources.</p> |

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| <p>Reconstruction; Secretariat for Coordinating Peace Process (SCOPP), Secretariat for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East (SIHRN); and the National Integration Programme unit (NIPU).</p> <p>Ministry of Housing and Construction Industry, Eastern Province Education and Irrigation Development :</p> <p>The Eastern Province Education Development Unit and the Eastern Province Irrigation Development Unit, which are overseen by the Ministry of Housing and Construction Industry, Eastern Province Education and Irrigation Development, are responsible for the regulation and implementation of programs for the development of education and irrigation in the Eastern Province.</p> <p>Ministry of Infrastructure Development in the Eastern Province:</p> <p>The third Ministry involved with IDP-related issues is the Ministry of Infrastructure Development in the Eastern Province. This Ministry is responsible for the implementation of rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction programs in areas other than the North, and specifically in the reconstruction of affected public infrastructure facilities and in the resettlement of displaced persons. The Ministry is also responsible for the implementation of the <i>Rehabilitation of the Person, Properties, and Industries Authority (REPPIA) Act No 29 of 1987</i></p> <p>In addition to the Cabinet Ministries, another three Non-Cabinet Ministries function for the betterment of IDPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry for Rehabilitation and district Development (Trincomalee) • the Ministry for Rehabilitation and District Development (Batticaloa) • The Ministry for rehabilitation and District Development (Vanni) | <p>CNO was only a temporary structure and was replaced after a month by the Task Force for Relief (TAFOR), which took over its functions. The Commissioner General for Essential Services is overall in charge in this regard.</p> <p>The following task forces were established by the government after considering the immediate needs :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Task Force for Rescue and Relief (TAFRER) ▪ Task Force to Rebuild the Nation (TAFREN) ▪ Task Force for Logistics and Order (TAFLOL) <p>The Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN):</p> <p>TAFREN plays the role of a mediator and facilitator, and it monitors the progress of all the projects in the tsunami-affected regions. TAFREN is entrusted with rebuilding and reconstructing infrastructure in several key areas: health services; power and energy; railways; posts and telecommunications; housing, urban development and environment; fisheries and ports; education; roads and bridges; water supply and drainage; tourism; Livelihood; and Donor/NGO/Civil society Co-ordination.</p> <p>The Transitional Accommodation Project (TAP):</p> <p>TAP is the focal point for co- coordinating emergency and Transitional accommodation issues.</p> <p>Tsunami Housing Reconstruction Unit (THRU):</p> <p>THRU was setup to assist line Ministries and other agencies engaged in housing construction in affected areas and to facilitate the Donor assistance.</p> <p>The main function of the THRU is the special purpose vehicle for construction of housed and townships in affected districts.</p> <p>Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation:</p> <p>This Ministry is also responsible for providing relief to the tsunami victims. Initially this Ministry was setup to deal with the War affected IDPs. But now it is engaged in some projects in North and East for Tsunami victims as well.</p> <p>There are several other Ministries which are</p> |
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| | responsible for assisting after the tsunami. Eg: Ministry of Public Administration and Home affairs had released number of circulars to protect the tsunami affected government servants in public administration. |
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In conclusion, it can be pointed out that taken as a whole, the plight of IDPs is looking starker than it was by December 2005. The context at present, while presenting numerous possibilities⁴ can become triggers for potential war reoccurrence, if not approached in a holistic, conflict-sensitive and non-discriminatory manner. Such a situation would, while becoming a disruption to the lives of all Sri Lankans can also contribute to further creation of internally displaced and hindrance to development activities that are presently underway. Most of all, it would further the suffering of both conflict-affected and the tsunami affected IDPs in Sri Lanka at present.

(Words: 2722)

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⁴ See further- *Polity-Vol.2.No.3 ISSN 1391-822x, New Development Strategy: Framework for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction-May 2005, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Scope and Limitations of Linking Post-tsunami reconstruction with Peace building* by Kethesh Loganathan-CPA, February 2005

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