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Seven Pillars of Coping Strategies

Preliminary Results from Case Studies in Trincomalee District

INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMME
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Preface

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 is a joint venture of the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP), Sri Lanka and the Centre for Advanced Training in Agricultural and Rural Development (CATAD) from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. The study is funded by IFSP with the financial assistance of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) and is carried out by an interdisciplinary Sri Lankan-German team of young researchers and practitioners.

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 explores socio-economic coping strategies and changes in land use pattern of conflict-affected communities in Trincomalee District. The study follows the livelihood system approach developed by the Department for International Development (DFID), UK.

The preliminary results of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 are documented in then IFSP Working Papers 37 to 45. The different steps of knowledge generation along the consecutive research phases and the research results are presented for further discussion.

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INTRODUCTION:

Conflict is the overriding constraint to development in the North and East of Sri Lanka. While war has become normalcy and is experienced as a reality by people, it leaves people with hopelessness and frustration. How do people manage to survive in such an environment? It would be essential for various actors and agencies active in rehabilitation and development to gain a thorough understanding of how people cope with the prevailing conditions of a protracted war. The Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) therefore commissioned the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 to explore socio-economic coping mechanisms of conflict-affected communities in the Trincomalee District with particular emphasis on land use pattern and on food and nutrition security.

This paper presents preliminary research results of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001. The findings of the first field phase were discussed during a mid-term review workshop held at the Nilaveli Beach Hotel on 27 August 2001. Practitioners and researchers from various institutions in Colombo, Peradenya and Trincomalee commented on the first outcomes of the study, discussed their consistency with other research findings and debated the suitability of the livelihood framework approach for research and development practice. This stakeholder dialogue is an important part of the activities of IFSP and CATAD with the aim to disseminate micro-level information about the war-affected areas of Sri Lanka to a wider range of key resource institutions, and at the same time, to feed their knowledge back into the research design of the ongoing activities of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001.

The paper proceeds as follows. It briefly describes the context of vulnerability, i.e. the frame conditions within which communities in the Trincomalee District are surviving. It then goes on to elaborate briefly on the livelihood systems approach and on the research methodology. The paper concludes with the main preliminary hypotheses of the ongoing field research focusing on socio-economic coping strategies and land use pattern in Trincomalee.

The Context of Vulnerability

The civil war in Sri Lanka can be described as a complex (political) emergency: the conflict is embedded in, and is an expression of, existing social, political, economic and cultural structures. It involves every dimension of society and the lives of the people in the conflict zones of Sri Lanka (mainly the Northeast). It is 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.

Almost 20 years of conflict and civil war in the Northeast of Sri Lanka have resulted in an alarming degree of malnutrition and impoverishment. Houses, village infrastructure and the production base are destroyed. Basic social facilities, such as health services and education, are inadequate. The severely restricted local economy prevents the individual from approaching opportunities. Particularly affected are households that depend on fishing, small-scale farming and daily wage labour. The vulnerability of female-headed households is especially striking. Many families recently returned from refugee camps to their home villages and are without

adequate means of livelihood. The prevailing destabilising security situation is a serious constraint for long-term oriented development co-operation.

The dramatic social and economic changes in the war zone area of Sri Lanka are commonly described by the following features (NEPC 2001, Shanmugaratnam 1999, Korf 2001, Goodhand & Lewer 1999, Reinhard 2001):

- A large proportion of the population has lost material assets and means of earnings. In addition, the public physical infrastructure is dilapidated or destroyed.
- The social structure of the traditional society has undergone severe changes, in particular the caste system and gender roles. While this situation has enabled disadvantaged members of the society to gain a more important place within the community (lower caste, poor) or household (women), it might also have caused detrimental effects: the work load of women increases, marginal people have lost a patron who would care and support in times of distress.
- Community networks of social welfare and support collapsed in view of the large numbers of individuals in a community in need of support (widows, orphans, disabled).
- There is little evidence for a strong leadership on the village level. Traditional leaders have limited power and status. Potential leaders are afraid to take a position that will expose them and thus makes them more vulnerable.
- Conflict and war has profound impacts on the psycho-social dimension of life: traumatic experiences of the past exacerbate feelings of helplessness, fatalism, and vulnerability.
- War, displacement and erosion or destruction of livelihoods brought many people in dependency on outside support, assistance and relief for survival. Combined with the common top down approaches of government and humanitarian agencies, this has resulted in a deep-rooted dependency syndrome in the area.
- Migration of individuals and/or families, be it forced or voluntarily, be it temporary or permanent, is a prominent trend. This has weakened social bonds and family ties. Since it is largely the upper and middle class, the more educated and entrepreneurial people migrating, this process has resulted in a brain drain from the war-torn area.
- The war undermines the confidence and trust of people in government institutions due to their weak performance and political biases.
- Political capital (affiliation with civilian and military power holders) is unevenly distributed between the communal groups. While this has been a cause of conflict in the past, the conflict has also deepened this inequality of opportunities, freedom in movements, and access to resources.
- The war has created a political economy of violence: threats, harassment, acts of random violence are reinforcing a system of bribery, taxation and other forced economic relations of a war time economy. These conflict entrepreneurs (conflict parties, militant groups, home guards) are 'all winners in the sense that for them there are clear economic advantages in the continuation of the war' (Goodhand and Lewer 1999, p. 76).

- The war and security restrictions have contributed to create a (semi-) closed regional economy: trade links are limited and dominated by certain ethnic groups (which again seeds additional ethnic grievances). In addition, the region has been largely left out from development activities undertaken by government and donors. And only recently, the donor community started again to involve in rehabilitation and reconstruction.
- The high uncertainty factor on the future development prevents business community to invest in this high risk area. The combined result of destruction and lack of investment has triggered an economic decline of the region and degraded its relative economic position among the country's provinces.

Food Security and Conflict

Since August 1998, the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) aims at supporting people at food risk and affected by the conflict to diversify and intensify their food and income sources and improve their diet and health care (objective). This should contribute to sustainable improvement in the basic needs situation, especially with a view to nutrition and food security amongst the poor population affected by the conflict in Trincomalee. This is perceived as a precondition for peaceful co-existence and co-operation of the various ethnic groups in the district (goal).

Food and nutrition security as it is understood by IFSP contains three main elements:

- (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 good dietary standards (is the food nutritious and are people in a status of health which allows them to absorb it?)

To overcome at least some of the constraints of the conflict, IFSP emphasises community mobilisation, people's participation and institutional as well as human capacity building. This should in the short- and medium term encourage the sustainable utilisation of local resources, enhance the demand for better services and at the same time increase the contribution towards rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

IFSP commissioned the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 to investigate behavioural pattern of people in the existing vulnerability context:¹

- How do people cope with the challenging frame conditions of a war-torn environment in order to sustain their lives and to achieve food security?
- How are land use pattern changing (land resource utilisation and land use rights) in the Trincomalee District and what consequences does this have for availability of and access to food?

¹ ICP Working Paper No. 1 provides more details on the preparation and background of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 and the rationale for IFSP to commission the research study.

LIVELIHOODS IN COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

The livelihoods approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities of development. The main advocate of livelihood thinking is the Department of International Development (DFID), UK. The approach is a combination of various concepts in participatory research and draws on work of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

The key question to be asked in any analysis of sustainable livelihoods is:

*In a particular frame condition, what combination of livelihood resources result in the ability to follow what combination of livelihood strategies with what outcome? Institutional processes and structures mediate the ability to carry out such strategies.
(adapted from Scoones 1998)*

Box 1: DEFINITION OF LIVELIHOOD:

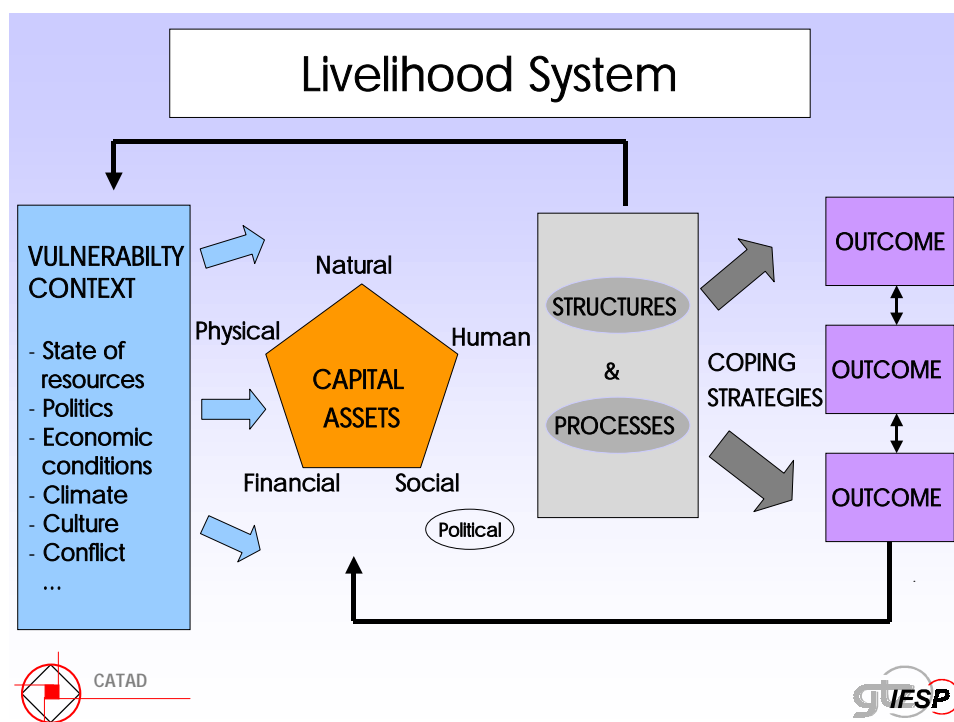
A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the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

adapted from Chambers & Conway 1992.

An important strength of the livelihood system approach is that it emphasises people's potentials in a holistic way rather than stressing problems, constraints and needs. It understands that livelihoods and institutions that influence and shape livelihoods, are dynamic. And it looks at the linkages between what we observe at the micro-level and how macro-level policies impact on the situation of the micro-level. A 'livelihood focused' development approach would aim at removing constraints to the realisation of potentials and building strengths of people. This is very much in line with current thinking of the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP).

The livelihoods systems approach is a particularly useful analytical tool to observe and understand behavioural pattern of people and communities in complex political emergencies, i.e. protracted social and ethnicised civil wars and conflicts. It does not perceive communities as vulnerable and helpless victims, but looks into their coping strategies in the existing frame conditions (*vulnerability context*). Having the difficult and challenging frame conditions in mind, the livelihoods approach looks into the livelihood assets (5 capital assets, see Box 1) and attempts to trace how people combine their assets (*coping strategies*) in order to arrive at certain results (*outcomes*). What people really achieve (*outcomes*) might differ from what they were aiming at (*objectives*), especially in case of negative external influences.

Chart 1: The Livelihood System



Source: adapted from Carney 1998 (modified)

Apart from the vulnerability context, transforming *structures and processes* will influence and shape behavioural pattern of people. We ask: what 'structures' (institutions: organisations, laws, policies) are present in the livelihood context and how are these structures performing and acting ('processes'). Processes would thus refer to the actual institutional arrangements (rules of the game, (dis-)incentives).² In complex emergencies, we can often observe a huge gap between laws and policies and actual behaviour of the responsible structures in enforcing them. Therefore, the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 differentiates more between what are the official institutions (structures: organisations, laws and policies) and how these are actually followed or by-passed through informal arrangements (processes). Transforming structures and processes are critical in determining who gains access to which assets and 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.

² At this point, we deviate slightly from the DFID definition, which defines structures as (organisations, from layers of government through to private sector in all its guises) and processes (policies, laws, rules of the game and incentives).

Box 2: The Five Capital Assets:

Natural capital:

The natural resource stock from which resource flows useful for livelihoods are derived (e.g. land, water, wildlife, biodiversity, environmental resources)

Human capital:

The skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health important to the ability to pursue different livelihood strategies.

Physical capital:

The basic infrastructure (transport, shelter, water, energy, and communications) and the production equipment and means, which enable people to pursue their livelihoods.

Financial capital:

The financial resources which are available to people (whether savings, supplies of credit or regular remittances or pensions) and which provide them with different livelihood options.

Social capital (with political capital):

The social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationship or trust) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods. Political capital as sub-component of social capital refers to access to wider institutions of society, in particular alliances with local or regional power holders (civil, formal & informal, militant).

(Adapted from Scoones 1998, further developed by IFSP-CATAD 2001)

In times of uncertainty and distress, people might rather concentrate on short-term survival than on sustainable management of natural resources. It is therefore essential to assess the *feedback loops* (positive and negative impacts) of the different livelihood outcomes on the capital assets, and in the longer term on structures, processes and the vulnerability context. While resource management tends to emphasise the environmental effects of coping strategies and outcomes for the livelihood system, it is equally important to look into the social, economic and political feedback loops to the household capital assets (positive as well as negative). In complex political emergencies, a conflict impact assessment could be useful to elaborate how certain coping strategies and outcomes might contribute to deepen ethnic grievances and thus causes of conflict while other outcomes might strengthen local capacities for peace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Principles of Action- and Decision-oriented Research (ADR)

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 follows the concept of 'action- and decision-oriented research (ADR)' developed by CATAD (Nagel & Fiege 2001). ADR aims at providing practitioners, in particular development projects and agencies, with operational, i.e. action-oriented, information to facilitate their planning, implementation and evaluation tasks. The concept of ADR is closely linked to the philosophy of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and is based on seven principles:

- i. *optimal ignorance*: 'knowing what is worth knowing'
- ii. *appropriate imprecision*: choosing standards of accuracy which might not be acceptable to academic research, but still allow responsible decision-making.
- iii. *iteration*: advancing in cycles, a continuous learning process
- iv. *exploration*: applying the serendipity principle = 'making fortunate and unexpected discoveries by chance.
- v. *eclecticism*: borrowing and accepting concepts and ideas from various available sources and schools of thought.
- vi. *triangulation*: looking at things from different (at least three) points of view. This principle is essential in considering team composition, units of observation, sources of information, and research methods.
- vii. *stakeholder dialogue*: feedback to and from practitioners, combine views from researchers and 'doers'.

The IFSP-CATAD Project 2001 understands itself as a *learning site*: learning goes beyond simple information collection, it is a process of interacting with people. The project places emphasis on stakeholder dialogue (communication with external resource institutions) and on capacity building of IFSP and partner staff (internal learning). The research team combined young researchers and practitioners with various disciplinary backgrounds from Sri Lanka and Germany to enhance inter-cultural and interdisciplinary teamwork.

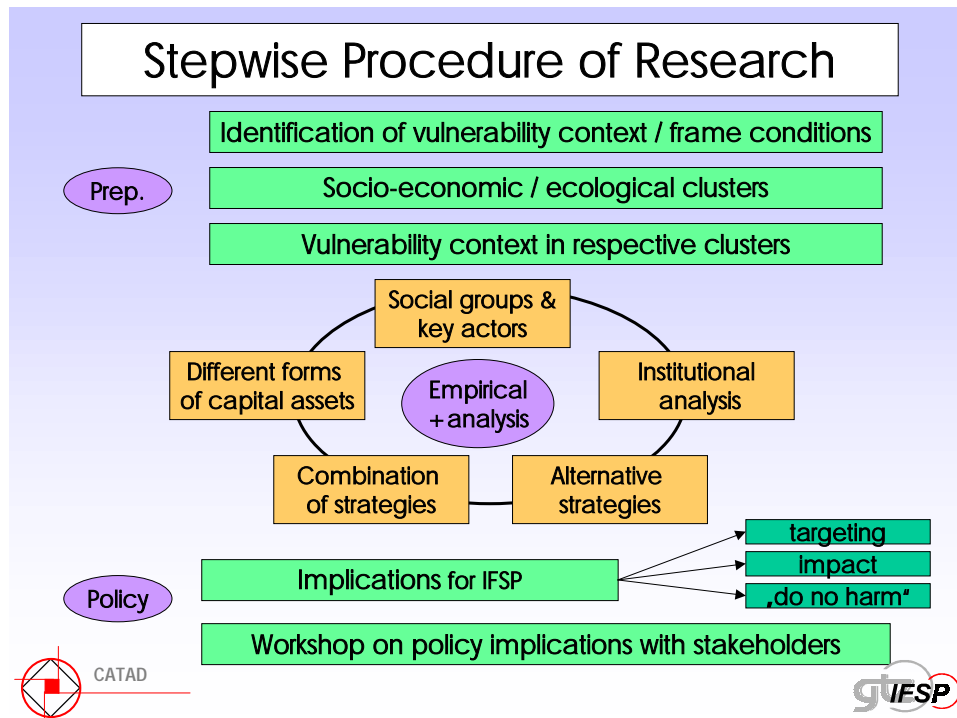
Stepwise Procedure of Research:

The research team utilised the livelihood systems approach as the framework of analysis for the fieldwork, while following the principles of action- and decision-oriented research. It followed a step-wise procedure of research (see Chart 2):

- In a preparatory phase, the team looked into the vulnerability context of the research area: what social, economic, political, and environmental frame conditions affect the livelihood systems in Trincomalee. Since Trincomalee is a diverse district, four main agro-economic and ecological clusters were identified focusing on the areas where IFSP is undertaking village projects:
 - (i) traditional paddy cultivation,
 - (ii) settlement areas with major/medium irrigation schemes,
 - (iii) coastal zones with fishing communities, and
 - (iv) cash crop (onion, vegetable) producing zones.

The vulnerability context in each cluster differs according to the security situation and the location of the research site with regard to borderline, proximity to urban areas, and natural resources.

Chart 2: Stepwise Procedure of Research



- The fieldwork consisted of a combined empirical and analytical phase, i.e. the information collected was continuously analysed and discussed within the cluster groups to derive key issues and knowledge gaps. The main emphasis of information collection was on identifying key actors and social groups in the community, investigating the different forms of capital assets of households or individuals and assessing existing structures and processes. Emphasis was on the perception of villagers whose information was cross-checked with other sources. The core of the research was on identifying the bundle of coping strategies applied to deal with the prevailing vulnerability context, either induced by the conflict or being a traditional strategy of survival. The alternative strategies within one community and across the different research clusters were then compared and analysed in order to derive the underlying rationale behind each behavioural pattern.
- In a next step, the research team plans to discuss the policy implications of the research findings with IFSP, partners and other key institutions. This stakeholder dialogue (Phase III) will take place on two levels:
 - (i) in the Trincomalee district focusing on project intervention strategies: How can IFSP and partners better reach the vulnerable groups (targeting) and support them with appropriate measures for livelihood promotion (impacts) while avoiding negative side-effects on the local conflict setting (do no harm)

- (ii) in Colombo, addressing key institutions for research and development to disseminate and discuss the findings and their implications for policy interventions on a regional (even national) level, and possibly the micro-impact of macro policies.

Research Methods:

As backbone of the investigation, the research team developed two thematic guidelines for socio-economic coping strategies and land use issues. These guidelines followed largely the logic of the livelihood systems approach looking into the different elements of the model, viz. vulnerability context, capital assets, structures and processes, and particularly on coping strategies and outcomes.

For data collection, the research team applied the following RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) methods:

- Informal village walks helped gain a first insight into social and geographical structures of the research areas and pre-select social groups for interviewing.
- Semi-structured interviews with individuals as well as
- focused group discussions provided the core of the collected data.
- The information collected from villagers with different social backgrounds was complemented by information obtained from key informants (mainly government officials, NGO staff, IFSP staff and knowledgeable individuals, local leaders, key actors).
- In addition, selected RRA tools (daily calendar, seasonal calendar, drawings, mapping) were incorporated in group discussions where they were deemed helpful in stimulating and structuring communication.

The team divided into thematic sub-teams with focuses on socio-economic coping strategies and land use pattern. Each cluster (village) team consisted of a sub-group of either of the two thematic sub-teams.

Selection of Research Locations:

The selection of research locations within the four identified clusters (see above) was done in close consultation with IFSP management and staff. The focus was on those divisions in Trincomalee where IFSP is currently promoting community development (Gomarankadawela, Morawewa, Padavisiripura, Kuchchaveli, Eachchilampattai, Muthur).

Furthermore, the research locations were identified in view of satisfying the following set of parameters:

- different agro-economic and ecological zones (cluster approach)
- main farming systems (or coastal resource utilisation)
- proximity to borderline, uncleared & cleared area
- differing degrees and facets of poverty and deprivation
- communities with IFSP intervention and without IFSP interventions
- considering the different ethnic groups in the district.

Out of a preliminary screening of 15 locations, four villages were chosen for further investigation (Table 1):

Table 1: Research Villages for IFSP-CATAD 2001:

Village	Agro-economic zone	Security situation	Land use issues:	Ethnicity
Kumpurupitty G.S. Divisions	Cash crop, coastal area	(Semi-)cleared, non-stabilised	Environmental degradation	Tamil
Iththikulam	Chena cultivation and traditional paddy cultivation	Uncleared area, close to borderline	Dramatic changes in land use	Tamil
Kalyanapura G.S. division	Settlement paddy cultivation	Border village, cleared area	Absence of 'earlier' land owners	Sinhalese
Vaddam	Fishing community	Border village, cleared area	Scarcity of homestead land	Muslim

In addition to these four village studies, IFSP and CATAD agreed to carry out a thematic area study on land use pattern with particular emphasis on land use disputes in the area of Menkaman – Dehiwatte (Table 2). This area is a settlement scheme (Allai Extension scheme) with different ethnic communities living in close proximity to each other. The two villages are situated close to the borderline with both conflict parties exercising an influential role for social, political and economic community life.

Table 2: Thematic Area Study

Village	Agro-economic zone	Security situation	Land use issues:	Ethnicity
Menkamam	Partly settlement scheme (AES), and partly traditional tank	Cleared area	Disputes over land and water resources, encroachment of grazing and tank bed area.	Tamil
Dehiwatte	Settlement scheme (AES)			Sinhalese

Limitations of the Study:

The IFSP-CATAD Project mainly employed qualitative research methods focusing on understanding behavioural pattern within the limited time frame of three months. The sample of villages and interviews conducted is relatively small. IFSP-CATAD did not conduct a large-scale questionnaire survey. Consequently, we do not intend to claim the research results as representative for Trincomalee district or even the Northeast. We rather understand that we point at spotlights and describe and analyse observations arising from the case studies. The emphasis is on interactive learning with IFSP staff and partners to derive appropriate project intervention strategies inclined to support potentials of people rather than focusing on their problems.

ANALYSIS OF PRELIMINARY RESEARCH RESULTS

The cluster teams analysed the comprehensive information collected in the five research locations and attempted to identify cross-cutting trends and key issues with focus on three major topics:

- (i) Land use rights (formal and informal use),
- (ii) Economic utilisation of land resources, and
- (iii) Socio-economic coping strategies and underlying rationales.

The paper intends to highlight *preliminary* findings of the first field phase. It debates first hypotheses derived by the research team in order to analyse the rationale of behavioural patterns of villagers and key actors. At some point, we might simplify *purposively* to make some observations more explicit, and consequently to stimulate discussion. Many of these hypotheses are themselves subject of debate among the team members. They are starting points for further investigation and will be confirmed or rejected during the second field phase. The detailed village findings will be further documented and accomplished and be subject of presentation at the final stakeholder dialogue in October 2001.

Land Use in the Livelihood System:

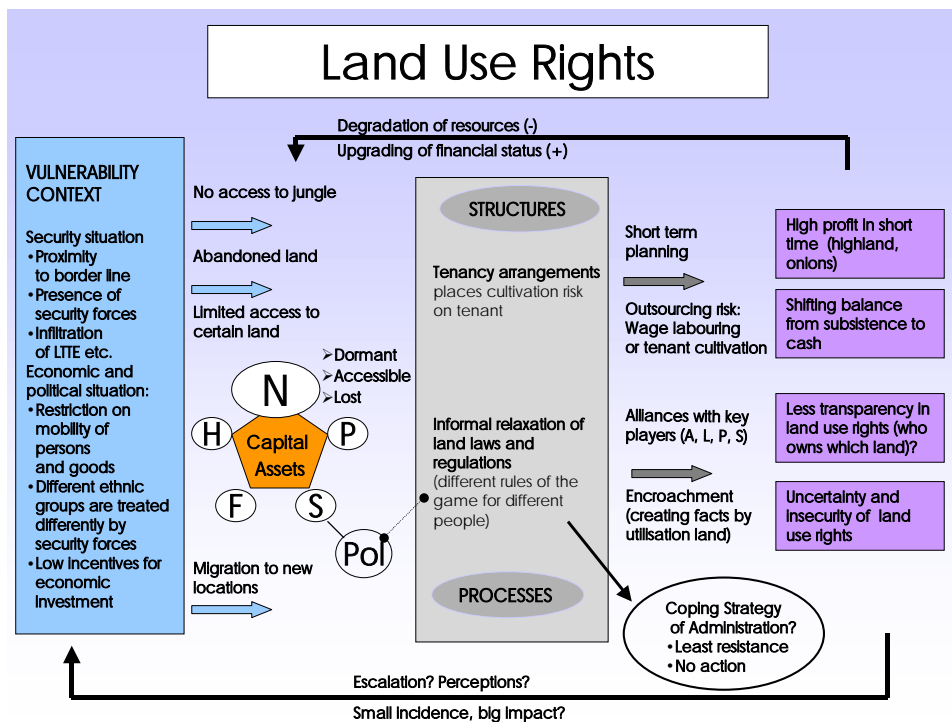
We will now focus on the underlying question: How do vulnerable groups organise their daily survival within certain frame conditions? Recalling the livelihood systems framework, we first look at the key factors in the vulnerability context and their impacts on the household resources (capital assets). Identifying the structures and processes in place (tenancy arrangements, loan arrangements, trade networks, handling of land use rights, services), the model highlights how households combine their livelihood assets to perform certain activities in order to cope with the vulnerability context. These activities lead to certain outcomes, which will again have an impact (feedback loop) on the capital assets of the same and of other households. In the medium- and long-term, outcomes might also affect structures and processes, and to a limited extent the vulnerability context.

Chart 3 presents the preliminary result of this analytical process focusing on land use rights in some research locations of our study. We focused on two main aspects of the vulnerability context: (i) the security situation, and (ii) the economic and political situation with several sub-aspects as given in the chart. A few examples shall demonstrate how the model is to be understood and how the complex information contained in the model can be extracted.

The security situation in the research locations is influenced by the proximity to the borderline (between cleared and uncleared areas), the presence of security forces and the infiltration of LTTE. This situation affects the natural capital of households: some of their land resources are currently not accessible (e.g. paddy fields in Kumpurupitty and Muslims' cultivation land in Ithikulam; jungle in Kumpurupitty, Iththikulam, Kalyanapura) and are thus classified as dormant capital: if the security situation eases, these capital assets will be accessible and usable again. On the other hand, villagers might still have access to other land resources (accessible natural capital, e.g. highland in Kumpurupitty, Ithikulam). At the same time, many people migrated temporarily or permanently out of the area to escape the tense security situation

leaving abandoned land behind. Furthermore, some of the natural capital has been lost during displacement (e.g. cattle).

Chart 3: Land Use Rights:



Source: IFSP-CATAD 2001

Furthermore, both conflict parties have established restrictions: The LTTE does not admit Muslims and Sinhalese people in their realm, while the government has imposed restrictions on the mobility of goods and persons to uncleared and to non-stabilised areas. It was also observed that the security forces treat the three ethnic groups in different ways. Since Tamils (especially young men) are always suspected to co-operate or support LTTE, the armed forces are far stricter with the regulations imposed on them than they would be with Sinhalese or Muslims (since these presumably would not support LTTE).

Example 1: Impact of Tenancy Arrangements

Tenancy arrangements (as a means to regulate land use rights) in the research locations were mainly informal (verbal) agreements avoiding formalised or legal arrangements according to the Agrarian Development Act. It is common practice that the tenant pays a fixed amount of tenancy to the landowner in cash (or kind). In this type of tenancy arrangement, the owner is outsourcing the cultivation risk to the tenant (which would not be the case in a system of sharing the harvest). In Iththikulam, farmers without adequate own land resources now have to decide whether to invest as a tenant in paddy cultivation (maybe engaging in loans), or working as wage labourer. The latter bears the advantage of avoiding the cultivation risk while earning cash income. Paddy cultivation, on the other hand, ensures the basic subsistence of a household, even though the profits as a tenant might be marginal. In Kumpurupitty, most landowners leased out their land for tenants from

Nilaveli for onion cultivation, while they assured their right to work as wage labourers for the tenants. One assumption is that most poor landowners were forced to do so due to the lack of investment capital (onion cultivation is a high input – high risk cultivation). Furthermore, they outsourced the cultivation risk to the tenants.

The observed preference for wage labouring (and highland cultivation) in certain locations (most prominently Ithikulam) could imply a shift from a subsistence orientation to a cash preference. Nevertheless, paddy cultivation still receives a higher societal esteem than other economic activities in the Tamil and Sinhalese rural society. This key issue of profitability and attractiveness of paddy cultivation versus highland cultivation and wage labouring will be further investigated in the second field phase of the IFSP-CATAD Project.

Example 2: Impact of Institutional Arrangements for Land Use Rights

Land use rights are a sensitive issue in the Trincomalee District. Displacement and migration has left a lot of land resources abandoned and fallow. Furthermore, it is more and more difficult to settle land disputes, in particular, if an ethnic dimension is involved. We could observe in several research locations that the respective government institutions officially in charge of settling land rights issues, were reluctant to take over their responsibilities. The behaviour of these key actors might be shaped by a 'no action' or 'least resistance' strategy in view of the politicised and ethnicised nature of the topic. At the same time, it was observed that formal land laws and regulations are not properly applied or even informally relaxed which leads to a situation that different rules of the game apply for different people. People themselves respond with their own strategies to gain influence on these processes. Alliances with key players and power holders are essential to derive personal benefits, to receive a legalised document for (possibly illegally) acquired land resources. While some groups have closer networks with politicians and the security forces (Muslims, Sinhalese people), others can rely more on the administrative players (Tamils) and in some cases the LTTE (in uncleared area).

The relaxation of existing legislation could have encouraged poor people in some areas to encroach abandoned land and thus creating facts (utilising and occupying land). They might assume that the institutions in charge will hardly take action against them or that, at a later stage, they might be able to gain political or administrative support for their case (improving their political capital).

These two aspects of structures and processes in land use rights result in outcomes, which are not inductive for long-term investment in agricultural production: The lack of transparency in land use rights (who owns which land?) and the uncertainty and insecurity of land use rights and titles in the long run could refrain people from sustainable land resource utilisation. It is unclear what rules would apply if landowners return to their land, which is currently under cultivation by encroachers (with possibly a strong link to power holders).

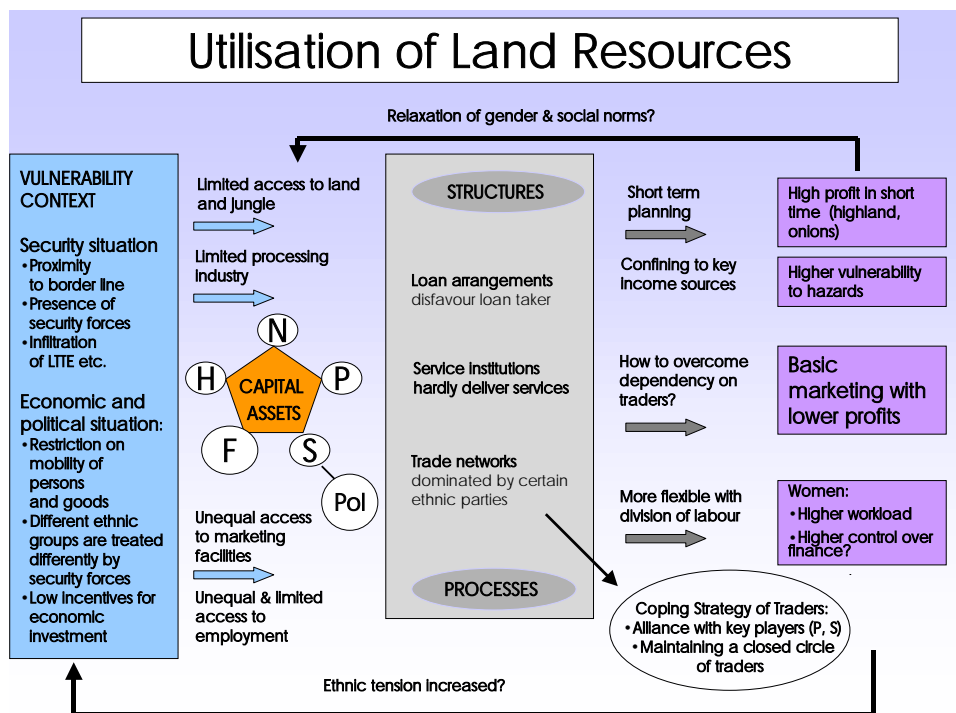
The political capital (access to power holders) rather than the formal legislation and laws determines largely who gains access to land resources and who can even legalise his/her case. This could in the long run undermine the trust of the population in the legal institutions in charge of defining and settling land use rights. The research team is concerned that the lack of accountability and transparency of institutional

arrangements in land use rights could be a further obstacle to settle the ethnic grievances, now, and in a post-conflict period.³

Example 3: Utilisation of Land Resources

Chart 4 looks into the physical utilisation of land resources. The economic and political situation in the district has resulted in unequal access to employment and to marketing facilities for different communal groups. Furthermore, the conflict situation prevents entrepreneurs to invest in economic assets, while limiting the access to certain natural resources (see above).

Chart 4: Utilisation of Land Resources



Source: IFSP-CATAD 2001

The model assesses the implications of loan arrangements, the weak service institutions and the oligopolised trade networks (a limited number of traders dominate) on economic coping strategies of farmers. We would like to concentrate on a few observations with regard to coping mechanisms: The security restrictions and the limited marketing opportunities push people to concentrate on key income sources, while they neglect (or are unable to perform) side-activities for income generation or subsistence. This leaves them more vulnerable to natural (and political) hazards. The dependence on a trade oligopoly, which is dominated by one ethnic group, leaves farmers with a very low profit, while, at least, basic marketing is possible at all. The common perception of farmers on the exploitative nature of economic relations with traders (unfavourable loans, low prices) could in the long run

³ Schrijvers (1997) describes the tension and violence in the Tamil-Muslim relationship. Land issues appear to have been of particular concern in the past, while nowadays, the Muslim dominance in trade networks might come to the forefront of interethnic perceptions in the East.

increase ethnic grievances and dividing lines. People perceive that certain ethnic groups utilise their closer relations with security forces to establish or strengthen a trade network.

Another important aspect is the relaxation of gender roles and division of labour. It allows households a higher flexibility in using their human capital. Goodhand & Lewer (1999) have elaborated how these changes are partly forced by the security situation (young men are reluctant to pass checkpoints, thus women take over marketing and transport tasks), while it could also be a general trend observed in other parts of the island. In the analytical framework of the livelihood system approach, the relaxation of gender roles strengthens the human resources available to a household (human capital), since it provides (a) greater flexibility in making use of family labour sources, and (b) increases thus the total available labour resources. Detrimental effects could be that workload is increased for women, and that children's family care is neglected if mothers work abroad and children live with relatives.

7 PILLARS OF COPING STRATEGIES

The research team analysed and compared coping strategies of conflict-affected communities in the five research locations in order to derive common and antagonistic features of dealing with the vulnerability context. We assessed different activities and linked these to the underlying rationale (why do people behave in a certain way?).

In a preliminary attempt, we derived seven main pillars (see Box 3) of coping strategies. These seven pillars describe the main rationales for common behavioural pattern. The same rationale, nevertheless, will lead to different coping strategies according to the prevailing vulnerability context and the structures and processes in each respective location. It should be emphasised that this is still to be considered a preliminary distinction of behavioural pattern. It might always be possible to find contradicting examples to any of these identified rationales.

The seven pillars are:

Box 3: Seven Pillars of Coping Strategies in Complex Emergencies:

- (1) Risk minimisation
- (1) Hiding economic facts
- (1) Migration
- (1) Seeking alliances with power holders
- (1) Handling roles and tasks flexibly
- (1) Satisfying claims of armed actors
- (1) Cash bias

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- (1) *Risk minimisation*: could be an overriding rationale of most of the strategies and their rationale described above. We distinguish three areas of risk minimisation: (i) minimising risk of life; (ii) minimising risk of economic loss, and (iii) outsourcing economic risk. Box 4 elaborates on the various aspects of risk minimisation and observed behavioural pattern.
- (2) *Hiding economic facts*: Many respondents tried to play down their economic (and social) status in interviews in order not to lose the entitlement for state support. This seems to be a common feature, which many development agencies face in their field work. It is difficult for them to derive a clear picture of wealth and resources in a community.

Box 4: Risk minimisation – an overriding rationale of coping?

Risk minimisation seems to be an overriding rationale for a large part of the coping strategies of conflict-affected communities and households. Many socio-economic activities can be attributed to this line of risk avoidance. We distinguish:

(1) *Minimising risk of life*: People try to avoid activities, which could be deemed dangerous for their life as far as this is feasible in the prevailing situation. The following behaviour and strategies can be attributed to this rationale:

- limited use of jungle resources (dangerous access)
- sending children outside of village
- residing outside of the village while only returning for cultivation
- hiring outside labourers (Muslims) who are less endangered of attacks by the conflict parties
- working on field in groups
- young men avoiding passage of checkpoints (replaced by female household members)
- relying on trade networks of Muslims who can more easily cross army checkpoints.

(1) *Minimising risk of economic loss*: people have often faced displacement and destruction of assets. Many families now avoid taking large investment or invest in movable items. Nevertheless, we have also observed features contradicting this trend (e.g. house building in Iththikulam which is close to a formerly very disputed borderline):

- Less investment in housing (risk of destruction)
- Less investment in big boats (risk of loss)
- Highland cultivation (low investment, family labour) instead of paddy cultivation
- Preference for savings in the form of small movable items which can be easily sold (jewellery rather than cattle)

(1) *Outsourcing economic risk*: The research team could observe a tendency of vulnerable families to outsource cultivation and marketing risks to others. In Iththikulam, many farmers preferred continuing highland cultivation (low input) and wage labouring against taking investment risk as tenant cultivator in paddy lands. In Kumpurupitty, poor households rented their land out and preferred to work as wage labourers instead of engaging themselves in the risky, but high profit business of onion cultivation.

- Preference for wage labouring instead of tenant cultivation
- Renting out own land and while working as wage labourer
- Relying on existing trade relations of Muslims who face less restrictions and risks in moving goods and persons.

- (3) *Migration*: We can distinguish forced and voluntary migration. While the first is mainly associated with displacement of villages due to the security situation, either for a short or a longer period, it can also result in permanent migration of some people to other areas in Sri Lanka or abroad. Voluntary migration is often economically driven: People escape from limited to more promising economic and labour opportunities (Middle East, Colombo). This is a common coping strategy of rural households in whole Sri Lanka (see Dunham and Edwards 1997; Shanmugaratnam 2001), however the conflict might have sharpened the push factor for labour migration (limited economic prospects in the NEP).
- (4) *Seeking alliances with power holders*: While explaining coping strategies in land use, we referred already to the strategy of various social and strategic groups to seek a close rapport with civil or military key actors and power holders in order to achieve a favourable relaxation of laws and regulations (security restrictions, land rights etc.). While this might again be a common strategy of rural population in Sri Lanka due to the political system of patronage, it becomes particularly dangerous in the context of a war zone, since it defines access to the various power groups largely through ethnic alignments. In Trincomalee, this means that Muslims and Sinhalese can draw on a good rapport with politicians (3 MPs are Muslim, one MP is Sinhalese) and the armed forces, while the Tamil population might be better rooted within the administrative apparatus and could also bring in LTTE as a potential means of threat. It was observed with concern that this system of politico-economic patronage continues to fuel ethnic grievances and dividing lines!⁴
- (5) *Satisfying claims of armed actors*: People face many forced financial claims from armed actors in their daily economic life: bribery claims by armed forces, taxation by LTTE and other forms of an economic market of violence (cf. Elwert 1997) are common particularly in the borderline areas. People largely fulfil these claims in order to be able to continue their economic activities. This political economy, however, spreads fear and deepens ethnic segregation even further.

⁴ In Vaddam, the research team observed another strategy: avoidance of alliances: Muslim villagers purposively denied an employment as home guards to avoid an escalation with LTTE. Vaddam is a village located close to the borderline in Muthur DS division.

- (6) *Handling roles and tasks flexibly*: The security and conflict situation places a heavy burden on households how to handle mobility restrictions. Young Tamil men are particularly disadvantaged, since security forces easily suspect them as LTTE supporters. That is why women had to take a more prominent role in trading and transporting goods over borderlines exposing them more to economic and social life. This phenomenon has been widely referred to (e.g. Goodhand and Lewer 1999). In addition, we could also observe that households send females abroad for employment. Are traditional and religious norms in the Tamil and Muslim societies, which might not favour or even sanction such behaviour, are consciously relaxed in order to gain an economic advantage? Again, we can observe this phenomenon also in other areas of Sri Lanka.
- (7) *Cash bias versus subsistence economy*: In contrast to our ex-ante expectations, we could identify a certain cash bias in the economic survival strategies. This feature was observed in Iththikulam (uncleared area) where farmers preferred to continue highland cultivation (cash crops) combined with wage labouring instead of returning to the socially more acknowledged tenant paddy cultivation (mainly subsistence cultivation). At the same time, some farmers utilised part of their cash earning to build houses in their traditional villages (as a means to increase their social status?). In Kumpurupitty, farmers have a high preference for short-term high profit crops (onion) and for wage labouring instead of subsistence production. This observation was surprising especially in uncleared areas where the research team expected that the mobility restriction imposed by the security forces would let people return to subsistence cultivation rather than to a cash-based economy with trading links crossing the borderlines. It is unclear, whether a barter system of goods exchange might gain a higher importance during periods of severe restrictions on mobility of goods and people.

Apart from the seven main pillars, the research team identified 2 extra pillars (Box 5), whose significance and validity in the research context remained debatable and will be subject of further investigation for the second field phase:

- *Has reliance on family bond increased?* It is often assumed that one coping strategy in times of distress and conflict is to increase family bonds and to rely more on the extended family.
- *Re-orienting priorities for investment?* Do people invest in other assets than they would do in peace times? One assumption is that they avoid large-scale investment or that they avoid investment at all, while saving in the form of jewellery (mobile assets)

Box 5: Two Extra Pillars?

(A) Has reliance on family bonds increased?

(A) Re-orienting priorities of investment?

The IFSP-CATAD team found information favouring as well as disfavouring these two hypotheses, and will further investigate their validity in the second field phase. At this point, we would like to emphasise again that the results from the first field phase are preliminary and subject to further confirmation or rejection in the second field phase. In addition, we do not claim to be representative for the whole district or the Northeast. The case studies are understood as spotlights to highlight certain features, identify starting points for further research, and provide IFSP with some in-depth knowledge on behavioural pattern and the rationale behind to adjust its participatory community development approach.

DISCUSSION:

Three Key Questions:

As departing point for discussion, the research team presented three key questions posed to the discussion round at the mid-term review workshop. These key questions should stimulate discussion, involving experiences from other areas of Sri Lanka and giving comparative evidence from various perspectives: what is specific for the war-torn areas and which might be general trends in societal changes? The three key questions were discussed in working groups and then fed back to the plenary.

(1) Are the trends we observe caused by attitudinal changes or by force (fear)?

- more prominent role of women
- cash bias versus subsistence
- day-to-day survival versus long-term horizon
- high profit in short term

We raised this issue with the particular question in mind: *Will people continue with this behavioural pattern in peace times?*

The discussion round did agree that most of the changes were circumstantial and therefore, interpreted to be forced by the prevailing vulnerability context. Some of the above changes can also be observed in other regions of Sri Lanka (i.e. change in gender roles, cash bias), however, the question remains in how far they would have occurred in the traditional societies of the Northeast without the external push of conflict and violence. With regard to a post-conflict period, the discussion round found it difficult to formulate any hypothesis, but stressed that behavioural changes will depend on dynamic conditions of peace and the degree of changes occurring. The question of how people will be able to cope up with a peace context or capture the peace dividend is an important topic arising at other discussion circles as well (cf. IFSP 2001).

(2) How far do alliances of certain groups with power holders (in regulating land use rights) undermine the public trust in legal institutions? (In how far is the implementation of legal procedures undermined by alliances with power holders?)

It seems that an illegal handling of land use rights is commonly observed in Sri Lanka. What gives it a specific 'explosive' nature in Trincomalee is the ethnicisation of the issue. With regard to people's attitudes, it was hypothesised that people have some trust in governmental institutions, since these issue all kinds of important documents, while people would as well remain sceptical with the existing institutional arrangements.

- How can IFSP support investment in cultivation under uncertain land use rights without doing harm?

Bilateral development co-operation has basically two options for involving in land use: (i) acting with the agreement and full support of the responsible government partner, or (ii) doing nothing. It was stressed that development

agencies should avoid involving themselves in grey zones where they would replace the responsible government institution in handling legal issues. In the context of Trincomalee, it was observed that the various government institutions on local and regional levels avoid taking responsibility for taking action (issuing documents, enforcing laws and regulations). Nevertheless, the laws and regulations give clear responsibility to specific institutions, and the signatories of documents can clearly be held responsible.

Development agencies (and IFSP) should encourage and even force the respective institutions to take over their specific responsibilities. An important part of development co-operation is to support accountability of local authorities. Agencies should refrain from taking action themselves even though this might retard project implementation. It was pointed out that in case of conflicts arising, it is essential that development agencies can clearly track the responsibility for earlier decision to the local authorities, which allows the agency more easily to support a settling of conflicts.

Furthermore, it was proposed that projects should strengthen the lobbying capacities of target groups (village-level) to voice their interests, while the project could at the same time urge service providers and government institutions to take over their responsibilities. In the context of displacement, we, however, wonder how displaced people (who are physically absent) can lobby for their interests in their absence. In this case, strengthening lobbies of target groups might rather support encroachers than displaced landowners, thus possibly contributing to an escalation of the situation.

With regard to IFSP, it was emphasised that a thorough analysis of *actual* land use rights (actual land occupation versus land ownership, tenancy) should receive more attention in the feasibility reports for tank rehabilitation. The World Bank funded Northeast Irrigated Agriculture Project (NEIAP) faces similar constraints in its tank rehabilitation programme, and follows the policy of 'no-action' in case of encroachment. The different players in tank rehabilitation (and other land-related development activities) should find a common understanding of how to deal with land use right issues, and develop a joint strategy how to incorporate the responsible local governance structures.

- How can IFSP contribute to re-establish trust into local institutional arrangements?

The question was discussed in the context of capacity building for service providers (government institutions and NGOs). IFSP and other projects should concentrate on improving existing procedures and institutional processes (the software). IFSP itself emphasises institutional strengthening mainly through two means: (i) material and logistical support, and (ii) training (on-the-job, courses, concept development). It was agreed that the second pillar of capacity building might be more sustainable in the long run.

(3) *Why do vulnerable people in certain areas convert forced changes into opportunities while in other areas, they remain in a trap?*

- Kumpurupitty case: abandoned resources, but marginal people remain marginal (wage labourers).
- Iththikulam case: displaced farmers utilise highland cultivation to re-establish their economic and social status.

Deriving clear cause-effect relationships would be a demanding task. The working group identified a few factors, which might have triggered different behavioural pattern: In the case of Iththikulam, the situation left few alternatives for cultivation, which then turned out to generate more income than traditional cultivation pattern. Even though situated in uncleared area, the village is less a vulnerable area with regard to conflict and security compared to the non-stabilised region in Kumpurupitty and Nilaveli. Villagers in Kumpurupitty might feel particularly under stress due to the volatile frame conditions, which might urge them to avoid risk taking and limit their interest in investment. However, it remains unclear why then people in Nilaveli are ready to invest heavily in risky businesses (onion) in these areas.

➤ *Where should IFSP focus on (with its limited resources)?*

It was understood that institutional capacity building would be essential. A main contribution of projects such as IFSP could be to support people staying in their own village by contributing to stabilising living conditions. In addition, project intervention should open up new avenues for people by linking them to financial support (which kind?) and providing incentives for investment. It should be emphasised, here, that this should not result in a further increase of the dependency syndrome, which undermines self-initiative, since people expect outsiders to support and work for them.

It was discussed where IFSP could achieve a greater impact of its measures. What are the critical points towards positive changes within village societies? The livelihood system approach (LSA) supports such line of thinking, since it looks at the potential and coping strategies of people. In the end, the discussion round felt unable to give a clear-cut answer to the question: Should IFSP concentrate to support winners (to induce economic development) or vulnerable people (to mitigate suffering)?

Is the Livelihood Systems Approach a Useful Tool for Analysis?

The plenary discussed in how far the livelihood system approach (LSA) could be a useful instrument for:

- Conducting action- and decision-oriented poverty research?
- Supporting (IFSP) field staff in needs assessment and community mobilisation?
- Providing information and deriving policy recommendations for decision makers?

Participants also pointed to the importance of environmental effects (feedback loop) for assessing the sustainability of livelihoods. It was noted that communication between scientists, decision makers and target groups would be essential to sensitise all involved actors about environmental problems. It could be added that the conflict has left its own mark on the environment (deforestation for bunkers etc.).

The research team feels that the LSA was instrumental in deriving a research methodology, key questions for research, and could also serve as a framework for village research: If the different elements and their linkages are clearly understood, the LSA model can substitute for detailed questionnaires while interviewing people. In addition, the LSA provides a broader view on the complexity of village life, while still offering sufficient simplifications to be able to derive an understandably simple 'picture' of the forces, rationale, linkages and impacts of human behaviour in a community. Furthermore, the philosophy of LSA stresses strengths and potentials of people rather than analysing problems and needs. This could become an innovative concept of approaching community development work in contrast to the wide-spread line of thinking in poverty research and alleviation programmes, which tend to look at problems and constraints. Nevertheless, with all respect, the LSA should always be understood as a servant rather than a master!

OUTLOOK:

Key issues for further assessment

The plenary raised several issues, which could receive more attention in the second field phase of the IFSP-CATAD Project 2001:

- How far are behavioural patterns culturally rooted? This refers particularly to the changing role of women in society. Which changes are due to the conflict situation? It was also proposed to look at possibly differing perceptions among men and women about the changing gender roles.
- How do trends observed in Trincomalee compare with research results from other regions of Sri Lanka? Are trends in poverty comparable between the (North)east and other parts of Sri Lanka?⁵
- What are the trends related to the vulnerability of youth? Young people grow up in a culture of violence, while themselves being especially vulnerable to violence (being suspected as LTTE supporters, harassment, torture, rape). How does this affect coping strategies of households, and what implications does this have for the future development of youth and children (education, psycho-social distress, hopelessness).

The plenary furthermore proposed to develop a matrix of research results including a methodological reflection (what is (in)appropriate in the context of a war-torn research region?). For IFSP and partners, it could also be useful to document good and bad practices (especially related to handling land use rights) for future reference.

⁵ The World Bank notes a common increase in poverty in recent years with the exception of the Western Province with the Colombo metropolitan area (cf. World Bank 2000). Is conflict the cause of poverty in the East or is it a common trend, whose roots might be macro-economic in nature?

Outlook:

In the second field phase, the research team will focus on filling knowledge gaps and complement and confirm preliminary findings. The team will also feed more information on village findings into the livelihood models and work out comparative village profiles. Livelihood models are not derived 'under the tree', but in interactive research with people and resource persons.

In order to achieve institutional sustainability, the community mobilisers (CM) of IFSP will be more involved in field research during the second phase. In an evaluative workshop, CM and the IFSP-CATAD team will derive suitable tools for fieldwork, which take the experience with LSA into account. The second important pillar will be to discuss research findings with IFSP and partners and analyse the policy implications for project interventions. This should stimulate reflection within the institutions to develop appropriate services and interventions.

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