

# Livelihoods, Food Security and Conflict in Trincomalee

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## 1 Introduction:

The civil war in Sri Lanka is embedded in and is an expression of existing social, political, economic and cultural structures. It is thus not a temporary crisis, but a long-enduring feature. The discourse in humanitarian assistance uses the term complex political emergency to denote such phenomenon of post-modern warfare: These emergencies originate from political competition over resources, and are often ethnicised or ethno-nationalist in nature, characterised by loyalty to one particular communal group, accompanied by strong antipathy towards other communal groups living within the same state. In the Sri Lankan case, it is essential to understand the conflict as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, or a conflict cocktail. The fundamental issue of the macro-conflict is the grievance between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority which has escalated into a war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the largely Sinhalese dominated armed forces. In addition to this major line of dissent, there are other social, political and ethnic cleavages between the three main communal groups, e.g. Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamils.

In the vulnerability context of such a complex political emergency, households have to adapt to gradual deteriorating economic trends and to cope with sudden political shocks in the form of violence. Rural societies in war-affected areas can thus be described as 'distressed livelihoods': they experience a dramatic increase in risk and uncertainty. This paper seeks to outline the strategies that people make use of to secure their livelihoods under such extreme conditions based on empirical studies in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. This area has been particularly affected by warfare and inter-ethnic troubles. Understanding the livelihood strategies of people is essential to design more appropriate intervention strategies of humanitarian and development assistance in times of emergencies. Such policies should try to support and stabilise existing livelihood strategies and to widen the spaces and opportunities for people to survive instead of reducing them to simple recipients of welfare and relief.

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The paper advances as follows: the first part gives an outline of conceptual approaches related to food security, livelihoods and vulnerability and how these can be applied to complex political emergencies. The second part of the paper discusses the empirical results of case studies in the Trincomalee district in the east of Sri Lanka. It is important to note that the empirical findings are based on investigations prior to the recent cease fire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. The findings thus reflect war-time survival strategies of people and not the actual livelihood strategies after the cease fire.

## **2 Livelihoods, War and Vulnerabilities:**

### *Food Security and Conflict*

Food insecurity is a key problem in complex emergencies. Structural causes of food insecurity are often at the root of conflict. However, to view food insecurity as a trigger of conflict and violence will be to down-play the complexity of protracted social conflicts. On the other hand, the impact of a conflict on food security is often striking: When violence escalates, food insecurity becomes acute for a large part of the population.

Food security is often reduced to a problem of production and national self-sufficiency in food. However, food security at macro-level still does not guarantee food security for all at household or at individual level (Kelegama 2000). Amartya Sen (1981) highlighted the entitlement thesis of famines which argues that people may be starving even though sufficient food is locally or regionally available. Often, malnutrition and starvation are more a problem of purchasing power or other entitlements to food than one of availability. The concept of integrated food and nutrition security (FNS) thus distinguishes three dimensions of food security (BMZ 1997, 1998):

- (i) Availability of food at all times (is sufficient food locally produced or imported to be available at local markets?)
- (ii) Access to food at all times (do households have the purchasing power or other entitlements to buy food?)
- (iii) Use and utilisation of food according to sufficient dietary standards (do people prepare nutritious food and is their state of health able to absorb it?)

For all these elements, stability over time is a crucial feature as food insecurity can be chronic or transitory. Chronic food insecurity is rooted in poverty, when the nutritional status of a household is persistently inadequate. In complex emergencies, transitory food insecurity affects both households with and without chronic food insecurity. Transitory food insecurity is a temporary decline in a household's access to food. The period of transition is often

temporary in the case of sudden, unpredictable shocks (such as natural disasters, e.g. the cyclone in Trincomalee in December 2001). Food can also become scarce at particular times of the year (seasonal food insecurity). Typically, the households and individuals most vulnerable to chronic food insecurity are also those who are hit hardest by shocks (cf. Thomson & Metz, 1997).

#### *The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Frame*

The livelihoods approach is a generalisation of the more established literature on food security (Alwang et al., 2001). The sustainable rural livelihoods frame is a way of thinking about the scope, objectives and priorities of development that is promoted by the Department of International Development of the British Government (DFID 2000) and was inspired by the work of Amartya Sen. An important strength of the livelihoods frame compared to earlier development

#### **Box 1: Definition of Livelihood**

*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.*

Source: Carney 1998

frameworks is that it emphasises people's potential in a holistic way rather than stressing on their problems, constraints and needs. It understands that livelihoods and institutions that influence and shape livelihoods are dynamic. The sustainable rural livelihoods framework is a qualitative approach seeking to understand relationships rather than producing quantitative figures.

While DFID (2000) employs the framework to derive sustainable means of fighting rural poverty in an environmentally sustainable way (Box 1), the present study uses the livelihood systems frame as an analytical tool to observe, analyse and better understand behavioural patterns of communities living in complex political emergencies, thus under extreme social, economic and political frame conditions.

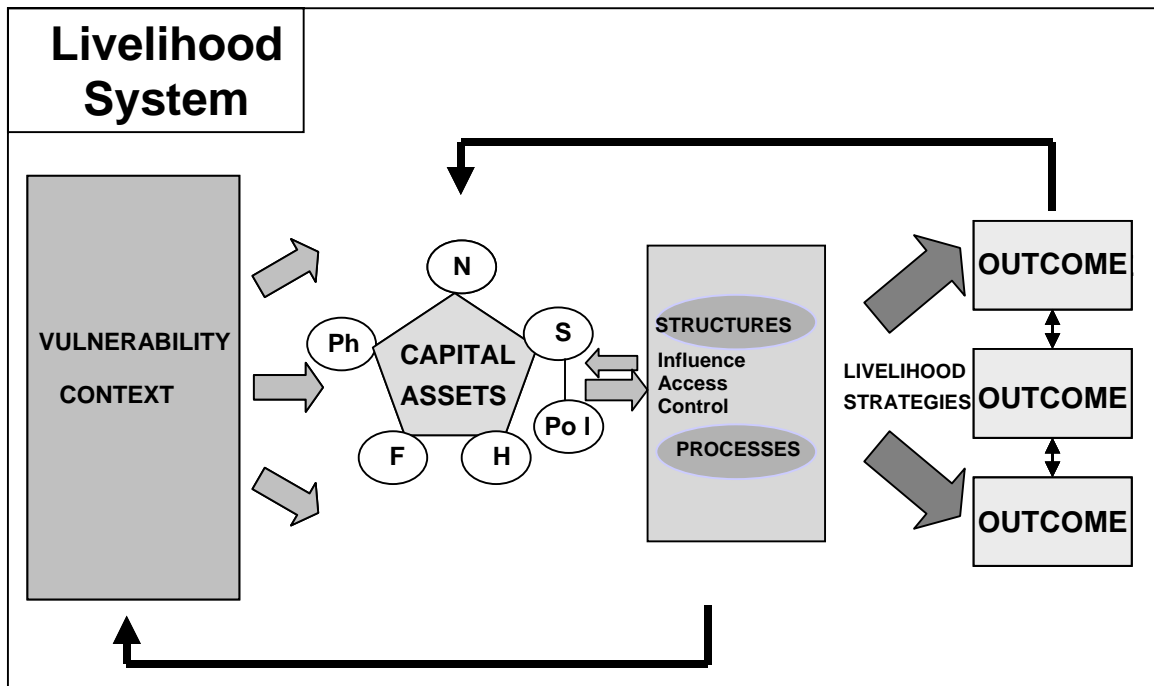


Figure 1: The Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Frame (DFID 2000, modified)

The livelihood systems frame (Figure 1) is a way of looking and analysing the system of a household's internal and external factors that affect its socio-economic survival.<sup>2</sup> It looks into livelihood strategies of people in a given vulnerability context (the frame conditions). People have access to six forms of capital assets (natural, physical, human, social, political, and financial). These are the resources, which people can make use of and combine in order to carry out livelihood strategies and achieve certain outcomes. These outcomes have positive as well as negative impacts on the livelihood (feedback loops). Structures and processes ('institutions') are critical in determining who gains access to which assets and to define the actual value of certain assets. Markets and legal restrictions have a profound influence on the extent to which one capital asset can be converted into other types of capital assets.

Livelihood strategies will differ with regard to whether people have to deal with gradual trends or sudden shocks: Adaptive strategies denote processes of change which are more or less conscious and deliberate in the way people adjust livelihood strategies to long term changes and challenges (trends). Coping strategies are short-term responses to periodic stress or sudden shocks of both natural and political hazards.

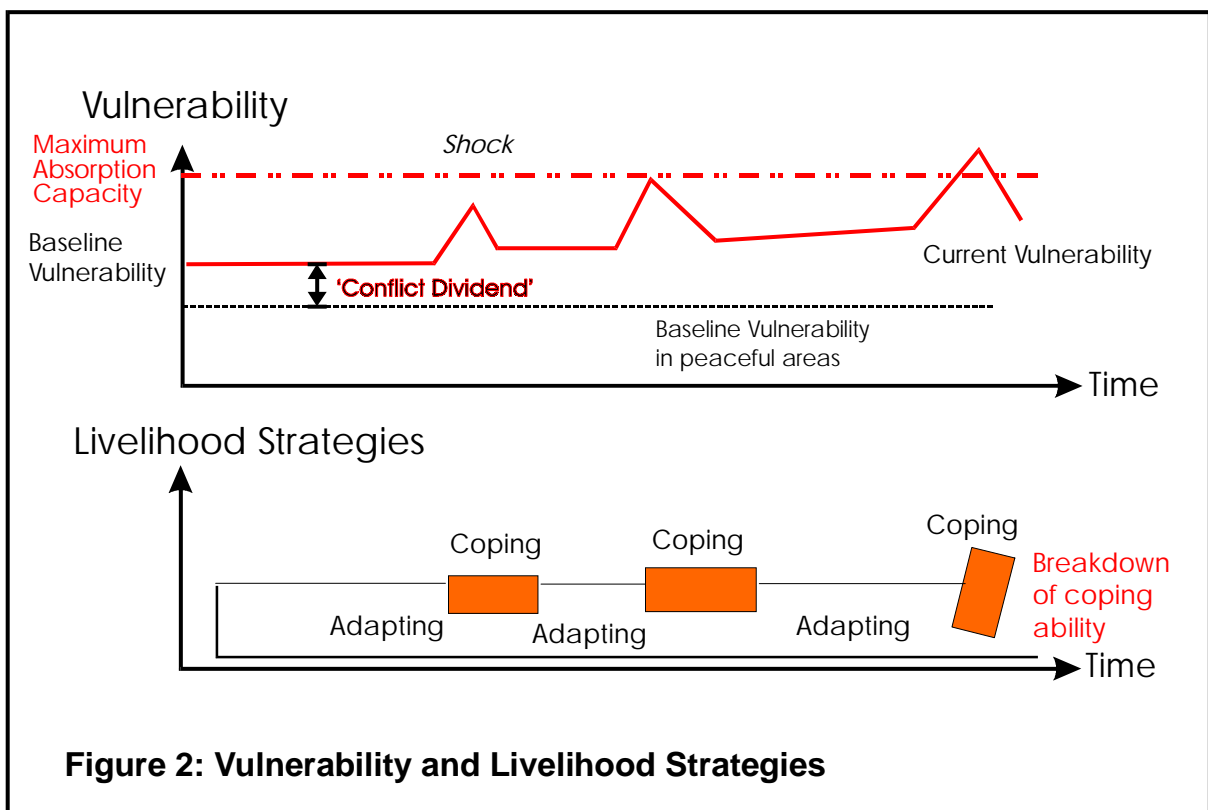
#### *Vulnerability and Risk*

Rural societies in the war-affected areas in Sri Lanka can be described as 'distressed livelihoods' or 'livelihoods at risk': They face multiple vulnerabilities caused by environmental hazards, market-related risks and conflict-related uncertainties which enhance the overall

threshold of vulnerability. Originally, the concept of vulnerability (Bohle 1993; Chambers 1989) has been mainly used to describe the livelihood risks in natural disasters. It is also useful to describe household vulnerability in complex political emergencies (CPE). It distinguishes between an external (exposure) and an internal (coping) dimension:

- (i) exposure to crises, stress and shocks: In CPE, political shocks are the most prominent feature, while we can also observe long-term declining trends (dilapidation of infrastructure, decline of agricultural production, disruption of market networks).
- (ii) Inadequate coping strategies: Civilians have very limited ability to cope with severe consequences of violence and fighting (political shocks). The main strategy seems to be leaving the arena of struggle (displacement, migration) by those who have the means to do so.
- (iii) Severe consequences: The shocks and crises, households experience in CPE, seriously harm the recovery potential of households to prevent a deterioration of their productive potential. A reduced (mentally, socially and economically degraded) situation becomes a 'normal' state of existence.

Figure 2 illustrates how exposure to stresses, shocks and crises in complex emergencies



<sup>2</sup> The specific vulnerability of individuals within a household and intra-household dynamics might in fact be very critical to understanding household behaviour and thus analysing household livelihoods.

affects the vulnerability of livelihoods and how households adapt to and cope with these externally imposed conditions. In complex emergencies, the baseline vulnerability is higher than in peaceful areas due to the increased risk level -- security risk and economic risk -- and declining economic opportunities (negative conflict dividend), which increase the threshold of vulnerability. People adapt their livelihood strategies to this situation. Short-term shocks (natural disasters, political shocks, violence) suddenly upset the precarious equilibrium and increase vulnerability (current vulnerability). People adopt coping strategies in response to these livelihood crises.

Slowly, the system recovers and households employ a new adapting strategy composed of elements from the former adapting strategy and the coping strategy to develop a new portfolio of livelihood activities. Structures and processes (institutions) are dynamic and are continuously reshaped over time (Scoones 1998). In complex political emergencies, civil institutions are largely distorted: These structures and processes largely determine the effective entitlements (access) to resources and to services, such as markets, inputs. They are part of a social and political negotiation process. In complex political emergencies, the power asymmetries favour militant actors (including both military and rebels) at the costs of 'civil(ised)' actors and institutions. The 'rule of violence', threat and fear are superimposed upon political and social institutions.

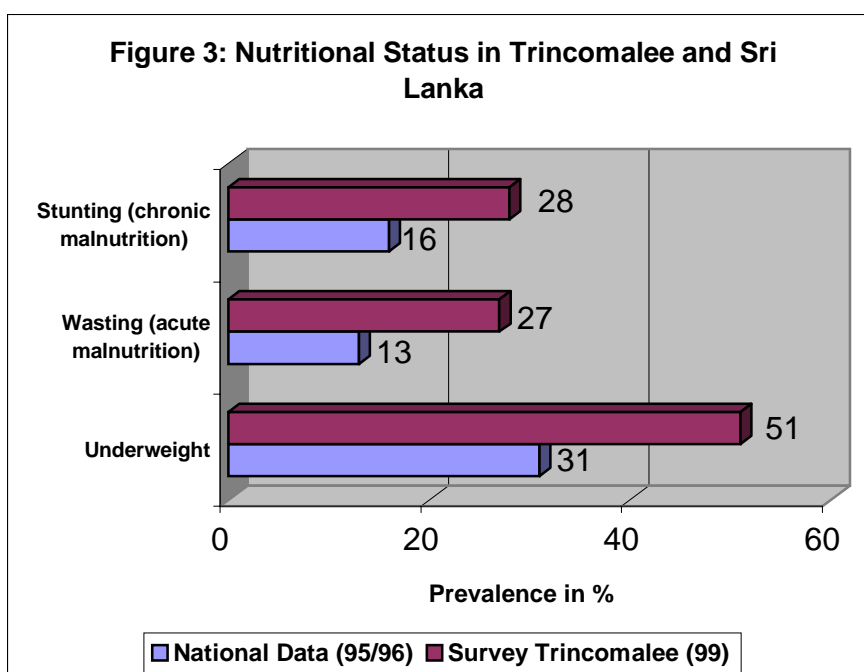
In such distressed livelihoods, managing risk (and uncertainty) becomes a predominant feature of livelihood strategies. Vaulmaul (2001) differentiates between income smoothing strategies to reduce ex-ante risk exposure as risk reduction strategies and consumption-smoothing strategies of ex-post loss management as response strategies. Ex-ante risk reduction strategies mainly focus on income diversification, building insurance's mechanisms, and risk sharing strategies. Ex-post management strategies seek to stabilise consumption and place a heavy burden on household assets: in emergency situations, households will make use of their savings, liquidation of assets, and reduce consumption and food intake temporarily. In destitute cases, households might be urged to migrate, dispose off their key livelihood assets and thus create a dependence on charity and relief. In many cases the post-crisis level of vulnerability will thus exceed the pre-crisis level due to the limited recovery potential (resilience) of the household capital assets. The vulnerability increase is known as 'expanded vulnerability' (Bohle 1993). In complex political emergencies, shocks occur frequently and gradually exhaust the recovery potential and the absorption capacity of households. At a certain time a new crisis will exceed the absorption capacity of households to respond to the shock (see Figure 2), and the household becomes dependent on outside

assistance. Households in complex emergencies face a continuous downward spiral towards a depletion of household capital assets and an increasing level of vulnerability.

### **3 Perceptions and Impact of War in Trincomalee**

Trincomalee is a multi-ethnic district positioned at a strategic location between the northern and the eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Trincomalee disposes of a big natural harbour and is the proclaimed capital of a Tamil Eelam (the independent Tamil homeland demanded by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE). The population ratio between the three ethnic groups is a politically contentious issue with currently roughly one third of the district population belonging to each of the three main ethnic community (Tamil, Muslims, Sinhalese). The Sinhalese mainly live in the cultivation and colonisation areas close to the interior of the country, while Tamil and Muslim villages are in close proximity at each other mainly at the coastal strips. Warfare in the district has been extremely divisive with both conflict parties, the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) pitting the communities living there against each other (O'Sullivan 1997). Violence in the East was not limited to fighting between the government and the LTTE, but also included sporadic clashes with other communal groups, especially in the early 1990s between the Tamil and Muslim populations. Though the civil war worsened in the other districts of the North-East from 1990, Trincomalee district had experienced many sporadic clashes between Tamil and Sinhala communities since the 1980s.

The disruption of economic activity is estimated to have decreased the contribution of the Northern and Eastern Provinces to national GDP from 15% in the 1980s to 4% in 1997 (DER 2000). UNDP (1998) calculates a negative average growth rate of 6.2% per year in 1990-95. The Eastern Province was not as badly affected as the Northern Province until 1995. However, since the late 1990s, military operations and the general climate of violence and insecurity had an adverse impact on the regional economy: Ethnic trading networks and patterns are disrupted, and the checkpoint and pass system restrict the mobility of people and goods and the access to markets (PIMU 2001). Eighteen years of conflict and civil war have resulted in the loss of lives, homes, land, the destruction of infrastructure and the production base of livelihoods. Basic facilities such as health services and education are inadequate. Furthermore, the breakdown of public and private sector support services, reduced access to farm inputs and credit, deterioration of rural roads, and the disruption of distribution and marketing systems constrain agricultural activities. The severely restricted local economy prevents the individual from exploring any opportunities.



### Comments

Malnutrition of children under 5 years, <-2 SD, NCHS

National data exclude the Northern and Eastern Province (NEP)

### Data Source

Source of national data: Department of Census and Statistics, Demographic and Health Survey 1995/96.

Source of Trincomalee data: IFSP Health and Nutrition Survey of 1999/2000, Working Paper 24, Reinhard and Krämer

Poverty in the north-east has worsened with the escalation of the war. About 80% of all the population in this region are estimated to live under the poverty line (basic food basket).<sup>3</sup> About 90% of the population in the Trincomalee district depend on state support (food stamps, dry rations, social transfers).<sup>4</sup> Poverty and deprivation is unevenly distributed in the district with some marginalised pockets of poverty found in remote areas or in highly disputed locations along the borderline between the fighting parties.

Household food insecurity as a result of conflict and war has reached alarming levels in terms of both acute and chronic malnutrition. A recent survey of the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) revealed substantially higher levels of malnutrition amongst children compared to what national data would suggest (Figure 3). The highest prevalence of

<sup>3</sup> Cf. IFSP 2000; DER 2000, World Bank 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. DPS. 2000. Action Plan for Rehabilitation. Trincomalee: District Planning Secretariat.

malnutrition was found amongst Tamil children in uncleared areas. This is a clear sign of the detrimental impacts of the war on household income and life opportunities in Trincomalee. Particularly affected are households that depend on fishing, small-scale farming and daily wage labour. The vulnerability of female-headed households is especially striking. In addition to the difficulty of the overall situation, intra-household food distribution culturally discriminates against women's appropriate nutrition intake. Many families that recently returned from refugee camps to their home villages are without adequate means of livelihood.

Agriculture has always been a central part of the economy in the Northern and Eastern Province with nearly two thirds of its pre-war population depending on farming, livestock rearing, and fishing for their livelihood. Until the mid 1980s, the region enjoyed a higher level of agricultural development than most other parts of the country. Its production of rice was in surplus and it had a comparative advantage in the production of vegetables, fruits and other cash crops. Since that time agricultural production and household incomes in the region have declined substantially. Government sources estimate that the land area used for agriculture as a whole declined from 44% to 36% of the total land area, and the extents used for paddy cultivation decreased from 17% to 9%, both in the period from 1983-1999. The main reasons attributed to this decline are the degradation of irrigation facilities, the high risk associated with agriculture due to the war, a large extent of agricultural lands being located in uncleared areas and the displacement of a large number of farmers (NEIAP 2000).

#### **4 Case Studies: Livelihoods, Vulnerability and Coping in Trincomalee**

##### *Material and Methods:*

In summer 2001, an interdisciplinary German-Sri Lankan research team investigated socio-economic livelihood strategies in four locations in Trincomalee district in the war-affected eastern region of Sri Lanka. The study was commissioned by the GTZ supported Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) and conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural and Rural Development (CATAD) of the Humboldt University of Berlin. The objective of this research study was to identify livelihood strategies of war-affected communities in order to advise the IFSP how it could improve the targeting and impact of its village projects. It should be kept in mind that the empirical investigation covered a period prior to the cease-fire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE and thus reflects war-time livelihood strategies, not actual (i.e. post-war) strategies of individuals and households in the Northeast.

All four research areas are situated at the borderline, either between uncleared (or 'grey') and cleared areas or between the settlements of different ethnic groups. Uncleared areas are those under the control of the Tamil rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Entrance to these areas was until very recently subject to approval by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The borderline areas are characterised by a high occurrence of fighting, violence, the presence of both armed parties, and intimidation.



Source: Korf et al., 2001; Layout: Christine Schenk

The locations were selected according to different poverty levels, agro-ecological clusters, and ethnicity in close consultation with the IFSP and included villages where IFSP had already been working and new villages. The study predominantly used qualitative research methods based on rapid rural appraisal (RRA). The teams conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals, focused group discussions, transect walks, and employed other RRA tools where appropriate. The DFID livelihood systems frame provided the methodological background.

This qualitative dataset allowed the research team to:

- (1) develop livelihood system models for each research location for different households ('filling the model'),
- (2) derive common and antagonistic patterns of livelihood strategies in the four case studies,
- (3) categorise the livelihood strategies according to a model of three pillars:
  - (i) *Managing personal risk of life* looks into how people cope with the increased probability of negative consequences for personal lives.
  - (ii) *Managing household economics* identifies different strategies of organising the capital assets within a household (capital assets).

- (iii) *Accessing external support* discusses how individuals or communities make use of structures and processes, i.e., how they access or influence political and military actors.

(4) differentiate coping from adapting strategies

In the following section, we will outline the empirical results of the study following this analytical logic: after providing a brief comparative introduction to the four case studies, we provide one case study of a livelihood system in Ithikulam, a village in uncleared area of Trincomalee district. Secondly, we derive common and antagonistic features of livelihood strategies and categorise them in the three pillar model. Thirdly, we discuss the implications trying to differentiate between coping and adapting strategies, responses to poverty and conflict and the role of social and political capital in livelihood strategies. This analysis will also allow us to hypothesise about the striking differences in livelihood strategies and resilience in the four research locations.

*Four Case Studies: Diversity and Commonalties*

The four research locations reflect the diversity of the district in agro-ecological, economic, social and cultural terms (see [Table 1](#)). All four case studies are located at or close to the borderline between uncleared (or 'grey') and cleared areas.<sup>5</sup> This implies an increased baseline vulnerability due to the frequent incidents of fighting, violence, and intimidation and the presence of both armed groups. Households thus have to cope with and adapt to a high risk level which decreases economic opportunities and influences investment choices. The psychological effects are striking: a lack of self-confidence, a tendency to keep a low profile, frustration in view of limited life opportunities, fear and desperation are widespread in these areas of increased vulnerability. The common feature in all four locations is thus the lack of stability.

Conflict, war and risk, nevertheless, have quite a different impact on each of the four research locations ([Table 1](#)). In some locations, villagers still pursue their traditional livelihood activities and farming systems, even though under constraining frame conditions. In other locations, the conflict forced villagers to leave traditional resources behind due to the war and to search for alternative livelihood options. In Ithikulam, a Tamil village in the uncleared (i.e. rebel controlled area), farmers converted the security threat into new opportunities: leaving traditional paddy cultivation behind, they now earn a considerable cash

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<sup>5</sup> 'Uncleared' area denotes those territories under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Entrance to these areas was until the recent ceasefire agreement subject to approval from the Ministry of Defence. In Trincomalee, however, many areas were 'grey' or 'semi-cleared' areas of disputed territory subject to constant instability and sporadic violence.

income from highland cultivation and wage labouring putting them into a comparative economic advantage to traditional tenant paddy cultivators. Villagers in Kalyanapura, a Sinhalese village at the borderline and thus subject to frequent attacks from the rebels, are able to secure a fragile prosperity due to the support given to them by the army, police and the central government. In Kumpurupitty, a Tamil village in an officially cleared, but actually 'grey' and disputed area, farmers are reluctant to engage in the highly profitable onion cultivation because of a lack of capital (lost during displacement) and a risk averse attitude. In Vattam, a Muslim fishing village, people prefer to keep a low profile between the two fighting parties, because they are just in the middle between navy and rebels. These four examples show the variety of contexts and responses to the circumstances which make a generalisation of findings very difficult. Nonetheless, there are certain livelihood strategies which are common to all four locations, while others are typical for a particular community only.

	<b>Ithikulam [I]</b>	<b>Kalyanapura [Ka]</b>	<b>Kumpurupitty [Ku]</b>	<b>Vattam [Va]</b>
<b>Vulnerability Context</b>	Tamil community in uncleared area; dilapidated public infrastructure	Sinhalese border village	Tamil settlement in 'semi-cleared' area; onion boom.	Muslim border village at coastal strip
<b>Main income sources</b>	Highland cultivation, wage labouring	Paddy cultivation, home guards, wage labour	Wage labouring, onion cultivation, land lease	Fishing, middle east employment
<b>Key trend</b>	Converting threats into opportunities	Fragile prosperity at the fringe of power	Missing the onion boom	Squeezed between the lines

Table 1: Village Sketches (compiled from Korf et al., 2001)

This diversity in livelihood strategies and outcomes demonstrates the complexity of the vulnerability context and shows that it cannot be understood as a mono-causal feature shaped solely by the war. The vulnerability context is rather the outcome of an interplay of different factors and its impact differs according to the capital assets of a community and of a household. In order to underline the complexity of the situation in each case study location, we have selected the case of Ithikulam, a village in the uncleared area, as an example to outline a 'model'-like description of the livelihood in this community following the framework outlined above.

*Case Study: Ithikulam – Village in Uncleared Area.*<sup>6</sup>

Ithikulam village was formed by displaced villagers from an ancient village, Sreenivasapuram, which is three kilometres from Ithikulam and situated at the very border of the uncleared area. Before 1985, when the villagers lived in their original village, they cultivated paddy as tenant farmers on lands which are situated in the cleared area. In 1985, the army established a military camp close to Sreenivasapuram and fighting between army and LTTE occurred frequently. During each attack, villagers were temporarily displaced and then returned to the village in a few days. The situation became increasingly more difficult when villagers had to pass the checkpoint to cultivate their fields in the cleared area. In response to the insecure living conditions, most villagers moved to Ithikulam and engaged in highland rainfed cultivation and other income earning activities for their livelihood. Although the army requested villagers to return to Sreenivasapuram to occupy the deserted houses, only those villagers who owned a permanent house returned and the poorer people of the community remained in Ithikulam.

The vulnerability context of the village is shaped by two major factors: dependence on external economic actors and the presence of both conflict parties which restricts the mobility of people and goods and has created fear and desperation. On the other hand, the irrigation schemes in the surrounding areas provide opportunities for wage labouring in paddy fields. How can people combine their household resources (5 capital assets) to carry out livelihood strategies?

We can associate adaptive strategies with long-term trends and coping strategies dealing with sudden deterioration of the security situation. As an important agricultural activity and income source, farm families cultivate diversified highland crops which has several advantages in this context. It also shows how rural households adapt to the increased baseline vulnerability in uncleared areas: highland cultivation demands lower investment and reduces thus the dependence on loans, which are only available to unfavourable conditions (high interest rates or dependence on traders). This ensures households a subsistence on highland crops and a reliable, though moderate income during the cultivation period of five months. Furthermore, households engage in alternative income-earning activities, in particular wage labouring in paddy fields in neighbouring villages in cleared area, thus supplementing their cash and paddy income. Highland cultivation allows sufficient flexibility in household labour allocation since women and children also work on the fields, an uncommon feature in paddy cultivation.

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<sup>6</sup> For more details refer to Ziebell and Ziegler 2001; Korf et al. 2001.

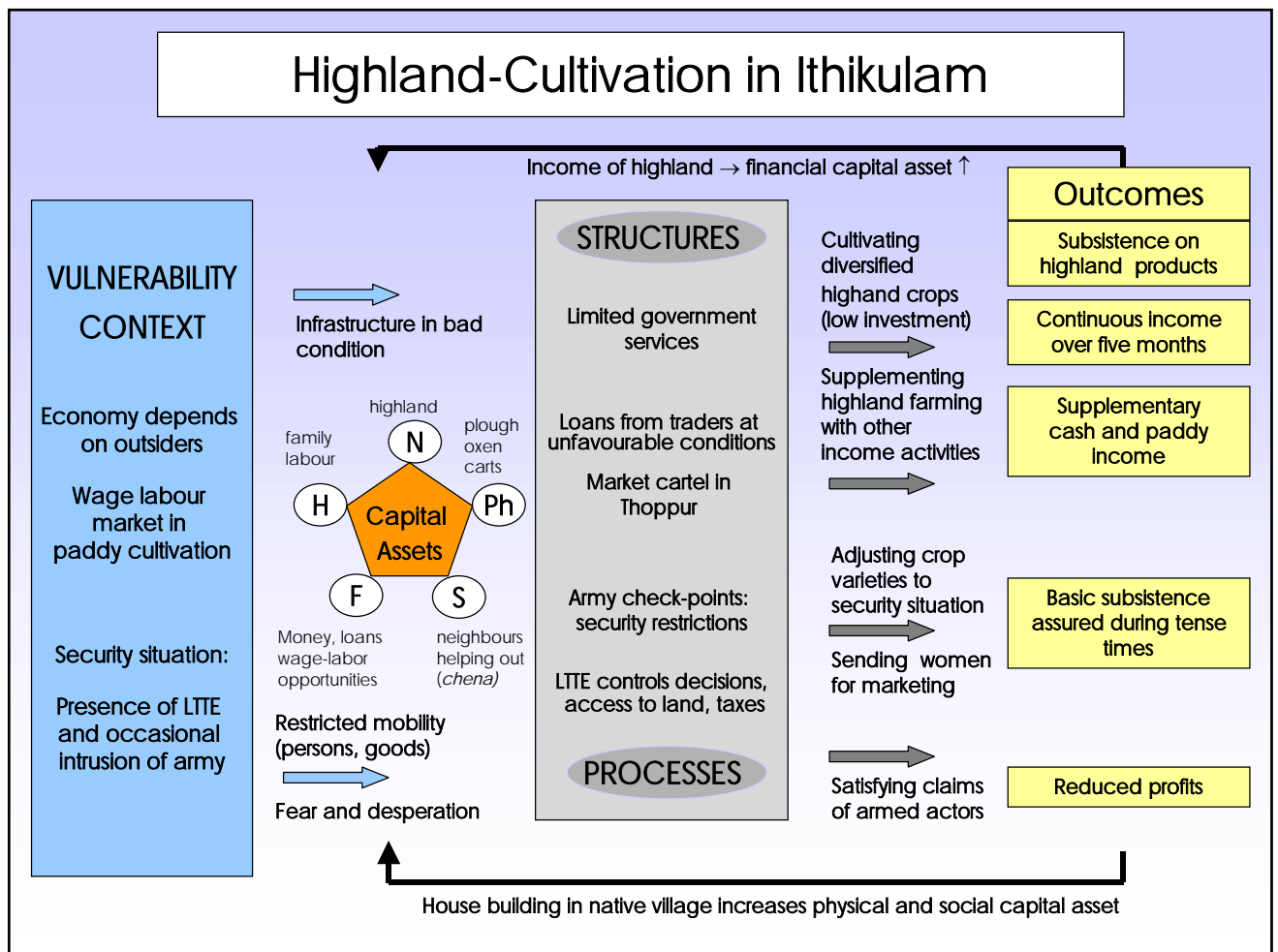


Figure 3: The Livelihood System of Ithikulam village (Source: Korf et al. 2001)

How do villagers cope with a deterioration of the security situation or with sudden shocks? Some households change their cropping pattern and cultivate corn (maize) in tense times, since they can store this crop more easily and thus can assure subsistence of food throughout the year, even though at this low level, when they cannot access outside markets. Another coping strategy is their preference to send women to the market which is on the other side of the borderline in cleared area, since men are afraid of harassment by the armed forces. These coping strategies appear to allow households to secure a basic subsistence even during tense periods.

In addition, villagers have to cope with the demands of armed actors in the form of taxes or bribes, which is often a precondition for carrying out livelihood activities. People in Ithikulam normally satisfy these claims and, as a consequence, have to accept reduced profits. It is essential to note that the social and political capital in Ithikulam is limited. In the village, there is no community-based organisation (CBO) functioning to access external funds and agencies. There does not appear to be any established social or religious body to promote

social and religious matters and thus provide the base for a social network in the community. In addition, people in Ithikulam have no access to politicians and other powerholders.

### Box 2: The Role of LTTE

The LTTE has developed its own rules and regulations to compensate for the destabilishment of civil law and order. Problems between the villagers are not brought to the Sri Lankan police but to the LTTE and their court. Inquiry, arrest, judgement, imprisonment etc, are carried out by LTTE according to their rules of law in addition to restrictions on the exploitation of natural resources like jungle, wood, sand, and land, as well as rubble.

LTTE has introduced a permit system for exploitation of natural resources (e.g. jungle), where payments have to be made to the LTTE to make use of these resources. In addition taxes are imposed on cart owners, big scale cattle keepers, paddy farmers, government staff and wealthy people.

With regard to land use rights, only a few farmers possess legal documents for land titles. Nevertheless, people feel that their land is secure through an informal system of assurance, since all villagers know from each other who cleared which land and neighbours can therefore stand as witnesses in case of disputes. Meanwhile, land is informally split up for dowries and is thus fragmented. However, informants clearly pointed out that the LTTE controls the clearing of land for cultivation and enforces rules on the use of jungle resources (e.g. firewood collection). Nevertheless, villagers also approached the cultivation officer (CO) in order to apply for permits – and subsequently gain – titles for their land. It appears that farmers seek title documents from both parties in order to be on the safe side regardless of who will be the future power holder in the area.

In the case of Ithikulam, villagers were able to convert an externally imposed threat (conflict) into a new economic opportunity: highland cultivation ensures a reliable, though moderate income and has enabled some of the villagers to increase their financial capital and in turn to invest in house building in their village of origin, thus re-establishing their physical and social capital. Tenant paddy cultivators in the surrounding traditional villages, on the other hand, reported that they cultivated at very low profits due to the high cultivation costs imposed on them due to more expensive inputs (transport to uncleared area), unfavourable loans and marketing conditions (traders' cartel in the close-by market town Thoppur). In most years, yields from paddy cultivation are only sufficient for subsistence and hardly provide additional cash income for tenant households.

### *Three Pillars of Livelihood Strategies*

Table 2 outlines the different livelihood strategies in the four case studies categorised according to the three pillar model. All in all, livelihood strategies of households in Trincomalee comprise a portfolio of short-term coping and long-term adapting strategies. The study shows that changed patterns of mobility are a key response of people to adjust to the risk-prone environment (cf. Goodhand et al., 2000). Our findings show that people utilise a number of different strategies to minimise their personal risk. They show a remarkable flexibility in migrating to more secure places, and in temporarily breaking up their family, i.e. sending children to relatives for security and education. Many of these *coping* strategies place heavy demands on the extended family network and lead to a gradual depletion of household assets. This is most probably one reason, why, for example, many farmers in Kalyanapura, even though they might reside outside the village, return during the cultivation season. They do not have much choice to give up their traditional means of living, and those forced to do so often face serious hardships to engage in alternative livelihood activities.

Many *adapting* strategies deal with declining income earning opportunities and the risk of investment, which is higher in conflict areas compared to peaceful areas. Households gradually deplete their capital stock after each political crisis. Cash income is more easily acquired through outside funds (state payments for home guards, welfare) or overseas employment (remittances cash flows) than through cultivation. State interventions cause further distortions of the local economy: the government employs large numbers of Sinhalese farmers as home guards in border villages offering stable monthly incomes. This massive inflow of direct incomes further increases local and regional disparities (IFSP 2000) and is by no means a sustainable livelihood activity. Adapting strategies also reflect the declining entitlements to resources, e.g. the disrupted access to land, water and jungle resources, that restricts the choice of livelihood options. Investment in sustainable land management is not rational for farm households that are uncertain about future developments affecting the fundamentals of their lives. Households therefore employ risk minimisation strategies to downsize possible losses and focus on cash earning (especially from overseas employment) and/or state welfare for survival.

Managing personal risk	Managing household economics	Accessing external support
<p><i>Minimising risk</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• leaving places of residence or cultivation permanently or temporarily [all],</li> <li>• fleeing to the jungle during sudden eruption of fighting [I, Ka],</li> <li>• residing with relatives in the peaceful areas of Sri Lanka and returning for cultivation only [Ka],</li> <li>• sending children to relatives in more secure places for schooling and safety [all],</li> <li>• sending women and elderly persons through checkpoints for marketing, because young men are more likely to become harassed [I],</li> <li>• working in fields in groups and seeking protection by the army [Ka].</li> </ul> <p><i>Risk taking (for economic survival):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collecting firewood in the jungle even though this is a very risky place</li> <li>• trespassing in the restricted fishing areas imposed by the navy, when fishermen expect a big catch of fish</li> </ul>	<p><i>Securing income:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• migrating for income opportunities to Middle East [all, Va],</li> <li>• confine to key income sources due to reduced life choices [Ka, Ku, Va],</li> <li>• seeking home guard employment for Sinhalese farmers [Ka],</li> </ul> <p><i>Organising the family:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• handling traditional gender roles and tasks more flexibly: women take a more active role in marketing, trading and cultivation [I],</li> <li>• re-sizing and re-uniting the family according to security and economic needs, e.g. sending vulnerable family members to more secure places [all].</li> </ul> <p><i>Managing expenditure and investment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• avoiding investment in tangible assets (e.g. boats, houses) [Ku], even though in two locations, people started building new houses [Va, I],</li> <li>• reducing expenses for entertainment and consumption patterns [all]. This is often coupled with a partial degrading social status,</li> <li>• using informal food markets (incl. Smuggling and illegal liquor production).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Alliancing with power holders (active):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishing good relationships with local government officers [Ka, Ku, Va],</li> <li>• seeking alliances with armed actors to get personal advantages (e.g. for trading) [Ka],</li> <li>• keeping a low profile in order not to cause trouble [I, Va]</li> </ul> <p><i>Satisfying claims of armed actors (passive):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• giving the necessary as bribe (in avoidance of being forced to give) [I, Ku],</li> <li>• by-passing taxation and bribery wherever possible with tricks etc. [I, Ku]</li> </ul> <p><i>Qualifying for state and NGO support:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• forming community-based organisations to access NGO support [Ka]. However, many local institutions are falling apart due to the reluctance of local leaders to become too noticeable [I, Ku],</li> <li>• concealing economic facts in order to qualify for state welfare [Va, Ku].</li> </ul> <p><i>Accessing formal and informal economic institutions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pawning jewellery to receive credit from banks, money lenders or mudalali (traders), relatives,</li> <li>• practising traditional group savings (seetu) for small-scale expenses [Va, Ka].</li> </ul>

Table 2: Three Pillars of Livelihood Strategies: Examples from Trincomalee (Source: Korf et al, 2001) Comments: I = Ithikulam; Ka = Kalyanapura; Ku = Kumpurupitty; Va = Vattam

## 5 Coping with or Adapting to - Conflict or Poverty?

Has the conflict accentuated poverty and thus livelihood strategies? How different are the villages in conflict areas from those in peaceful areas of Sri Lanka? Coping strategies are the outcome of an interplay of various factors and impacts – not one single one such as the conflict - on the different elements of livelihood. It is therefore difficult to make a firm distinction between poverty and conflict coping. However, the first pillar in our model – managing personal risk of life – is clearly linked to the conflict and the increased personal risk related with conflict. Apart from that, uncertainty and insecurity also increases the economic risk of investment, and this factor is mirrored in various coping strategies of the second and third pillar. In this regard, increased economic risk can also be caused by macro-economic conditions, e.g. through national open-market policies, and coping with such induced risks might be similar to coping with economic risks induced by the security situation. Some argue that state welfare and relief could prevent a large-scale decline of the population into deep poverty (O'Sullivan 1997). In the research locations, government welfare in the form of Samurdhi food stamps, dry rations, and resettlement aid are an important food and income source and people have adapted strategies for tapping these resources. This could also be a sign of the depletion of household capital assets due to the protracted duration of the war: Households gradually deplete their capital stock after each shock and thus increase their dependency from outside assistance. Relief-oriented aid offered by the state and NGOs might have supported a reorientation of household strategies towards the tapping of these funds instead of investing scarce assets in an insecure environment.

It is important to note that power and reciprocity in vertical networks of support more and more determine survival strategies of people in the war-torn areas of Sri Lanka (third pillar of livelihood strategies: accessing external support). We can observe ethnicised interactions in political and economic terms: entitlements to agricultural resources and markets are unequally distributed among the three ethnic groups. Especially the Tamil population suffers from a comparative disadvantage, since the armed forces suspect them of collaboration with the rebels. Sinhalese and Muslims largely dominate trade networks, since they can form alliances with the military and thus easily pass through military checkpoints while Tamil traders face a lot of troubles in transporting their goods. In addition, the central government provides generous assistance to Sinhalese farmers in the border villages to encourage them to remain living in these areas. The government employs a large number of young Sinhalese in these villages as home guards to protect their community. This provides considerable and stable income which would otherwise not be available in these villages. On the other hand,

the rebels levy taxes on Muslim traders and thus expropriate part of the gained profits from them.

Such interactions develop into a form of 'war economy' where economic businesses and interactions involve military power holders. In the long term, this has serious consequences: Social capital (support through community networks) is gradually undermined by the dominance of political capital and patronage: entitlements are attributed to those with a stronger link to political and military power holders. The problem with such political practice is that it reinforces those grievances among the ethnic groups which fuelled the civil war.

### **Epilogue: Post-emergency Livelihoods**

In February 2002, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government signed a cease-fire agreement to stop fighting. This is understood as the beginning of a peace process with the next step being direct negotiations under the mediation of the Norwegian government between LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in Thailand due in September 2002. For people living in the war-affected north-east of Sri Lanka, life opportunities have substantially changed even though people in the war-affected areas largely remain prudent about the future of the fragile peace process. The biggest changes in vulnerability context are that people are now allowed to move more freely, the fishing ban is largely lifted, and new traders come to the areas offering market opportunities to farmers and fishermen. However, many farmers are still not able to access their agricultural resources, because their fields are full of mines and some land is still occupied by the army (e.g. high security zone in Jaffna peninsula) or they are simply still afraid to go to remote places. It would be essential to investigate more how livelihood strategies change now as a response to the new vulnerability context, in particular with a focus on three research questions:

- What are the new coping strategies that people develop to respond to the new freedom of movement, while the long-term prospects of peace remains fragile?
- Which adaptive strategies prevail during the change process and which are abandoned or re-shaped subsequently?
- How does the peace process affect the balance between the different power holders (army, LTTE, civil administration) on local level and how does this affect the ethnic biases in entitlements to agricultural resources?

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