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Conflict Mitigation through Food Security?

INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME
TRINCOMALEE

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The Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee aims at supporting people at food risk and affected by the conflict. IFSP supports them to diversify and intensify their food and income sources and improve their diet and health care (objective). This is expected to contribute to sustainable improvement of their basic needs situation. Nutrition and food security, better access to services, better health care and finally integration into society are pre-conditions for peaceful co-existence and cooperation of the ethnic groups (goal).

IFSP started in August 1998 with a first phase until May 2001. A second project phase until end 2003 has been agreed upon as a result of a progress review conducted in July/August 2000.

IFSP encourages cooperation with government institutions and non-government organisations. Capacity building for development is the core of our mandate. This includes farmer's organisations, rural development societies, mosque societies, school societies and other village based organisations. Promoting participation and community mobilisation allows to address the common agenda of the communities which is stability, prosperity and peace.

Conflict mitigation through food security is a challenge. We do not just distribute food to needy families. We rather encourage them to organise themselves, to contribute actively to meet their own aspirations and priorities. Only then food-for-work as a tool for development would make sense.

Efforts towards conflict mitigation challenges our Sri Lankan partners. It is their professional involvement and their dedication that enables us to effect our contribution. We in turn support them in enhancing their capacities and skills through training in sectoral subjects, community mobilisation and dialogue.

Trincomalee, December 2000

Dedo Geinitz

Perception of the War

Violence in society

Violence is inherent to the history of Sri Lanka. The struggle between and among the Sinhalese of the central and southern areas and the Tamils of the north is documented in the written history and is part of their culture. Remnants of struggle, conflict and war are the outflow of post colonial and post feudal conditions. Today's power structure and dispute between the state and a particular group, the Tamil people, determines the conflict.

Almost 20 years of conflict and war have influenced the society. Discrimination, violence and destruction, atrocities, violation of human rights have become day-to-day reality. Efforts to reconcile and to promote a national identity among the social groups show little progress.

Reconciliation would be the need of the moment as perceived by the Sinhalese, whereas, peace through justice would be the demand of the Tamils. There is, however, no national reconciliation policy in place and hence, resistance to the prevailing power structure of the state which marginalises one particular group would be their perception.¹

An opinion poll of end 1999 showed a differentiated, however, overwhelming support for peace from all communities. Negotiation for peace was commonly seen as the only alternative.² A recent survey³ underlines that about two third of all youth covered, consider violence improper. However, Tamil and Sinhalese youth perceive each other either as "khaki clad security personnel with guns" or "terrorists" clearly showing the prevalence of polarisation.

Cost of war

More than 60,000 persons have lost their lives. Around 700,000 persons have been repeatedly displaced and more than 170,000 persons are living in camps. Many political leaders, journalists and intellectuals were killed. A generation of children is growing up in an environment of conflict, insecurity, trauma and polarisation. Estimates show about 400,000 children displaced in the north and east, with a large proportion suffering from psychological trauma and stress. Children are forcibly conscripted by the LTTE.

A dramatic change of the demographic pattern has affected social and economic life. The North-East Province has experienced an exodus of people. The pre-

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² National Peace Council, Summary of the results of an opinion poll (unpublished), 2000.

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war population of Jaffna was about 1.5 million which is now reduced to about half a million.

The present value of the costs of the conflict is estimated at nearly 170% of the 1996 GDP (approx. Rs. 1,300 billion or DM 37 billion) for the period from 1984 to 1996. Economic growth is estimated to be affected by 2-3% p.a. during this time.⁴

Defence expenditure increased to 10% of GDP in 2000. The present budget for the war is at Rs. 70 billion (approx. DM 2.0 billion), reflecting about 30% more than GTZ's commissions from the Federal German Government years back. The war economy involves an alarming crowding-out of public investment. Losses on foreign investment, forgone tourist arrivals, infrastructure bottlenecks, reduction of social welfare, disruption of economic activities and a low capital formation are being observed.

At the level of the IFSP the cost of war pose quite some constraint. Communication equipment installed is costly and funds could be used for other purposes. About 100 security clearances have been applied for from January to November 2000. To arrange these security clearances administrative efforts are high. About 7,500 km of driving had to be covered at a direct cost of about Rs. 200,000 (DM 5,700).

Structural deficits

The ethnic conflict has created its own environment. 20 years of war and as per today more than 120,000 combatants involved at the side of the Sri Lankan government have created a new kind of caste in society. Once the war is over this caste will encounter great difficulties to be absorbed into main stream development and may even resist their demobilisation. About 20,000 deserters, many of them with weapons pose a threat to civilian security. Violence has increased.

The country is in a state of war economy. The public ordinance act of May 2000 and the emergency regulations affect all strata of the Sri Lankan society. Censorship, restrictions on the ground, conflict attributed killings and retaliation, harassment of the minority group make it almost impossible to follow an ordinary and average pattern in social life.

The north-east is almost cut off from main economic and social development. Lack of own resources, lack of interest and support as a result of the conflict have lead to marginalisation. Agricultural surplus is traded out. Almost all finished products are imported.

⁴ Institute of Policy Studies, The Economic cost of the war in Sri Lanka, January 2000.

Perception of the War

No one wants to go to the north-eastern districts. Hardly any one is willing to explore business and to risk investment. People who can afford leave. Remaining are those who have either no choice or who are deeply rooted in local society.

Relief has become a major element of support for affected people. Relief, though necessary, if done on a protracted base undermines initiative and makes people even more vulnerable and dependent. Refugees have been living for more than ten years in camps without any sign that they could return to their original villages.

Though the war is perceived as the main problem it appears to be only one, however, significant reason for stagnation. The war aggravates the comparatively low capacities of the public sector institutions. It further highlights the deficits of the economy which constitute structural deficits of the state administration and an antagonism between the public and the private sector.

Poverty aggravated

Poverty in the north-east has worsened with the escalation of the war. The districts in the north-east are suffering the worst deprivation compared to an overall poverty assessment for Sri Lanka.⁵ About 80% of the population in the north and east are estimated to fall under the poverty line (basic food basket). The lack of resources, lack of access to and availability of food and income opportunities result in a common status of shared poverty. Basic social facilities such as health services and education are lacking. The severely restricted local economy prevents the individual from approaching opportunities.

About 90% of the population in Trincomalee district depend on state support (food stamps, dry rations, social transfers).⁶ For the year 2000 about Rs. 100 million have been set aside for relief (DM 2,8 million). This money is lost for reconstruction and mainstream development.

Distortions at village level contribute to further marginalisation. Home guards in Sinhalese border villages are fetching monthly allowances of about Rs. 6,000. Since almost all adult men are employed as home guard by the state, this massive flow of direct income increases local and regional disparities.

⁵ World Bank country report, Sri Lanka – Recaptures missed opportunities, June 2000.
DER, A framework for poverty reduction in Sri Lanka (Draft – Final Report), June 2000.

⁶ District Planning Secretariat Trincomalee, Action plan for rehabilitation 2000

Perception of the War

Working and living in a conflict area

Initiatives towards mitigating the conflict include first and basic policy considerations supported by development institutions and organisations such as the Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation.⁷ Diplomatic activities have seen Norway approaching facilitation. Initiatives on the ground include projects, which are directly addressing local and regional priorities and at the same time programmatic issues. The Federal Republic of Germany through GTZ supports IFSP, teacher in-service training, rehabilitation for Jaffna, water supply in Ampara, Vavunya and Mannar. The World Bank funds a province wide agricultural project. Non-government organisations work for village development and for certain social groups affected by the war.

Working and living in a conflict area means to cooperate with people who have experienced loss of life and property, internal displacement, break down of their community and institutional network, loss of career opportunities. These persons continue to experience uncertainty and risk. How could one expect creativity and active contribution under these conditions?

What could we do as development professionals? Motivation through well determined action, human resources promotion, addressing needs, promoting dialogue and meeting at personal level are entry points for confidence building among us and our Sri Lankan colleagues. We have to make them fit in observing their working environment, analysing it and proposing decision. We have to make them fit for taking over tasks and responsibility. We observe positive and even enthusiastic response from our partners and we conclude that investment in human resources creates benefits even under the conditions of conflict.

Continuity in our cooperation is vital. Sufficient budgets for first level development and as a tool to mobilise funding from government sources are important prerequisites. Encouraging capacity building and, as important, lobby for the north and east are implicit challenges.

⁷ The framework for relief, rehabilitation and reconciliation; District workshop reports; Sectoral workshop reports; Summarised reports of the district and sectoral workshops, Colombo 2000.

Malnutrition and Conflict

Malnutrition: The Effect of the Conflict

20 years of conflict and war

An alarmingly high percentage of the population in the North and East of Sri Lanka is malnourished and impoverished due to the ethnic conflict and war that started nearly 20 years ago. Houses, village infrastructure and production bases are destroyed. Particularly affected are households that depend on fishing, small-scale farming, daily labour, including in particular households run by war widows. Families who recently returned from refugee camps to their home villages and are without a means of livelihood.

The North-East Province is highly affected by the consequences of the ongoing war: internal displacement, destroyed social and economic infrastructure, lack of transport, food shortage, limited income sources, high number of widows and orphans, impairment of psycho-social development and security restrictions in day-to-day life.

In Trincomalee district the three ethnic groups, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims are more or less equally represented. 42% of the population is younger than 15 years of age. Since 1987 more than 56,000 families have been displaced due to the conflict. More than 47,000 have been resettled until 1997 but still about 1,300 displaced families remain in camps.

Assessment of the prevailing situation

Malnutrition amongst women and children is very high in Trincomalee district. This is the finding of a nutrition and health survey that was conducted in 20 Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim villages. Main causes of malnutrition are lack of safe drinking water, poor hygiene, difficult access to health facilities, food shortage as well as little variety in the daily food. Nearly 40% of the displaced Muslim families and 27% of the displaced Tamil families in the survey sample were resettled during the last 5 years.

Malnutrition – harm to children’s future

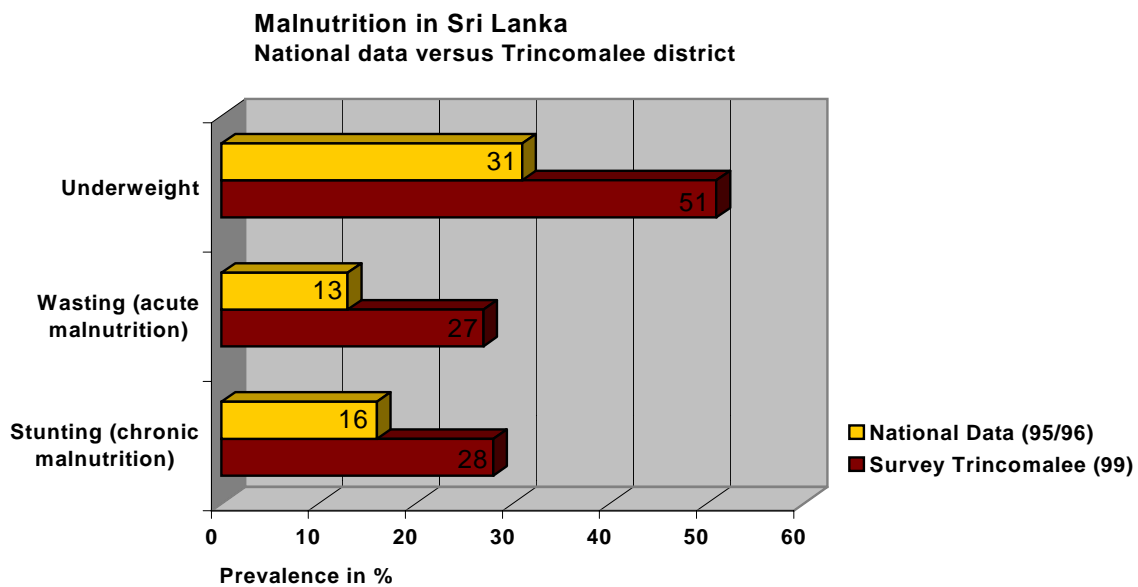
Out of all children with recorded birth weight, 19% weighed less than 2500g. This is a consequence of mother’s malnutrition as well as a cause for future malnutrition of the children. They will have great difficulties to catch up weight in the early months and years of their life. The highest prevalence of low birth weight was found amongst the Tamil children in "uncleared areas" (38%) (areas controlled by LTTE).

One out of four children under five years of age is suffering from acute malnutrition (wasting), which was

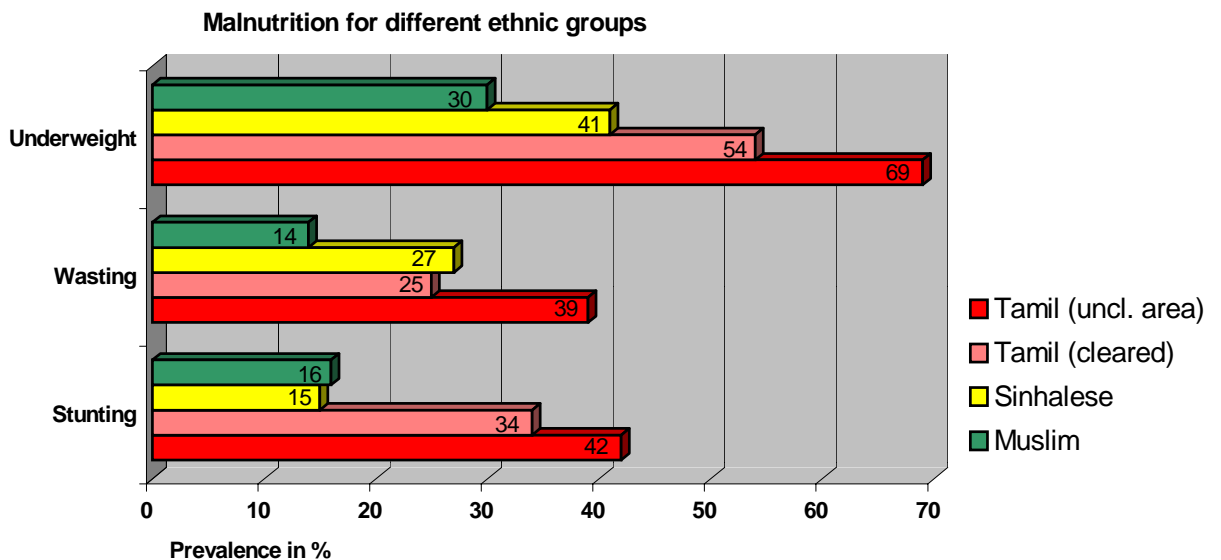
Malnutrition and Conflict

found extremely high amongst all three ethnic groups (27%). WHO considers wasting prevalence rates above 10% a serious public health problem which would require urgent action for improvement.

The comparison of findings in the survey area with national prevalence of malnutrition shows very unfavourable results for all three indicators of malnutrition. Data on national level (Demographic Health Survey 95/96) do not include the North-East Province.



For all three nutrition indicators (underweight, wasting and stunting) significant differences in malnutrition prevalence exist. Most affected are Tamil children in so called “uncleared areas”.



Malnutrition and Conflict

Women eat last

Every second woman in the survey area is malnourished (BMI <18.5) and in the “uncleared areas” even 77%. Half of them are severely malnourished (BMI<17) which is an intolerable situation. Malnutrition of women among the Muslim and Sinhalese communities is lower, but still 29-40% are affected. In addition to the overall difficult situation, intra-household food distribution discriminates against women's appropriate nutrition intake, due to cultural reasons.

Difficult to reach medical assistance and services

Health facilities are damaged, poorly equipped and understaffed. Many staff positions remain vacant since officers are not willing to work in remote areas due to security reasons and difficult accessibility. As a consequence, preventive and curative health services cannot be provided in the quantity and quality required. Government restrictions on the flow of goods into the “uncleared areas” include food, medicine, construction material and many other essential commodities.

Fever is one of the main health problems mentioned by 85% of the surveyed mothers, whereas 56% referred to acute respiratory infections (ARI) and 17% to diarrhoea. Half of the children had some kind of acute respiratory infections (cough, cold, running nose) at the day of interview, 11% showed signs of skin disease and 14% were reported to have fever.

Whereas 90% of the Sinhalese mothers had delivered their last child in the hospital, in uncleared areas 83% had delivered at home, without any trained assistance.

Clean drinking water and good sanitation – basic needs can not be met

Nearly half of the households do not have enough drinking water throughout the year. Most affected is the Tamil population in uncleared areas (73%). On average 40% of the surveyed families have access to latrines, but only 4% of the households in uncleared areas.

Not enough food – difficult to get

During the critical months (October to January, before harvest) up to 50% of the surveyed families experience food shortages. The Sinhalese population seems much less affected by seasonal food shortage than Tamils and Muslims. A large extent of the agriculture land and many irrigation systems are abandoned due to the security situation. Very few families have home gardens.

In the divisional centres (central villages/small towns) food and consuming goods are available in remarkable variety.

Malnutrition and Conflict

However, distances to the villages are often very far, transport facilities are poor and purchasing power is low.

Rice and vegetables

Many families have only two meals per day and the diet consists mainly of rice, sambol and few vegetables. Some villages have good access to fish, a very good source of protein. Nevertheless, most families do not consume healthy food items such as eggs, fish, vegetables and fruits often enough and in sufficient amounts.

Rice, as a staple food for all three ethnic groups is consumed daily. Consumption of beans, green vegetables, other vegetables as well as oil and fat is higher amongst the Sinhalese families (several times per week), whereas consumption amongst Tamil and Muslim families is lower than on a weekly basis. Consumption of fruits as well as milk products was low amongst all three communities (monthly basis).

Diet in the “uncleared areas” mainly consists of rice with a few vegetables and fish. Consumption frequency of oil, fruits, milk, milk products, eggs and meat is extremely low (monthly basis). The importance of fish in their diet indicates the vulnerability caused by fishing restrictions directed by the security forces.

The use of iodised salt is not a common practice. Main reason for not using iodised salt seems to be the lack of knowledge (71%) and lack of availability (21%), mainly in uncleared areas.

90% of the children up to four months were exclusively breastfed, but weaning food and children’s diet is extremely monotonous, especially amongst the Tamil and Muslim community. Consumption of fruits and vegetables, as well as fish and pulses urgently need to be promoted.

Food for thought – empty stomachs prevent from learning

In remote areas (poverty pockets) malnutrition is a major problem amongst school children. School principals report that children faint during lessons, they cannot concentrate or do not even come to school since they have to help their parents in earning money or cultivation.

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