REPORT

Capacity-Building in Conflict Zones

A Feminist Analysis of Humanitarian Assistance in Sri Lanka

Malathi de Alwis
Jennifer Hyndman

Cover Photograph

Clothesline Project organized by Suriya Women's Development Centre, Batticaloa to raise awareness regarding violence against women in the context of ethnic conflict.

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Introduction

At the end of 2000, more than 22 million people worldwide were displaced within their country of origin, a figure far larger than the total number (14.5 million) of refugees (Immigration and Refugee Service of America, 2001). Since 1991, the provision of protection and assistance to displaced persons has moved from neutral countries adjacent to the source country of conflict into states hosting the conflict. In turn, this has generated an expanded role for both UN agencies and NGOs that now work regularly within 'unstable' regions. Beginning in Iraq, in 1991, the UN Security Council began authorizing humanitarian aid and peacekeepers for countries experiencing conflict. Operation Provide Comfort established "safe havens" inside Northern Iraq where UN peacekeepers ensured the safety of displaced Kurds assisted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). About the same time, "Open Relief Centres" (ORCs) were set up inside Sri Lanka to stem the tide of refugees from Sri Lanka to India and elsewhere, by providing assistance closer to home to those adversely affected by fighting. While not sanctioned by the UN Security Council nor secured by UN peacekeepers, the ORCs are part of post-Cold War pattern of assisting those displaced by conflict 'at home', rather than as refugees. In a sense, all of Sri Lanka has become an ORC, given the widespread presence and large-scale operations throughout the country. The success of these interventions has been somewhat mixed in places like Srebrenica and Rwanda; however, the sizeable and on-going presence of humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies in locations such as Sri Lanka suggests that they are here for the duration of the conflict.

This critical shift towards the management of displacement within national borders has also engendered an increased concern about 'capacity-building.' Capacity-building in this context is defined as "any intervention

designed either to reinforce or create strengths upon which communities can draw to offset disaster-related vulnerability" (Lautze & Hammond 1996: 2). The significance of institutional capacity building — international intervention and collaboration to develop stronger and more numerous local NGOs to meet existing needs— is key because it aims to resist the strong tendency towards charity or compassion filtered through a colonial past. In theory, successful institutional capacity building should render international agencies unnecessary during anything but the emergency phase of a humanitarian crisis. Despite being a recent addition to humanitarian parlance, capacity-building is not a new concept or practice. Our project sought to build upon pre-existing work on this subject by focusing on two central themes: (1) the relationship between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local non-governmental organizations (LNGOs), and the particular organizational cultures that each produced; and (2) the relationship between NGOs and their beneficiaries (and oftentimes whole communities).

This broad framework of exploring institutional capacity-building was further contextualized through the analysis of humanitarian programmes, projects, and initiatives that focused particularly on gender. Just as nationalism is a gendered project, so too is humanitarianism (de Alwis 2002, Hyndman 2000). The language and practice of nationalism construct women in particular ways: they tend to be subordinate to men but also critical symbols of male power. This power and pride is undermined, for example, when one ethnic group rapes women from another ethnic community. Such violence can be conceived as fighting nationalist battles on the bodies of women, acts which are not uncommon in the Sri Lankan conflict. Similarly, in locations where groups are identified as 'vulnerable', rape is more likely to occur because social norms and stability have broken down.

Ironically, however, ethnic conflict can also enable the redefinition of woman's place within society (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1998). Just as the fictional 'Rosie the Riveter' represented the new possibilities for women during wartime, so too are Sri Lankan women faced with new roles and spaces posed by the on-going conflict and war. We should add, however, that such change does not necessarily benefit women. Our research suggests that women increasingly lead single-parent families, often becoming the sole income earner when menfolk are absent. The consequences of war, especially displacement, are profoundly gendered. Both men and women are adversely affected in distinctive ways. While our research did not focus on the feminization of poverty, anecdotal evidence suggests that this process is in operation in many of the regions most affected by displacement due to war.

However, it is clear that conflict destabilizes social relations both negatively and positively. On the positive side, the option for NGOs to train young women in unconventional trades and skills can be more viable during such periods of change. The training of women mechanics, for example, something unheard of before the war, was reported both in LTTE-controlled areas and in Government-controlled areas. In the Wanni, fuel restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) have reduced the availability of basic mechanized transport. Accordingly, over the years, women have begun to ride bicycles in parts of the country where such behaviour would not have been condoned before the war. So, women's mobility has changed, even if it may be more restricted overall (de Alwis 2002).

In addition to increased potential violence against women, problems related to household income and access to health care also tend to become accentuated during conditions of conflict and displacement. We therefore decided to assess the existing resources and potential for institutional 'capacity building' in three areas that frequently come under the rubric

of NGOs: (1) the promotion of income security options which serve to stabilize household economies and provide some form of economic independence to women; (2) the prevention of violence against women and support for those affected; and (3) the provision of health services and information to women.

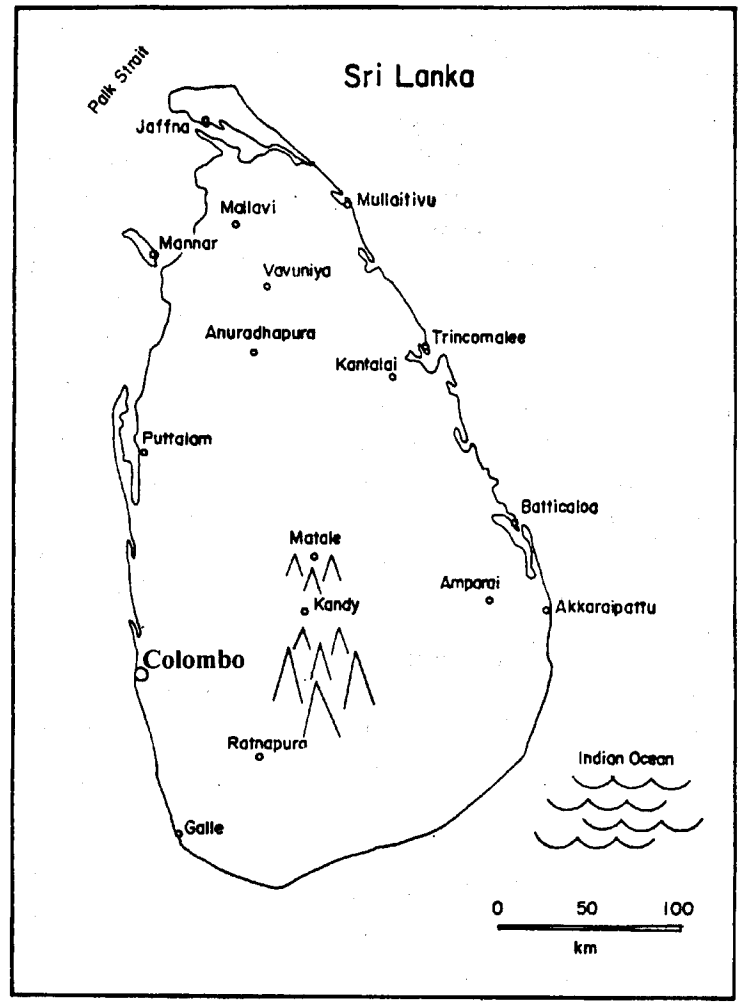
Situating Sri Lanka

A comprehensive account of political conflict and conditions in Sri Lanka is not possible here nor necessary. Numerous Sri Lankan and Sri Lankanist scholars whose work span several decades, have provided incisive analyses about developments within the country. Sri Lanka's present is an expression of a long history of conflict and struggle (Abeysekera & Gunasinghe (eds) 1987, Committee for Rational Development (ed) 1984, Jayawardena 1985, Jeganathan & Ismail (eds) 1995, Spencer (ed) 1990). Indeed, the specificities of place and the histories of the country are vital and provide a crucial backdrop against which any humanitarian programme or project should be conceptualized.

The political construction of ethnic identity and gendered nationalism in Sri Lanka has been traced and debated by a number of scholars (de Alwis 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996, Hellman-Rajanayagam 1990, Ismail 1992, 1995, Jayawardena 1986, 1992, 1995, Jeganathan 1998, 2000, Maunaguru 1995). These analyses inform the political developments which make up Sri Lanka's more recent history while also highlighting the importance of ethnic nationalism and its role in state-building in Sri Lanka.

The civil war in Sri Lanka, which has been raging for the past twenty years, has spawned large-scale displacement within the country (*see **figure 1***). Government statistics suggest that there are approximately 800,000 internally displaced persons, though numbers vary and tend to be lower

Figure 1: Map of Sri Lanka



according to international organizations. The death toll now exceeds 60,000. Mass displacement, multiple displacements, long-term displacement, and attacks on communities of displaced persons amid militarization across Sri Lanka present massive challenges to both national and international organizations positioned to address the human needs they generate. The government-controlled 'cleared'/'unliberated' areas (depending on who you ask) which stand in contrast to the LTTE-controlled 'uncleared'/'liberated' areas are spaces that continually shift and frontlines that are ever-evolving in these 'border areas.' Displaced persons exist on both sides of these lines, and encompass Tamil, Sinhala, and Muslim groups, though the majority of displaced persons in Sri Lanka are Tamil. Displacement has occurred more than once for many households; we heard one report of a woman who was displaced 19 times. Those affected by displacement are the focus of humanitarian assistance in the country, and assessing the modalities of delivering that assistance constituted the basis of our project.

To compare the colonizing powers of Sri Lanka (Portuguese, Dutch, then British), or even the missionaries who visited the country, with the international humanitarian organizations that are currently located in Sri Lanka is to risk overstating the latter's influence in a country governed by an elected government, but their respective aims are not dissimilar. The provision of social and economic infrastructure is an on-going objective of international NGOs, such as CARE, CIDA (Canadian Development Agency), FORUT, HIVOS, MSF (Holland and France), OXFAM, Save the Children (UK, USA & Norway), WUSC (World University Services of Canada), and others operating in Sri Lanka.

Activities that would normally be provided by other sources in peacetime, such as education, vocational training, health service, and income generation projects for people in places adversely affected by the war, are implemented by

international NGOs in concert with local and national non-governmental organizations. Considerable resources for these services are provided to nationally-based NGOs by the international NGOs. This is not a bad thing in and of itself. But the relations of power embedded in these projects must be more self-consciously analyzed, if any strong sense of accountability to Sri Lankan civil society, its nationally-based organizations with expertise and experience in such areas, and its governing bodies is to be forged.

While NGOs and UN agencies do not consciously attempt to reproduce power relations of the past, their terms of reference and the basis of their engagement with individual beneficiaries or targeted communities often do so. Based on research into a large national NGO in Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya/m, Stirrat (1999: 70) has argued that the new orthodoxy of popular participatory development approaches represents a kind of 'Neo-Orientalism.' By this, the author suggests that a 'community', 'village', or 'local people' are defined by external agents, as in the colonial period, as in need of assistance, and while 'they' should participate in any humanitarian and/or development projects, there is an implicit distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Stirrat argues that "a series of cookbooks have replaced individually developed skills and knowledge" (Ibid: 79-80), and that international agencies working in Sri Lanka fail to see that change is not simply a matter of improving techniques. Capacity-building, then, is not simply a technique based on a handbook of generic practices that aim to improve a place or people. It must strengthen livelihoods and civil society's institutions in such a way that the distinction between 'us' and 'them' is eliminated.

In this vein, we have misgivings about the term 'beneficiary', a concept widely used in humanitarian and development circles in Sri Lanka. Beneficiary implies that one is a [needy] recipient of services or goods, not necessarily an

autonomous actor whose livelihood may be temporarily undermined. While we use the term beneficiary in this report, following common practice, we suggest that all agencies revisit the meaning and impact of this usage, and determine whether it resonates with agency objectives.

Capacity Building in War Zones

Capacity-building is a means of engaging and strengthening existing knowledge and skills to render people's livelihoods more secure. It implies outside intervention to augment or restore the well-being of persons adversely affected by any number of factors, including war, displacement, ecological disaster, or state-sponsored dispossession. Capacity-building builds on but departs from 'development' in a number of key ways: (1) it acknowledges the prior existence of economic relations and modes of making a living that can be strengthened or restored, rather than fixed by foreign expertise and (2) it implies a time-limited intervention on the part of those providing the external assistance, assuming that sustainable livelihoods can either be restored or created in situ with appropriate planning.

These are important departures from the development project, which stems largely from the coincidence of decolonization and Cold War posturing after the second World War. The development project was (and is) very much a geopolitical project, as well as a social and economic one, about the East (or South) by the West (or North). Development was, in its conception, a script written by the most powerful capitalist countries for the newly independent 'Third World' or non-aligned countries. It was, in this sense, orientalist (Said 1978): a project about the 'East' by and ostensibly for the West. Arturo Escobar (1995) has long argued that 'development' is a self-interested project in which the West

defines the paths of change for the less fortunate, and then selectively provides resources for this 'progress' to be realized. A strong interpretation of Escobar's argument is that 'development' is a neo-colonial project by the West to help more unfortunate societies become more like [successful] Western ones. Like colonialism, development is a well-intentioned, even humanitarian, project with social, political, and economic objectives.

As a humanitarian response, capacity-building aims to address deficiencies within displaced populations, or at least disruptions to their livelihoods, to which outside expertise, experience, or resources can be added to ameliorate the situation. Such objectives may be well-meaning and practical in peacetime, but they become highly politicized in a war zone. Displaced populations on all sides of the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka, for example, may be 'taxed' by governing parties, such as the LTTE or the Sri Lankan government, to provide resources for on-going fighting. The restoration of livelihoods, in such a context, is much less straightforward than the concept of capacity-building to increase social and economic security in peacetime.

Capacity-building also aims to augment and improve upon skills, experience, and resources already situated in a given location. The idea that support for something as innocuous as education could become support for militarization is difficult to comprehend in such a context. Parents in LTTE-controlled areas of Sri Lanka have avoided sending their children to school because it is considered a training and recruitment ground for the Tiger rebel group. This is no unfounded fear for there have been instances where entire classes of students have disappeared to serve as LTTE cadres under the leadership of their teachers.

Both of these scenarios illustrate the politicization of what might be considered capacity-building practices. Similar arguments can also be posed towards many of the capacity-

building projects that are being run in the government-controlled areas that have enabled the state to pour money into the defense industry in the secure knowledge that the disbursement of education, health, social services etc is being facilitated by humanitarian agencies.

One must be vigilant, then, and extremely careful about the ways in which conventional development practices are transposed onto a highly politicized conflict zone, where the welfare of civilians is being negotiated on a constant basis. For example, the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA), a common assessment tool in development circles, is highly questionable in the Wanni area of Northern Sri Lanka. PRA employs a methodology that involves the collection of household data, including the number of family members, their livelihoods, the household assets and income in terms of land, livestock, and earnings. It includes family names and a 'social map' of who lives where, with whom, and owns what. Such information in the hands of the LTTE for the purposes of monitoring the current military training and recruitment campaign could be disastrous. Aside from 'Neo-Orientalist' concerns voiced earlier, such information in the hands of the armed forces can also be dangerous particularly in the increasingly hostile and suspicious climate that reigns in the Eastern Province (exacerbated after the assassination attempts on the Sri Lankan President and the Prime Minister during the latter half of 1999) where every Tamil person is perceived as a potential 'terrorist.' The Eastern Province has of late been constructed in the media, and popular discourses more generally, as the place of origin of many male and female bombers who have 'infiltrated' Colombo.

Accountability

In order to be accountable to the people one aims to assist, the concept and practice of capacity-building must be linked

to the geopolitics of conflict, the catalysts of displacement, and the uneven impact that dislocation has across differences of gender, class, caste, and ethnic identity. By this, we do not mean that the sharing of resources proportionately among competing factions to the conflict is sufficient, i.e., one should help all sides in order to remain neutral and apolitical. Rather, the political crisis in Sri Lanka cannot be separated from the humanitarian crisis it generates. On-going consultations with displaced persons throughout Sri Lanka, collated by OXFAM, Great Britain and Save the Children, UK in the Listening to the Displaced reports, raise a salient point: people's needs, concerns, and material well-being would not be an issue if the war could be stopped and their livelihoods restored. The mobility of people and goods is highly restricted because of the war, a pattern that distorts markets and prevents access for many to better jobs and educational opportunities. Political solutions are critical to the success of capacity-building in terms of the long term security of people's livelihoods.

There can be no single recipe for capacity-building. That is, no module or training manual can provide all of the political information, conceptual categories, and cultural capital necessary for the successful implementation of practices that augment the existing foundations and skills of all places. Context matters: the historically and geographically constituted grounds for conflict that precipitate humanitarian intervention have to be understood and addressed before such efforts can be genuinely effective. If local and/or national actors in humanitarian efforts have no space to engage and shape the concept and practice of capacity-building in situ, it risks becoming just another Western project. The contingencies of a particular humanitarian crisis, of cultural politics, and of place reconstitute meaning and implication at a range of scales. Advocates of capacity-building, or any other humanitarian activity, can ignore this only at their peril.

South Asian intellectuals have for many years now written critically of how knowledge about themselves, their histories, and their regions has been produced and disseminated under various regimes of power and authority, be it colonialist or developmentalist (Chimni, 1998). The Subaltern School of historians in India (and those they have inspired) as well as feminist scholars in various parts of South Asia have played a central role in this endeavour of writing back, of producing their own knowledge of place and history and decolonizing (neo)colonial epistemologies of knowledge production (Chatterjee, 1986). Many of these intellectuals, several of whom are located in Sri Lanka, are also activists, journalists, lawyers and policy-makers and thus crucial opinion makers and breakers; they are the watch dogs of their societies who will insist on accountability if humanitarian organizations cease to provide it.

Senior staff implementing capacity-building have asked, "what is the value-added to work done by INGOs in conjunctions with local NGOs?" Genuine engagement between both parties (international and local) may be more cumbersome than working independently, but it is one of few measures of accountability to the places in which capacity-building takes place. International NGOs can ask at least two questions to ascertain their accountability in a broad sense:

(a) To what extent does the INGO impart skills and resources to its national counterparts and consult with them to render itself redundant over time? (Is it even possible for an INGO to be redundant in a conflict situation?)

(b) To what extent does the INGO render its national counterparts more sustainable, stable, and able organizations?

Accountability is a sensitive issue for humanitarian organizations precisely because those who fund and administer such agencies are not the same groups as those who receive their services. Unlike a democratic municipality, province, or nation-state whose constituents vote on policies, people, and programmes to govern them, the recipients of humanitarian assistance have less say as to what, how, or who will help them (despite the pro-active efforts of many NGOs that promote 'the right to a say'). Thus the accountability of both international and national organizations that provide such assistance is an even more critical issue.

Avoiding charitable relations between donors and recipients requires genuine engagement between international humanitarian agencies and their national counterparts. The onus is on the international agencies to initiate such contact; to respond to the expertise and experience of national staff in situ by allowing them to shape the meaning and practice of capacity-building at all levels; and to ensure that every effort is made to avoid arrogance, disinterest, or indifference on the part of international staff towards such local 'capacity'. To do so would be to reinscribe yet another round of neo-colonial power relations in countries already at war.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that the sustenance of such forms of accountability and capacity-building is not only an extremely complicated task but frequently derailed by political intervention. An INGO project officer articulated her frustration with such intrusions thus: "You can meet a local group, show them how you operate, what your expectations are, and let them see how they can use what you are offering. Just as they begin to flower, they are co-opted by the regime who install their own handlers, and you are back to zero again." Capacity-building in a conflict zone is always a politicized project requiring on-going negotiation.

Gender vs. Women

Since the institutionalization of "women in development" (WID) in the early 1970s (as a result of liberal feminist agitations globally), several permutations of this formulation has since been proposed, reformed and challenged. These can be most clearly charted through the paradigm shifts delineated by the now familiar acronyms WID, to WAD (women and development), to GAD (gender and development).[1] As Eva Rathberger has pointed out, the WID approach is linked closely with the modernization paradigm and "is understood to mean the integration of women *into* global processes of economic, political, and social growth and change" (p. 489, emphasis ours).

This approach which became the dominant paradigm for understanding women's roles in development in the early 1970s, shifted to a WAD approach in the late 1970s. The latter approach focused on the "relationship *between* women and development processes" rather than purely on strategies for the integration of women into development (p. 492, emphasis ours). GAD, influenced by socialist feminist critiques of the modernization paradigm, emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to the WID and WAD approaches. Instead of focusing on women per se, its central concern was the "social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to women and to men" (p. 494). GAD not only goes further in questioning the underlying assumptions of social, economic and political structures but in fact, "demands a degree of commitment to structural change and power shifts that is unlikely to be found

[1] For an extremely comprehensive discussion of these paradigms and their critiques as well as resolutions, see Lind 1995. See also Moser 1993 and Rathberger 1990.

either in national or international agencies" (p. 495). This commitment to structural and relational change is lost when agencies simply invoke the categories of 'women' or 'gender' in an effort to 'include' gender programming in their projects.

The transformative potential of the GAD paradigm is often diluted by organizations that maintain it is not practically applicable, especially in emergency situations where the provision of basic necessities such as food, shelter and sanitation are the priorities. Gender concerns are produced as a 'luxury' in such contexts. Once a situation is no longer defined as an 'emergency', it gets pushed up along the evolutionary ladder to 'rehabilitation' and finally, 'development'. In the latter two contexts, many NGOs, and humanitarian NGOs in particular, frequently bandy around the terms 'gender sensitizing' and 'gender mainstreaming.' Both these strategies, while taking into account the social construction of gender and the power relations which produce and are produced by such constructions, are often reduced to that of merely holding a couple of workshops on this subject for their staff (with rarely any follow ups), 'adding on' women beneficiaries or women's perspectives to their larger frameworks of intervention that remain unchanged and unproblematized.

What we wish to stress here is that every humanitarian project, in its design, method, evaluation, and impact, is gendered. For example, in the context of emergency relief, food stuff is handed to women and cadjans to men as it is implicitly understood that women will cook and the men will construct the temporary shelters. In the context of development, the fact that most income generation projects for women are those that enable them to work from or near home (i.e. poultry rearing, home gardening, sewing) already carries with it an implicit assumption that links women with the private and gendered sphere, the home. Similarly, stereotyped roles in society are perpetuated through the

training of women in particular kinds of skills and professions. They are more often taught sewing and weaving —appropriate feminine skills— rather than masonry or carpentry (although WUSC admirably attempts to provide such training). Women are encouraged to be nurses and typists —appropriate supportive roles— rather than doctors or office administrators. Therefore, to include 'gender balance' or a 'gender analysis' in the evaluation of a project, as some INGOs do, without making gender explicit and integrating it into the very conception of a project is to the miss the point.

It is crucial to keep in mind that 'gender' cannot be reduced to 'women'. Gender refers to a vast range of relations of power between men and women; between different (gendered) modes of providing services to displaced persons; and between distinct (gendered) outcomes of humanitarian interventions for displaced populations. Men and women are affected differently by war, just as they are affected differently by the antidotes, services, and interventions that are made in the name of humanitarian assistance. Women and other minority groups can be disadvantaged or even harmed by such activities or interventions if assistance is gender-blind, that is, based on the assumption that assistance will affect all displaced persons equally. Similarly, assumptions that do not differentiate the displacement experience of men and women may be at risk of lumping everyone into an often masculine/ masculinized norm, obfuscating the conditions and issues of women and/or other non-dominant groups.

However, to be 'gender sensitive' or 'gender balanced' should not merely mean to be exclusively focused on women. While women are frequently disadvantaged by some humanitarian programmes because they are less likely to speak out, or speak English, than their male counterparts, this does not mean that programmes in which women are the sole beneficiaries represent an adequate approach to addressing issues of gender inequality within the context of displacement.

In Sri Lanka, gender concerns are frequently reduced to a concern with women's, and particularly widows', welfare. Accordingly, credit schemes for 'widows' are numerous. The fact that women are identified as 'widows' and often pushed to take on such an identity, when their status might be much more ambiguous (their spouse might be missing or 'disappeared') in a society that stigmatizes such a familial status, is rarely problematized in these contexts.[2]

The reduction of gender concerns to women's welfare appears also to have led many humanitarian organizations to appoint women as gender coordinators. The particular gendering of this position produces several unfortunate consequences: (1) most gender coordinators end up working exclusively with women's groups and/or on women's projects, thus rarely interacting with male beneficiaries or being provided with opportunities to make men rethink and change unequal gender hierarchies that they might be perpetuating within Sri Lankan society; (2) in a context where no trained gender coordinator is available within the NGO, responsibility for 'gender' often devolves upon an untrained and uninterested woman programme officer because of the assumption that her womanhood automatically makes her sensitive to issues of gender; (3) it absolves field and programme officers who do not hold such a position from taking responsibility or being accountable to promoting gender equality in the programmes that they implement, and (4) gender is considered a 'soft' issue that does not require the apportioning of significant resources.

The latter point is further concretised through a commonly made argument by many international and national NGOs that things are better for women in Sri Lanka than

[2] Some NGOs, which preferred to give loans to women because they were considered better re-payers, would then try to spin this as an example of their gender sensitivity and balance when questioned about their gender policies.

elsewhere in South Asia, and therefore gender politics need not be an issue of concern. While it is true that Sri Lankan society is relatively free of practices such as female infanticide, honour killings, dowry deaths and sati —the usual bugbears of its neighbours – this does not mean that gender inequalities do not exist in the country or that sexual harassment, rape, incest and domestic violence are not part of the lived reality. For that matter, one could not argue that any society, in any part of the world, is free of such unsafe and unfair conditions for women. When deployed, such rationale for gender inaction only serves to reinforce the 'us'/'them' distinction.

What we are calling for here, then, is a feminist approach to gender and capacity-building that analyzes and integrates considerations of culture, location, and geopolitics. This more feminist approach allows more flexibility in assessment of need and programme development. Gender should not be prioritized ahead of ethnicity, nationality, caste, or class in all places nor at all times. Gender must be part of a flexible analytical package that international agencies use in collaborating with local and national partners, and that all NGOs employ in conducting programmes in areas affected by displacement.

Methodology

The research for this report was conducted during a period of approximately one and a half years, from January 1999 to July 2000. Our choice of field sites was based on the desire to capture the variety and complexity of different conflict zones in Sri Lanka. As a result, we decided to concentrate on the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara in the Eastern Province, the Wanni region in the north (including the city of Vavuniya) and the Puttalam district in the North Western

Province. We had originally hoped to include the city of Jaffna as well, but the challenge of transportation, clearance, and other logistics in the region soon convinced us that this would not be a productive venture. In each of the regions, we met with aid beneficiaries, non-aid beneficiaries, community leaders, members of CBOs (community based organizations), and senior and junior staff in the branch offices of both international and national (or local) NGOs. In Colombo, we conducted more formal interviews with country representatives and programme officers in the head offices of international and national NGOs, while also engaging in extensive library and archival research at these offices.

Our positioning as a bi-national team (North American geographer and a Sri Lankan anthropologist) proved to be particularly fruitful, frequently enabling differential access to people and places. Only the non-Sri Lankan researcher (as a guest of Oxfam) could visit the northern region of the Wanni. This highlights well the importance of nationality and ethnicity in terms of access to particular areas. Sri Lankans visiting Vavuniya were required to obtain passes on a daily basis so that the army could monitor their presence in the area. In a sense, then, displacement is not a static condition of people simply being away from their homes, but rather a prevailing condition affecting most Sri Lankans whose mobility, access, and security are always in question.

Due to the sensitivity of the political situation and the complexity of the issues addressed, the two researchers decided not to use a tape recorder. We also decided against the use of a formal questionnaire as we wished to provoke more free-flowing discussions and debates. We nevertheless took field notes, including specific details and quotes that came up in our conversations and meetings, in order to preserve the accuracy of our information. Much of our most interesting information, in fact, was gleaned in non-interview situations, at meal times, during vehicle travel, and on walks

through various project sites with LNGO representatives and local people affected by the projects. We did, however, establish a set of questions that we posed to all those involved in the dissemination of humanitarian aid and another set of questions which we posed to the beneficiaries of such aid. Given below is a sample of some of the questions we kept in mind throughout the implementation of our project:

(1) What are the existing modalities of service delivery by international humanitarian organizations in the three programme areas (violence prevention, women's health, and income generation)? To what extent do these modes of delivery contribute to the development of indigenous capacity to perform or deliver these services?

(2) Within the realm of humanitarian aid and operations, to what extent does 'local institutional capacity' exist? What policies and initiatives by international NGOs and UN agencies demonstrate capacity-building?

(3) How are NGOs, UN agencies, and other non-state actors, such as women's groups and independent research centres, positioned in relation to the conflict? Are they perceived as neutral, Tamil-focused, government-allied, etc.?

(4) How has humanitarian aid been used by recipients in Sri Lanka? Is there any evidence that it has extended or contributed to conflict?

(5) To what extent does the theoretical literature related to gender and its links to ethnic nationalism and political violence speak to the experience in Sri Lanka?

While we are convinced that this more fluid method of research has elicited rich and meaningful information and insights, its

only drawback has been that such an approach has made the mobilisation of research assistants a rather complicated task. Since the research assistants do not administer a standardised questionnaire, they require much more training in terms of how to make conversation and put their interviewees at ease; how to pick up subtle nuances of body language and voice intonation; and how to take note of the physical spaces in which encounters took place, including interiors of homes, the integration of work and family space, etc.

A further complication, which is also a telling indictment of the political and economic situation in the country at present, has been the great reluctance of many young, bilingual Tamil-speaking men and women to take on this kind of work which either involves (for those living in Colombo) having to travel to 'conflict areas' or (for those living in the north or east) having to travel out of their familiar 'home territory.' Our conversations with Tamil men and women involved in humanitarian work revealed that the politics of their participation in projects such as ours is politically wrought. Stories of Tamil chauvinists in the northern areas accusing such persons of betraying their people, for example, make such work uncomfortable at best and threatening at worst to some of the people with whom we spoke. Ironically, most young men and women who were interested in this kind of work were already employed by local and international NGOs or local government departments, thus making them ineligible to work on our project.

In conducting research, we did not take the comments and responses we solicited at face value - as unquestionable truths - but examined them as partial knowledge in both senses of the word. In piecing together different versions of a project or organization, we came to very different conclusions than someone who quantitatively records beneficiaries' answers to a questionnaire. What was perhaps most intriguing was the

realization that we could both interview the same person separately (and at different times) and get quite different answers to the same questions. We attribute this in part to our different locations within the culture(s) of humanitarian assistance: one of us as a Sri Lankan; the other as an 'expat'.

Socially, the majority of expatriates and Sri Lankans tend not to associate with each other. Even within the workplace, while virtually all international organizations are a mixture of both locals and expats, there are noticeable divisions between these groups (and obviously within these groups as well on the basis of class, gender and ethnicity). Accordingly, our different positioning allowed us different kinds of experiences and access to the same organization. The essential role of expatriates in the Wanni was also noted by several expats working there; they could make decisions and negotiate projects with local authorities without having to live permanently in the same jurisdiction. Direct questioning and interviewing of Sri Lankan staff working in the Wanni by the North American researcher was, at times, difficult when trying to ascertain, for example, levels of violence against women. In the absence of statistics, it was impossible to discern how, if at all, responses were shaped by political investments and realities derived from living in the Wanni.

We also encountered attitudes that research in the realm of humanitarian assistance was illegitimate, or frivolous. We were frequently informed that funds could be better expended on 'making a difference', by implementing practical, 'grassroots' projects, and not just studying them. We found such comments short-sighted, and contend that practice can only be improved through research at various levels, including project evaluation, impact assessment, and the larger patterns and processes which affect the conception and execution of humanitarian assistance. Our position is that good practice depends upon strong analysis of what works, what does not,

what cannot, and why. Evaluations (which we found to be conducted within the span of a week or two) provide limited assessment within the scope and terms of reference of a specific project, but they cannot easily compare projects or organizational approaches to programming, nor can they query the given categories of planning and approach (i.e. those found on an organization's project proposal sheet, or evaluation format).

There is a difference, however, between thorough consultative research, including accountability to field practices, and negative armchair criticism that serves no constructive (and therefore political or practical) ends. We encountered 'research' about humanitarian organizations based on self-definition and autobiographies of three international non-governmental organizations operating in Sri Lanka. The author took apparently random brochures, pamphlets, and documents produced by these organizations as its sources. Based on these 'findings', the author then made grand claims that one of these organizations produces "a dehistoricized narrative" of the present (Wickramasinghe, 1998: 24). Given the claims made, the evidence provided is hardly sufficient to substantiate such a charge. We consider such tactics as lightweight efforts to condemn the humanitarian project without even speaking to its representatives or visiting its work on the ground. Following Geraldine Pratt's (1996) feminist position against 'trashing' in the academic world, we call for *constructive engagement* with NGOs and other agencies involved in humanitarian assistance.

One of our primary research objectives has been to not only conduct research and engage in thoughtful analyses that can lead to productive changes but to try to *make* changes in the process of our research; to be involved in feminist 'action research.' We frequently sought to further institutional capacity building by sharing the knowledge and information

that we gleaned from projects and staff at both INGOs and LNGOs with other organizations and staff we met; we facilitated meetings between gender coordinators from different organizations working in the same region, and we linked possible beneficiary organizations with potential funders. The gender training workshops run by Jennifer Hyndman in Akkarayan (June 2000) and in Colombo (December 2000), as well as the day-long workshops in Colombo, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee – run by both researchers – in order to share our research findings and procure feedback were organized with a similar objective in mind.

Analysis by Geographical Area

Humanitarian organizations in Sri Lanka frequently refer to the northern and eastern regions of the country as conflict zones, a practice which tends to homogenize these regions. However, each district within a region, and even each town in a single district, tends to be very different from every other in terms of the ethnic makeup of its population, available resources, proximity to the front line(s), and access to the capital city, its human capital, supplies, etc. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that our research results varied geographically, with significant disparities within and between the northern and eastern areas. Without trying to reduce our findings to simple axioms, we will list some salient patterns and observations.

On the whole, the Batticaloa district was strongest in the areas of gender and capacity-building, taken together as well as considered separately. This can be attributed to a number of factors including the presence of the Eastern University in Chenkaladi; the re-location of a number of

enterprising, well-trained and well-educated people from Jaffna in this area (in part because of the amenities such as the university); and a large middle class.[3] On a different note, we noticed that significant improvements in the area of gender had been made among 'refugees'[4] in the Puttalam district, in large part because of its easy access from Colombo and relative distance from the 'frontlines.' Women's organizations in Puttalam, for example, had more opportunities for training and on-going support from Muslim women's organizations and other intellectuals and activists based in Colombo and Kandy. In contrast, the Wanni was consistently the weakest area in terms of both gender and capacity-building as well as the two combined.

The Wanni

Jonathan Goodhand (1998: 110) has arged that the "LTTE effectively run a command economy in the Wanni controlling all aspects of economic life, including markets, prices,

3 A branch of the Jaffna University is located in Vavuniya town, but it has not attracted as many scholars, probably due to its strong focus on agriculture, as well as the very unstable condition of that area. The South Eastern University, located in the Ampara district, is relatively new and considered to be less prestigious than its counterpart in Chenkaladi. This campus has also not been able to foster a very large intellectual community in that district.

4 The term refugee technically refers to a person displaced outside her or his country of origin, but in Sri Lanka, refugee is often used by both NGOs and Sri Lankans to describe an internally displaced person. This stems in part from the return of refugees from India who continue to be referred to as refugees. We adopt this usage accordingly for the purposes of this research.

production and taxation." Certainly, the difference in time zone, the more rural landscape, and the greater visible poverty mark the Wanni off from the rest of the country. Highly restricted supply routes into and out of the Wanni, controlled by the Ministry of Defence, also generate an economy of scarcity and extremely high prices for basic goods such as cement, batteries, and non-kerosene fuel, on the one hand, and a surplus economy of local underpriced agricultural and fishing products that might otherwise be shipped to the South for sale, on the other. Nonetheless, both local and international NGOs have a strong presence in the area (see ***figure 2***).

Several issues plague capacity-building goals in the Wanni:

1. ***Difficulty of finding qualified personnel for both INGO and LNGO posts.***

While the coordinators of LNGOs tend to be political appointments by the local authorities, there are relatively few people (compared with other regions) with the experience and skills to administer and implement projects. INGOs reported having difficulty filling advertised posts, and often hired from Colombo. Most of those securing INGO jobs were either from Jaffna or Colombo.

Another challenge to capacity-building is the local authorities' decision to assign each LNGO a particular geographical area for which it is responsible. This works against the potential for LNGO specialization and sectoral expertise, for example, in micro-credit or primary health, and instead ensures geographical coverage and monitoring.

2. ***Turnover among staff in the LNGOs***

This was identified by a number of INGOs with LNGO partners in the Wanni. Annual turnover among staff make

Lime production micro-credit project, Mullaitivu

training over time virtually impossible. There is a two-way temporariness to this relationship: LNGOs do not provide the most steady of employment prospects, so employees may simply move on to better prospects, but also INGO contracts with LNGOs tend to be based on an annual budget cycle, which means that INGOs do not/cannot invest in the LNGO in any medium or long term way.

3. ***Lack of coordination in building capacity*** (interpreted here as local training)

Related to the shortage of qualified staff and the high turnover, capacity-building by INGOs and LNGOs is challenging. In the Wanni, a problem of coordination was noted by more than one INGO. Training in enterprise development, for example, might be offered to the same LNGO constituency (2 districts) by two international agencies within the space of a month, and yet little if no training (in the area of gender, for example) would occur at all. (For a broader discussion of humanitarian coordination in Sri Lanka, see Van Brabant 1997).

4. ***Relationships of UN agencies to INGOs and of INGOs to LNGOs.***

Some of these relationships are nominally described as partnerships, but in fact are more like subcontracting arrangements. UN agencies have, in the recent past, commissioned certain INGOs to implement micro-projects worth $1 million per year on their behalf. Funds dispersed in such a manner are less based on assessed need and planned intervention than the fiscal and often political imperative to disburse funds to legitimate agency presence in the area. While this is changing, the notion that an INGO acts as a subcontractor to a UN or donor agency wholly problematizes the notion of capacity-building at a more local level because

donor imperatives can prevail over the local ones and can fuel the war in unintended ways.

Unintentionally fuelling conflict is a risk of all humanitarian and/or development assistance, on both sides of the line. In the Wanni, food rations are increasingly being used as a weapon of war. The University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna reported in May 1999 that food rations are increasingly being tied to military training by the LTTE. Civilians who do not cooperate with LTTE authorities and submit to mandatory military training will be denied food rations. This is, in part, a response to the actions of parents who have kept their children away from school, preferring to send them to private tutories.

Parents have avoided sending their children to school because it is considered a training and recruitment ground for the LTTE. Entire classes of students have disappeared to serve as LTTE personnel under the leadership of their teachers. Both of these scenarios illustrate the violation of basic human rights, and adversely affect childrenís health, education, and general well-being. Military training of children in school yards and of civilians in various public spaces was witnessed on several occasions during the two research trips to the Wanni.

Vavuniya South

While Vavuniya is a major logistical and administrative base for humanitarian operations in the Wanni, it is also a catchment area for displaced persons (of Tamil background) caught on the government-controlled side of the line. Accordingly, tens of thousands of displaced persons have been living in or near Vavuniya, in government-sponsored 'welfare centres' for as long as eight years (*see figure 3*). Given Sinhalese chauvinism towards Tamils in general, Vavuniya has become something of a holding centre for displaced Tamils whose mobility is restricted to Vavuniya District by the Government. Our visits

Welfare Centre near Vavuniya

to welfare centres and with INGO and LNGO staff here suggest the following:

1. The Government has been clear with humanitarian organizations that the welfare centres and their occupants are its responsibility. While this is admirable at one level, *very little appears to have been done to improve the well-being of people who have been displaced over the long term.* This situation has reached a crisis of sorts, so that INGOs - at their insistence - have been allowed to come in and provide specific services (i.e. safe water, sanitation, mental health services) to people in the camps. There is a pattern of clear discrimination against the displaced people in Vavuniya, which is only beginning to be addressed by INGOs and LNGOs. The pitiful conditions in the camps, where a cash benefit of 20 rupees/child/day and 35 rupees/adult/day is provided, warrant an advocacy role on the part of the UN agencies and INGOs.

2. Where possible, INGOs should strengthen the social mobilisation activities by LNGOs, such as SEED. To date, women have been encouraged to organize and voice their concerns. While this is a laudable start, a gender analysis of current programmes and needs in the centres would be welcome. We witnessed no evidence of women organizing on their own accord, and while some activities may be underway, these should be identified and strengthened.

Trincomalee District

The equal representation of the three major ethnic groups – Sinhala (33%), Tamil (33%) and Muslim (33%) – in the Trincomalee district has made it one of the most interesting

as well as challenging regions in which to work. While there is a lot of inter-mixing among the groups, in the form of marriages and trading relationships, the continued conflict in the country has also led to the sharpening of ethnic sensibilities. For example, humanitarian projects are closely monitored by each ethnic group in order to ensure that one group is not receiving more aid than the other.

Unfortunately, the Sri Lankan government's politicization of aid and rehabilitation in this region, has only exacerbated this volatile situation. We recorded numerous instances where displaced Sinhalese had received immediate compensation while similarly affected Tamils would be made to wait six months or more. On the other hand, we also heard of instances where displaced Tamils had been re-located or re-settled while Sinhala refugees were made to languish in welfare camps, for over ten years, because the government was biding its time until it could resettle them in predominantly Tamil regions and thus reclaim that area for the Sinhala nation.

Observations and potential changes that could be effected in this district include the following:

1. The links between gender and capacity-building in this district are weak, though they have shown distinct improvement over the course of our research. The six month training workshop on the prevention of violence against women – for gender coordinators of many NGOs in the Eastern Province – which was initiated by Oxfam in Trincomalee must be commended in particular. We have sought to encourage the participants of this programme to continue to meet after the workshop is completed so that they can continue to support each other's projects, as an informal network.

2. There are few autonomous women's organizations in the Trincomalee district. Three exceptions are the Trincomalee Women's Welfare Organization, largely a charitable agency, the Eastern United Women's Organization, based in Kantalai and its breakaway group, the Shakti Organization, also based in Kantalai. While an increase in women's organizations per se would not be a sufficient response to the status quo, the status quo is an indicator that women's empowerment and organizational capacity is low.

   While most INGOs in Trincomalee have a gender coordinator or a field officer with a designated gender/ women's groups mandate, the communication and coordination among these organizations is not adequately developed. We therefore recommend that all NGOs focusing on gender issues in this district form their own NGO Forum based on the example of a network in Batticaloa, the Eastern Women's NGO Forum, which is coordinated by the Suriya Women's Development Centre. Ideally, NGOs in Trincomalee should be encouraged to participate in the monthly meetings that are held by the Eastern Women's NGO Forum so that discussions and sharing of ideas within the Eastern region can be further strengthened. The logistics of travel and security, however, have made this difficult.

3. According to both local and INGO sources, the Trincomalee NGO Consortium is a fairly politicized forum in which many government officials sit in other capacities (i.e. as Rotary members or board members of local NGOs). This has considerably constrained relations within the Consortium leading to much disillusionment and cynicism. The Consortium was also accused of keeping new NGO members out.

4. One salient issue that our research documented in the Lovelane welfare centre was the high incidence of teen pregnancy among the Sinhala refugees; as far as we know this has remained largely unaddressed by NGOs in the district.

Batticaloa & Ampara Districts

This region hosts the greatest capacity in terms of gender programming and feminist analysis. Observations and recommendations include the following:

1. Despite the tense security situation and the strong military presence in Batticaloa throughout most of the project, the town hosts perhaps the strongest organization in terms of gender and empowerment, namely Suriya Women's Development Centre, which is run by a group of Tamil women who were displaced from various regions in the north and east of Sri Lanka. In concert with feminists at the Eastern University as well as feminist organizations in Colombo, and with funding received from organizations such as CIDA and HIVOS (Netherlands), Suriya has been successful in working towards women's empowerment and the propagation of ethnic harmony through a variety of innovative programmes (*see **figure 4***). The work they do with displaced communities in the region is particularly significant for the efforts that have been expended to mobilize IDP women to help themselves: in the securing of their rights; in seeking productive forms of self-employment; and in producing public awareness about the deleterious effects of ethnic chauvinism and patriarchy. Suriya has also consistently focused on issues of violence against women by educating the public, providing medical and legal assistance to the survivors,

Suriya's Cultural Group

making police complaints and taking the perpetrators to court. In this context, the need for a shelter for women who have experienced domestic violence has been identified, though the personnel and professional capacity to provide the necessary staffing poses a serious challenge despite demonstrated need.

2. The WUSC regional office in Batticaloa further concretises many of the feminist initiatives undertaken by Suriya with the WUSC gender coordinators working closely with Suriya staff in coordinating the Eastern Women's NGO Forum and organizing the celebration of International Women's Day. WUSC's insistence on the equal participation of both men and women in their projects, their focus on promoting alternative skills for women and especially trying to sensitise these women's families, employers and neighbours about the need for such shifts from rigid, gendered stereotypes makes them the most feminist INGO in Sri Lanka. WUSC's innovative efforts at transforming gender relations provide an exemplary understanding of gender roles and the opportunity for change during conflict and adversity.

3. The Affected Women's Forum located in Akkaraipattu (Ampara District) is another feminist organization founded by displaced women which has had a strong impact and provided important leadership to other organizations that work on gender issues in that region. Like Suriya, this organization too is involved in community development and the empowerment of women, but it also focuses on skills training (with the support of WUSC and CIDA) and leadership development. The organization recently launched a very successful anti-alcoholism campaign that linked alcohol abuse with domestic violence.

While the population of Batticaloa town is primarily Tamil (Hindus and Christians), with a few pockets of Muslims, the Batticaloa district is more diverse, with villages that are clearly identified as either Tamil or Muslim, by the local population. In such a context and with a history of frequent Tamil and Muslim conflict, the presence of community-based organizations, such the Kalmunai Peace Foundation (KPF) (partially funded by Oxfam), is especially crucial. KPF was founded by a group of Tamil and Muslim men and women who sought to reduce inter-ethnic conflict in their region by acting as intermediaries and peace advocates during contexts of inter-ethnic tension and misunderstanding and by promoting inter-ethnic interaction through cultural, extra-curricular and intellectual activities.

4. Another project well worth replicating in all the conflict areas is the Butterfly Garden, in Batticaloa town, where children of various ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds are granted 'scholarships' to spend 9 months together in an educational and play setting. The Garden's transformative approach to education grapples with the cultural politics of that region. Promoting attitudes of acceptance and cooperation and forging friendships among these youth constitutes a concrete step towards changing attitudes and prejudices that fuel ethnic nationalisms.

Puttalam District

Puttalam became the focus of attention for many humanitarian organizations when there was a vast influx of Muslim refugees who had been summarily exiled from the Northern Province, in October 1990. While most of these refugees have now been re-located within the district, and most humanitarian agencies

have pulled out of the district, there still remain several refugee camps. Though the conditions within these camps have improved considerably since the early '90s, the refugees continue to be extremely disgruntled with both the government (which cut off their rations until a huge campaign was launched to have them reinstated) and the humanitarian agencies (which are perceived as abandoning displaced Muslims in preference for displaced Tamils in the north).

The relatively calm atmosphere in Puttalam due to its distance from the 'frontlines' (it should be noted that the relationships among internally displaced persons (IDPs) from different regions of the north as well as between IDPs and the host populations remain fraught and are reportedly worsening as natural resources become more scarce) has made life more bearable for IDPs here. Puttalam's proximity to Colombo has enabled many IDPs to find employment there while also becoming a convenient gateway to the Middle East for many women IDPs who have gone there as cooks and nannies. This proximity has also enabled consistent and continuous interactions between local NGOs and those based in Colombo. The Colombo-based feminist organization, Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, is involved in several research and training programmes in this district. The large women's organization, WODEPT (funded by FORUT), seems to have considerable potential, though more autonomy from its funders would be constructive for the organization. Several promising young women who work in predominantly male organizations such as the Rural Development Fund and its breakaway organization, the Community Trust Fund, should be included at the decision-making level of these organizations instead of being relegated "to only work with women."

Anuradhapura Town (not a focus of the study)

Anuradhapura has played a crucial role in the on-going conflict as 1) a site of refuge (primarily for displaced Sinhalese and

to a lesser degree displaced Tamils and Muslims); 2) a site of solace for Sinhala Buddhists, and as a site of power for Sinhala politicians due to the presence of the Sri Maha Bodhi as well as the ruined reminders of a glorious Sinhala past (and thus an important target for the LTTE); 3) as a site of emergency care for soldiers, with the best-equipped hospital closest to the frontline(s) located there; and most recently, 4) as a site of rest and recreation for soldiers. Through interviews with other INGOs, particularly staff at Save the Children Fund, UK, in 1999, we got a strong sense that adolescent girls involved in this emerging sex trade were at some risk in terms of both health and safety. Little, if any concern, has been expressed nationally about the situation for women sex workers in Anuradhapura, and we feel strongly that these issues should be followed up in a systematic and feminist manner. By this we mean that the women affected should be provided with support and options for alternative livelihoods, not simply treated for sexually transmitted diseases or criminalized through frequent round-ups and jail terms for the services that they render to soldiers on R & R.

Madhu: Sacred Shrine and Open Relief Centre (ORC)

Madhu was also not a focus of the study, but we visited it twice due to its uniqueness as a humanitarian safe space and politically symbolic site.

During our first season of research in June 1999, Madhu was 'cleared' by the government in two senses of the word. First, it took control of the territory, ostensibly from the LTTE, although Madhu church itself was considered a sanctuary from both SLA soldiers and LTTE rebels. Second, government forces emptied the camp of thousands of displaced persons during the month of May 1999 (*see **figure 5***) in preparation for the annual pilgrimage to the shrine by Sinhala Catholics living predominantly in the Western province to take place in

'Cleared' Madhu camp, 1999

July 1999. Up until this time, Sinhala pilgrimages to this shrine had been significantly reduced due to the uncertain security situation in that region and the government's sudden 'securing' of the shrine was believed to be a political ploy to gain the votes of these pilgrims during a crucial Provincial Council election in the Western Province which was held that same month. By our second season of research, Madhu was once again on the LTTE side of the line, and reoccupied by thousands more (but different) displaced persons. These changes illustrate radical shifts generating displacement in the North, especially in areas close to the 'frontlines.'

But Madhu is unique for another reason. In 1990, UNHCR established an Open Relief Centre (ORC) at Madhu. The ORC was declared a 'zone of peace' by UNHCR, and was officially administered by the church under UNHCR's supervision (Jeyaraj 1999). Unlike protected areas of Bosnia or Somalia, the open relief centre at Madhu was politically neutral, completely demilitarized, and without an international peacekeeping force. It is further distinguished from other areas of the country hosting displaced persons by its local history and identity as a safe place before the war began and UNHCR arrived.

The Catholic shrine and church at Madhu is the most sacred in the country (Perera 1998). In 1544, Catholic converts from Mannar Island went to the Madhu area, fleeing the lethal power of a Hindu king in Jaffna who had massacred some 600 Catholics. Only a small group who escaped with a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary made it safely to Madhu. In the eyes of the survivors, the statue had saved their lives. They erected a church at Madhu, which has become a sacred site of pilgrimage for Catholics of all ethnic backgrounds ever since (Ibid). When UNHCR landed in Madhu and established a 'zone of peace', it did so with a tradition of 450 years of sanctuary behind it.

For almost ten years, thousands of refugees lived without incident in the ORC, as conflict in Sri Lanka waxed and waned. Once again, several thousand people live in Madhu, awaiting more peace and increased safety in the western parts of Mannar before they return to their homes and fields. The contrast between the holding camps, or welfare centres, in Vavuniya and the impromptu huts of Madhu under UNHCR's watch today could not be greater; these two groups of Sri Lankans displaced by war are treated very differently, with Madhu residents enjoying relatively unrestricted mobility compared to their Vavuniya counterparts. This mobility is crucial to the maintenance of livelihoods and household self-sufficiency. IDPs at Madhu can travel freely to tend to their fields, fish, or work as day labourers for wages.

Analysis by Focus Area

Much work has been done on the importance of sustaining and supporting the livelihoods of people in Third World countries. Supporting displaced persons is immediately more political, and supporting them in an ongoing conflict is even more sensitive. Stories of the LTTE 'taxing' the beneficiaries of NGO-sponsored projects were common. In the Wanni, it is common knowledge that a significant portion of the resources being provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is going to the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), the development arm of the LTTE. This provides a lucrative and important source of funds to the LTTE, but is the price to paid for operating in the Wanni. Similarly, one can comment upon the considerable resources for schools, training, and infrastructure being provided by international humanitarian organizations to displaced persons and poorer segments of the local population in the 'cleared,' i.e. government-controlled areas. These costs would normally

be incurred by the government, but are instead being provided by UN agencies and international NGOs, effectively operating as a subsidy to the government. This allows the government to spend more money on the military to fight the war.

Given this situation, one must be vigilant and extremely careful about the ways in which conventional development practices are transposed onto a highly political conflict zone, where the welfare of civilians is being negotiated on a constant basis. For example, the use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA), a common assessment tool in development circles, is highly questionable in the Wanni. PRA employs a methodology that involves the collection of household data, including the number of family members, their livelihoods, the household assets and income in terms of land, livestock, and earnings. It includes family names and a 'social map' of who lives where, with whom, and owns what. Such information, collected by humanitarian or development organizations, could be used by governing authorities in unintended ways.

In a broader context, food is a weapon in a different war. Humanitarian organizations and those concerned with upholding human rights should remember the lessons learned from much of the feminist work over the past two decades: women (and girls) tend to eat last and often less; they are subject to violence during the course of their gendered work routines, such as collecting firewood beyond the perimeters of refugee camps; and they are less likely to be able to voice their concerns to the authorities and to humanitarian agencies. Disparities in social power almost always run across gender lines, and these must be pro-actively analyzed by all agencies and personnel concerned with displaced populations. The first step to establishing 'best practices' is to assess and analyze the conditions of displacement at hand, taking into account the history and location of the conflict. Recognition of the exclusion or marginalization of particular groups (which may

or may not include women) is a precondition to appropriate action. Local NGOs provide a critical link to this information.

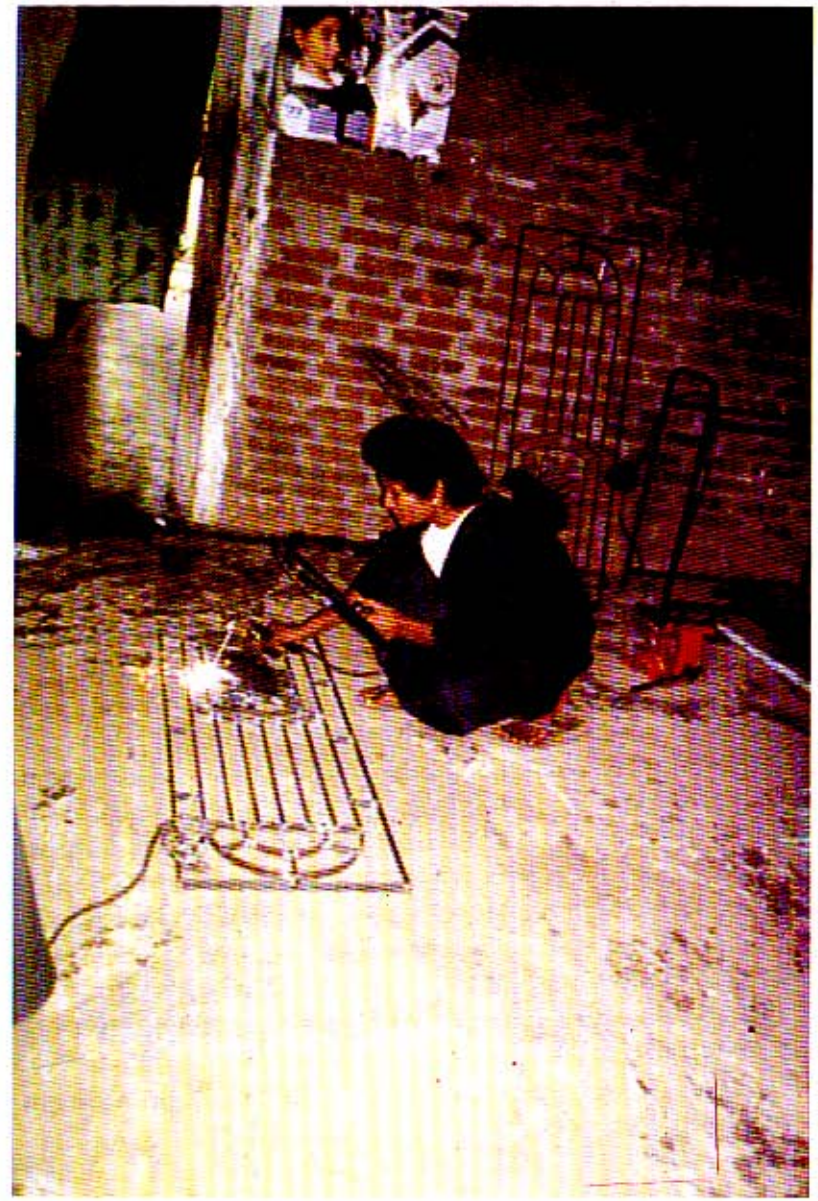
The following sections briefly address our project findings in the three substantive areas outlined.

Income Generation

We found basically two major humanitarian approaches to strengthening income security: 1) providing micro-credit to targeted groups; or 2) providing skills training and on-the-job training (OJT) to specific groups. The former is much easier to administer and execute than the latter, especially in terms of gender aims. This is to say that, 'helping' widows (a common group of beneficiaries) by providing credit for them is a much more straightforward task than, for example, changing societal perceptions about what kinds of work women can do and what kinds of spaces single women can occupy. This way, the NGOs can gain points for gender sensitivity though one of the primary reasons such disbursements were made predominantly to women was because they were perceived to be better re-payers than men. Unlike skills training, the giving of loans is also more easily quantifiable and requires less investment in terms of time and input.

Skills training with a focus on the transformation of gender norms was the mainstay of one INGO, World University Services of Canada (WUSC), whose four year plan towards improving gender equity - among other goals - represents a systematic and long term strategy to invoke a gender analysis in its programmes. WUSC must be commended for its approach: "a programme constantly learning from its own mistakes." WUSC (with partial funding from CIDA & UNHCR) has, in cooperation with other INGOS and local institutions in places like Trincomalee, Batticaloa and

Welding in a home-based workshop



Vavuniya, provided additional funds for courses in welding, bicycle repair, carpentry, and mechanics. This is nothing particularly new, except that many of these classes are full of young women. Other classes mix young men and women together. During our field work, the sight of three young Muslim women graduates of one course welding iron gates in their home-based workshop was indeed a concrete expression of changing attitudes about what women can do (*see **figure 6***).

One of the most productive aspects of WUSC's skills training or PRET (Project for Rehabilitation through Education and Training) programmes is the careful conceptualization and evaluation of every aspect of the programme as well as the organization's commitment to learn from its mistakes and to constantly adapt to changing circumstances and needs. The PRET programmes are divided into six months of classroom training and six months of OJT (on the job training) at the conclusion of which each participant is provided with a tool kit and financial incentives to start her/his own business or is helped to find employment in the region (the best students are frequently kept on at the workplaces in which they do their OJT or hired as class instructors and demonstrators). This form of skills training is also prefaced by a series of workshops that raise the gender consciousness of the programme participants and supplemented by Parent Awareness Programmes (now Neighbour Awareness Programmes have also been included at the request of some of the trainees) and Employer Awareness Programmes. What is remarkable about this approach is its attempt to address the involvement and attitudes of a broad range of players within a given location. The comprehensive nature of such a strategy demonstrates a commitment to transforming social relations, in this case gender relations.

The central focus of assistance to individuals – especially 'widows' – and communities, in our findings, was not however skills training, but micro-credit – most frequently

in the form of direct loans to borrowers or via revolving loan funds administered by community groups set up by the NGOs for this very purpose. While this is no doubt an important component of humanitarian and/or development assistance, we find it surprising that equal effort has not been expended to generate capital through the mobilization of savings so that the local NGOs would not be continuously dependent on outside funds and foreign donors. We also find it questionable that micro credit has become the main strategy of addressing issues of gender in programming and assistance.

The very term 'widow' is problematic in INGO/LNGO circles. On the one hand, some war widows are recognized and compensated by the state, making it beneficial to identify as such for purposes of securing income. In the Tamil language, however, widow "implies that which is inauspicious and pitiable" (Sachithanandan 1998: 191). Perhaps the most auspicious project involving widows is that by AWARE, a community-based organization in Killinochchi District where some women accepted loans from OXFAM, and were able to undertake various enterprises so that they could earn a dowry to become marriageable again. Many did this, though many others were afraid to take loans for fear of not being able to repay them. Already their mobility and moral integrity were questioned as 'widows', they said.

With the exception of AWARE and some micro credit projects supported by Suriya (Batticaloa) and Affected Women's Forum (Akkraipattu), genuine gender analysis and integration in these credit schemes were absent. Our findings also suggest that giving loans to women or 'widows', without a prior and on-going discussion with the entire community that enables the production of an organic gendered analysis of the situation within which these women live, can cause resentment among men in the same community, who may not have similar access (although many women took out loans on behalf of their male family members). Instead of empowering

women, such loans to women can provoke a backlash among the men who want to avenge them, which in turn exacerbates gender inequality.

When asked what kinds of assistance they need, members are positioned within a humanitarian (or development) discourse that structures viable responses. The notion of community consultation is fraught; options are in some sense imported in that the humanitarian agencies approve of some and not others, so of course people will ask for things within the universe of the possible. Accordingly, we witnessed entire villages of women taking loans to do goat-rearing as an income security strategy. In large part, no other options were perceived to exist, despite the fact that many women had never reared goats before. This kind of phenomenon is particularly troubling in a context where goat and poultry rearing has been found to be non-sustainable due to the high disease and mortality rate among chickens and kids, insufficient availability of veterinary services and inadequate marketing (Nadarajaa & Sivarajah 1994, Nadarajaa et al 1994).

The issue of sustainability also arises in terms of creating capacity for independent livelihoods versus providing income-generation projects (even in the form of repayable loans) that often involve job creation without necessarily considering market niches and viability over time. If job creation does not lead to increased economic independence after 6 months, does it serve to improve income security?

There was also some evidence that micro-credit programmes rendered the INGOs that administered them susceptible to manipulation. Beneficiaries were found to play one organization off another, i.e. CARE gave us this, so you Oxfam should also give us this. This has two potential effects: 1) that INGOs concede to groups in question without demonstrated need; and 2) that accountability is substantially reduced because funds from one organization can be used to 'stand in for' funds from another organization when

administrative checks and follow-up is conducted. On several occasions, particularly in the Echelempattu area, no accounts or records of repayment were available for micro-credit projects.

Clearly, micro-credit schemes represent a well-intentioned if band aid attempt to relieve the symptoms of the war. It was only too apparent to us that only the resolution of the ethnic conflict can transform the structural impediments of mobility restrictions, repeated displacement, interrupted education, and related unemployment. Where such strategies may work well in peacetime, their efficacy appeared questionable in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. As one NGO staff member pointed out, "micro-credit was originally conceived in the Bangladeshi context as a slow, long term way forward. It has now been parachuted into a context of war in Sri Lanka without clear thought as to how it can/not work." For example, the culture of unrest and displacement in the country has engendered the practice of providing primarily short-term loans (duration of 3-6 months) that do not provide borrowers with enough flexibility to adjust to income fluctuations when re-paying the loans. This usually results in the borrower taking another loan (either from another NGO or worse still, a money lender) to repay the first one thus exacerbating their original indebtedness and impoverishment.

Our analysis calls for a rethinking of the impact of micro-credit on income security initiatives, especially as they pertain to gender relations. Such initiatives cannot simply be counting exercises (i.e. how many women benefit?), but should attempt to change relationships between men and women that remain inequitable. Skills training for women in tractor or bicycle repair go a long way to transforming societal attitudes and perceptions. Their success cannot simply be counted, for example, using employment placement as an indicator of achievement. If a woman completes the carpentry course, but

goes on to work in a garment factory (in a post-war scenario) her acquired skills and achievement serves to change perceptions of what can be done by women. We witnessed too many sewing programmes and not enough carpentry training sessions for women. The war represents a period of instability, displacement, and poverty for many of those affected, but it is also a space for potential changes in attitude, practice, and mores.

Finally, projects to improve income security must not only integrate a gender analysis into project design, implementation, and evaluation, but begin to incorporate qualitative as well as quantitative measures of ascertaining project impact. Impact measurement is a buzz word in both humanitarian and development circles these days, but little discussion of the qualitative meaning of the terms has occurred.

Violence Against Women

By violence, we not only mean rape and sexual violence related to war, but all expressions of force or conflict that inflict harm. Torture, post-traumatic stress, and other kinds of physical violence fall under this category. Where conditions of conflict prevail, rape and other violent acts are perpetrated against both men and women, though patterns of violence are invariably gendered. Rape has been convicted as a war crime, and just recently it has been included as a tool of genocide punishable by law. Rape has both material consequences and symbolic value in conditions of war. The violation of women can - in extreme cases - give rise to offspring fathered by the enemy (i.e. Bosnia-Hercegovina). Rape brings shame and a sense of defeat to the men who fail to protect 'their' women, not to mention the harm —physical, mental and psychical— it inflicts on the women themselves.

We also encountered the problem of alcoholism, and its related conditions of domestic violence and income insecurity. These connections highlight the links between violence against women, income insecurity, and NGO efforts to alleviate this income insecurity. Should micro-credit loans be given to households under such circumstances? One woman explained that the money she makes from her boutique business (based on an NGO loan) is taken from her by her husband who drinks the money away; he beats her on occasion, and she is afraid to refuse him the money he demands, even though the household is extremely poor. Recognition of this problem, particularly in the Trincomalee area, is critical, and training for field officers to address alcoholism is sorely needed. When asked why one YMCA fieldworker didn't confront the perpetrators of violence in such situations, she commented that she would be thrown out of these villages if she approached the issue. Avoiding such issues, while continuing to lend money for micro-enterprises, risks exacerbating the problem of violence in these communities.

Addressing issues of violence with women adversely affected is not easy, and NGOs in Trincomalee have begun to use women's health and nutrition information as an entry point for intervention into sexual violence issues. Once again, the links between violence and other dimensions of women's livelihoods, namely their health, are clear.

Affected Women's Forum and Suriya have a policy and practice of integrating prevention of violence against women into all projects, an example from which other LNGOs and INGOs might be able to learn. INGO and LNGO assistance tends to be sector-specific, but it is critical in our view, that violence against women be seen to be intimately related to income security and to women's physical as well as mental health. Gender analysis across these axes must filter down through all programmes, sectors, and projects.

It is also crucial to think of ways to reach and educate the populace at large. In this regard, Suriya and Affected Women's Forum have been especially creative in producing songs, posters, pamphlets and street dramas that address the issue of violence against women, in their communities and beyond. In November 2000, Suriya, inspired by the Clothes Line project in the Netherlands, initiated a similar public installation in the town of Batticaloa where they hung a piece of clothing (inscribed with the date and crime which was committed) which had belonged to a woman victim of violence, on a clothesline. Such an innovative venture would have been even more powerful if it could have been taken around the entire country with different groups adding the clothing of women victims from other ethnic communities as well. Similarly, CIDA's initiative to paint the length of a train with the repeated slogan "Prevent Violence Against Women" has also had a very powerful impact.[5]

Women's Health

With few exceptions (Crook, 1998; Save the Children, 1998), we have found a profound silence on the issue of women's health among displaced people in Sri Lanka. Although the UN Population Fund is working with the government to provide reproductive health services, these were not very evident in the conflict-affected areas. Where it was discussed, however, the conception of what constituted women's health was limited mostly to services for pregnant women and maternal-child care after birth had taken place (women's role as reproducer, rather than as whole person).

A number of health issues left out of this equation include the availability of birth control measures and

[5] So much so that commercial companies have now picked up this idea and begun advertising on the exterior of trains.

treatments for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. The importance of such issues in the North and East, where many of the government-run health services have collapsed or been scaled down, is particularly pressing. The increasing prevalence of Sri Lankan soldiers in the Wanni, for example, has led to the de facto creation of a large centre for prostitution in nearby Anuradhapura, where many troops take their rest and relaxation. Young women and girls in this area are directly affected by the war, and yet there is little if any reproductive health information or services offered to them. The increased incidence of sexual violence in the environs of Anuradhapura has received even less attention. The work of the Family Planning Association and other groups are a hopeful sign but more needs to be done here.

Reproductive health services will always vary across locations, given different laws for/against abortion, the position of women in a given community or society, and the disparity in resources available for such services. However, the reconceptualization of women's health seems to be required of many humanitarian organizations which still perceive it in terms of population control (family planning) or maternal and child health. A more holistic view of women's health was formulated at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 1994 and at the UN NGO Forum on Women in Beijing, 1995, a view which also recognizes the role of men in reproduction. The idea that reproductive health is about more than 'women' who are pregnant or lactating needs clear dissemination throughout the areas affected by war (Palmer 1998).

In this context, it is heartening that the mental health of women (as well as that of men) has become an issue of concern. There are only 18 psychiatrists in Sri Lanka. However, Family Rehabilitation Centre, Befrienders, Family Services, Survivors, MSF Holland in Vavuniya, and several

other organizations have taken on the psychosocial dimensions of health in the northern and eastern provinces.

An important health dimension that rarely comes under the rubric of women's health is addressing women's sexuality. In Akkaraipattu, a displaced woman head of household criticized the Affected Women's Forum's supposed stand of "we don't need men" with the counter argument that "we also have our needs which must be fulfilled."[6]

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult for the many single women and widows to start any new relationships; they are harassed; their movements are judged suspiciously and their reputations are always at stake; work to change public ridicule is necessary, but also recognizing that women's mobility and well-being are impaired in the short term (marriage may not be a choice but a necessary thing to avoid harassment, offer protection from public scrutiny, etc.). Adolescent sexuality is also rarely included in NGO mandates. A WUSC staff member reiterated the many basic questions posed to her about women's bodies, sexual reproduction, etc. during gender workshops under PRET.

As a strategy of intervention, women's health and nutrition are frequently considered to be non-emergency issues in a humanitarian context, yet conflict and displacement can render them invisible crises. Women (and girls) are often the last to eat, and are likely to attend to their own health needs once other, more prioritised work is complete. Pro-active measures to address these power relations and gendered impacts are required to erase the silence on this issue.

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[6] Needless to say these needs were only perceived as being able to be fulfilled by men. At no juncture did we encounter discussions of masturbation or lesbianism.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka has been at war for almost twenty years. Most humanitarian aid organizations that originally arrived on this island to provide emergency aid have now embraced 'rehabilitation', 'return', and 'development' as part of their mandates as well. Such mandates however, have also spawned its critics. Paul Caspersz (1999), a dedicated social activist, has recently noted that developmental methodologies like PRA and its siblings such as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Strategic Programme (PSP), Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and Institutional Development and Organizational Strengthening (ID-OS) have only succeeded in demoralizing and deradicalizing the very people it seeks to help: "The task of the propagators of PRA, LFA and the like is to teach the poor to know their situation and promote among them little self-help programmes to make that situation (which they already know) a little less intolerable. The task of social activists is to change it" (*Island*, 12 May 1999). However unpalatable such a criticism may be to those providing humanitarian assistance, it is crucial that we heed such arguments before more harm than good prevails.

Gender is but one of the many bases on which segments of a population are treated differentially, so a careful analysis of the context of displacement is always a prerequisite for action. The exigencies of location, of conflict, and of history must be integrated into any sound humanitarian approach. Just as displacement is created, so too are the places in which it occurs.

Recommendations

It is much easier to diagnose the problems with humanitarian and development assistance in a conflict situation than to propose alternative solutions and examples of effective practice in such a context. Regardless of purported neutrality or apolitical status, humanitarian work is always fraught with politics. Capacity-building in Sri Lanka, for example, will always be circumscribed by perceived socio-cultural alliances or simply one's cultural background as Muslim, Tamil, or Sinhalese. Once basic food, shelter, and health services have been established, changing prevailing attitudes and strengthening civil organizations to reduce conflict is central to humanitarian work in conflict areas. A practical *modus vivendi* can be forged in a variety of ways. We offer several suggestions and some concrete examples:

1. International NGOs should work more closely with national and local NGOs of all ethnic groups, but especially those that have a sincere commitment to work towards a peaceful political solution to the ethnic conflict. Contesting the chauvinist elements within Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms in everyday NGO practice represents a crucial part of the institutional change that is required to dampen, rather than fuel, the conflict.[7] The importance of a 'third space', a politics beyond the binaries of 'us' and 'them', Tamil/ Sinhalese, 'either/or' cannot be underestimated. After almost twenty

[7] The question of whether humanitarian and development assistance fuel conflict, relieve its symptoms, or strengthen civil institutions is a major issue, outside the scope of this report, but addressed by many others (see Tiruchelvam 1996; Hendrickson 1998).

years of fighting, militancy and militarism are clearly not the answer. Organizations that actively work against the often racist and stereotypical notions of 'other' should be sought, strengthened, and encouraged to expand their work. As we outlined above, two noteworthy organizations that come under this rubric and that are presently being funded by INGOs are the Butterfly Garden in Batticaloa and the Kalmunai Peace Foundation.

We suggest that NGOs think of more creative ways to transform the attitudes of civilian populations as a whole, rather than focusing solely at the micro-level, i.e., a village or an organization. Such an approach avoids the 'Neo-Orientalist' paternalism of 'us' helping 'them' (those in specified villages), and changes the problem to be solved. Challenging nationalisms that fuel the war is at least as important as treating its symptoms. For example, NGOs should consider funding and producing good street theatre, teledrama and film scripts to (a) promote positive gender roles and (b) to promote peace and greater acceptance among ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Street theatre to recruit new rebels in the LTTE-controlled areas is common, as are poster campaigns and teledramas produced with Sinhala nationalism in mind. Why not engage the public imagination and contest the political investments of these representations? In our follow-up workshops, suggestions were made that short advertisements for TV, theatre, cartoons, posters, and bumper stickers be used to contest status quo. Such projects would involve challenging existing chauvinisms among both Sinhalese and Tamil segments of the population. In this context, HIVOS' funding of cultural programmes coordinated by Vibhavi, Centre for Alternative Culture and OXFAM's funding of the progressive journal, *Pravada* are a step in the right direction.

2. International NGOs need to expand their conception of gender and collaborate with LNGOs so that gender is

conceptualized as part of the design, implementation, and evaluation of each and every project. By identifying national and regional efforts already in place, INGOs can work to strengthen or augment extant organizations by promoting positive social change through transforming gender roles/ identities. Conflict tends to represent a period of instability and most often loss or suffering, but the presence of INGOs during such crises also represents an opportunity. Persons displaced from their jobs, schools, and land can be provided with training, skills, and schooling by existing institutions whose capacity can be strengthened and expanded by INGOs. An opening for change exists: societal attitudes about what women can and should do are dynamic. As noted above, two of the most inspirational examples of feminist organizing in a conflict situation are the Suriya Women's Development Centre in Batticaloa and the Affected Women's Forum in Akkraipattu.

Humanitarian organizations cannot afford to be too preoccupied with gender sensitive *models* for displaced populations. Such models are often static and prove more useful as heuristic tools within humanitarian administrations than as practical effective strategies of on the ground assistance. In this regard, we find that WUSC has developed a productive way to utilize gender manuals and gender sensitive models by expending a great deal of time, effort, and resources to adapting the manuals and models that are conceptualized in and sent out from Ottawa, Canada to suit the contexts and conditions of different localities and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. *Adaptation of static models and modules of 'gender programming' to the local context is critical.* The most crucial aspect of WUSC's adaptation is that it is done in conjunction with local feminist organizations and beneficiaries.

It is particularly unfortunate however, that such carefully re-worked resource materials and well-trained personnel are

not accessible to other INGOs (and only a limited number of LNGOs) in Sri Lanka who keep re-inventing the wheel, albeit in a less competent manner, every time they too try to organize gender workshops or train gender coordinators. *Developing a network for gender trainers and a central repository for such shared resources would be an invaluable asset for international and local NGOs alike (see point # 4 below).* While not part of our own mandate, we strongly feel that CIDA should cease funding micro-credit projects (as many others are doing this), and strengthen its exemplary work in the areas of prevention of violence against women, of the Shakti programme, and of gender equity currently part of CIDA's mandate in Sri Lanka.

Gender training for male staff by male gender trainers is vital to counter the current trend towards marginalizing gender as a women's issue. This should include immediate training courses for both expat and national staff by qualified male consultants or staff members, *and* the consideration of male staff for gender coordinator posts within organizations, both INGOs and LNGOs. Concentrating on men may appear to reproduce the problematic emphasis on women in much current gender programming, but the goal is rather to have men challenge other men about the meanings and actions associated with masculinity, the work assigned to men and women, and the possibilities for change.

3. Comprehensive training on the nature of the conflict and political situation in Sri Lanka is essential for all incoming expatriate staff if they are to avoid falling unwittingly into patterns of discrimination or the politicization of aid within a context of competing nationalisms. The antecedents to and dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict were not always well-understood by the international staff we encountered. One

explanation for this is the short-term duration of international staff contracts. Developing an understanding of the complicated and ever-changing dynamics and implications of this twenty year war in Sri Lanka is a huge project in itself, and yet how can someone with a one year employment contract be expected to undertake this challenge effectively? International staff rely heavily on national employees for access to, information about, and understanding of Sri Lankan politics.

More accountability on the part of international NGOs and UN agencies might be generated through longer contracts and commitments to international staff and the renewal of such contracts in a single place. We understand that some hardship posts are necessarily shorter term, but this need not apply equally to all positions where longer tenure could serve international agencies well. Likewise, international NGOs might do well to revisit their personnel policies so that the promotion of nationally-based staff are not artificially limited by a problematic local/international distinction between staff in international NGOs, and even UN agencies. Effectively, a kind of 'glass ceiling' for those hired locally exists in many of the international NGOs. The hierarchies that such divisions generate can serve to create turnover among committed national staff whose institutional memory tends to outlive those of more temporary international staff. Offering renewals for personnel on international contracts, where warranted, and dismantling barriers to promotion and allowing access to more senior posts for national staff employed by INGOs can improve accountability to Sri Lankan society and serve the interests of the organizations themselves.

On a similar note, local capacity could be strengthened significantly if INGOs offered more predictable and longer term budget cycles to the LNGOs with whom they partner.

4. Greater coordination of NGOs should take place on two fronts:

(a) **Among gender coordinators within and across regions,** by providing sufficient resources for network support (travel, hosting people from other areas, per diems, etc.)

(b) **Among INGOs (particularly in the Wanni)** where duplication of training in one area (i.e. enterprise and micro-credit courses) is occurring at the expense of other areas (i.e. gender, or gender and micro-credit or gender and capacity-building)

Just as the development literature has long talked about 'South-South' links between developing countries, so too are local and regional links between national staff at both LNGOs and INGOs critical to sharing experience, knowledge, skills, and support. Exchanges among staff of a single NGO between different areas/offices offers one set of opportunities for building capacity within the culture (and policy priorities) of a NGO. Networks which include both INGOs and LNGOs build capacity in another way, by establishing on-going links among humanitarian staff who can liaise and assist one another across the INGO-LNGO divide. Networks such as the Eastern Women's NGO Forum need to be replicated, expanded, and supported to a much greater extent.

In terms of duplicating training and coordination among INGOs and LNGOs, fora exist for coordination, but our findings demonstrate that capacity-building in a particular area is programme-driven by a particular INGO at a certain time. In places like the Wanni, courses on monitoring and evaluations, project design, enterprise development, etc., are welcome and well-attended, yet any sense of longer term planning as to where and how this training can be deepened or improved upon is absent. Staff turnover proves to be a major

obstacle, and capacity-building thus ceases to exist in any genuine form.

Developing a network for gender trainers and a central repository for such shared resources would be an invaluable asset for international and local NGOs alike. The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies' (CHA) head office in Colombo should become the central repository for gender resources as well as all other published work on the Sri Lanka experience of humanitarian assistance. This will help to reduce the frequent replication of projects and also enable the sharing of information in a more productive fashion. When we visited CHA in 1999, we were appalled to find that the library was housed in a little cubicle to which we were not allowed access. The documents were not catalogued, and the librarian was extremely unhelpful and incompetent (we are glad to hear that he has now been replaced). For this reason, we also compiled an annotated bibliography of humanitarian resources related to gender, capacity-building, and the substantive areas identified in this report to be made publicly available as part of this project.

While CHA was perceived to be performing an important role by holding both analytical and practical workshops, producing a newsletter and other publications, and linking INGOs and LNGOs in a more formal fashion, we also received several complaints regarding its inability to provide coordination in any productive fashion despite its "guzzling of resources." In the districts we visited, the regional offices of CHA were reviewed even more critically and were seen to be ineffectual if not irrelevant and rife with power inequalities and political intrigue.

5. Multiple language competence among both international and Sri Lankan staff in humanitarian organizations is a key

issue. Language training should be made available by NGOs (especially INGOs), so that Sinhala-speaking people can learn Tamil (during their working hours) and vice-versa. This has proven successful at UNHCR's Colombo office, according to reports from senior staff there.

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This report seeks to advance, both in theory and practice, the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Sri Lanka while simultaneously analyzing the links between gender, conflict and displacement. The report focuses on 'capacity building' conducted by international NGOs and UN agencies to build and sustain institutional capacity among local/national organizations in Sri Lanka. It specifically assesses the existing resources and potential for institutional capacity building in three areas: the prevention of violence against women and support for those affected; the provision of facilities and information on women's health issues; and the promotion of income security options which serve to stabilize household economies. In conclusion, the report provides several recommendations on how some of the deficiencies and problems identified can be rectified or resolved.

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