

## **Survival Strategies Adopted by Marginalized People in War Affected Regions: A Case Study of North Central Sri Lanka**

**Rev. Pinnawala Sangasumana**

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### **Abstract**

Several thousand people had displaced in some "Conflict-locked" areas while a large number of human settlements have become vulnerable for the negative consequences of the prolonged armed conflict, particularly in the Northern and North Central Provinces of Sri Lanka. Hence, the human, social, and livelihood security issue of the families in these armed conflict induced areas of Sri Lanka had become a serious socio-political concern during the past three decades. Accordingly, the objective of this research paper was to examine the different vulnerabilities faced by communities as well as to measure the survival strategies adopted by them. The study area was the village of Yakawewa in Keththigollewa Division of North Central Province of Sri Lanka. A large number of villagers from Yakawewa were killed and maimed by the roadside claymore attack of Tamil terrorists in 2006. This single event marked a turning point in the decade's long conflict of the country as it considered to have significantly swayed the government of Sri Lanka stance towards seeking a military solution to the conflict. The field work for this was done in 2010-2018 which used a rich array of qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, particularly in a longitudinal manner. Research results revealed that multi-faceted coping strategies are being adopted by resettled Sinhalese in Yakawewa village in the phase of transforming from conflict-locked to a normal situation. The nature and sequence of their restoring process were depended on individuals' economic, social and political capabilities and attitudes. Household level coping strategies are strong in adapting to the new situation because in many cases individual rationality has come to the fore instead of collective rationality. In addition, many resettlement issues are being faced by the returnees as a result of emerging property issues, competition over the resources, physical and social isolation, subsistent attitudes and lack of self-esteem *etc.* It can be concluded that most of the survival strategies are onsite practices but preparedness mechanism.

### **Keywords:**

Displacement,  
Resettlement,  
Survival Strategies,  
Security,  
Vulnerability

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### **Author correspondence:**

Rev. Pinnawala Sangasumana  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka  
Email: pssumana@sjp.ac.lk

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## 1. Introduction

The global issue of conflict-induced displacement is considered as a perpetual catastrophe for the people who are forced to leave their material possessions due to the insecurity driven by armed conflicts. According to the nature and sequence of the conflict, they may have to find temporary refuge for several years anticipating returning to their places of origin. Perhaps, even in the post conflict situation, resettlement of displaced may not become a reality. This was more or less experienced by resettled conflict-induced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka for about three decades. Despite from the Tamil and Muslim IDPs, most of the Sinhalese displaced from conflict affected peripheral villages have already returned to their places of origin after the defeat of the Tamil terrorism in May 2009. But they are still struggling to abstain from negative consequences of the prolonged armed conflict. Hence, it is timely to understand the way in which they are transforming from militarized environment to peaceful society and to identify the issues and challenges faced during this transition stage. The success of various actors in resettling IDPs depends to a large extent on the question of how the IDPs emerge or escape from militarized environment to a peaceful setting. A key problem in this equation was that the resettlement actors focus primarily on the single aspect of homelessness and destitution. Hence this paper is arguing that a durable solution for resettlement issue cannot be found only through material support. Such assistant programmes should address the challenges faced by IDPs in reestablishing their normal life (Sangasumana 2010). To understand this is so, this research focuses on to identify the transitional issues and coping strategies through the experiences of resettled Sinhalese who were struggling to rebuild their socioeconomic and cultural landscape.

The conflict-induced internal displacement (CIID) wherever it occurs creates a humanitarian, political, socio-cultural and environmental tragedy of great proportions. Attempts to redress this problem had been numerous but none had so far been able to offer a satisfactory solution which necessitates the work done in this paper. At the time of the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009, Sri Lanka faced a phenomenal problem of having to care for hundreds of thousands of conflict-induced internally displaced persons (CIDPs). In this context there is a dire need to fill the void between policy and needs on the field in restoring these displaced lives. Hence, it is argued that, the real issues and challenges faced by the resettlers should be focused as the focal point in seeking durable solutions to the problem of internal displacement.

Many attempts have been made to address the internal displacement by governments, international organizations, regional bodies, national and international human rights institutions, etc. According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on internal displacement, addressing displacement involves a complete attempt to deal with every aspect and phase of the internal displacement. It goes on to outline the rights of the IDPs from the period prior to any displacement through to the end of displacement. Principles 5-9 thus deal with the issue of prevention or protection from displacement, while 10-27 cover protection and assistance during displacement and also 28-30 deal with questions relating to seeking durable solutions including return, resettlement and reintegration (UN 2000). Even though multifaceted efforts have been made to address this problem, there is still a big gap between theory and practice mainly because the focus has been primarily on the physical aspects of homelessness and destitution. In addition, most of the studies have been confined merely to identify the grievances and agonies of the IDPs, and thereby recommending the relevant authorities to adopt necessary action to resettle such IDPs. In this context, the present research is going to be somewhat different from the above conventional approaches.

Even though multifaceted studies have addressed the problem of conflict induced internal displacement at global and local level, for most of the countries, finding a durable solution is still in question because the focus has been raised of the plight of IDPs, their specific needs and vulnerabilities and national and international responses (Mooney 2003). From their study of internal displacement Cohen and Deng (1998) draw an overarching conclusion: too much attention has been focused on the delivery of emergency assistance. To be effective, they suggest that strategies to address mass displacement need to be broader and more comprehensive. From this background, present research has attempted to fulfill some areas which have not yet been attended. In addition, this has been based on the knowledge of social, political, cultural and philosophical geography which could help to develop an innovative framework in seeking durable solutions

for restoring displaced lives in an appropriate manner and create a synergy between different academics, disciplines, practitioners and policy makers etc.

Vulnerability I always seen in negative aspect which caused to the destruction of social security. In fact, sometimes it may be an encouraging force for creativity and change if opportunities available. Vulnerability does not emerged with its on status but linking with different situations. Uexkull (2014) has studied the interrelationship between drought, vulnerability and civil conflict violence. Using novel high-resolution data on civil conflict events in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2008, she evaluates the relationship in line with the argument, areas with rainfed croplands see an increased risk of civil conflict violence following drought. Both natural and human resources directly link with the vulnerability in a situation of armed conflict at any level (Korf 2011). Therefore the successfulness of the strategies adopted by the war victims may depend the resource availability and the accessibility. Citing examples from Liberia, Sawyer (2005) explains the way in which Social capital and survival strategies are capable to handling the post conflict situation. There are interesting dimensions in communities under threat always seek solutions for their vulnerable situations. Ruwanpura (2003) discusses how Sinhala female household heads adopt survival strategies against the conflict affected vulnerabilities in Eastern Sri Lanka. Citing particular case studies she has pointed out how women could overcome the issues such as poverty by using limited opportunities. However this type of studies are mostly undertaken by qualitative researchers since the latter methodology help to explore the unseen depth of the vulnerable situation on the one hand and dynamic survival strategies adopted by different people who faced vulnerability to different humanistic issues (Orme and Seipel 2007).

## 2. Research Problem

The geographic meaning of 'place' is wide and deep since it includes one's place in society. This research takes the position that by the same token 'displacement' also lends to a rich array of nuances and interpretations. One's place in the society is powerfully determined by his/her life goals and socio-geographical networks. This implies that displacement is a process whereby they lose this power which was built up over the years. Hence, the study argues that restoring normal life of the displaced is in fact not just an issue of returning to their places of origin but a process that addresses their transition issues and consequent of which they would be able to find their place in society. In this study, 'place' as one of the main concepts in geography has been explored through the process of internal displacement in emphasizing its socio-economic, political, cultural as well as spiritual interpretations. From the researcher's point of view, displacement is not a simple phenomenon of just fleeing from one place to another but losing one's place in the society. Therefore, the restoration of displaced lives is not only about survival, but also about planning for the future, rebuilding lost assets and re-establishing the place.

Human Displacement is the term for the most wretched experience of people who are involuntarily fleeing from their habitual environments and are experiencing dislocation and dispossession as a result of natural or manmade disasters all over the world. The nature of the displacement process varies from place to place and community to community. The root causes of displacement such as political conflicts, natural or man-made disasters and development projects etc. are extremely complex. As a result of, or in order to avoid the effect of one or more of these causes, people have been forced to leave their places of origin. The prolonged armed conflict was the most worsening cause for displacement in Sri Lanka which gained greater momentum since 1983, escalating in violent confrontations between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Tamil Terrorists so called Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE). As a terrorist group they had been undertaking frequent human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests, detention, torture, forced expulsion, on public transport, bomb explosions in public places and suicide bomb attacks etc. On the other hand, Government was confronting this situation in fighting against them with heavy artillery firing, military operations, aerial bombardment, establishing high security zones etc. Altogether, this situation has caused a mass movement of people from their places of origin as well as human suffering and damage in almost all spheres of life. However, the armed conflict and its worst agonies are no longer in the country but the issues and challenges of the post-conflict displacement have become much more complicated. Even though the background setting of the conflict induced displacement scenario of Sri Lanka has changed dramatically since May 2009, the

question of rehabilitation, resettlement and reintegration still remain as cardinal issues for the CIDPs, despite the new socio- political circumstances.

### Research Questions

The study has focused two key research questions.

- What exactly is the influence of the armed conflict on the lives of frontier villagers in North central Sri Lanka and how do they perceive and cope with those influences?
- How individuals and communities adopt survival strategies against vulnerability to the armed conflict?

### Objectives

1. To identify different vulnerabilities assaulted the existence of conflict-affected communities
2. To examine the importance of survival strategies adopted by conflict-affected communities in the frame of their vulnerable context.

Under normal circumstances, displaced people undergo a process where they face loss of their homes, physical dislocation, detachment from the socio-economic networks, social and material dispossession, and more often breakdown of the family etc. Each displaced family would fasten different values, likings and attachments to the set of material and spiritual things that they are losing because of the displacement. In transiting from such conflict affected to a post-conflict setting every displaced have to face several issues and challenges in rebuilding their normal life. Therefore it is timely and relevant to understand the manner of their transition from a conflict affected to a post-conflict setting and to identify the issues and challenges faced by them during the transition stage. It is also very important to identify the way in which these people adopted different coping strategies in transiting from a conflict to a post-conflict situation and to rebuild their normal life.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

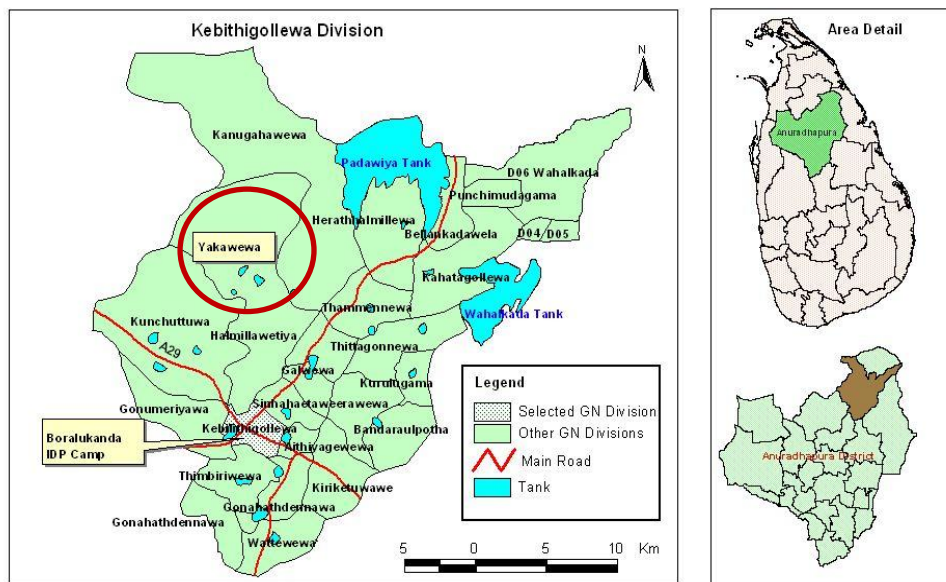
The research method was mainly qualitative involving in-depth discussions with various groups in the community and informal village walks. Interview with households were the key to investigate survival strategies of conflict affected people in frontier villages. The information was complemented through data from key informants. Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focused group discussions and direct observations were particularly useful in gathering data and generating new insights in to the process involved in determining survival strategies and vulnerability. These methods were well-suited to grasping the volatile mechanisms of peoples' survival strategies in general. It was very important to record some particular lived experience of conflict affected communities and present them as their own expressions. The selected focus group of the study comprised conflict affected Sinhala community in North Central Sri Lanka because most of the studies conducted to hither to had dealt with IDPs of Tamil or Muslim origin in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The main body of the data was collected in formal interviews that had been designed to be conducted in a systematically organized manner under certain themes. Those interviews were carried out with selected respondents who represented different household categories. Since it was envisaged to select 20 respondents from each campsite and who belonged to different categories, the stratified non-probability sampling method was applied. Even though selected respondents were interviewed within the pre-structured frame, the discussions were continued with ample opportunity for the respondents to explore lived experiences which they considered particularly significant. Questions and information that might otherwise have been left out were allowed to emerge, because the respondents were given a relatively free rein to give their own perception of their lived experiences. This methodology provided several advantages in collecting reliable and valid data as well as maintaining them in a more progressive way. In order to obtain and follow up some

uniform data such as possessions (fix-points), the method was very helpful. Since the method were carried out with a particular guiding checklist, some clarifications and feedback could be able to be undertaken easily. Consequently, information from one interview was able to be cross-checked in a different context. Another important advantage was that systematically obtained data from this method were able to be organized and sorted out so that they could be used by assigned qualitative analysis software. Focus group discussions held aimed at the manner in which vulnerability was experienced collectively and how actions were taken in coping with different situations and in adapting to a new environment. As Table 01 shows, 04 group discussions have been conducted with particular groups belonging to the selected village.

| Index  | Category      | No. of Participants |
|--------|---------------|---------------------|
| FGD_01 | Elder Females | 07                  |
| FGD_02 | Elder Males   | 04                  |
| FGD_03 | Female Widows | 06                  |
| FGD_04 | Mixed Group   | 12                  |

Figure 01: Location of Research Site



Admin. Boundaries: National Atlas 2009 and Digital Data of Survey Department, Sri Lanka, Projection: Transverse Mercator/Kandawala, Prepared By: Rev. P.Sangasumana

As a qualitative analytical method, all those things were categorized according to the respondent's perception as important material assets by the data sorting process. Since this categorization process needed to be confirmed by multiple data sources, used a computer software; NUD-IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) which was more helpful to create categories and build the different relationships. Hence, in analyzing categorical data, an important qualitative method, narrative analysis was used in the study. At present understanding experience as lived and stories told has gained popularity and credence in qualitative research. Apart from the conventional methods, narrative analysis successfully captures the real perceptions of the respondents that cannot be quantified into numerical data.

The term of 'frontier villages or border areas' is debatable in the current context of Sri Lankan Politics. According to the common view, as there is no separate territory within the country, there wouldn't be so called border or frontier villages in Sri Lanka. But in fact the neighbouring villages of the war-torn areas have been confronted the armed conflict during the past two and half decades. Therefore in the first phase of the methodology, it was attempted to identify most suitable research site where conflict-affected communities

are living. After having preliminary survey, village yakawewa located in Kebithigollewa Division in Anuradhapura District was selected as a main research site. Yakawewa village is bordering Eastern Province. During the past two decades, the villagers had to confront different kind of vulnerabilities due to kidnapping, persecutions and unexpected attacks from LTTE carders. As a result of a LTTE claymore attack in 2006 targeting public transport bus with full of civilians, about 300 Sinhala families in Yakawewa and neighbouring villages fled their habitual residents temporarily. Even though several claymore attacks, killings and other fearful incidents took place in the same area during the following year, many families recently returned from IDP camps to their home villages and living under the vulnerable context.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

##### Security related vulnerability

The main cause for the security related vulnerabilities of the village is different kind of LTTE attacks during the last two decades. In 1995, when LTTE attacked to the neighbouring villages, the people of Yakawewa left the village and stayed in a camp which is closer to Kabithigollawa town for about three years. After few years once seeing a peaceful environment they came back to their village and started living in the same old manner establishing the village and they lived in good extent for about ten years. In 2006 about 60 persons of the village were killed by a LTTE claymore attack and this was the main incident which affected to different changes of the village. Many of villagers who took the initiatives in any activity in the village were killed by this attack including the Buddhist priest of the temple. Most of the children lost their parents and also the parents lost their children and as a result the villagers were facing a crucial situation to live in the village with the memories of their loved once under the unsecured environment. As a result they had to leave the village once again and to be in a camp as IDPs. After about one and half years most of the villagers started moving in to the village again as groups and stayed in the middle of the village due to the emerging difficulties in the camp. In the same manner the rest also started moving in to the village gradually. As per 2011, there were about 70 families are living in the village, about 40 families were living in the camp without moving into the village and some families have moved into other areas for permanent residence. So the main cause which influenced the vulnerabilities faced by Yakawewa villagers is the lack of people in the village. There were four main reasons the villagers point out under security related vulnerabilities which was caused by the prolonged armed conflict. They were,

- a. Possibility of facing another claymore attack
- b. Fear of getting killed by the LTTE carders
- c. Fear of getting a mortar attack to the village
- d. Fear of getting the villagers kidnapped or killed by the LTTE when they are in the fields or in any other place
- e. Have to live consciously because of the noises of explosion and firing.

##### Livelihood related vulnerability

It is understood that one of the main vulnerabilities faced by the conflict affected villagers was issues and challengers in maintaining livelihood system. The villagers were facing vulnerabilities in consequence of two main reasons such as income generation had been blocked by the influences caused by the armed conflict and labour and land utilization which supported to maintain a sustainable household economy had been threaten. Paddy and chena cultivation and livestock framing were the main livelihood of Yakawewa village which has an agricultural based economy. The agricultural system has got completely destroyed under the war affected situation. Eventhough they were returned to the village one year before, still the farmers scared to go to their paddy fields. In order to protect the villages, a defense line had been established by the government close to the village. Consequential result was the yakawewa farmers lost a vast area of their paddy fields which had been located beyond the line. In addition, chena cultivation is completely given by farmers up because they feared to go into the forests to start them newly. Since there was uncertainty in the village, they don't like to have buffaloes and goats in large quantities, because it was difficult to take them when leaving the village in case of an emergency. They had to face many difficulties during the cultivation and harvesting periods since

most of the villagers are dead and some others didn't come back to the village. Therefore it is very difficult to practice the traditional labour exchange system which was used in agriculture from the past days.

Villagers faced different challenges in maintaining main income sources because of the damages caused by the wild animals and the droughts. As a result of this situation most of the young males volunteered to join the home-guard security service (Civil Security Forces) to earn a monthly salary leaving the cultivation. Some of the supplementary occupations engaged by women such as working at garment factories in nearest town and sand mining at river bank were totally collapsed because of the risk of terrorist attacks. Four village boutiques had been closed due to the depopulation. Wild elephants had destroyed the chena lands and home gardens in the absence of the villagers and as a result the food security of households had been threatened. In the past, villagers were following small group saving strategies which help to maintain economic stability of them but then it was not functioning properly because some members of the groups had lost or left away from the village. They didn't have any savings since they have used all the savings during the displaced period, and also they had to sell the crops what they had in stocks at a cheaper rate. Therefore the household savings have been very poor in this vulnerable context.

#### Socio Cultural Vulnerability

The senior members of the village played an important role in social integration before the conflict but losing most of elderly villagers in claymore attack had badly affected the entire social system of the village. Consequently indigenous knowledge which has been kept from generation to generation through those elders was missed to the village. As an example, some primeval palmyra books on indigenous medicine had been destroyed in the absence of secured position due to death or displacement of their owners. Since most of the *Yakawewa* villagers are interrelated each other through their kinship, there were well established social organization and social integration. It was evident that, before the armed conflict, males and females worked as peer groups in the same gender for different activities in the village. Since women worked as peer groups in cutting firewood in the forests, draw water and work together at special occasions they could have proper social control as well as conflict mitigation system. But as a result of the armed conflict, peer groups are not functioned today and also villagers cannot carry out the work what they did before being in peer groups. This new situation had changed the attitudes of people and has influenced to develop individual rationality instead of collective rationality among the villagers. As a result, the community organizations such as community development organization, small group organizations which was existed before were closed down and only the death donation society (*Maranadhara Samithiya*) was functioning.

In the vulnerable context of socio culture, it is evident that the considerable changes taken place due to destruction of family structure. Since most of the members were killed by the blast and some others are staying in camps, the other family members had left the village had influenced to generate different social problems in the village. Elderly parents happened to stay lonely in their houses after losing their children and in some cases they had to look after grandchildren left behind their parents by the attack. As a result of breaking down the social relationship, the labour which was provided by the villagers for free on public activities such as renovating tanks and their bunds, streams and roads had got reduced. The main reason for this was the lower number of men existing in the village and most of remained men also engaged in village security duties. The relations who live outside the village had limited their visits into the village due to the fear of attacks. On the other hand, the *Yakawewa* villagers were also reluctant to visit their relations due to the difficulties they face in traveling. Meanwhile due to the same reason, politicians as well as the government officers came to the village very rarely. This situation has caused to wither the social relations and because there was a gap between the village and the outsiders, the village became isolated.

As a result of the armed conflict, time budget of the people had been changed and specially the daily routine of women and children also changed. This has mainly influenced in changing of gender roles. The idea of most of the women is that they concerned more on security activities than the usual livelihood generation activities. Their lives had become boring since they spend most of their time in watching TV and sleeping during the day time. Elderly men and women say that they just spend their time without doing anything since

they can't get involved in activities basically in the temple and also in other public places. Meanwhile some married women were engaging religious practices with their own in every time in order to reduce their stress. But a considerable number of married males anyway object to this situation because they said that some married women who got disappointed of the brutal attack had been trying to engage with religious activities created discrimination of their husbands especially in sexual life. This situation had emerged another type of social problem such as having sexual misconduct and addiction of drugs and liquor etc. Since the number of grandchildren were less in most of the families, the traditional role in looking after the younger siblings, teaching ethics and telling stories of their grandparents had considerably been shortened. When comparison with elder male siblings, there was an increase in the work load what men are carrying out. According to their own sense they feel that the day is too short since they have to do all their work only during the day time. Men were very busy because of the war since they had to engage in livelihood and social activities during the day time and in home guard duties in the night. As a result of the armed conflict Yakawewa villagers had to stop most of their religious and ritual activities which they had followed traditionally. Specially, they had to stop very important religious functions such as *chantingpirith*, *bodhi poojas* and other rituals which they used to have during the late evening. Situations which related to education were coming under socio-culture related vulnerabilities. The interests what the children had on education had got reduced because of the reduction of the number of colleagues who were in the village, no competition on education and no grouped based activities in doing studies. The children who went to schools in Kebithigollawa town couldn't go to schools in the proper time because of the road checking, road blockers and the checking of the buses. When returning from schools also the situation was the same. Reluctance of the teachers coming in to the village also had affected badly to the stability of the schools. The school has only few students since there was only limited number of children in the village. The villagers had to totally depend on the public transport bus going through the village since they can't afford to pump fuel even into the bikes they have because the prices of fuel have gone up.

### **Survival strategies adopted by vulnerable communities**

This part tries to discuss the result based on the analysis on actions taken by the people at individual, household and Community level against the vulnerabilities above discussed. It was revealed that most of the attempts to face the vulnerability are somewhat strategies for their survival.

#### Livelihood related survival strategies

Seeking possible opportunities as an income generation has taken a prominent place under individual strategies which has been followed by the Yakawewa villagers to survive against the livelihood related vulnerabilities. Getting attached to the civil security forces to carry out the duty of a home-guard could be seen among the male villagers instead of the jobs what they did, before getting affected by the conflicts. Men were involved in fishing, providing wage labour on agricultural activities in neighboring villages and women engaged in selling agricultural products in the periodic markets in the town. Different strategies can be seen under individual level instead of finding out new income opportunities with the drawback of the livelihood systems. Investing saved money as a mean of developing income generation, earning money by pawning jewelry, borrowing money from friends or receiving funds from the government or other organizations can be seen as individual level strategies. Household level strategies were strong among the survival strategies which was practical against the livelihood related vulnerabilities. Sharing foods and other resources among the neighboring families had been developed within that period. To make the house-hold economy stable they got the child labour involved in and also got the contribution from the each family member during the risky periods. The earnings what they receive from different methods were handled carefully at each and every house-hold.

They have got used to save money in banks instead of buying lands, renovating houses, buying new furniture and other equipment and investing in other economic activities. Some of them tend to buy lands near the town where they are preferred as safer areas. Approximately 50 percent of current members of the village have bought such a land so that it can be used as a survival destination if they would be able to leave the



village again. As a household level strategy they have limited going on trips, in seeing relations and also they spend money only on necessary expenses of the family. As an example, during last six months, none of them has gone trips or pilgrims individually or as a group.

Before getting fear from attacks, villagers used to store the paddy without selling them till they get a good rate in the market, but now it is evident that the harvest directly goes to the market from the field as soon as possible. Having this strategy they try to minimize the risk and if suddenly they would have to leave village due to claymore or mortar attacks even though it severely causes to the food security and economic stability of each household. The house-holds with less labour forces tend to rent out their paddy fields to neighboring villagers to cultivate in according to an agreement sharing harvest.

Community based livelihood survival strategies followed by Yakawewa villagers can be seen at a very lower rate. An organized mechanism where they can manage labour properly is getting developed as a solution for low labour in agricultural activities. Development of relationships among neighbors through the death donation society which is a strong community organization and extend duties based on an agreement in labour utilization can be seen here. If one breaks the agreement they control him using powerful rules and regulations. Also they encourage villagers who are staying outside the village to come back to the village as a solution to the labour shortage. When increasing the security which is affecting the livelihood development and when getting funds for the development of infrastructure from the government the villagers act accordingly after getting properly organized.

#### Security related survival strategies

It is noted that the conflict affected villagers in Yakawewa are following very important survival strategies in individual, household and community level to face the above mentioned security related vulnerabilities. Considering the individual strategies for the security, it is clear that every individual is living on alert about their safeness. If someone see something suspicious in the village they used to inform it either to the soldiers or to the home-guards. As a survival strategy they are no moving here and there even in the village except for only important activities and also didn't go anywhere in the night. Mental adjustment is another main survival strategy which came under individual level in security related vulnerabilities. Most of the villagers say that 'now we are not scared even if a LTTE tiger comes to the front', 'If we are to die it will happen at any time and where ever we are'. In this manner they are trying to keep more mental strength in order to confront the unsecured situation. Being in the forests during the night to safeguard the lives is a main strategy during high risky situations, which is coming under household level survival strategies. During these periods few families get together as a groups and move into the forests before the darkness carrying the food what they have prepared for dinner. When doing this they used to follow strategies such as go through roads which is not famous, wear dark colored clothes, not to make any noise, not to light fire, heat the milk bottles of their siblings using the body heat and etc. Also they select different locations in the forest without being in the same place every day. They try to minimize risk during the high risky period by not sweeping the gardens, changing the environment in the kitchen to show that they didn't cook in that and etc, thinking that the LTTE carders will come to the village and kill them. (Story 1)

Another main household level survival strategy is to move into the relations' places or to be in the previous IDP camp which is concerned as a survival destination during the high risky periods. They come to the village only on essential activities such as paddy cultivation, feeding livestock and etc. They believe that the safest way is to stay in the camp for a longer period of the year. Each household follows different strategies for the security of their children. When they go out they leave the children at home and also they restrict the children going to the playgrounds, lakes and other common places and also advise them on the security day and night.

During the low risky periods when they feel uncertainty the villagers near the LTTE areas used to move in the centre of the village and spend the nights with others. When doing this they used to select the closer relations' houses. If not few neighboring families get together and stay in one house in the night. Second day they stay in another house which is totally different to the house where they stayed in the previous day. People who stay in the border of the village use to come to the relations' places in the night which is in the

centre of the village as a habit. The ways people are facing risky situations can be strongly seen in household level survival strategies. They train their children to be on alert about their own security. The villagers should keep the relations and the friends informed about the emergency situations in advance where they have to move from the village leaving their valuables or stay in an abandoned house where no one is living at the moment (story 2).

Community based strategies have become the most important under the survival strategies of Yakawewa villagers. Among those strategies having a defense line with the support of the government across the forests which is closer to the village to avoid the LTTEs coming into the village and have soldiers on the border line and also to cover the entire body of the public transport bus which is coming from Kabithigollawa town using the armed sheet have become a prominent place. It is evident that the civil security forces are active for the security of the village and it can be seen that voluntary participation of the villagers in these activities as well. To avoid insecure situations faced by the villagers when transporting people they clean either sides of the road up to 50m by removing the bushes. When considering the security standards based on the community level they avoid gathering into a central location, regular concentration on each villager and also training of villagers to face risky situations are also evident. They maintain the relationship through the death donation society (death benevolent) which is important for the security of the village. They have taken a common decision to have controls in encouraging people to participate in these meetings. Charging Rs.500 penalty on each meeting they miss and submit a letter giving evidence for not participating are among the rules of control. Another strategy is to maintain relationship with the government and the security officers through the death donation society, since then they will be on alert about the security of the village. As a solution to the insecure situation of the village the school which is located in the town is starting 30 minutes later than the other schools based on the request of the villagers. If the villagers have to participate in the meetings which are held at the government offices they start them at very late morning and finish before late evening. The villagers have done a bunker with a big hole in the school ground to be used during a mortar attack. In addition they have limited to held ceremonies only during the day time, use different ways to travel without using the same transport method, to be on alert about the visitors coming to the village. It is very interesting to identify that to have Boralukanda IDP camp as the survival destination for villagers in case of an emergency security situation. This integration has been effective to the villagers as well as the IDPs in the camps for getting comparative advantages.

- a) The interrelationship between villagers and IDPs can be maintained through their kinship. IDPs of the camp receive the membership of the death donation society. Villagers can use the camp as a survival destination in an emergency risky situation. With the support of IDPs they would be able to get enough room and huts from the camp without any difficulties. Therefore, on the one hand, IDPs are able to keep their ownership of the village while the villagers are able to keep in touch with the rights of the camp on the other.
- b) IDPs are benefited to get economic gains from the village with the support from villagers such as looking after their paddy fields, home gardens and livestock. IDPs come into the village only to cultivate and harvest the crops.
- b) The donations received from the NGOs and general public by the IDPs in the camp by forwarding the details of them and others indirectly goes to the villagers as well.
- c) When doing a head counting in the village they include the names of IDPs who are in the camp and vice versa and as a result both the IDPs of the camp and the villagers receive the double counting benefit.

#### Survival strategies against socio-cultural vulnerability

War environment has influenced on socio culture changes of the border villagers. Individual and community level strategies are popular in these issues. Young married couples are using family planning methods in order to postpone having children till the conflict situation is getting reduced. About 86% of children who lived in the families said that they don't like to stay in the village because of the barriers they face in getting education. As a social cultural strategy they live together with the parents considering the social consequence of children living with them. Parents don't allow children to travel without them or any other adult. Another individual strategy is to use the own motor bikes in travelling instead of public transport bus even it is expensive because it is much safer. Most of villagers tend to get involved in religious activities in time to time to reduce social isolation. They have done a separate shrine for Lord Buddha and maintain a *bodhi* tree in the school garden and started worshipping without going to the temple which is located far to the village. Most of the villagers use this new place to worship.

In order to maintain social integration, the IDPs in the camp participate for public meetings and in special activities of the village. They come to the village temple specially, for religious activities. The parents who think that the camp environment will negatively effect on the children's personality development, tend to send their children to the grand parents who are living in the village expecting better socialization of their children. An important household level strategy has been implemented by the villagers in order to overcome some particular socio cultural vulnerabilities such as following extended family system rather than the nuclear family system which was developing rapidly among rural communities. The reason for this is that they are feeling the importance of having many members in the family when participating in social activities as well as for security purposes. The interrelationship maintained by the villagers and the people in the camp can be seen as a strong community level strategy. IDPs of the camp and villagers are interdependent on each other for many reasons. This inter-linkage is based on adopting survival strategies against different vulnerabilities.

- a) When the parents feel that it is dangerous to send the children to the schools which is located in the town for higher education after completion of the primary education because of the security restrictions they can leave the children with the relations who are in the camp.
- b) To get the funds what the IDPs of the camp receive through different donors.
- c) During the cultivation and harvesting seasons the relations who are in the camp come to the village to support the relations.
- d) The villagers can maintain relationships with the outsiders through the IDPs of the camp on different matters.

In addition to that villagers try to maintain the community level social relations. Specially, they tend to have relations with the security officers and government officers by participating in meetings with them. The villagers have implemented different community level rules and regulations by themselves in maintaining unity in the village. As an example in order to maintain death donation society in a proper way, they have different rules such as if one person doesn't come for a meeting for a day he or she has to pay five hundred rupees as penalty and if it is a reasonable then he or she should forward a letter to the society.

They are forming social groups among them instead of the peer groups which was existed before and they encourage people to save money and also provide them with loan facilities and carry out other welfare activities. As a result of the armed conflict most of the males and females become widowed. As a solution for this matter they change the customs which was followed by the villagers before, so that currently anyone can marry whom he or she wants totally on mutual understanding without considering the cast, age and dowry etc.

#### *Transition from conflict-locked to peaceful setting*

The transition issues of so called Sinhala border villagers are relatively bound with the result of brutal attacks, inner ethnic tensions, political instability, lack of livelihoods, changing lifestyles and attitudes, lack

of trust within the society at large, depopulation of conflict affected villages, changing demographic composition of the affected areas, militarisation of conflict affected villages, loneliness and personnel insecurity, etc. Research results brought out four types of transitional issues faced by Sinhala villagers who had been chased away from their places of origin due to the armed conflict such as ensuring security, sustaining livelihoods, socio-cultural adaptation and policy implementation. The study reveals that the issues of transition from a conflict affected to a post-conflict setting of resettled war affected communities are related to the type of losses (loss of family, physical assets; livelihoods etc.), the duration of displacement, ethnicity and culture, reaction of the host population and finally to the coping abilities and strategies of the person involved. An important finding of the study is that at the conflict affected situation, fear and uncertainty are dominant for their life. Hence the results of such experiences are more or less have affected negatively in restoring their normal life. Eventhough there are no more issues related to the physical security right now, very crucial issues related to the social security are evident in the process of transition from a conflict affected to a post-conflict setting vz. Less access to the resources, marginalization, property issues, social disorganization etc.

In the process of transition from a conflict affected to a post-conflict setting, the experience of displaced women are unmistakable. As a girl, mother or widow, the displaced woman has become the very symbol of suffering, dispossession and change in the context of conflict and displacement. The widowhood has become the most critical among these factors, magnifying the general characteristics of the duration of being displaced, the loss of tangible and intangible assets, the nature of uprootedness, the experience of economic and social vulnerability etc. This is true in general, but especially for Sinhala women from border villages who for more than two decades have been living with fear and suspicion. However, these same factors have forced many displaced women to seek new opportunities. Time is nevertheless here the most important factor, for it has enabled displaced women to overcome the transition issues and rebuild their lives by seeking new possibilities. As a result of changing their roles in and outside the household, the displaced women's power of decision making has taken a prominent and decisive place according to their changing role due to the time factor.

#### Policy implementation

The politicization of the resettlement process has led to increased fear and uncertainty among the CIDPs. The highly bureaucratic driven system has even created new conflicts between the authorities and the displaced. This process has even led to the creation of fractions among segments of CIDPs. For instance, some Muslim CIDPs in Trincomalee, are receiving support both from government and from NGOs backed by ethno-religious political influences, to make their stay permanent.

The surprise defeat of the LTTE created a new condition that was never anticipated by the authorities and the CIDPs. The new conditions created in the post conflict Sri Lanka has certainly affected the state of inbetweenness of the CIDPs. For instance, certain emergency measures taken by local authorities during the conflict period are now being challenged in the post-conflict setting. For example, in the land alienation policy of the government of Sri Lanka, the IDPs are considered as non-permanent residents of a particular location. Accordingly they are not entitled to settle permanently and receive lands from the government, because the original idea was to encourage the resettlement of the IDPs at their places of origin, once the conflict was over. However, due to the prolonging of the armed conflict in the mid-1990s, the government has changed its policy towards land alienation and enabled the CIDPs to settle in the locations where they lived as displaced. Accordingly, some CIDPs have received permanent settlements in different areas. This policy has been once again changed after end of the conflict such that the policy is to send back all CIDPs to their places of origin. This new regulation has caused confusion among many.

In general, displaced women in both communities have adopted coping strategies at their transition from conflict affected to post-conflict setting. Most strikingly, Yakawewa women could overcome their socio-cultural issues by adopting long-term livelihood strategies with the support of their well-organized social

system. Their enthusiasms say that coping strategies are not only for acute survival but for the planning of the future as well. To be more precise, every strategy adopted by resettlers has more or less enabled them to manage the insecure situation. Over time in vulnerable situations most of the children in resettled families had engaged in household matters such as helping their parents, looking after their younger siblings, working at their paddy and Chena cultivations and occasionally as child labourers. Some women have used rather rare survival strategies in relation to their mental eudemonia, a circumstance that illustrates the importance of adopting spiritual strategies towards the mental needs in addition to the material satisfactions. Even though the conflict and displacement generates inescapable sufferings, losses, fear and anxiety, the present study finds that some people have accomplished new opportunities and positive changes by adopting different coping strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

There were different communities who have been living for a long time in frontier villages of Sri Lanka in the shadow of prolonged armed conflict which had been caused to generate different conflict situations beyond them. It can be identified that, when considering all those conflict situations, there are three main vulnerable situations such as; war-related, livelihood related and socio-culture related vulnerabilities. In order to living with these conflicts, conflict-affected communities attempt to overcome some vulnerable situations through survival strategies individual and community level. The study focuses on two objectives related to Survival Strategies of Conflict-affected Communities in North Central Sri Lanka. Under the livelihood related survival strategies it is important to examine how do people manage to secure their food requirements and how are they making use of the food in an insecure environment shaped by armed conflict? Land use comes in a particularly important aspect of vulnerability of food. The major effect of armed conflict on livelihood systems is an increase in uncertainty and risk. Paddy lands are partly in insecure areas close to the jungle which under control of LTTE. People have experienced day-night displacement, having to flee homes to the jungle or other areas during sudden eruption or fighting. People have very limited possibilities to cope with severe consequences of armed conflict which seriously harm the recovery potential of households. Under this background, in such times of uncertainty and distress, people might rather concentrate on short term survival strategies than sustainable long term strategies. The paper investigates how conflict-affected people survive in the context of civil war in Sri Lanka. It analyses survival strategies of households of frontier villagers in Anuradhapura district in North central Sri Lanka. Even though every household leave their original villages when warfare goes high, most of them return within few weeks and establish some form of livelihoods during ceasing of the warfare.

This study reveals that restoration of displaced lives cannot be achieved only through material support. But such assistance should go hand in hand with planning for the life goals and reestablishment of their 'place' in society. There is no effective consultation or a dialogue between the authorities and the displaced on their present and future wellbeing. Under these circumstances, it is inevitable rumours begin to spread among CIDPs, something that would eventually lead to a higher state of uncertainties. Even though resettled communities have adopted numerous strategies for coping with transition issues at the individual, household, and community levels, the social security and livelihood related vulnerabilities are still evident. They have used some short sighted survival strategies towards their life security, particularly at the early phase of the resettlement.

The existing assistance programmes that have been offered to CIDPs in Sri Lanka has been less valued because those have not been designed according to an overall strategy, and the general lack of a longer-term perspective has been subjected to particular criticism. Even though the findings of the present study originated from lived experiences of Sinhala displaced of border villages, the transition issues discussed here can be used for analyzing the particular situations of conflict and displacements all over the world. Rephrased, it would help to formulate a model for resettling not only the conflict affected but those who have been displaced because of natural disasters and development projects as well.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 01*

#### **From Camp to the Village**

Most of the men in the village were killed by the bomb blast widowing their wives. They couldn't come back to the village since they were scared to stay with their children in the village without the husbands. Also they couldn't do their work alone and they felt that they don't have any security and because of this most of the women decided to stay in the camps. Both of my husband and his father died from the bomb blast. I decided to come back to the village thinking that I can survive eating fruits, green leaves and etc which is in the village and it is better than being in the camp. Then I married a person whose wife is passed away. He is looking after my two children and myself very well. When we hear the sound of shot guns we used to go to the relations who stay at a distance without staying in our own house. If not we send only the children to a relation temporarily. Even for weddings or funerals we carryout only the necessary rituals without using the loudspeakers and other unwanted things like before and also we don't have many people for these occasions. We finish all the cooking and other work at home before getting dark and used to switch off the lights and to sleep early. If we want to go to a relation's place we have an early dinner before going and also come back early in the morning to send the children to schools. We feel like the day is too short unlike before. In the past we had many work to do in the paddy fields and also in the gardens. But now the life is really boring.

House wife (45 years old)

*Appendix 02***Changing Role of Women**

As women we have to face different conflict situations when living in these bordering villages. We are unable to have daily routine such as collecting firewood from the jungle, bringing water and also grinding rice like the way what we did before as a peer group. We have to follow all these things on our own. As soon as we come to home in the morning from relation's house which is used to stay at night we should prepare meals and send the children to schools and also should get ready to go to the other house again before getting the darkness in the night. Sometimes we have to get bathe in the tank only when the civil security constables guard the area being in either sides. As women this is a difficult task for us. We don't cook lunch so that the food is left over. We cook dinner before getting dark for us to go to the night stay. We feed children making them fear of something. We don't let the children sleep long hours. We train them to run in to the jungle in any emergency situation. Before we leave homes we make the water pot empty and don't sweep the garden and also remove the fire ash from the fire. Then is tigers come they will think that this is an empty house. We will have to suffer like this until the war is over.

Woman informant (39 years old)

*Appendix 03***Withered Lives**

We have faced different difficulties within this period, after the LTTE attack and had to do many things for the survival. We had to live like beggars eating the food what we get from other. We wished that the night would never come since we were very frightened to be even in the jungle in the night. We wanted to move into urban areas leaving our own but we couldn't do that since we are not educated enough to live in a new area. The youth in the village along with the security forces motivated us to be remained in the village. Since we wanted to protect the village and couldn't cultivate being in the village we got a paid job home-guard duty by the government, after a training period of 2-3 months. We got threatens of LTTE attack to the village soon after my marriage. Most of the time, I had to engage with my duty at night to protect the village. Therefore, I send my wife to the other house with her parents. Since we couldn't have a sexual relationship even when we are at home it became another pressure on us. Both of us together decided to postpone having a child. We didn't have kids for six years since we didn't want to put the children also into the same trouble what we are facing.

Home guard (35 years old)



*Appendix 04***Cultivation under threat**

No one in the village wanted to go to their chena and paddy fields near the forest after LTTE claymore attack. Terrorists started to commandeer even the farmers who work in the fields. We get main income source by growing paddy. We don't have any other source of income then after high risky period we started farming in safer paddy fields. Some villagers cut trees, hunt wild animals and alsobrewing liquorillegally to earn a living since they don't have any thing else to do. Our wives and children are also struggling hard to spend this life. They engage different economic activities. Sometimes we light a lamp in the hut which is in the chena field and used to be in another safer place where they have made. Then if tigers come to the field they look for us in the hut with the lamp on and go away thinking that there is no one. This war have affected badly to our cultivation. In the morning when we return from safer areas where we had get sleep, we saw our home gardens have been destroyed by wild animals. Now we don't cultivate. That is not only because wild animals destroy them but also since the terrorists get to know that there are people in the village if we cultivate properly.

Farmer (51 years old)

*Appendix 05***Education at risk**

We had to go to the camp twice because of the tiger threat we faced. When we were in the camp we had to go to another school in the afternoon and they conducted classes for us separately. Because of this we couldn't study properly. Today our village is very isolated and we feel lonely. Most of the villagers died from the bomb blast and there are only few of us in the village since some of the villagers are still in the camps. Some of the other villagers have built up the houses near the town. So we can't play or study with the friends like before. Those days our parents sent us for tuition classes since they got enough money. Now we go only for only few classes. In the night no one switches on the lights. The neighbors who are staying close get together in the night. So we can't study in the night and since the friends are in different places we can't do our homework discussing with them. Because of these issues and since there is no competition we feel lazy to study. The parents don't let us go out after coming back from school and even they don't take us anywhere. Always we have to think only about the security.

School boy (15 years old)