

Inclusive Development of Infrastructure

Working with local stakeholders to deliver conflict sensitive infrastructure reconstruction programmes in the North and East of Sri Lanka



Reconstructing physical infrastructure

After 30 years of war, communities in Sri Lanka need to be rebuilt physically, socially and economically. Infrastructure suffered from damage and neglect during the conflict, and an absence of new investment. The vital role of infrastructure in serving human endeavours means that when elements of it are damaged or destroyed, the ability of society to function – economically and socially – is severely disrupted. Yet, with the cessation of violence, these areas are attracting new populations, placing even greater demands on local infrastructure. Both resettlement and reconstruction in turn are critical elements of a broader process of reconciliation between communities involved in the decades old political conflict.

Physical infrastructure is broadly defined to include services that are essential ingredients to quality of life and economic activity. These include water and sanitation, health and education, transport and communications, and energy. The reconstruction of damaged and inadequate physical infrastructure will be essential to reduce poverty and sustain long term conflict transformation in the region.

Conflict and poverty

There is a lot of disagreement about the specific relationship between conflict and poverty, but there seems to be a growing consensus that poverty and conflict cannot continue to be regarded mutually exclusive elements of social development. Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of conflict, and the relationship is a two way process. The definition of poverty as a cycle projects its dynamic nature, and its linkage to marginalisation and social exclusion, and relates to images of social processes and structures within a society. Post conflict countries are also characterised by devastated or severely

distorted economies, with both human capital and physical infrastructure destroyed. Conflict makes the objective of poverty reduction all the more difficult, since not only is growth retarded, money is taken for military spending from basic social services, and the poor are themselves disproportionately the victims of the conflict.

The close links between conflict and poverty are evident in Sri Lanka. Income levels and human development indicators for the North and East are among the lowest in Sri Lanka. The needs assessment document of the government estimated poverty in the Northern Province to be 37%, compared to a national average of 15%. Others have estimated that around 50% of the North and East population could be under the poverty line.



People affected by conflict wish to get back to normal life in an environment where they feel secure and have access to basic services and economic opportunities. Infrastructure is the capital stock that provides public goods and services, and is crucial for the effective development of social and administrative services, national integration, security, expansion of trade and market access, and quality of life for households.



Connectors and dividers

There are two realities in any conflict situation: dividers and connectors. Dividers are those factors that people are fighting about or cause tension. Connectors bring people together and reduce tension. Peace and development are inter-related, and in war-torn societies a lasting peace is considered inconceivable without addressing the problem of reintegration of people dislocated by war and insecurity.

The reconstruction of infrastructure can connect or divide. If handled insensitively, infrastructure can reinforce existing prejudices or be the source of new conflict. In contrast, reconstructing physical infrastructure after a war can help in the peace building process through restoring dignity and promoting conflict sensitive approaches.

Any physical reconstruction needs to be tailored to the needs of the affected people. Often this means developing an environment that fosters reconciliation, forgiveness, the transformation of relationships, and ultimately peaceful co-existence. There is a need for communities to move from conflict to active coexistence through enhancing relationships that are characterised by a recognition and respect for diversity and an active embrace of difference, equal access to resources and opportunities, and equity in all aspects of life.

Inclusive development

Successful transitions to peace and poverty alleviation require a comprehensive approach and development assistance will play a key role in this process. However, a mechanical or materialist approach to reconstruction is incomplete and inadequate insofar as it neglects the dimension of human relationships.

Persisting inequalities – vertical and horizontal – and differential access to opportunities can increase social tension and may lead back to conflict. Reconstruction programmes must be inclusive, taking account of the varying needs of different groups, while also addressing inequalities in access to infrastructure. Infrastructure that connects rather than divides different constituencies must also be identified and prioritised. In order to achieve this, there is a need to explore how different constituents affect the post-conflict reconstruction process, and how development interventions, and cultural contexts may change that role.

It is against this background that the *Conflict Prevention through Infrastructure Reconstruction* was launched in early 2011. The project is part of a longer term study into the relationship between physical infrastructure reconstruction programmes and social cohesion among conflict affected people in the North and East of Sri Lanka. This phase of the study aims to provide an insight into the critical components of adequate infrastructure and to establish how local people are currently engaged in the reconstruction process. The anticipated outcomes include an:

- Improved understanding of how infrastructure reconstruction programmes affect social cohesion among local communities
- Increased awareness of conflict sensitive reconstruction principles among key stakeholders
- Enhanced research capacity of Universities in the North and East to address relevant local development challenges toward conflict prevention

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