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Pro-factors Delaying Post-war Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Although it has been reported that the civil war which was prevailed for nearly three decades in Sri Lanka is over, the scholarly studies in the field have highlighted that even after around 11 years, the post-war reconciliation process in Sri Lanka is still facing numerous challenges. This study was conducted to investigate the factors that contribute to the hindrance of the reconciliation process between Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. The study employed a mixed-method approach where both the qualitative and quantitative data were gathered and analyzed. The literature review of the study is directed to place the study on a theoretical foundation based on sustainable reconciliation. Primary data were collected from a sample of both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities that were directly affected by the civil war. The gathered data were triangulated by verifying from various sources including key informant interviews and records of events. Data analysis were done through the thematic method. Qualitative data were analyzed using explanatory and content analysis methods while the quantitative data were analyzed using simple statistical calculations such as means and percentages. The findings of the study highlighted that the ethnic reconciliation process in Sri Lanka is facing challenges mainly due to lack of understanding of each other, inadequacy of political will to sort out the issue and socio-cultural factors including psychological factors that have not been solved for a long time.

1. Introduction

The civil war between the Sri Lankan government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a major catastrophe that stood against the country's development with a history of nearly thirty years. The end of the war has set the stage for all Sri Lankans to play a greater role in building a long-lasting peace between Sinhala and Tamil communities. Even though the civil war has ended, occasional fragments of ethnic hostilities are still burning in the space created by the absence of a practical holistic approach and a good road map to resolve the conflicts.

Eventually, this situation might lead to some contingency or a trend towards a recreation of civil unrest and rivalries among these communities in the future. Consequently, it is a timely needed social necessity, a responsibility and a duty of all Sri Lankans to identify and be alert on the major causes which were instrumental to developing antagonistic rivalries between these groups in order to facilitate a long-lasting peace in the country. As the evaluation studies of Sri Lankan post war reconciliation points out "post-war transition is more complicated and difficult, following a unilateral war victory in competition with a complicit that ends in a negotiated peace settlement ..." [1]

Even though the government has taken various attempts to carry out reconstruction work, livelihood development, and peacebuilding in war-affected areas, their outcomes seem to be questionable in reaching the long-term reconciliation among these communities. Building sustainable peace in a conflict society needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive reconciliation strategy to forget the rivalries, be empathetic to each other, and create trust and understanding. The national reconciliation in Sri Lanka has largely concentrated on contracted institutional realizations, political (re)formation related to ethnic harmony and territorial-based devolution of power. These mechanisms and institutional forms are taking a prolonged time for finding remedial measures on crucial issues and thus leaving an unsolved problem in the country. [2]

Furthermore, there would be several structural impediments against the successful completion of the postwar reconciliation process. As per the findings of some peace researchers "much of the

cause for the failure of the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka was due to politically motivated-ethnic disagreements, prolonged issues relating to ethnic solitudes at a national level, and wide social and economic inequalities…" [3]

Therefore, peace builders of the country need to clearly envisage the situation in a way to avoid possible impediments in the peace process. The military defeat of the LTTE in the final battle in May 2009 which marked the end of the long war could be a potential turning point in ethnic relations and ethno-political dynamics of the country. "However, at this potential turning point whether history depends on the ability of various stakeholders of peace to use the new historical space to sustainable peace through national reconciliation and social cohesion should be found out…" [4]

Accordingly, it is necessary to learn the lessons from the past experience of the ongoing peace process in order to avoid the existing social, cultural, and political constraints. The broader scope of the study was classified into several specific sub-objectives as given below.

· Identifying the existing prejudices and social constraints that are emerging among Tamil and Sinhala communities

· Investigating the political and other constraints in the reconciliation process in war-affected areas.

· Identifying the limitations of methodological approaches of the post-war reconciliation process itself.

· Forwarding suitable proposals to overcome the existing constraints of the peace process to strengthen the social links among these communities.

2. Material and Methods

The literature review of this study revealed a vacuum of knowledge about the causes for delaying the post-war reconciliation process between Sinhala and Tamil communities in the war-affected areas. When opening scholarly overviews about Sri Lanka's reconciliation process during and aftermath of war, the reconciliation process seems to have been detached from the mainstreamed political process and remain unregulated in the country. [5]

Accordingly, it is directed to incorporate the study on a theoretical foundation based on the search of pro factors towards sustainable reconciliation.

The study employed a mixed-method approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. "Mixed-methods researchers are pragmatic, collect both narrative and numerical data, employ both structured and emergent designs, analyze their data both via statistical and content analysis, and make meta-inferences as answers to their research questions by integrating the inferences gleaned from their qualitative and quantitative findings." [6]

A sample survey was conducted to accumulate quantitative information about the views and attitudes of people living in the war-affected areas. Such information was instrumental in understanding the nature of prejudices held by respective people against other communities, their willingness to reconciliation and the existing constraints against sustainable post-war reconciliation. Furthermore, Qualitative information was collected through key informant interviews to have an in-depth understanding of the research problem.

The study followed a judgmental sampling method to select war-affected six villages in Trincomalee district, Eastern Province where people belonging to both Sinhala and Tamil communities are living. They have also suffered heavily during the civil war. Among them, Kambakotte, Mailakudawewa, and Mahadiwulwewa were selected as dominant Sinhala Villages. Similarly, Nochchikulama, Shanthipuram, and Elaswaththa were selected to represent the villages dominated by Tamil people. Except Elaswaththa village, all the other villages are located in the close vicinity of the Morawewa Divisional Secretariat area.

Map 1: Map of Morawewa Secretariat

Elaswaththa is a village situated in the Trincomalee divisional secretariat of the district adjoining the Morawewa Divisional Secretariat area. A major reason to select this village to the sample is that it is almost inhabited by Tamil people who migrated from Nochchikulama and Shanthipuram during the war. They have lived in refugee camps during the war period.

Both Sinhala and Tamil people living in these proximal villages have had a high social integration and cohesion in cultural, economic, political, and other numerous social aspects prior to the civil war. In the initial visits to the study area, it was envisaged that both Sinhala and Tamil people in these villages have been returning to their normal way of living. Since the socio-economic relations between Tamil and Sinhala people living in these villages also had

been growing, this was considered as a positive sign of the possible avenues to reconciliation.

Primary data collection of the study was initially conducted with 200 randomly selected stratified sample representing respondents of these villages. It consisted of 100 respondents to represent the Sinhala community and the rest to represent the Tamil community. In this selection, socio-economic variables such as level of education, level of income, age, occupation, and gender were taken into particular consideration. A questionnaire was administered to collect necessary information from the selected sample.

The study also incorporated qualitative information collected through key informant interviews with 24 data providers. They represented12 data providers each from Sinhala and Tamil communities. The necessary primary data was collected using interview guidelines. In the process of formulating the questionnaire and interview guidelines, the themes such as the views on the impact of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation programs, existing prejudices towards each other on economic, infrastructural, and other resources, strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies adopted for the reconciliation, possible strategies to establish sustainable peace between Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities, etc. were taken into main consideration.

Both questionnaire and interview guidelines were translated to Sinhala and Tamil languages accordingly. Questionnaires were filled out by respondents themselves with the proper guidance granted to them. The key informant interviews were electronically recorded with the consent of interviewees. The necessary secondary information was gathered via a variety of sources in a wide range of platforms, such as census reports, survey reports, government documents, and non-government reports.

3. Methods of Data Analysis

The quantitative information collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using simple statistical calculations such as means and percentages. The qualitative data collected from the interviews were evaluated incorporating a thematic analysis. In the formulation of such themes, objectives of the study were taken into consideration. Repeated reading and active reading were notable efforts taken to avoid any data being missed and to have a thorough grasp. Additional steps such as building a close relationship with the data, deciding the basic coding, finding the respective themes, studying the themes, naming and defining the themes were taken to the analysis and rearranging of the data in the study was also taken into consideration.

4. Results

It was realized that there are several impediments in operation at the ground level, national level, and organizational level for delaying the reconciliation process. In case of disturbances at the ground level is concerned, the prejudices remaining among Sinhalese and Tamil people towards each other have been significant. Such prejudices seem to be sustained by the majority and minority feelings inherent in them.

Sinhalese, being the majority group of the country shared a view that Tamils enjoyed many benefits from the post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation programs targeting to uplift the war-affected areas. Even Sinhala people living in war-affected areas share this prejudice which is leading to jealousy against Tamil people. Those ethnic groups who lived more harmoniously before the civil war are now hesitating to reconcile due to this existing suspicion and resentment.

Meanwhile, the study could reveal that Tamil people in the study area too share a prejudice towards Sinhala villagers living in the close vicinity. Such prejudices are based on the misunderstanding that Sinhalese as a majority group enjoy much freedom, political power, and better living than their counterparts. Many of them were of the view that Sinhalese people unlawfully exploit the financial and economic resources which were allocated for the development of Tamil communities. Also, some of the Tamil villagers were of the view that government too provided more development resources for Sinhala people who were not marginalized as the Tamils.

Furthermore, there were certain other political constraints found to be operating at the national and policy level contributing to the delay of the postwar reconciliation process. They were the outcomes of antagonistic and hegemonic attitudes in policy planning and implementation. The people's lack of participation in the decision making and implementation of reconciliation programs, much priority given to the infrastructure building in those war-affected areas, and the neglect of the root causes for the emergence of ethnicity-based rivalries were some of the instrumental factors for the achievement of sustainable peacebuilding in those areas.

Upuldeniya et al.

Finally, at the organizational and institutional levels, there were certain limitations to provide a better path to reach the reconciliation targets. Reconciliation models show a greater dependency on humanity-based aspects such as psychological healing, giving forgiveness, truth-telling, etc. With the prioritization towards infrastructure building and reconstruction work, invisible bitter memories of the war and misunderstandings developed in peoples' minds have been mostly neglected. Therefore, it was revealed that the methodology adopted to reach the post-war reconciliation itself seemed to be a major limitation against its achievement.

5. Discussion

Despite the respective studies of the literature review, this study led us to study the delay of the post-war reconciliation concerning the context of the study. The discussion is based on the analysis of operational factors at three levels namely ground level, national level, and the organizational level. Initially, the ground level impediments against reaching sustainable peace and reconciliation were analyzed in terms of (a)existing prejudices towards each other by these ethnic groups and (b) the structural constraints in respective communities for rebuilding the social relationship.

Secondly, the national-level factors were analyzed in terms of political constraints confronted by peacebuilders. Finally, this study analyzed the methodological limitations of the reconciliation process itself in formulating and operating the reconciliation strategies at the grassroots level.

5.1.a Challenging Prejudices of Sinhala and Tamil communities towards each other

As per the theoretical explanations of prejudice, there is a mutually exclusive link between good relations and prejudice. The term "prejudice" can be defined as the bias that devalues people because of their perceived membership of a social group. Whenever, the growing prejudice exists among two communities their relationship is too found to be rivalries with fragmented, disconnected, and hostile interactions. "Any analysis of prejudice must begin with an analysis of the social context within which it arises. Intergroup relations, and prejudice in particular, need to be understood using multiple levels of analysis…" [7]

This study found that both Sinhala and Tamil people who lived in their respective villages had closely developed brotherhood and values before the civil war. Even though there were some cultural differences, they were not mattered for a communal and harmonious living among them. However, the decades-long armed conflict was instrumental to destroy the unity among them and growing resentments. It has been a crucial factor to grow antagonistic prejudices towards each other who were previously lived so close to each other.

Figure 01: A typology of good relations and prejudice [8]
Source: Dominic Abroms, 2010, p.35

The field survey investigated the prejudicial views held by both Sinhala and Tami villagers towards each other in terms of sharing infrastructure facilities of the post-war reconstruction and access to educational facilities of the area.

Table 1: Prejudicial Views of Sinhala and Tamil Villagers towards sharing Infrastructure Facilities

Prejudicial Views	Sinhala Villagers	Tamil Villagers
There is unjust in the distribution	67%	72%
There is no unjust in the distribution	33%	28%
Total	100	100

Source: Field Study 2019

As per the above information, it is revealed that the majority of each ethnic community holds suspicion and resentment towards the other ethnic group that they are enjoying more benefits of the post-war reconstruction and other infrastructure facilities in the area. This misunderstanding seems to be highly held by Tamil people as they justify it as a result of the hegemony of the majority in the country. The observations during the fieldwork convinced that the resentment of Sinhala villagers towards Tamils were growing due to the misunderstanding that international agencies, as well as the government. They mostly look into the needs of Tamil people to satisfy the donor agencies.

Also, it revealed that certain bitter memories of Tamil villagers during the war have continuously affected them to stay lonely from the Sinhalese. As a Tamil School teacher expressed;

"Many of our belongings were robbed during the war by others. It is because we were living in refugee camps initially after the war. Therefore, we do not need to restore friendship with Sinhala people who were not helpful during the war period."

(KII-, Interviewed, 28th September 2019)

5.1.b Structural Constraints of Sinhala and Tamil Ethnic Communities to Restore the Social Linkages.

In protracted ethno-political conflicted societies, intergroup contacts and cooperative learning are supportive paths to reduce prejudices between the antagonist groups. Studying the following figures, the value of intergroup contacts to reduce prejudices promote positive attitudes and positive behavior for supportive relations can be understood.
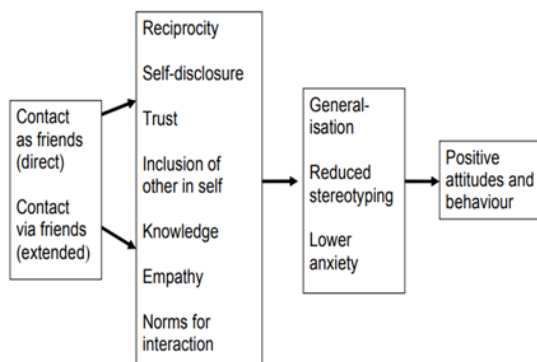

Figure 2: Routes from intergroup contacts to lowered prejudice. [9]

In the case of lowering the prejudices between rivalry groups in post-conflict societies, communication strategies have become so important. However, this study revealed that both Tamil and Sinhala villagers frequently find difficulties in communicating with other ethnic group members due to the language barrier. This has been a major constraint in promoting interactions and understanding between these groups as one Tamil school teacher pointed out.

"Once Sinhala students were invited to take part in some cultural activities in our school. Since we were unable to provide translators, those students could not understand the mission of this program as they did not know Tamil. (KII-, Interviewed on 28th September 2019).

Language and communication problem has become a barrier and an issue that should be addressed very deeply in the post-war reconciliation process. As one Sinhala elderly person pointed out

"I think Tamil people must learn Sinhala. Because this is a country where the majority represents Sinhalese. Similarly, Sinhala people also must learn Tamil, but they won't learn. However, it is not a must…" (KII-, Interviewed on -, 02nd October 2019).

Before the civil war, both Sinhala and Tamil villagers maintained close cultural contact in their day-to-day living. In Tamil dominant areas Sinhala people used to take part in religious and cultural ceremonies organized by Tamil people. Similarly, In Sinhala dominant villages too Tamil people used to participate in festivals and rituals in Buddhist Temples. However, in the post-war period, these respective communities used to live with their people due to certain resentments developed among them. Therefore, it is understood that cultural integration is the main component in a post-war reconciliation process to bring all communities to a common platform. This study revealed that the behavior pattern of both Sinhalese and Tamil people were not contributory for regaining the previously held social linkages among them. As one of the retired Sinhala government officers pointed out.

"I have a lot of experiences. Sinhala people go to Tamil kovils, their calibrations and common festivals. But I think Tamil people do not go to Sinhala temples and other festivals of Sinhala people. I think they ignore us and our culture…" (KII-, Interviewed on 04th October 2019).

Religious organizations, as well as schools, were found to be providing a better platform for both Sinhala and Tamil people to develop brotherhood throughout their life in the border villages before the civil war. Even though many infrastructure facilities were not provided in these schools, they were accepted and utilized equally for their educational purposes. However, the traditional views of sharing and simplicity seem to have been evaporated from these communities due to unknown reasons. As per the attitude of a Tamil villager.

"All the infrastructure facilities are dumped into Sinhalese schools whereas Tamil students not getting even minimum requirements to study. And, in the reconciliation process also we don't see Sinhala people use education to succeed the peacebuilding process…" (KII-, Interviewed on 05th September 2019)

5.2 Political constraints in the post-war reconciliation process at national level

Restoration of peace and establishing reconciliation in a post-conflict society requires a genuine will of the government in power. They have to be empathetic to the affected communities and restore their rights and livelihood in order to heal the

wounds in their minds. Also, the government should be capable of bringing all the relevant stakeholders into a common platform for removing existing barriers and constraints to reach the targets.

Restoring the moral order that has broken down requires that "justice be done". A successor government owes it, above all, as a moral obligation to the victims of the repressive system. Post-conflict justice serves to heal the wounds and to repair the private and public damage done by the antecedent regime. As a sort of ritual cleansing process, it also paves the way for a moral and political renaissance. [10].
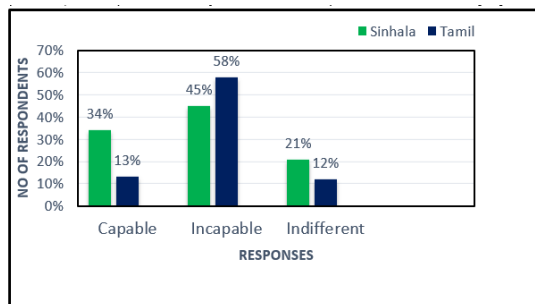

Figure 3: Peoples' view on capability of politicians to establish reconciliation.
Source: Field Data

This information shows that majority of both Sinhala and Tamil respondents were of the view that politicians are not having the capability to restore peace and establish reconciliation in this post-conflict society. This negative attitude towards politicians seems to be relatively high. among Tamil villagers who are still possessing antagonistic views towards Sinhala people in general. Therefore, it is envisaged that until positive attitudes of people are developed towards politicians in the country their active participation in the reconciliation process would not be realized successfully.

"To date, reconciliation in Sri Lanka has not been well integrated into the conflict transformation process, and it is fair to say that reconciliation initiatives have been poorly planned, with little effort made to include a political, socio-economic, religious or cultural focus…" [11]

It is also a basic requirement that political leadership should take necessary steps for people to forget the bitter past war memories remaining in their hearts and encourage them to forgive each other who were previously held ethnic rivalries. This study revealed that certain efforts of both Sinhala and Tamil politicians to construct war memorial statues to commemorate their deceased soldiers in the war and the annual celebrations of war victory or war heroes etc. have been aimed at gaining narrow political achievements. Sometimes government efforts to

disturb the celebrat ions of LTTE war heroes have resulted in the resentments of the Tamil community.

As per an interview with a former carder of L.T.T.E. also will be helpful to understand the unfavorable fact regarding such involvement of the Sri Lankan government.

"I think the government should not disturb to the celebrations or rituals of Tamil people are such kind of behavior people should be given the psychological freedom…" (KII-, Interviewed on 28th September 2019).

According to the theory of memory, memory projects may delay in the reconciliation efforts if they are one-side, if they fuel controversies or celebrate extremist or totalitarian ideologies [12]. It could be revealed in the study also that, memorization activities have taken place even after many years after the war. The following pictures based on the memory projects can be identified as pro-factors for the delay of the post-war reconciliation process.

Figure 4: An Occasion of Ceremony near a Monument by Sri Lankan Army
Source: Field Data

Figure 5: The Recently Built Monument in the University of Jaffna to Memorize Died Tamil People in the War. *Source: Field Data*

5.3 Methodological limitations of reconciliation process itself in formulating and operating the reconciliation strategies at grassroots level

Reconciliation is defined by its Hebrew root word 'Tikuum Olam' which means a three-part process of HEAL, REPAIR AND TRANSFORM. In

order to HEAL the impact of tribal or ethnic division, civil war and violence, a process of acknowledging the evils that have been committed is essential. History has proven that grievances ignored will eventually destroy the potential for a sustainable peace. Authentic reconciliation and healing are not possible without justice and equality. This is a fundamental requirement for reconciliation. [13]

It is a well-known fact that Sri Lankan government too initiated several development strategies based on reconstruction, resettlement, and reconciliation in the post-conflict society. Those infrastructure facilities including road networks, electricity, water supply, etc. have been restored to ensure the normal livelihood of people in war-affected areas. However, it is a timely necessity to evaluate the progress of the reconciliation programs in terms of the methodologies adopted in the process and their ability to involve the peoples' participation successfully.

Those reconciliation programs to be effective in a post-conflict society should link with several other inputs instrumental to peacebuilding. Among them, psychological and humanitarian components such as truth-telling, and healing are very important pre-requirements for its successful implementation. The following figure depicts the integrated components of the reconciliation process.

Figure 6: Integrated Components of Reconciliation [14]

One of the incumbents of Tamil temple was of the view that some essential components of a reconciliation process seem to be missing in the ongoing peace-building programs.

"The government must engage in peacebuilding with an open heart and with spiritual pleasure. I think the healing process of current reconciliation programs seems to be missing. It is a big problem …" (KII-, Interviewed on 04th September 2019)

As per the Tamil respondents of the study, most of the programs which were implemented in the postwar period in the area are not based on the need for reconciliation.
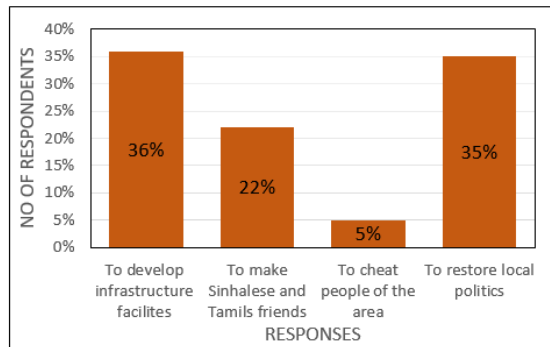

Figure 7: Views of Tamil Respondents about the Reconciliation Programs *Source: Field Data*

According to this figure, the majority of them (71%) assessed these programs are either targeted to infrastructure building or to restore local politics. Only a few (22%) of the respondents agreed that such programs were instrumental to restore the friendship among Tamil and Sinhala people as one GN Officer pointed out

"Almost all reconciliation projects have been planned by the government officers themselves at the top level. They have neither knowledgeable about the felt needs of the affected areas nor made a consultation with the stakeholders in the affected areas before planning these programs. Similarly, they have not seen restoring social harmony between Sinhala and Tamil people as a felt need of these areas "
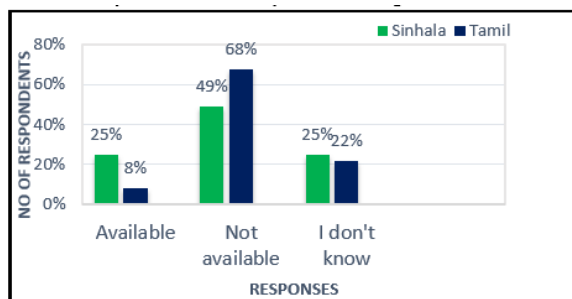

Figure 8: The Attitudes of Both Communities on Availability of Long-Term Programs in Media to Help Sinhala People and Tamil People to Live Together. *Source: Field Data*

Mass media and mass communication are two important stakeholders of reconciliation between two antagonist groups, as they can always communicate positive messages for bringing them to a common platform.

Media helps dissipate the rumors and propaganda disseminated by extremists, which feed social and political tensions. It also creates a space for articulating diverse viewpoints, approaches, and opinions. Above all, it contributes to both transparency and accountability in public affairs,

exerting pressure on political and social leaders to behave in a responsible way. [15]

Television, radio, and newspapers have been at the forefront in this process and are considered to be major stakeholders in peacebuilding process. However, some agents of media were found to be violating media ethics and the responsibilities of serving positively towards reconciliation during the past.

Some of the university academics have been involved in the evaluation of the progress of ongoing reconciliation programs. As per the views of one of such Sinhala universities, academics pointed out……

"Progress and continuation of dialogues regarding the reconciliation process cannot be heard or seen in the country. And, the success of dialogues in the reconciliation processes of international society are not taken by Sri Lanka and no programs for that…" (KII-, Interviewed on 05th October 2019)

Based on the data of Table 3, it is revealed that both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities agree on the unavailability of a well plan to reconcile people.

Table 2: Availability of planned strategies to restore friendship between Sinhala and Tamil people

Views of People	Sinhala Respondents	Tamil Respondents
There are well planned programs	30	22
There are no well-planned programs	52	44
Don't know	18	34
Total	100	100

Reconciliation programs should be carried out with the participation of people in war affected areas since they are the key stakeholders of this process. It is mainly due to the fact the needs and priorities of such people need to be included ensuring their ability to share the available benefits. Accordingly, it shows that

6.Conclusion

Following the military victory of the war, the Sri Lankan government has been implementing several strategies targeting reconstruction, resettlement, and reconciliation in the war-affected areas*. Reconciliation strategies that were targeting the restoration of peace and* goodwill among Sinhala and Tamil communities have been implemented with the involvement of government and non-governmental institutions. The findings of the study revealed that various socio-economic and political constraints are found to be impeding the successful implementation of these targets. Among them, first, the ground level impediments operating in terms of existing prejudices among Sinhala and Tamil communities towards each other and structural constraints to restore social linkages have been prominent. These prejudices were the outcomes of misunderstanding toward other communities that they are enjoying more benefits of the economic resources and the post-war development programs.

The structural constraints of the reconciliation process signify the existing barriers based on language and culture base differences that were hindering opportunities to interact between these communities. Secondly, the national-level factors in terms of political constraints to reach the final destination of sustainable peace were investigated. Finally, it was assessed that the methodological feasibility of the strategies affected those programs. It is revealed that lack of well-planned road map based on humanitarian requirements seems to be lacking as politicians have been more interested in the implementation of reconstruction and resettlement requirements. Also, political parties who celebrate war victory or war heroes were found to be stimulating resentments among Sinhala and Tamil groups. Finally, the methodological limitations of the reconciliation projects are to formulate and implement strategies to win the participation of both Sinhala and Tamil at the grass-root level have impeded reaching their targets. Accordingly, the study concluded that reconciliation programs are needed to be formulated, implemented, and monitored continuously with the real participation of both Sinhala and Tamil people in the war affected areas to reach sustainable peace in the post-conflict society in Sri Lanka.

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