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# Development and peace in Sri Lanka: Entry points for social and economic policy formulation

**Abstract**
This paper presents an analytical framework to understand key trends and dynamics impinging on peace and conflict dimensions within a country context. This framework can be applied at all stages, including in post-conflict contexts to inform policymakers and practitioners on programming interventions in support of sustainable conditions for peace. The paper then chooses for the context of Sri Lanka one crucial peace factor, that linked to socio-economic development and – based on empirical consultations – identifies a number of conflict risk as well as peace opportunities that can be unpacked through an inclusive and just development policy formulation.

## Introduction

Despite Sri Lanka's early achievements in the field of social policies and welfare, the country remained marred by violent conflict over the past decades along various ethno-religious, caste/ class based and regional divides. Respectively there have been many analyses and recommendations formulated over the years to address those challenges and to find ways to ensure an inclusive and sustainable social and political settlement that works for all communities in Sri Lanka. This paper attempts an analysis of peace potentials in Sri Lanka from a social policy perspective.

Peace as understood in this paper is not just seen as the absence of war and violence, but a situation "*when people are anticipating and managing conflicts without violence, and are engaging in inclusive social change processes that improve the quality of life. They are doing so without compromising the possibility of continuing to do so in the future, or the possibility of others to do so. This is the idea of interdependent, positive peace*" (International Alert, 2017, p. 10). Attention also needs to be paid to a set of appropriate processes to gain and maintain peace.

Understanding peace and conflict issues requires a focus on various interconnected factors ranging from power relations and political economy to

social and economic development issues. It is also important to understand the nature of political settlements and elite bargains. The paper first provides a short overview of International Alert's peace factor analysis that can be used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of peace and conflict issues. The main part of the paper then focuses on the challenges as well as opportunities in regard to socio-economic development as an important entry point to ensure long-term conditions for positive peace and stability in Sri Lanka. The findings presented in this main part of the paper are based on consultations with experts and resource persons in early 2019.

It should be mentioned at the outset that this paper focuses on overarching societal and political issues in Sri Lanka that need attention rather than addressing specific conflict relevant issues per se, such as the Easter Sunday attacks in April 2019, the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 or the implications of the new emerging political settlement after the recent presidential and parliamentarian elections in the county. Instead, this paper will focus on entry points for peacebuilding in the field of socio-economic policy formulation and interventions. It is hoped that this can provide important insights for current policy makers when formulating their own new vision for the country as well as preparing appropriate response plans for the COVID-19 recovery in Sri Lanka.

## Peace Factor Analysis

In recent years, the political settlement approach has gained prominence amongst policy makers and practitioners. It focuses on development and peace building challenges in conflict-affected and fragile political contexts[1]. Since peace building requires an engagement with the state in one or the other way, this approach ensures consideration of the important processes of state building in peace work. Political settlement, especially in conflict-affected countries, is an essential concept to understand success or failure of state building and/or peace building efforts. DFID (2010) defines political settlements as "an expression of a common understanding, usually forged between elites, about how power is organised and exercised to best serve their interests, and about how the relationship between state and society is being articulated". In this regard, political settlements are fundamentally "bargaining outcomes among contending elites" (John, Jonathan, & Putzel, 2009). It is the elites who decide on power-sharing arrangements and work to maintain these. If one is to understand how elites have captured the state and how to challenge this, a focus on understanding elite behaviour and its significance for political process is crucial. Key questions asked with this analytical framework are around questions of level of inclusivity/ exclusivity

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[1]For a good overview on the political settlement concept see: Parks & Cole (2010)

for different types of political settlements, elite motivation to support (or not) specific settlements and consensus on governing (such as impersonal rule-following versus systems of patronage) (Kelsall, Tim 2016).

The particular focus on elites does not mean that existing power relations cannot be influenced. Elite groups can change over time, as is particularly well recorded within some South Asian contexts, including Sri Lanka. Moreover, themselves not a homogenous group, some elites are interested in and motivated to work towards more equitable power arrangements. This heterogeneity of elite interests is recognised to be an important entry point. Additionally, it highlights the importance of identifying those groups with the potential to successfully challenge existing elite/power relationships within the state.

A political settlement perspective provides strategic directions for engagement with an existing political system and enables bargaining for a more inclusive social and political contract between the state and citizenry. This perspective would also help identify internal incentives (or pressure-points) to push for necessary reforms and changes. And finally, an analysis that utilises this approach can help identify societal groups and constituencies that are particularly well-positioned to support such processes and who can strengthen the impact of change agents within the political system.

The political settlement approach is used to sharpen the focus of analysis when assessing peace factors. The peace factors, taken from a programming framework developed by International Alert in 2017, represent the field of analysis used to understand how well-established and resilient peace is (or is not) in a given context. This is particularly important in a post-conflict context to assess the quality and sustainability of a political settlement. It provides a framework within which to evaluate the relative utility of institutions, policies, projects or tools from a peace building or a conflict-sensitivity perspective, and a lens through which to examine a context in terms of the features which either strengthen and enable or undermine and block peace and progress towards peace. Such a perspective allows peace builders to identify opportunities to strengthen those features which are already quite robust, and/or to try and remove or circumvent those features which are obstacles to peace.

This approach to peace and conflict analyses is particularly important in a post-conflict context (such as Sri Lanka) to assess the quality and sustainability of a political settlement. It provides a framework within which to evaluate the relative utility of institutions, policies, projects or tools from a peacebuilding or a conflict-sensitivity perspective, and a lens through which to examine a context in terms of the features which either strengthen and enable, or undermine and block, peace and progress towards peace. Such a perspective allows peacebuilders to identify opportunities to strengthen those

features which are already quite robust, and/or to try and remove or circumvent those features which are obstacles to peace.

To better understand and capture the complexity of peace, the above-mentioned programming framework differentiates between five key peace factors, namely power, law and justice, safety, well-being, income and assets. These peace factors are inter-related, in that each can reinforce or undermine the others. For the use of an analytical framework, four key areas have been identified for a more in-depth investigation of conflict dynamics as well as peace opportunities.

### *Power, Governance and Politics*

The first factor of power looks at the degree to which relationships between people, and between people and governing or otherwise powerful institutions, allow for participation, accountability, mutual support, and legitimate and effective decision-making and actions.

A key aspect of the peace factor of power is the space for people's voice in the choice of leadership, as well as over the direction and conduct of those in leadership, and for people to be able to contribute to the shaping of the governance system and to have the means by which to hold the leadership to account. It is also important that sections of the population are not excluded from such power on the basis of their membership of particular groups such as those based on sex, age, ethnicity, religion, region or class. Whilst dominance of the political power and that of governance by a certain group may have been established through historical control or sheer majority, recognising that structural exclusion violates human rights and dignity, entrenches injustice, resentment and inequity, and fails to peacefully and fairly resolve conflicts.

The power of political decision-making (defined as decision-making about the use of resources at any level) is the most pertinent exercise of power in relation to peace. Where power differentials in the opportunity and capacity to exercise of such decision-making exist between different groups in society – or between members within the same group – then such societies are more vulnerable to violence. Closely related is that of community and social relations that are built on trust, compromise and reconciliation within and between groups, also sometimes referred to as mutual social capital, which can be severely depleted where there has been violent communal conflicts or deep active tensions. Finally, the quality – and legitimacy – of leadership at different levels in the society must be assessed in terms of how current leaders are exercising their power, and whether they are doing so in line with the values that promote peaceful societies i.e. fairly and with consideration for the impacts on all members and groups of that society.

## *Security, Law, Order and Justice*

The security for people to live their everyday lives safe from harm and from the undue fear of threats is an important factor for peace. It is necessary that violence against others is not a legitimised means of resolving personal or local conflicts as such legitimisation will increase the likelihood of violence being used to address political and other conflicts. In keeping with this, the police, security forces and other agents of security must secure the trust of all groups of the society they are mandated to protect. They also need to be provided with the requisite skills and capacity to carry out their responsibilities in line with the principles of human rights and humanitarian law. Equally important, the application and reception of the law and legal process is seen as an important factor, particularly on its fairness, equality and effectiveness for different people and groups, both to utilise non-violent means to address grievances, conflicts and disputes and to have their human rights and equality respected within this process. The main considerations for this peace factor within Alert's analytical framework are effective laws and effective mechanisms for justice.

## *Wellbeing, Equity & Community Relations*

This factor examines the ways in which people's mental and physical wellbeing are maintained and consideration given to their aspirations. Wellbeing factors include equality of access to basic services - such as shelter, nutrition, education, health and clean water – which are of a comparatively decent and competent standard. The values imparted through these services must promote the vision, desire and capabilities needed for maintaining and strengthening the peace factors. This is especially important for children and young people's education. Of equal importance is recognition of the ways in which people's status, location, access to opportunities and their structural vulnerabilities impact their psychosocial wellbeing and allow them to feel respected and valued in society.

One of the recurrent issues was that of the need for the state, through its various bodies, to improve communication and public outreach on issues related to transitional justice and reconciliation, and to find ways to manage the diverse perspectives and emotional investment from different groups in society. One such example was the lack of adequate revision of Sinhala textbooks and educational curriculum reforms that more accurately represents the history of diverse groups and peaceful coexistence in Sri Lanka and reflections on the problematic events in the past such as the 1983 riots and other instances of violence. It was also noted that while the reconciliation process has been aided by dialogue and commitment between moderates across the political spectrum, there has been little effort and capacity to engage with the more extreme viewpoints on either side of the discussion.

### *The Economy, Income and Assets*

A final factor is the way people are enabled to make a living and to manage their assets in ways that satisfy their needs, reduce their vulnerability, appropriately invest for their future, and make a satisfactory economic contribution. In developing and enabling economic opportunities, consideration must be given to environmental sustainability and to economic diversity, with a view to managing competition between and within communities and to create economic interdependence. Furthermore, equality of economic opportunities is paramount such that opportunities are equally available to different groups of people regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, class, region, age, language and other social categories. Equality in this regard is achieved through ensuring barriers to opportunity do not disproportionately apply to any one group or community of people. At the same time, society will need to allow for individuals and households finding ways to improve themselves and achieve positive social mobility.

### Conflict Risks in the Economic Sphere

All of above peace factors offer entry points for an in-depth analysis of trends and dynamics affecting peace and conflict in Sri Lanka from a political settlement perspective. In the second part of the paper, the peace factor on economy is chosen to illustrate the application of this analytical framework to the Sri Lanka context and to outline some entry points for the formulation of long-term peace supportive policy formulation and interventions. Development issues have always been an important feature in Sri Lanka's past socio-political unrests. Many peacebuilding approaches in the past had a strong focus on identity politics and constitutional reforms. This paper attempts to outline some of the important complementary measures that can be achieved through a more inclusive and just socio-economic development model for Sri Lanka.

Inclusive development is measured by assessing the distribution of wellbeing and benefits from development initiatives and commonly includes a broader range of dimensions than only income in assessing the performance of these initiatives. Moreover, inclusive development initiatives can offer the opportunity for social integration and perhaps even reconciliation, bridging not only the centre-periphery gaps but also those related to minorities and the marginalised. As mentioned earlier, development, and especially economic development, in Sri Lanka has commonly been associated with the centre, with very few notable projects that were planned and set-up in the peripheral regions. The inclusivity of those projects designed at the centre has not yet been evaluated: some stakeholders suggest however that this aspect can be significantly improved. The absence either of a credible model of inclusive

development or associated narrative limits the Sri Lankan public dialogue about development.

Looking through the lens of the peace factor linked to socio-economic development as outlined earlier in this paper, the following key challenges can be identified.

### *Grievances arising from disparities in development and support*

The lack of systematic and targeted regional development policies was cited by several of those interviewed as a factor to increased potential for resentment, tensions, and a return to violent conflict within the country. One of those consulted in the business sector noted that he often used the image of an "air-conditioned oxcart" to describe Sri Lanka's great disparities in development between Colombo and other regions.

The continued growth in economic inequalities across the country amidst hardships brought about by rising costs of living and a slowdown in government public expenditure contributed to increasing disillusionment with the government. These inequalities continue to generate space for resentment, tensions, and a growing sense of frustration.

Some regions had prospered relatively better following the end of the war in 2009 and the change in regime in 2015; Jaffna was mentioned in a number of instances in this regard. However, economic development that improved local incomes and assets were neglected in other areas in the North, notably the Wanni, meaning a continuation of tensions and grievances as well as an absence of the experience of peace dividends. Similarly, there had been few economic growth policies for the South. Moreover, for regional development to be made a priority, it is important to negotiate this more effectively with Colombo policymakers. Allies from within the Colombo circle (business as well as political elites) who see the need to shift growth to outside the capital are important.

One of the related factors noted for poor regional development policies was that of tax evasion, poor distribution of existing resources and overall an insufficient investment into regional development. Also, when these issues of regional development were brought to the notice of the government, there was little willingness for cooperation to discuss ways in which the business community could be involved in promoting better practices or engage in policy making that addressed the issue of equitable and peace-conducive economic growth and development for the regions.

### *Unpopular top-down development model in use*

Regarding the Colombo-centric policymaking, several of those consulted noted the increasing frustration amongst the public with the UNP. Some referred to the 2002-2006 Norway-mediated peace process during

which the top-down economic reforms instigated by the UNP government of the time, also led by Ranil Wickremasinghe, proved very unpopular and subsequently led to the downfall of the government.

It was noted that the current economic policies mirrored a similar 'business as usual' model. Some faulted the lack of imagination shown by the Prime Minister in putting forward innovative outside-the-box economic programmes. Some noted that the continued approach was a driving force for the continued alienation of rural communities that could be leveraged by factions to increase support for the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, even though the prevailing economic model of the previous regime had been very much infrastructure-centric, and in particular focused on improving road connectivity between regional hubs and Colombo.

### *Dependence on continued militarisation to meet employment needs*

Another area of concern has been the continued failure to raise non-military employment opportunities for educated rural youth in the South. Rather, there has been a push towards large-scale military spending with a view to gain support towards peace and reconciliation efforts. However, such recruitments may not be a sustainable approach to containing the prevailing discontent. Nonetheless, it appears the government is aware of the possibility of growing unrest in rural areas and is keen to safeguard against it through military recruitment drives in the face of limited public employment opportunities. It was suggested that the military is needed in the south for stability, in the face of limited employment options for Sinhala youth.

An equivalent issue amongst other interviewees is that of unemployed and underemployed rural Tamil and Muslim youth in the North and East. During the war, significant sections of Tamil youth (many of whom were forcibly recruited into the movement) were engaged in the administration and operation of LTTE- controlled areas and in camps. Many currently experience personal and employment difficulties in the post-militant context. There are also concerns for the economic (and psychosocial) situation of youth (and adults) who are disabled following the war.

A related concern is that there have been very few demobilisation attempts and certainly not any of proportionate scale to the size of the armed security forces in Sri Lanka. Creating economic and employment opportunities that lead away from the military and militant groups are seen as a necessary component for achieving a sustainable peace in the current consultation and analysis.

### *Steep increase in post-war family and household indebtedness*

Another key issue is the high levels of indebtedness resulting from unregulated microcredit schemes, particularly in the North and East of the

country. In the post-war context, many households utilised the growing microcredit opportunities to take out loans to rebuild or renovate the house or to buy vehicles. In other cases, people have taken on entrepreneurial or agricultural loans for personal purposes, such as weddings. For a considerable number, this decision was made without a clear plan on how to repay the debt and without understanding of how the exorbitantly high credit and interest rates worked, resulting in unmanageable amounts of debt.

Such loans have been popular across different segments of society in these contexts. Public sector employees for example have also been offered loans and other schemes designed to increase their status but have struggled to meet the repayment schedules. The pressure to pay back the loans and, in some cases, the unethical means used to pressure (including asking for sexual favours of or threatening violence towards) vulnerable people have resulted in suicide or self-harm attempts and in some cases, families fleeing their homes to escape debt collectors.

The government has been called on for action to regulate the sector and to bring in measures to reduce these impacts. However, little has been done to date apart from the issuance of public warnings and education campaigns. The issue requires further research and high-level policy action. High indebtedness has contributed to destabilising families and communities, and the irresponsible and exploitative nature of targeting vulnerable communities for such schemes has led to many people feeling unprotected.

### *Social policy deficits and inequality*

Social justice still has currency in Sri Lanka. For many decades, Sri Lanka was hailed as a model for social welfare in the South. However, over the past 10 years, the various regimes have focussed on large scale infrastructure development, which neglects the issues of social welfare. Key issues of public concern – employment, education, access to health and social welfare – have received very little government attention. In fact, for many years now there has been a decline in the quality and coverage of services. This has been particularly problematic with the education system at the school and university levels. The current political elite (both around Mahinda Rajapaksa as well as Ranil Wickremasinghe), have also been noted to be one of the most stringent – if covert - free market proponents, with several sectors in the education and health sector having undergone privatisation. The levels of nepotism and corruption also mean that privatisation opportunities are more likely to be given to political supporters or in exchange for favours.

### Peace Opportunities

The following section outlines several recommendations aimed at policy makers and practitioners to untap some of the potential of a more

inclusive and peace supportive socio-economic development model for Sri Lanka. This is in light of the fact that there continues to be a disconnect between Colombo and regional development outside the Western province, with inequality issues still widespread. This applies for both rural constituencies in the south as well as in the north, albeit with different degrees and characteristics. This perception of exclusion along socio-economic lines can have implications in both parts of the country. Inclusive development initiatives can offer the opportunity for social integration and even reconciliation, bridging not only the centre-periphery gaps but also to those related to minorities and the marginalised. Economic development in Sri Lanka has commonly been associated with the centre and the absence either of a credible model of inclusive development or associated narrative limits the Sri Lankan public dialogue about development. This paper suggests *six areas of possible intervention*:

> **(1)** To address perceptions and real patterns of exclusion and marginalisation linked to socio-economic opportunities, a ***new regional development model*** should be discussed and introduced. This could also be an alternative solution to the constitutional debate on power sharing arrangements, which is, at the moment, at a standstill as there is no common ground between the Tamil and Sinhalese population on the purpose and design of any such devolved structures. Widespread deprivation on the other hand is a key factor leading to grievances and resentments against other ethno-religious groups, especially at the local level. Such disparities are also linked to the harsh business environment for small and medium enterprises and smallholdings farmers in rural areas of the country.

To pursue the idea of regional empowerment, it is important to build more horizontal linkages between the different regions and districts and to establish a broader institutional platform to engage with local government and businesses, for any regional network to increase "voices" from the local level. This would directly challenge the 'Colombo discourse' currently dominant in development discussions. Nonetheless, it also requires that local or rather regional groups rise to the challenge of working together. Accompaniment, capacity building and support-work in this regard may be extremely useful to regional organisations. However, economic empowerment at regional levels requires the independence and quality of local institutions responsible for development. As such, state agencies, private groups, community and civil society organisations, need to be strengthened. Successfully generating voices from the regions that can influence national policymaking means a coordinated effort and strategic alliance-building as well.

At a straight-forward level, this can also mean feeding grass-root level problems into national policy formulation and the proposing of mechanisms and capacities to address such problems. However, a deeper discussion on issues of decentralisation, governance reform, and economic devolution will be necessary, including a revisiting of the stalled constitutional reform debate about a new devolved power sharing model. Currently there is no common ground or vision for a more decentralised Sri Lanka as constituencies in the South still perceive this as an attempt for greater independence for the Tamil community (and potentially a breakup of the country) whereas in the North it is largely seen as an important political recognition to facilitate reconciliation and transition justice. A stronger focus on economic and developmental benefits of regionalisation could potentially provide more entry points to rally support in all parts of the country for greater decentralisation.

> **(2)** Inclusive economic development can also strengthen social integration and reconciliation measures by ***bridgigng divides through shared economic dividens***. As stated earlier, peace potentials exist in the inclusive development approach not only because it allows marginalised regions to move centre-stage, air their grievances and force a resolution but also because it can overcome, in a similar way, ethno-religious divides. The close relationship between location and ethnicity in Sri Lanka heightens the need to ensure that the peace potential in such initiatives is not squandered. For example, the seeking of multi-ethnic benefits (along the line of examples such as for example the SiTaMu initiative2) should be made a laudatory objective of development initiatives. If done the right way and with the appropriate sensitivity, such initiatives can help generate social integration and perhaps even reconciliation. Strong institutional structures are necessary for this since it cannot be done on the basis of individual civil society activities or otherwise disconnected projects.

This dialogue around reconciliation through development could also be utilised by companies and for-profit companies to practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that goes beyond lip service to multi-ethnic and - religious diversity. The majority of private sector companies in Sri Lanka are in fact privately owned and (although clearly dependent on the state) there is

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[2] This was a concept promoted by the Business for Peace Alliance some years ago to set up business with multi-ethnic ownership that includes Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim stakeholders (hence SiTaMu, which in Sinhalese means 'deep thought'). The application of this concept in areas such as Trincomalee proved very successful in the sense that it strengthened collaboration and reconciliation between the different communities, but it also worked out to the benefit of the business as for different purposes the different ethnicities also provided complementary advantages in dealing with various opportunities and challenges in regard to the business operation in a conflict affected environment. The SiTaMU label could be used as a conflict sensitive compliance label.

the potential to utilise the sector to build a common platform for issues of joint concern. This however should include internal company practices as well as external CSR interventions.

In particular, the private sector, as a potential catalyst of economic development, and provider of economic opportunities and income, can improve living standards not only of its employees but also that of the public at large. The private sector was given primary place as the engine of growth in former government policies; it is important that job creation in the sector inculcate social stability and socio-economic security especially for vulnerable segments of society, such as rural youth. However, there is ample evidence that youth from non-urban, non-English speaking backgrounds experience serious discrimination by the private sector when seeking employment (Amarasuriya, Gunduz, & Mayer, 2009; Hettige & Mayer, 2008; Gunatilaka, Mayer, & Vodopivec, 2010; Hettige, 2015). The average local graduate faces severe problems in accessing employment; and private sector attitudes towards liberal arts education at the tertiary level appear to contribute to the existing high levels of unemployment by graduates. It has been noted that the private sector not only insists on proficiency in English as a job requirement, but also to assess candidates' social background and the quality of education received. As a result, those from outside of Colombo, with little access to English education, tend to be at a disadvantage in their search for employment in the private sector. These issues contribute to why many rural youth hold a negative opinion of the private sector and are reluctant to enter the private sector job market.

There are a host of good practices and guidelines in existence that the Sri Lankan private sector can draw on and adapt for its own context in this regard. The Decent Work enterprise concept promoted by the ILO for instance, addresses issues such as gender inequality in income and employment opportunities, the provision of income-generating opportunities for low-income groups and, generating social dialogue among the private sector, employees and others. Moreover, the shortage of labour could be an entry point to discuss changes with regard to the nature of employment provision. While work is needed, undisputedly, it is 'decent work' that is needed as an incentive for people to stay. Looking at the conditions of work (better working conditions, due respect and consideration, wages, flexi-time), may be helpful in attracting all segments of society, including women and youth.

> **(3)** A major factor that prevented the demobilisation of armed forces in Sri Lanka after the end of the war in 2009 has been the need to maintain employment for a vast number of soldiers deriving from the rural South of Sri Lanka. The current securitzation of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks has of course strengthened the argument of maintaining or even increasing the current army size.

However, it is important to undertake more in-depth studies and analysis about possible demobilization strategies in the future and, linked to that, to ***prepare plans for alternative employment options, especially for soldiers from a marginalised rural background***. Job creation (in a conflict sensitive way) is still a key issue in the south to offer viable alternatives to army employment, and in the north to ensure that various post-war vocation training programmes can be picked up with demand. A lot of investment is consumption-oriented and does not generate sufficient productive employment. This should also include an engagement with the local private sector on responsible investment.

Linked to the need to keep the issue of alternative employment and livelihood opportunities for armed forces on the agenda is a revisiting of various past efforts to formulate a comprehensive national youth policy in order to ensure more viable employment opportunities for young people outside the army (or overseas migration). The comprehensive youth policy document produced shortly before the regime change in 2015 for the then Ministry of Youth Affairs is of remarkable good quality and rather than starting the whole process again, it would be worthwhile to explore opportunities to bring that document back into the policy debate and implementation level. It would also set a good example of honouring past effort rather than dismissing everything done under a previous regime (which is the mainstream political practice in Sri Lanka).

**(4)** A key challenge for a more inclusive and sustainable development model for Sri Lanka is the dire crisis and continuing deterioration of and the respective need to ***improve again the educational and healthcare standards***, both important factors for productive and inclusive economic development as well as socio-economic security. Both sectors have long been neglected (despite Sri Lanka's social welfare model and achievements from the early 60s and 70s) and the institutional erosion that took place under the authoritarian regime post-war from 2009 onwards has further impacted negatively on standards and quality in those two sectors. Hence, there is an urgent need to pay more attention to social policy formulation to improve the quality and access to the education, health and social welfare sectors.

The dearth of current dialogue on the appropriate and desired model of development for Sri Lanka highlights a key area of concern for peacebuilding. Without such shared consensus amongst broader sections of society, peacebuilding potentials are limited. Towards this end, mechanism should be put in place that allows citizens to get more involved in local level

development planning and local impact assessments. Such mechanism should operate along multi-stakeholder lines, drawing on those who can bridge the divides across the political affiliations and state-citizen, and those that emphasise commonality, including by looking at similar experiences elsewhere in Asia.

(5) Any advocacy and alliance building efforts on socio-economic issues and respective policy revisions need to be grounded in empirical evidence. There is a dearth of in-depth studies over the past years and a decline of quality data at institutions such as the Central Bank and the Department for Census and Statistics. A strong ***push to support research and opinion surveys*** (both quantitative and qualitative) to bring out present trends and issues is needed. Evidence makes it more difficult for practices and policies to be implemented without question and justification, and it may challenge existing opinions.

The National Youth Survey conducted in 1999/2000 is a good example[3]. The research covered the opinions and attitudes of Sri Lankan youth on a whole range of issues, not only in the field of politics, but more so on socio-cultural and developmental aspects that are of importance for young people. The national multi-stage stratified random sample of respondents included nearly 3000 young people throughout the country (including the conflict affected Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka). Key findings of this survey contradicted some of the common notions about the ethnic conflict, pointing much more towards underlying socio-economic fundamentals of the conflict, with young people from the North and the South showing much more similarities in their expressions of frustration and grievances as opposed to the youth living in urban centres and the Western Province (Hettige & Mayer, 2002; Mayer, 2004).

However, the conduct of such studies may require political will as institutions require the allocation of financial and human resources. A number of institutions may also require capacity building measures to undertake such survey exercises. As has been the case in the past, national Universities have generally been in a good position (also given their spread throughout the country) to lead on this with regard to outreach and legitimacy. Capacity building efforts would still be important, however. The resultant evidence could then be used for strengthening country-wide dialogue and alliance building on key social policy issues.

(6) The dearth of current dialogue on the appropriate and desired model of development for Sri Lanka highlights a key area of concern for peace

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[3]A follow-up survey was conducted in 2009/10; see Hettige, Graner, & Amarasuriya (2014)

building. Without such a shared consensus amongst the broader sections of society, peace building potentials are limited. Towards this end, one approach could be the establishment of a mechanism along the lines of a '***development watch***' that informs citizens about development plans and local impacts. The dialogue should avoid an exclusive focus on economic issues and issues of political governance and should touch on broader social policy/ social development issues which are more likely to resonate with wider sections of Sri Lankan civil society and citizenry. This mechanism should operate along multi-stakeholder lines, drawing on those who can bridge the divides across the political affiliations and state-citizen, and those that emphasise commonality – e.g., the South-South dialogue by looking at similar experiences elsewhere in Asia.

## Conclusion

Successful peace building in Sri Lanka needs to tackle various challenges: a) support reform efforts of the state and the democratic systems, b) improve the nature of state-citizen relations and (c) an examination and reaffirming of (equitable) citizen-citizen relations. While root causes of the conflict may be many-folded, peace building is unlikely to be successful without influencing these larger framework conditions as described above. However, this paper highlighted the potential of more inclusive socio-economic development policies and programmes as an opportunity to establish long-term conditions for peace and stability for all citizens in Sri Lanka. While other areas around power structures, law and order and broader well-being need to be addressed as well, the economic sphere offers both particular challenges as well as opportunities at this juncture in Sri Lanka's history, e.g. the need to deal with the fall-out of the COVID-19 crisis, but also a new regime that just consolidated its power in the August 2020 elections with a renewed mandate for economic development. What is needed is a new dialogue between citizens and the state on salient issues linked to economic development, social policy, and governance issues. Such dialogues should be aimed towards improving understanding and support of necessary political and institutional reforms to enable inclusive and just society structures in Sri Lanka and a positive role for the state.

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