



Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

# Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium Sri Lanka Research Programme

Image by Sharni Jayawardene



# About us

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) is a six year global research programme exploring livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations. Funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and EC, SLRC was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict.

SLRC is undertaking research in eight focus countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda. The Sri Lanka research programme is being led the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), based in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

## What is the focus of SLRC's Sri Lanka research programme?

Sri Lanka has just witnessed the end of a protracted war that lasted for the best part of three decades, the roots and causes of which are multiple and complex. Post-war development strategies in the north and east of the country, pursued by both the government and donors, have focused largely on economic recovery. Yet, while such strategies are premised on the notion that state legitimacy can be won through economic development, the impacts of this approach have yet to be properly assessed.

SLRC's Sri Lankan research programme will look primarily at processes of post-conflict resettlement, exploring how resettled populations are accessing basic services, livelihoods and social protection in a post-war context. More specifically, the research programme will focus on the impacts of the

actions of state, non-state and private sector actors on small-scale fisher households in the north and east of Sri Lanka during the post-conflict rehabilitation phase. Fishing is an important livelihood activity in the coastal north and east, and is also believed to be a sector which could potentially contribute quite significantly to the growth of the national economy. In addition, the focus on small-scale fishing as an important source of livelihoods will help capture subsidiary and alternative livelihood options, such as migration for employment, which women and men adopted during the course of the conflict as coping strategies. Finally, the programme will also help us to understand how macro-level policy decisions have impacted upon women and men in poor fishing families in the post-war period.

The research programme is guided by two core research themes, outlined below.

### 1 Experiences of resettlement and state-society relations

State-citizen relations in the conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka have always been somewhat ambiguous. It has been argued, for example, that the strong centralised and ethnocentric nature of multiple governments in previous decades resulted in the rise of sharp ethnic tensions, which in turn led to violent conflict. However, at the same time, the state maintained a presence in the north and east throughout the war, providing some level of basic service delivery. Meanwhile, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) also built a proto-state in areas under its control. In this sense, it would seem that the two main protagonists in the war competed for legitimacy via the provision of basic services.

Since the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, post-war state reconstruction and reconciliation

efforts in the north and east have been predicated upon economic recovery and a return to 'normalcy'. However, there is little empirical evidence to show whether this strategy has resulted in improvements in state legitimacy in the conflict-affected areas.

Research within this first theme aims to investigate the nexus between economic recovery, service delivery and state legitimacy in the war-affected areas of Sri Lanka through a critical exploration of resettlement processes. The research is guided by three specific questions:

- What are the different ways in which women and men who have been displaced due to conflict, experience resettlement? Does this diversity of experience lead to differing concepts of state legitimacy and perceptions of the state?
- How are basic services, social protection and livelihood support provided to the different groups and accessed by them?
- What are the overarching policy processes that govern state support to resettlement? What are the social, political and economic drivers of these processes?

## 2 Getting better or getting worse? A longitudinal study of fisher household livelihood trajectories in the north and east of Sri Lanka

Prior to the war in the 1980s, fisher livelihoods were not, generally speaking, a critical factor in shaping Tamil nationalist political agendas. However, the impacts of the war on fishing were so dramatic that it became a critical issue of post-war reconstruction and development during the 2002-2005 ceasefire. Indeed, the state has identified the development of the fishing sector as an important driver of

livelihood recovery in the conflict-affected areas, as illustrated by the 'Accelerated Fishing Development Plan' for the north and the 'Eastern Revival' programme in the east.



As a result of the conflict, fishing communities in the north and east experienced extended periods of isolation. In the post-conflict period, these same fishing communities are having to compete against migrant fishers from other parts of the country whose greater level of mechanisation and technological capacity puts them at an advantage. Yet we know little about adaptation and assimilation by the local fisher industry community to effectively compete in the new environment.

Specific research questions within this theme include:

- What do livelihood trajectories in conflict-affected areas tell us about how governments, aid agencies and private sector can more effectively support people to make a secure living in a post-conflict situation?
- What is the impact of the changing external context from conflict to post-conflict on livelihood trajectories and coping strategies of small scale fisher households?
- What are the socio-political power structures within fisher value chains and what are the strategic entry points and approaches for external interventions in order to secure fisher household livelihoods in a conflict and post-conflict context

## How will we carry out the research?

The programme will focus geographically on the three districts of Jaffna, Mannar and Trincomalee districts, which will allow us to look at a range of resettled populations with a diversity of experiences and characteristics.

A longitudinal panel survey will be conducted in 2012 and again in 2015 which will generate data on people's livelihood trajectories over time and help us identify which, if any, aid interventions or government policies and programmes are making a difference in peoples' lives. The surveys will be complemented by qualitative research on themes such as the dynamics of displacement and return resettlement, land rights.

For the fishing sector work, analysis will be done at two levels. At the first, we will look at the policy and strategic directives of the state in relation to fisheries. At the second, intra- and inter-household analysis will be carried out in order to generate an understanding of micro-power structures and networks, to investigate how livelihood outcomes vary by age and gender and to understand how coping strategies used during conflict can be strengthened into sustainable livelihoods on a post-war setting.

## What will be done with the research?

Through a combination of regular engagement with key stakeholders (government, non-government and private sector), starting from the study design phase and disseminating

compelling, accessible and relevant research outputs, we would ultimately like to see a more informed and sensitive engagement by local and national government with women and men who are resettling in the north and east of Sri Lanka and those engaged in the fisheries sector. In this regard, we hope to employ various modes of dissemination such as written reports, presentations, media articles, photography and radio programmes to reach different stakeholders. More specifically, we hope to contribute to the discussions on improvements in livelihood support, service provision and social protection to the communities in the North and East who have been affected by the conflict. We would also like to contribute to an increased awareness of the role of the state in providing these services and the nexus between service delivery and state legitimacy / state-building.



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