

CONFLICT EARLY WARNING CHALLENGES IN A POST WAR CONTEXT: THE CASE OF THE EU IN SRI LANKA

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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DEVCO	European Commission, Development and Cooperation, Europe Aid
DfID	Department for International Development
DG	Directorate General
DG-RELEX	Directorate General, External Relations
ECHO	European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IFS	Instrument for Stability
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya [National Heritage Party]
JVP	Janathā Vimukthi Peramuṇa [People's Liberation Front]
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupees
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sri Lanka has long suffered periods of violent conflict, most prominently between the separatist group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). This violent conflict, born out of a multitude of factors, came to an end in May 2009 after a military battle which saw the defeat of the LTTE and the reclaiming of all rebel-held areas of the country. However, over two years since the end of conflict, there remain substantial challenges to progress on a political settlement.

In an attempt to examine conflict early warning tools and processes employed by the European Union (EU) and member states in Sri Lanka, this report will provide a snapshot of the current context in Sri Lanka with a specific focus on conflict risks and the role the EU and member states play within this context, particularly undertaking conflict early warning, early action and, ultimately, conflict prevention.

'In relation to violent conflicts, early warning can be understood as a "process that alerts decision-makers of the potential outbreak, escalation, and resurgence of violent conflict; and promotes an understanding among decision-makers of the nature and impacts of violent conflict".¹ For many of the interviewees, the end of the war in Sri Lanka was definitive and the likelihood of Sri Lanka returning to war in the near future limited; however, their analysis into the means through which the war was won and consequent political progress in addressing the causes which led to the war, indicates that fundamental grievances continue to exist, thereby indicating that early warning systems are as crucial now as they were during the period of war.

In contrast to this analysis, donors have gradually downscaled their presence, in particular funding to address root causes of the conflict. Multiple factors, including the difficult operating environment in Sri Lanka, the increased presence of non-traditional donors such as China and the Western economic recession, have all contributed to the reduction of funds for peacebuilding. Funding streams traditionally safeguarded for peacebuilding have been cut and redirected to countries which pose immediate security risks.

Irrespective of donor community downscaling of activities, there continue to be numerous opportunities to effectively monitor and mitigate actions which have the potential to sow and exacerbate conflict in the future.

Below are listed some opportunities and recommendations for the EU and member states, for early Warning and early Action in Sri Lanka's current landscape:

- **Greater coordination between political and operational sections** of the EU can help inform partnerships at the operational level; they can help strengthen the impact of interventions and programmatic recommendations for future approaches. A transparent and inclusive context analysis increases the potential of a coordinated response, owned and supported within the EU but also by member states and partners.
- **Identifying joint strategies for the EU and its member states to play strategic lead roles in particular areas of advocacy for conflict early warning, early action and conflict prevention.** Collectively, the EU and its member states would benefit from collaboration on the design of a joint strategy to highlight potential advocacy and implementation avenues for each particular country.

¹ S. Babaud and N. Mirimanova (2011). *The European Commission Early Warning Architecture and Crisis Response Capacity*. Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning: Brussels.

- **The post-war situation will indicate only long-term risks, but it is still important to monitor and mitigate such risks.** There needs to be a redesign of the lens through which conflict analysis is conducted, looking for trends which could potentially lead to longer-term, systematic inequality and instability. In response to a more nuanced, longer-term analysis, donors must also be prepared to take more a nuanced, longer-term approach.
- **Embassy/Colombo-level analysis is not enough.** Working more closely with a broader representation of Sri Lankan civil society will help to provide additional information and, more crucially, additional lenses through which information is analysed, allowing space to include the donor community as part of the context.
- **Better understanding of problems/conflict risks does not necessarily easily translate into a change in programme design or political response.** Response planning needs to improve by a) reflecting the realities on the ground through in-depth, localised analysis and b) by drawing on interdisciplinary professional consultations.
- **Trade links between the European Union and Sri Lanka remain strong.** 2009 trade figures indicate that 'the EU is Sri Lanka's largest export partner; Sri Lanka exported €2.06 billion (LKR309 billion) worth of products and services to the EU, which represented 39 percent of Sri Lanka's total exports.'² This indicates that there remain avenues for advocacy and leverage to explore with the Sri Lankan government. The avenue of trade could potentially be a basis for more symmetrical dialogue with the government on issues of post-war recovery, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
- **Support the peace supporting diaspora.** Western countries, have large populations of Sri Lankan diaspora communities, across all ethnicities, economic and political standing. Many members of the diaspora actively support Sri Lanka through numerous humanitarian, development, economic and political avenues³. Western governments could explore avenues of working with diaspora communities to harness their influence and agency for the long lasting peace of Sri Lanka.

2 Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives (2009). 'Trade', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/eu_sri_lanka/trade_relation/index_en.htm

3 W. Zunzer (2004). 'Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation'. *Occasional Paper*. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management Berlin; F. Cochrane (2007) 'Civil Society beyond the State: The Impact of Diaspora Communities on Peace Building'. *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition Vol. 2 No. 2*, p.19-29, p.24.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka has suffered decades of violent civil conflict, in which the most prominent actors were the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This conflict has seen numerous government administrations, the LTTE and the international community negotiate their way through talks⁴, ceasefire agreements (CFA) and, finally an all-out military battle which resulted in the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009. Much has been written about the root cause of the conflict, the role of the LTTE and the country's administrative approach at various points of the conflict; this case study will neither offer an alternative historical in-depth analysis nor provide a literature review of the conflict/post conflict analysis; however, it will provide a snapshot of the current context with special focus on conflict risk dynamics, early warning and early action tools and processes utilised by the European Union delegation in Sri Lanka and European member states. Furthermore, it will also provide a set of recommendations to the Western donor community on where opportunities could be maximised to strengthen conflict early warning and early action.

4 J. Uyangoda (2005). *Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding, an introduction to Theories and Practices*. GTZ: Sri Lanka, p.308-352.

BACKGROUND

LOOKING BACK – CONFLICT CONTEXT

Before exploring the need to still talk of conflict early warning in a country which is classified by many bilateral and multilateral donors as post conflict, we must briefly explore Sri Lanka's recent conflict history. Many analysts would agree the root causes of Sri Lanka's armed conflict were founded on regional and economic struggles for socio-economic opportunities enjoyed by a small elite in the western province⁵. Years of failure by the ruling administrations to 'institutionalise democratic politics'⁶ led to growing tensions along ethnic and regional lines which ultimately created a separatist movement in Tamil-dominated areas of the north and east of Sri Lanka. The separatist movement, spearheaded by the armed group LTTE, gained gradual control of the administration of the north and parts of the east of Sri Lanka, increasing the threat posed to the GoSL's authority. The country suffered decades of insurgency and counter-insurgency campaigns, which resulted in not much more than increased divisions – regional and ethnic – and the deterioration of the government's ability to design and implement effective and egalitarian democratic systems of good governance.

The two warring sides came together in 2002 for what most analysts deemed at the time to be the beginning of a round of peace talks which represented a radical departure from earlier governments' approaches,⁷ and thus gave hope that there could be a positive end to the war and the signing of a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) which would herald a peace process. This was the first step in a process of talks between the GoSL and the LTTE which lasted until March 2003. The CFA was still theoretically in place during further attempts at negotiations in 2006. It finally collapsed in 2008, leaving both parties more determined than ever to end the war through military means. The talks and the CFA were a process which the international community backed wholeheartedly and supported through a large-scale economic and peacebuilding agenda⁸. As a means of incentive to come to a negotiated political settlement, donor communities held international conferences in support of negotiations during which they pledged large sums of money for the reconstruction of the conflict regions of the north and east, extensive rehabilitation programmes for those affected by the conflict and financial support to aid both the GoSL and LTTE.

On the whole, the donor community's belief was that 'conflict and antagonisms would be overcome through dialogue and consensus [...] and second, that economic development would create disincentives for going back to war'⁹. Donors fundamentally believed that grassroots-level peacebuilding would enable or "empower" communities to better manage their conflict. However, what many in the international community failed to predict was that development alone as the driver of peace – prior to an agreed and implemented peace process – was doomed to failure as the context which perpetuated the conflict was still being maintained¹⁰. Therefore, development aid at times further perpetuated grievances instead of supporting peace¹¹. When the negotiations came to an end, conditional pledges failed to materialise and the donor community adopted less

5 World Bank Sri Lanka Country Assistance Strategy (2002/05). 'Appendix I - The Root Causes of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSRILANKA/Resources/App1.pdf>

6 J. Goodhand and B. Klem (2005). 'Aid Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, 2000-2005', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SRILANKAEXTN/Resources/SLAidConflictPeace.pdf>

7 Ibid.

8 B. Korf (2006). *Dining with the Devils*. Oxford Development Studies: Oxford; in J. Goodhand, J. Spencer and B. Korf (2011). *Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, Caught in the peace trap?* Routledge, p.12.

9 J. Goodhand, J. Spencer and B. Korf (2011). *Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, Caught in the peace trap?* Routledge.

10 J. Goodhand and B. Klem (2005). 'Aid Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, 2000-2005', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SRILANKAEXTN/Resources/SLAidConflictPeace.pdf>

11 See M. Mayer, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, Y. Thangarajah (eds.) (2003). *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*. Macmillan India, New Delhi.

cohesive strategies in response to the context. Political incentives to support Sri Lanka became harder to justify, given that there was no longer a functioning peace process.

Many Western donors continued their aid and development support of Sri Lanka after the December 2004 Asian tsunami. However, with regard to donors' political agendas, the failure of the talks and the collapse of the CFA brought about a shift in policy; although aid was still disbursed, there was increased pressure from Western governments on the Sri Lankan administration to end the conflict.

The political landscape also substantially changed in 2005 when Mahinda Rajapaksa won the presidential election with support from the JVP and JHU (two nationalist parties). This change was echoed by a radical change in policy by the GoSL with regard to the conflict, namely through an increasingly intensive military operation to regain all rebel-held territories and defeat the LTTE.

The war finally ended after a protracted military battle in May 2009. The GoSL has since then consolidated its powers through an early presidential election in January 2010 which resulted in President Rajapaksa's re-election, followed by an overwhelming majority victory in the parliamentary elections of April 2010. The administration has since also amended the constitution by extending the presidential term from a two-term maximum (maximum 6 years per term) to an unlimited number of terms. The amendment has also granted the president the authority to nominate and appoint independent commissions for the police, judiciary, public service, human rights and elections after seeking recommendations from the parliamentary council. Arguably one of the most important parliamentary bills in Sri Lanka's history was rushed through the parliamentary apparatus within two weeks, giving the country no time to seriously contemplate the long-term consequences of such an amendment, even for those in favour of a strong executive presidency and maintenance of the status quo.

THE CURRENT DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE

Despite the aforementioned constitutional and policy reforms, which many analysts would in fact argue run contrary to strong democratic traditions, the administration remains highly popular. It is pushing forward an aggressive infrastructure agenda and an international public relations campaign, reaching out to the diaspora and consolidating its partnerships with its Asian neighbours. However, some acknowledge that this post-war nation-building agenda seems to be happening at the expense of achieving a sustainable and inclusive peaceful solution to conflicts in Sri Lanka. Many of the underlying issues which gave rise to the original uprisings and separatist movements, such as regional access to economic opportunities, land rights, youth unemployment, ethnic politics, the politicisation of language and the structure of the education system, have yet to be genuinely addressed.

In recognition of the need to make a comprehensive case for early warning in a post-conflict state, those operating within Sri Lanka and those who have deprioritised Sri Lanka on the list of fragile states must analyse the aforementioned causes of conflict alongside current trends on the ground. The state continued in 2011 to maintain emergency laws on the basis of threats to national security; it is planning and implementing large centrally-driven development projects across the country with limited consultation with local communities; civil activities have been carried out by the military, reinforcing the sense of continued militarisation; access to conflict zones has been strictly controlled, especially for international organisations and international media; the financial benefits of the peace dividend are not shown to be fair or transparent, falling largely into the hands of elite groups; furthermore, the political settlement discourse has not made any significant progress.

Some political analysts interviewed argued that, at the base of the conflict, democratic institutions and practice are weak. For example, there is a commitment to ensure checks and balances through parliamentary committees; however, these committees seldom fulfil their function, given that parliamentary bills rarely go through a second round of debate, making parliamentary procedures ad hoc. Analysts would argue that the weaknesses of the parliamentary system highlight the merging of social and political conflict in Sri Lanka. To compound this, citizens speak of rampant corruption and a lack of reliable systems of governance. With regard to development policy, socio-political analysts interviewed repeatedly referred to the lack of evidence to illustrate that development and infrastructure projects were designed and implemented according to respective regional needs, but that much evidence pointed to development being used as a tool to consolidate

political presence of the state over the north and east, making it government owned rather than community owned.

Through the analysis of the aforementioned factors, this case study argues that the terms upon which the war was won, coupled with Sri Lanka's current domestic socio-economic context, leads to one commonly-held conclusion: the war may be over, but the conflict is not. For this reason, the premise of this case study is that early warning processes are as necessary now as they have ever been.

THE EU AND WESTERN DONOR GROUP CONTEXT

Despite the outlined context and the aforementioned history of Western donor support as an incentive to broker peace (both as an end to itself but also in response to the recognition that development has historically lacked a sustainable impact when delivered in a conflict context), successive failures in brokering the peace left the international community to reconsider and reduce its role. Additionally, the change in the Sri Lankan political landscape from a pro-Western government to one that has sought non-traditional allies illustrated the beginning of a shifting landscape for the donor community to work within. As Burke and Mulakala put it, the new administration 'resisted efforts by donors to form common positions and rejected the perceived conditions of the Tokyo declaration...[which left the Western donor community]...scratching their heads over how to direct their efforts at peacebuilding'¹². Furthermore, the unprecedented level of support for post-tsunami reconstruction reduced the conditionality of aid which had previously been used as an incentive for peace, arguably reducing further Western donor leverage¹³. Moreover, consolidation of partnerships between the GoSL and its Asian neighbours (India, China, Iran and Japan), whose contributions by far dwarfed those of Western donors, reduced Western donors' financial significance even further. Such partnerships offer the GoSL some breathing space as they seem to be agreed with little or no conditionality for political reform. Additionally, the aforementioned Asian donors also now have a foothold in a country which is geostrategically advantageous to their national interests.

According to the donors and analysts interviewed, there were also three additional factors which had gradually contributed to shrinking Western donor presence:

- the upgrade of Sri Lanka by the IMF to a middle income country;
- the end of the war;
- the Western economic recession.

On the whole, many EU member state representatives interviewed indicated that such factors had made it increasingly difficult for the donor community to justify its presence in Sri Lanka. For instance, DfID closed its offices in 2006 soon after the declaration of middle income status. The end of the war came to a very high-profile and well-reported end, making it increasingly difficult to galvanise support from Western governments to fund peacebuilding initiatives aimed at tackling the root causes of the conflict, a long-term challenge which aims to address causes much more complex than the dichotomy of two warring parties. Furthermore, Western governments are coming under increasing pressure from their recession-stricken citizens to cut back on international development budgets to decrease the impact on their own citizens. Moreover, if money is ringfenced for peace and development, governments are then under increasing pressure to provide demonstrable, high profile results to their citizens.

The changing Western donor context, coupled with the increasing centralisation of the state apparatus (as described earlier), allotted and disbursed through informal agreements, not only dictates what and where infrastructure will be developed, but also which projects will be allowed to be implemented. Of crucial interest to this case study, political analysts and member state representatives noted that projects targeting issues of governance, democracy, human rights, security and access to justice are difficult, if not impossible, to implement. Programmes which address such issues are seen as a) not a priority in post-war nation building and b) functions

¹² J. Goodhand, J. Spencer and B. Korf (2011). *Conflict and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka, Caught in the peace trap?* Routledge, p.160.

¹³ *Ibid.*

already performed by government, and performed well, thus requiring no international support. This has put additional pressure on the operational mandate of donors still currently present in Sri Lanka. Fearing restrictions from government, some donors have chosen to work in line with the government's infrastructure and economic priorities and implement projects which offer no threat to the current status quo, in turn maintaining the space and access they have available, potentially neglecting to address ongoing "conflict" dynamics.

It is important to mention at this point the risks in not learning from historical experience regarding such stark donor-government policy alignment as significant to a country's conflict dynamics. During the CFA period, donors aligned themselves to the government's economic development plans of strengthening the free market economy on the premise that economic development was the path to peace: 'the total amount of aid increased from LKR17.2 billion in 2002 to LKR61.2 billion in 2003'¹⁴. As Bastian points out, 'only 15 of the 62 projects were directly related to peace or had provision to work in the northeast. The 15 new projects mentioned above show donors were keen to expand in those areas affected by war, but what really happened was that the signing of the CFA, and conditions of normalcy and stability created by it, enabled donors to increase support for the mainstream economic agenda.'¹⁵ This agenda, with strong liberal overtones, was seen as one factor for widespread economic dissatisfaction at the local level, which played a significant part in the change of government in the elections of 2005. Donor alignment with government policy without adequate scrutiny of and comment on the possible impacts and consequences of these policies was certainly an issue. The failure of the free market economy to lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict from 2003-2006 and the conditions of normality are outcomes and conditions which also seem applicable to current-day Sri Lanka.

14 Ibid, p.144.

15 Ibid, p.145

CONFLICT EARLY WARNING IN SRI LANKA – THROUGH THE CURRENT WESTERN DONOR LENS

This section will namely draw on findings from the two main components of this study; desk-based research and a series of conversations with a selection of representatives from the EU Delegation, ECHO and other member state (MS) representatives. It will not outline the current policy frameworks or early warning tools currently in place at the Brussels level, as this was already outlined in Saferworld's mapping analysis of the European Commission Early Warning Architecture and Crisis Response Capacity January 2011 paper¹⁶ which provided information for the conversations mentioned below.

The EU in Sri Lanka¹⁷

- The EU has played an active role in Sri Lanka for many decades.
- Its formal partnership dates back to 1975 when the EC signed a Commercial Cooperation Agreement with the GoSL. This has since been updated into a more comprehensive agreement which came into force in 1995.
- The EU's 2007-2013 country strategy paper (CSP) outlines the challenges facing Sri Lanka over the period as the following:
 - The need to resolve the volatile political and conflict situation with the overall objective of realising a lasting resolution of the conflict through a peacefully negotiated political settlement which respects the legitimate demands of all the people of Sri Lanka, including minority communities;
 - The need to take forward a series of reforms and ensure faster growth to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty reduction;
 - The need to eradicate acute poverty in parts of central Sri Lanka and in the whole of the north and east of Sri Lanka.
- The priority sector for 2007-2013 will be support to the peace process and poverty reduction in the north and east through sustainable integrated district development of one to two districts. In addition, the CSP will include smaller allocation of support to two non-focal sectors: trade and good governance.

CONTEXT AND POWER ANALYSIS

The context as analysed by the EU and member states seems to be characterised by the following trends:

1. DECREASED SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & PEACEBUILDING WORK

Donors consistently reported problems with implementing human rights and peacebuilding programmes/projects in the current climate in Sri Lanka. At the planning stage of donor initiatives, access to areas to conduct a thorough needs analysis is limited, both geographically as well as thematically, leaving donors fearing that they may not be accessing the most vulnerable beneficiaries. Infrastructure development is prioritised and

¹⁶ S. Babaud and N. Mirimanova (2011), *The European Commission Early-warning Architecture and Crisis-response Capacity*. Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning: Brussels. Available at: <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/092011ECArch.pdf>

¹⁷ Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives (2011). 'Political and economic relations', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/eu_sri_lanka/political_relations/index_en.htm

rapidly approved by the GoSL, particularly when compared with human rights and peacebuilding projects. With regard to the implementation stage, if access is granted, there is clear continued military presence in previous conflict zones, which has contributed to allegations of the military's involvement in screening beneficiaries of development projects. In contrast, there have also been positive reports that military presence provides essential community support for many female-headed households left with a shrinking support network since the end of the war. According to the experts interviewed, such support is welcomed by many community groups but fear remains a consistent underlying issue.

Concerns over greater restrictions and control are also a factor underpinning the issue of advocacy with respect to a) the space to work (particularly on human rights and peacebuilding) and b) the push for constructive change. A trend repeatedly relayed is the need to preserve the already-limited space agencies currently have and to do so by maintaining a low profile on issues which have the potential to aggravate the government, the exclusive power holder of this space. Donors are left balancing between a pragmatic or principled approach and have chosen to adopt different strategies, be it limiting funding only for infrastructure development and disaster relief, supporting livelihood programmes, such as economic schemes for ex-combatants, or pulling out of Sri Lanka entirely.

The trend of shrinking human rights and peacebuilding space is also echoed in terms of funding. Donors consistently reflected upon the fact that there was less funding available for civil society organisations on issues of good governance, human rights and state/society relations. This was namely because a) donors are under increasing pressure from their central government and the GoSL to show short-term, concrete results, and b) when funds are disbursed for such projects, the operating environment is controlled and under increasing operational pressure, resulting in further stagnation of impact, and c) the difficulty in justifying peacebuilding work in a so-called “post-conflict” context.

2. WEAK RULE OF LAW

The overall analysis from donors is that the likelihood of an outbreak of large-scale violent conflict is unlikely in the near future: society is in a state of fatigue after many decades of war, communities are more interested with the immediate task of rebuilding their lives, the space for alternative political movements has shrunk and the military capacity of the previous internal enemy, the LTTE, has been annihilated. However, this does not signify an absence of conflicts or of violence. As long as there is a real and/or perceived neglect of grievances, trauma, justice provision, equitable distribution of the peace dividend and economic recovery, the risk of conflict, in whichever form, remains. Localised incidents of violence and weak rule of law have the potential to fuel tensions in the future. The fundamental question is to which degree the state is able and willing to address the allegations of criminality by groups and of local inter/intra-group conflict.

3. DONOR ALIGNMENT WITH THE GOSL

Donors referred to a growing trend by the GoSL to enforce the principles agreed in the 2005 Paris Declaration, namely that of ‘Ownership: Partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and coordinate development actions...[and]... Alignment: Donors base their overall support on partner countries’ national development strategies, institutions, and procedures.’¹⁸ Despite donor agreement that these principles are indeed necessary, they wish to also point out two fundamental issues: firstly, the Paris Declaration does not effectively address guiding principles in a conflict/post-conflict context where state institutions are not necessarily seen as being legitimate, fair, transparent and democratic, and may in fact intend to implement harmful/conflict-fuelling development policies; secondly, related to the first point, is that, by abiding by the Paris Declaration, they risk contributing to state rather than citizen ownership of the peace and thus being complicit in driving inequality and injustice, and undermining democratic institutions and practice. There is reference to a strained relationship between the GoSL and the Western donor community, underlying which is a fundamental disagreement over what conflict-sensitive peace dividends should essentially look like. While the government seeks to prioritise infrastructure development as the path to peace, Western donors would like to support infrastructure alongside the implementation of democratic reform, poverty alleviation (across all regions) and an inclusive peace process.

18 OECD (2005/2008). ‘The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action’, accessed 16th May 2011. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>

Furthermore, donors refer to the asymmetrical partnership with the government. An example provided was the Joint Plan for Assistance in the Northern Province for 2011¹⁹. Agreed by the UN, the GoSL and numerous NGOs, the Joint Plan is an agreement which sets out a comprehensive recovery plan in collaboration with the UN and bilateral donors. However, at the time of research, there was expressed frustration at the lack of improvement on the ground with regards to access to beneficiaries. Although the overall joint plan of assistance has been agreed upon, individual projects must continue to go through a government vetting process which ensures that the operational context is dominated by projects which fit the strict criteria of the government agenda – infrastructure-heavy recovery projects – making access to “softer” recovery programmes extremely difficult. This type of operational partnership produces an uneasy collaboration, ultimately weakening Sri Lanka’s potential for strong social and economic transition.

4. CENTRALISATION OF POWER AND PARALLEL POWER STRUCTURES

The changes in the constitution with the approval of the 18th Amendment by a two-thirds majority in parliament has led to greater control of democratic institutions by the executive arm of the government. Despite the extensive number of ministries in place, there is a growing trend that leadership positions and thus decision-making power lie in the hands of few officials – who in some instances hold multiple positions – close to the centre of government. This can appear to be sidelining experienced bureaucrats. The NGO secretariat is now integrated into the Ministry of Defence, which raises numerous questions over the freedom that NGOs currently have and will have in the future.

Such changes raise many questions over the legitimacy of current democracy and development structures in Sri Lanka. Some argue that the concentration of power illustrates a democracy which lacks sufficient checks and balances, creating the opportunity for a high degree of state control and erosion in accountability to the general public. Powerful elites also drive top-down policy making, showing little evidence of community-driven policy, particularly when one considers the low-level turnout in local and general elections in the north of the country. More importantly, this approach risks the alienation of regional needs, creating a climate of regional inequality, and potentially forming eventual pockets of turmoil which lead to violent conflict. Indeed, this is the trend which gave rise to previous insurgencies, and yet there seems to be little evidence to illustrate the government is monitoring and constructively responding to this risk in its recovery plan.

5. MEDIA FREEDOM

The media in Sri Lanka has been increasingly restricted in recent years, with reports of attacks on media offices, disappearances and intimidation of journalists. A cautionary political line is being taken by editors of major newspapers. A number of journalists are reported to have fled the country in response to death threats. This situation has repeatedly raised international concern amongst media watchdogs who have pressed for more concerted action to protect the media and journalists in the country with little apparent success.

19 The Government of Sri Lanka, United Nations and Partners (2011). 'Joint Plan for Assistance, Northern Province 2011', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/sriLanka_hpsl/Files/Appeals%20and%20Funding/Appeals%20and%20Funding/AF00025_JPA%202011_final-%20Full%20Doc.pdf

ANALYSING FRAGILITY

Conversations in Sri Lanka with EU representatives alluded to a variety of mechanisms utilised by the EU to gather and share information on the context, which are outlined below;

A. EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HUMANITARIAN AID AND CIVIL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT (ECHO)

Representatives of the EU delegation spoke of the extent to which ECHO's work on the ground supports the wider delegation in Sri Lanka. Due to the nature of their mandate and the level of access they have available in the regions, ECHO tends to have up-to-date information of regional context dynamics more than any other EU actor, particularly in the conflict-affected regions of the north and east of the island. The department also consults with partners, civil society groups and organisations funded by the EU.

ECHO in Sri Lanka²⁰

The European Commission Humanitarian Aid department, with a presence in Sri Lanka since 1994, has provided approximately €150 million (LKR22.5 billion) in aid to victims of both the conflict and natural disasters on the island. ECHO's activities benefit vulnerable populations affected by the conflict in Sri Lanka as well as the 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees living in camps in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Through ECHO, the EU has also provided emergency relief in response to natural disasters, such as the floods of May 2003 in the southern province and the Asian tsunami of December 2004.

In Sri Lanka, ECHO's assistance focuses on the sectors of shelter, non-food relief items, water and sanitation, food security, health, psycho-social support, capacity building, protection, humanitarian demining and humanitarian coordination. In 2009/10, ECHO provided €24 million (LKR3.6 billion) worth of humanitarian aid for populations affected by the conflict.

It is important to reiterate the difficulty referred to by representatives of directly conducting a comprehensive assessment or even subcontracting work because of the sensitivity of these issues and the lack of access to the public. Subsequently, ECHO uses the network already available. The access ECHO has is also well shared within the EU community in Sri Lanka and in Brussels. Information is then used to send regular reports to the DG-ECHO desk in Brussels, which informs the head of unit. In return, ECHO-Sri Lanka also receives updates from DG-ECHO. In Sri Lanka, staff spoke of weekly internal meetings where updated information was shared and planned actions discussed, producing situation reports on emerging trends in the regions. Moreover, when the opportunity arises, ECHO takes steps to support the EU delegation, as it has done so in the past. There are monthly video conferences between the ECHO desk and its development arm to share information and analysis.

With regard to the wider international community in Sri Lanka, ECHO is an active participant in all conflict and humanitarian debates. ECHO co-chairs the bilateral donor group alongside Canada, which it sees as a good opportunity to disseminate knowledge to the wider group and also have a closer working relationship with Canada. Its reflections on the group are that it is a respectful circle where various actors appreciate the different knowledge brought to the group from varying areas of expertise. The group is mindful to understand the limitations of ECHO's mandate and its valuable added contribution. Information is shared at varying degrees, dependent on the political mandate of participants and on the individual characteristics of participants. Staff also referred to the mechanism of cluster meetings, focusing on specific issues, such as food security, as a forum where conflict issues were discussed as part of the context analysis of the operating environment. ECHO also attends various UN meetings where, although they are a donor to the UN, UN staff seem to regard it differently on account of its humanitarian mandate and so share information they would be less likely to share with other UN donors. Aside from the bilateral donor group, there is also a development partners meeting chaired by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UN. Reflections on these groups are that information is not so readily shared due to the high level of participation, and that it is seen as an informative platform rather than an analytical one.

20 Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives (2011). 'Humanitarian Aid', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/eu_sri_lanka/humanitarian_aid/index_en.htm

B. EU, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Gathering contextual information for the EU delegation's Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management section is quite different to that of ECHO. Given the differing nature of the mandates, the information from the regions in terms of conflict/humanitarian issues is limited for section teams because they are primarily focused on gathering information relative to funded projects. The Instrument for Stability (IfS) often diverts much of its human resource capacity to project management rather than contextual trends. Staff here also referred to cluster meetings and email distribution lists. However, due to the compartmentalisation of information, emerging trends were often difficult to identify.

With regard to information flows between the delegation and Brussels teams, staff received the *Tariqa* newsletter from the Crisis Room. Furthermore, there seems to be a good working relationship between the Crisis Management team, the Crisis Response Officer in Delhi and the Brussels desk. Formal email updates from Colombo to Brussels always copy in the regional Crisis Response Officer, who also has the task of synthesising the various country updates from Asia in one report to Brussels. Staff also mentioned regular informal communication with the regional Crisis Response Officer. Staff in the Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management team also participate in and contribute to all the aforementioned coordination mechanisms previously outlined in reference to ECHO.

It is important to note here that formal context analyses are conducted by the political section of the delegation, namely the Heads of Mission, in collaboration with the Brussels desk. Likewise, the political sections of the delegation and Brussels share monthly analysis reports which are not fully shared with the entire delegation due to the nature of this particularly politically-sensitive context. It is noteworthy to also mention that the section also recognises that this is not the case for every delegation. Sri Lanka seems to be a particularly sensitive case and the relationship with the national government is highly complex. Formal policy decisions in response to context analysis are then taken at the policy working group, after which the different sections of the delegation are informed of the general EU response to the context.

Discussions with EU representatives indicate there is a general sense that information gathered from the ground is done so through informal information flows. The primary bottleneck to gathering information is the lack of independent access to the regions. Furthermore, as indicated in the preceding sections, the access that is available is closely supervised by military personnel.

The delegation made recommendations to help gather and analyse information in a context where the space for such analysis was shrinking and where the context remained, to a certain degree, fragile and fluid. These included specialist information flows, for example, a subscription-based tool which offers information as per a pertinent theme or region of priority to that individual/delegation. This tool would offer in-depth research and analysis on said themes drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge to support analysis and action. Additionally, periodic, analytical updates on the context would allow staff to look beyond the parameters of the projects they manage.

C. EU MEMBER STATES

The most commonly used methodology of collecting and analysing information is internal analytical discussions with occasional consultative support. This was corroborated in almost all conversations with member state representatives. Furthermore, staff referred to having previously conducted interagency consultation prior to finalising multi-year plans. However, given the general atmosphere of cutbacks and downscaling of budgets and capacity, many agencies are frequently working on short-term, annual plans. Lastly, some member state representatives referred to using the available variety of networks to gather information: for those working closer to the government, this included obtaining information from ministries and their advisory councils.

Importantly, interviewees representing member states and civil society organisations repeatedly commented on the lack of information available from the regions in Sri Lanka; more specifically, the lack of analysis of trends and expert-level recommendations.

KEY CHALLENGES

- The gap between the political and operational sections of the EU could benefit from being addressed. The gap often contributes to perceptions of a lack of transparency and internal coordination. Information on the rationale of policy changes alongside an inclusive analysis would contribute to organisation-wide ownership of background and direction. This would effectively strengthen the role of the EU as it contributes to clarity, transparency and potential collaboration with others.
- Understandably, the operational sections of the delegation lack the capacity to systematically collect and analyse information beyond what they already do for the regional Crisis Response Officer and the Brussels desk. However, it is important that capacity be provided, as doing so will help inform partnerships, help assess, monitor and offer advice on the implementation of projects, as well as inform the political section of trends emerging during project implementation. Such a process would ultimately lead to effective implementation, impact and policy advocacy.
- The effectiveness of solely relying on internal conflict analysis must be addressed critically as it is highly dependent on the access, agency and quality of staff available to delegations at the time. Therefore one must ask a) if this is an effective long-term approach, given that many embassies are downsizing and the capacity to provide this analysis may not always be available to all and b) whether this approach always provides a balanced analysis, given the high staff turnover, the evident lack of knowledge management and limited access given to most agencies. These are factors which are known to contribute to the potential bias of information.
- Furthermore, it is critical that analysis is conducted using multiple approaches and alongside multiple agencies, as this will further reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of a crisis/outbreak of violence. Montanaro & Schünemann refer to this as the critical difference between strong and weak signals: 'a strong signal is reported by, for example, 400 articles in mainstream media, while a weak one by, for example, only three in local media. Yet these three sources may be highly significant conflict triggers. Therefore "weak" means weak in terms of media attention, but not necessarily weak in significance.'²¹

Analysis of Beruwela Unrest, 2009

A violent incident broke out within the Muslim community in the town of Beruwela, southern Sri Lanka, in early 2009 between two sects of Islam representing different Islamic beliefs: the Wahhabi Muslims (a branch of Islam predominantly practiced in Saudi Arabia and across the Middle East) and the Ahmadiyya Muslims (a branch of Islam predominantly practiced in India and across South Asia). The story was portrayed by the media as an incident which represents the rising influence of extremism leading to the potential radicalisation of Muslims in Sri Lanka.

However, an insider mediator of the conflict maintains that there was a general misrepresentation of the fact of the breakout of violence and, in fact, the rise in Wahhabi Muslims in Sri Lanka is largely down to circular labour migration to the Middle East. Conversely, the mediator argued that there were serious potential conflict risks in the east of Sri Lanka, relating to the equal distribution of aid, which had received little attention but by far outweighed the risk of radicalisation. This risk related to the perception that the Muslim community had been repeatedly discriminated against (with regard to aid distribution, political settlement and peace negotiations) by the government, ex-militant groups and NGOs. More recently, referring to the flood disaster of 2010; there was a perception among the Muslim community that aid had been provided to the Tamil and Sinhalese communities, but that the Muslim community had been sidelined and, nonetheless, indirectly punished for having stronger short-term crisis management capacities.

21 L. Montanaro and J. Schünemann (2011). *Walk the Talk; The EU needs an effective early warning system to match its ambitions to prevent conflict and promote peace*. Initiative for Peacebuilding: Brussels, p.17.

This illustrates an example of an incident of violence which was well documented and widely reported, leading to a well-ingrained perception (two years later) of the rise of Islamic conservatism in Sri Lanka. This incident, which arguably posed low level risk, has overshadowed the less-profiled grievance which suggests potential for the rise of long-term ethnic conflict (between Muslims and other ethnic groups) if not effectively addressed.

- Information seems to be increasingly analysed through short-term and thematic lenses owing to donor hesitation to commit longer term and uncertainty about what they can/should do. There is not much evidence to illustrate that donors are using information to produce a thorough analysis which addresses the country's long term needs.
- More critically, given the donor analysis of the centralisation of power, a complex, highly asymmetrical relationship with the government, the undoubtedly shrinking space for human rights and peacebuilding work, sporadic outbreaks of targeted violence, the recognition of the inequality of the peace dividend and the absence of political will to address a political settlement, it seems more critical now than ever to invest in effective mechanisms to monitor conflict trends. This is particularly pertinent, given that early warning is designed to prevent the outbreak of larger-scale violence. However, donors are in fact downscaling those particular capacities, which raises the question of what is understood to be peaceful conditions?

RESPONDING TO ANALYSIS AND WARNING

Arguably, the most important part of the early warning process is the link between early warning and early response. Outlined below are key response mechanisms used by the EU in Sri Lanka and member states alongside some critical reflections:

1. EU FUNDING INSTRUMENTS: INSTRUMENT FOR STABILITY (IFS)

The EU has actively taken a decision to fund numerous projects under the funding stream Instrument for Stability (IfS), principally focusing on the areas of 'conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding'²². Many of the financial decisions taken under this instrument were made during a period of acute armed conflict when, for many analysts, including the EU, the current political context had not been foreseen²³. The overriding belief within the donor community is that the instrument was effective in improving the situation of human rights defenders and human rights NGOs and that it mitigated the effects of the war to some degree. However, there was an acknowledgement that, to a certain extent, the IfS portfolio became fragmented due to the large number of projects, making it difficult to manage, which raised questions regarding the aid portfolio. The principle belief of the delegation is that the IfS was justified in the past, owing to the difficult operating environment; however, in the current context, where DG RELEX legally declared the end of the crisis situation in November 2010, the Development Corporation Instrument (DCI) is more appropriate as it also allows space for some engagement with the government.

Other donors have also drastically downsized in response to their respective "analysis" which illustrated that Sri Lanka was post "conflict"²⁴, resulting in limited presence and commitment. Focus has also shifted with regard to development in Sri Lanka as it has rapidly fallen off the list of priority countries for most, if not all, Western donors. Many donors have also begun to align themselves with government agencies, some much more so than others, with the strategic goal of maintaining activities and impacting on the biggest actor in the context.

22 European Union EXTERNAL ACTION (2011). 'Instrument for Stability (IfS), EU in Action', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://www.eeas.europa.eu/ifs/index_en.htm

23 European Commission (2006). 'Sri Lanka Strategy Paper 2007-2013', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://www.eeas.europa.eu/sri_lanka/csp/07_13_en.pdf

24 The conflict analysis indicators used here were only relevant for a war context, rather than that of a broader conflict context.

2. THE BILATERAL DONOR COORDINATION GROUP

This is a small mechanism set up initially during the Sri Lanka peace process in 2003-04. A coordinator of that group is hosted by the World Bank (WB) to support donor information sharing and promote coordination amongst bilateral donors in Sri Lanka. It is supported by a small group of donors through a trust fund, which provides coordination for all donors. This group is chaired by different donors and comes together on a regular basis to discuss issues pertinent to the current context. In the recent past, meetings tended to focus on the monitoring of humanitarian assistance, resettlement and the flooding disaster of 2010. However, there seems to be an increasing interest to start again to address the conflict sensitivity of development aid. In discussions with the EU and member state representatives, there is a general recognition that this is a useful mechanism, which, due to the sheer number of its members, is not being used to its full potential.

Due to the shifting context in Sri Lanka, and donor alignment and realignment, interviewees spoke of the increasing hesitation to openly share analysis and strategy, particularly regarding conflict issues (discussion mainly focused on humanitarian support). Ironically, this suspicion is largely down to the lack of strategic analysis shared by others, which results in a spiralling reluctance to share information. It must be said though, that donors are not directly forthcoming with information on their strategies largely because of two interrelated fears: the level of political alignment of other donors and the perceived incompatibility of the “newer” donors. Donors have, to a large degree, started to re-engage with the government; however, the varying degrees of engagement (which are also not openly shared) causes some members to self-censor their analysis in case of the withdrawal of access by the government. This suspicion leads to the dilution of conversation to issues which are perceived as “safe”, such as humanitarian aid.

The bilateral donor group is also suffering from the problem of fatigue, which has further contributed to disengagement and caution. Donors, alongside INGOs, have been on the receiving end of a series of negative campaigns regarding their role and level of effectiveness before, during and after the war. Such claims include contributing to instability and working against national sovereignty. Additionally, with central government control at all levels of decision making and across numerous accountability structures, Western governments' declaration of the end to the “conflict” in Sri Lanka and reduced presence in the country, coupled with the increased influence of larger donors, has left traditional donors feeling fatigued and powerless. This has, in turn, contributed to a lack of willingness to participate analytically in coordination mechanisms and address the early warning challenges facing Sri Lanka's long term peace, effectively ‘condemning donors to pragmatism’²⁵.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Funding instruments seem to be based on outdated donor context analysis. In the case of the EU, the gap between the conceptualisation of strategy papers, disbursement and implementation can take up to three years. The current strategy paper covers the period 2007-2013, and the tool offered to respond to the context within which the delegation works is scenario based. Critically, it does not foresee the current context. This does not provide the EU, member states or partners with a responsive, clear and transparent strategic direction in the current context. The broad approach often leaves those outside of the EU unclear and frustrated with the lack of transparency on priorities and approaches, resulting in a reduced desire to share knowledge and strategy, and to collaborate. It is important that donors ensure strategy papers are sufficiently updated (based on consultative and comprehensive context analysis) so that effective response mechanisms can be in place. Sharing these papers with donors can help support collaborative approaches.
- Moreover, there is evidence to illustrate that donors seem to be analysing and thus responding and monitoring interventions using insufficient indicators. Indicators pertinent at the height of a militarised conflict are unsuitable for the current context. Donors must design indicators which recognise that a lack of war does not necessarily equate to a lack of conflict. An example would be indicators which help monitor the abuse of power and the decline of democratic space such as the independence of key institutions.

25 Interviewee comment, Colombo, 4th March 2011.

- Crucially, a lack of realistic and sustained engagement in coordination mechanisms significantly hinders donors' abilities to both analyse and, more importantly, respond to early warning. It is also important to point out that realism and sustainability must also be entwined in order for the coordination mechanism to reach its full potential as an effective analysis and response platform: one without the other contributes to tensions and inefficiency.
- There seem to be numerous assumptions about the incompatibility and intractability of some of the newer donors. The projection of suspicions in attitude will, in turn, help fuel the newer donor feeling of being outsiders to this group, potentially meaning they contribute and take part even less. There is potential for more, if somewhat circumspect, honest dialogue on these issues and perhaps an exploration of the attitudes of the newer donors towards these issues.
- The reduction of Western donor financial contributions (particularly in relation to their Asian donor counterparts) seems to have contributed to the common belief that it signifies the reduction of donor impact. Even if one assumes that this is truly the case, it is important to recognise that working separately without a joint strategy will significantly reduce impact even further. The aforementioned factors seem to have led to a lack of interest in developing a joint donor strategic approach, significantly contributing to donor fragmentation, fatigue and, arguably, donor harm.

CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka's civil war has officially ended. Now is the time to start building a long-lasting peace which includes all Sri Lankan citizens. The risk in not addressing the root causes and drivers of the previous war or in having a peace that suits some but not all is a potential regression into another war between society and the state. Simple as it may sound, it is not reflected in the actions of many actors in Sri Lanka.

Arguably, early warning mechanisms are not designed to only be used at the outbreak of war, but to also verify an inclusive, legitimate and sustainable peaceful future, which is as appropriate now as ever. Additionally, analysis without responsive, reflective action is, in many respects, redundant. Funds need to be carefully distributed to agencies and projects aiming to address the drivers of conflict, while at the same time continuing to find scope for cooperation with the GoSL. Strengthening advocacy within Sri Lanka, and also with donors and central government agencies, will allow those outside of the country to understand the challenges facing the country and the support needed to address them.

Given the multiple implementation and financial challenges facing donors in Sri Lanka, it is clear to see how EU and member states' capacity is often used to meet immediate challenges. However, the challenges facing post-war Sri Lanka are complex and multiple, and require the joint analysis of a multidisciplinary nature to identify the risks and peace-supporting opportunities. Support and collaboration with peace and conflict advisors, socio-political analysts and civil society peace advocates/groups on a frequent basis could support the analysis and response capacity of agencies, ensuring that implementation is strategic and peace supporting.

Lastly, the existing bilateral donor group could be further strengthened if used more frequently as an analytical mechanism rather than an information-sharing mechanism. The ongoing reluctance to use the mechanism for political analysis and joint response has allowed for non-complementary approaches. Complementarity could be supported if the donor group could commit to a joint analysis and, following that, a joint strategy. By maximising the strengths of different actors, a joint strategy would allow for complementarity and support, crucially reducing the likelihood of causing harm and increasing the likelihood of creating a positive peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Greater coordination between political and operational sections.** The lack of internal coordination within any institution has the potential to lead to a lack of clarity, principled ownership, mutual support, communication and increased fragmentation, both within the institution but also between the institution and others (including partners). Institutions such as the EU are well regarded and staffed with highly competent and principled individuals who are able to work discretely on sensitive political and operational matters. Precisely for these reasons, political and operational sections could benefit from designing means by which they are able to share information and analysis with little or no risk to diplomatic relations. Circular information sharing between the political and operational section is of mutual benefit; information privy to the political sections can help inform partnerships at the operation sections (other donors and award recipients), help analysis and support, help strengthen the impact of interventions and impact analysis of projects. A more detailed and transparent context analysis increases the potential of leading to a coordinated response, owned and supported within the EU but also by member states and partners. A better alignment to the EU's new External Action Service could ultimately also improve the EU's foreign policy voice and impact.
- **Identifying strategies for the EU and member states to play strategic lead roles in particular areas of advocacy.** Acknowledged by many interviewees, the EC and member states all have particular political and advocacy strengths which can be of mutual benefit and support if coordinated closely and strategically. Collectively, the EU and member states would benefit from collaborating, designing and mutually supporting a joint strategy which would highlight differing advocacy issues on which each country could potentially lead. This approach will provide the space to work separately with respective partners while at the same time mutually supporting an overall coordinated strategy. A joint strategy and advocacy campaign may require additional support from a conflict advisor position to support information flow and implementation.
- **The post-war situation will indicate only long-term risks, but is still important to monitor.** The current context in Sri Lanka does not easily fit into the definition of intra-state conflict; however, this does not necessarily signify the end of conflict. The donor community needs to redesign the lens through which a conflict analysis is conducted, looking for trends which could potentially lead to longer term, systematic inequality and instability. The focus of analysis should be on issues which donor representatives individually recognise as real and serious risks, such as the deterioration of the rule of law. In response to a more nuanced, longer-term analysis, donors must also be prepared to take a more nuanced, longer-term approach and not opt for the "easier" path of defining conflict and post conflict through the more traditional lens. Standard conflict analysis in the current context does not suffice, as one senior political economist interviewed stated: 'the underlying assumption in standard conflict analysis tools is a belief which says we can find a common framework to deal with complex problems.'²⁶
- **Embassy/Colombo level analysis is not enough.** Conducting analysis within the walls of the embassy or within the parameters of Colombo contributes to the risk of analysis distortion. This approach has the potential to negate the acknowledgement of critical dimensions because of conscious/subconscious bias or a simple lack of access to information. Precisely for this reason and the aforementioned difficulty in accessing certain regions of the country (for international organisations in particular), the donor community should make a concerted effort to design mechanisms through which it could work with numerous local NGOs, community and business leaders, academics, journalists and political economists, to name but a few. Working more closely

26 Interviewee comment, Colombo, 11th March 2011.

with a broader representation of Sri Lankan civil society will help to provide additional information and, more crucially, additional lenses through which to analyse and interpret information, providing space to include the donor community as part of that context.

- **Better understanding of problems/conflict risks does not necessarily easily translate into a change in programme design or political response.** Response planning needs to improve to a) reflect the realities on the ground through in-depth, localised analysis and b) be drawn on interdisciplinary professional consultations. Evident from the interviews conducted for this case study is the disparity between the conflict trends individuals identified and the response to such trends; it seemed to be the case that individuals might identify the drivers of conflict, but broader conflict analysis identified the symptoms, increasing the likelihood of designing programmes which addressed symptoms rather than root causes. Acknowledging the nuances of the operating environment, donors could potentially find ways of grappling with such issues through more creative means, for example detailed scenario-based analysis (including donors as key actors in the conflict), external workshops to discuss liberal peace, and professional reflection seminars and consultations on how to positively influence negative political settlements.
- **Focus on trade links as an avenue for advocacy.** Trade links between the European Union and Sri Lanka remain strong: 2009 trade figures indicate that 'the EU is Sri Lanka's largest export partner; Sri Lanka exported €2.06 billion (LKR309 billion) worth of products and services to the EU, which represented 39 percent of Sri Lanka's total exports.'²⁷ The withdrawal of GSP+²⁸ might have had some impact on the 2009 trade figures (too early to verify at the time of writing); however, being Sri Lanka's largest export market, the EU will not have lost any importance in the role it plays in Sri Lanka's economy. Sri Lanka continues to benefit from standard preferential status and Europe will continue to be one of Sri Lanka's largest export economies for some time to come. This indicates that there remain avenues for advocacy and leverage to explore with the Sri Lankan government – traditional donors are not as powerless as their self-reflection indicates. The avenue of trade could potentially be the basis for more symmetrical dialogue with the government on issues of post-war recovery, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As one peacebuilding expert mentioned in an interview, 'there is space – you are a donor with resources, something can be explored here.'²⁹
- **Maximise the positive potential of Sri Lankan diaspora communities.** Western countries have large populations of Sri Lankan diaspora communities, across all ethnic, economic and political standpoints. Many members of the diaspora actively support Sri Lanka through numerous humanitarian, development, economic and political avenues. The impact of the diaspora on their country of heritage is demonstrable, and the impact of their country of heritage on diaspora communities the same, making the diaspora an actor in the context which should not be underestimated or sidelined. As the diaspora suffers from similar factions to those in Sri Lanka, Western governments should use all available space and freedom to address factions in the "host" country. Western governments could potentially work with diaspora communities to harness their influence and agency for the long lasting peace of Sri Lanka. This could conceivably be supporting advocacy for the application of democratic principles and processes in Sri Lanka, an inclusive political settlement or an inclusive peace dividend. Governments could in fact also support peace-promoting diaspora investment in Sri Lanka. The motivations and impact of the diaspora in conflict contexts have been studied and proven to have varying degrees of impact; however, the universal conclusion is that there is a clearly evident impact. For these reasons, Western donors should explore and support the positive impact of diaspora communities on Sri Lanka.

27 Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka and the Maldives (2009). 'Trade', accessed 16th May 2011. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/eu_sri_lanka/trade_relation/index_en.htm

28 See: <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=515>

29 Interviewee comment, Colombo, 8th March 2011.

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