

SRI LANKA PROJECT REPORT

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A. General Introduction of Sri Lanka Development

The situation in Sri Lanka at the moment is characterized by the debates around the presidential elections and the different programmes of the presidential candidates, and by unabated political violence especially in the North and East. In mid-August, Foreign Minister Kadagamir was assassinated. The government accuses the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), which denies responsibility and asserts that the murder was an 'inside job' in order to destabilize the cease-fire. Immediately after the assassination a state of emergency was declared which gives the government and thus the police and army power to hold people for questioning for up to a month without due process. Tamils in Colombo itself and those traveling through check points face far more controls than before as a result. The state of emergency has been renewed twice and is reviewed monthly.

In the south and at the national level, much attention has focused on electoral politics. In August, the Supreme Court ruled that Presidential elections must be held and the Elections Commissioner set the date for November 17. When this report was written in October, the LTTE had not announced a boycott of the elections, nor sent a candidate of their own, and had not stated any intent to prevent their constituency from voting. There are in all 12 candidates running, but only two of them are predicted to have a realistic chance to win: The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP, the ruling party) candidate, Mahinda Rajapaksa, calls for abrogating the joint mechanism for tsunami relief work in the north and east and for renegotiating the ceasefire agreement. He rejects the idea of a federal solution to the ethnic conflict. Ranil Wickremesinghe, the United National Party (UNP) candidate, platform calls for moving forward with peace negotiations within the current ceasefire agreement (Wickremesinghe was Prime Minister when it was negotiated) and within the framework of a unified and federalist country. He also has called for a national unity government between the SLFP and UNP. The race is close. There are numerous other issues, primarily economic, and many nuances of political allies and divisions.

After Kadagamir's assassination, both the President and the LTTE called for new dialogue. Each side continues to blame the other for the failure to move forward. Many believe there will be no breakthrough until after the elections, if then.

The recent visit by Ian Martin, special UN Human Rights Advisor (head of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal), focused renewed attention on the numerous human rights violations on both sides. This shortly followed the European Union ban on travel for LTTE dignitaries.

Violence continues in the north and east. There seem to be more open conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army, with firing on check points and army posts. There continue to be significant targeted assassinations and killings between the LTTE, the Karuna faction and the Army. As the violence increases, other political parties are also targeted and civilians are more often injured and killed. While the violence in the east remains extremely high, there has now also been a significant flare up of violence in Jaffna beginning in September.

The concern that the cease-fire might break down continues to increase. Both Sri Lankan Army and LTTE have been taking additional security measures (new check points, etc.) and intensifying their trainings.

B. Mandate of the Teams

Mandate: Reduce violence to increase the safety of civilians in Sri Lanka so they can contribute to a lasting peace with justice.

Objectives:

1. Reduce the level of and potential for violence.
2. To support and improve the safety, confidence and ability of Sri Lankan peacemakers and other civilians to address conflict in nonviolent ways.
3. Work with Sri Lankans to deter resumption of violent conflict.

The extended mandate due to the post-tsunami work has lessened its significance for NPSL, though we continue to accompany relief workers who have difficulty crossing between government and LTTE controlled territory. We also continue to work with the Disaster Relief Monitoring Unit (DRMU) of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, serving as an information resource to affected communities and the DRMU in Colombo. We also provide accompaniment and related assistance to individuals and communities as needed when they interact with various government agencies to address land title, personal identification and other documentation issues. So while we are not doing humanitarian related work, our work supports and enables those who are.

C. Activities of NPSL

New FTMs

At the end of July, 14 new Field Team Members arrived for 12 weeks of in-country training. (Eldred de Klerk was later hired to be the Team Manager so 13 have been deployed to the field). For twelve weeks the FTMs received intensive language instruction and orientation to Sri Lanka's current social/ political/ economic context and made field site visits to the teams in Mutur/Trinco and Valaichchenai. Andy Mason, training coordinator (a former FTM and current consultant with NPSL), included strong emphasis on developing skills for internal team functioning as well as external-in-the-field functioning. The full new team came together for a short staff retreat at the end of September, then all field team members (except two working with Paffrel) returned to their field sites. Current team assignments are (bold indicates team coordinators):

✍ Jaffna Team: **Susan** and Kathy

✍ Trinco Team: **Charles, Peters**, Kati, Bella and Sjors

✍ Mutur Team: **Atif**, Mariza, Fabian, Miranda and Jaleel (Field Officer)

✉ **Batticaloa Team:** (with further sub-division planning still to be worked out): **Rita**, Frank, Karen G, Kwan-Sen, Ashfaul, Dan, Sunzu, King, John, Pramila and Majith (Field Officer).

Batticaloa/Valaichchenai

The work in Batti was affected by a constant flow of FTMs to and from the field. Rita Webb rejoined her team in early July after a bout of dengue fever. Andy Mason resigned from NP and left the team in mid-July, though he was willing to consult with NP for the In-Country Training. Karen Green was on leave for several weeks in August. Angela Pinchero was on sick leave in late August, and then was hired to be the Programme Manager. Oloo (Charles) Otieno moved to Trincomalee to start the newly formed team in Trinco town. Karen Ayasse completed her two years with NP and left in October, after playing a critical role in helping to orient new FTMs to Batti. She is already missed. Abdul Majith, who was a translator for the team, was promoted to Field Officer. The impact this chronic understaffing has on the work and staff can not be underestimated, and the deployment of the newer FTMs will be a great relief.

The environment in Batticaloa district continues to be very tense. Assassinations and killings continue to rise, occurring almost daily and are affecting civilian communities more. There is a continued aspect of inter-ethnic tensions. The split in the LTTE, leading to the so-called Karuna faction, has added a complication in the area that decreases the sense of safety and the space for civilians to act on peace, reconstruction, rehabilitation and other matters of rural life. The continued state of emergency adds to the insecurity. There have been more attacks on military posts and check points and police. Post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation continues to be slow everywhere, but quite unevenly between communities, adding to tensions. There continue to be issues of child recruitment and abductions, other abductions, and little positive economic development. The district is made up of many small, very isolated rural villages, many still struggling with post war impacts. Overall the situation feels tense and unhopeful for a larger peace.

During this period the team once again provided presence at a large number of temple festivals. The temple festivals are significant spiritual and community events. Last year, and again this year, the NP Batticaloa team played a key role in helping to coordinate INGO presence to deter violence, support the community and local NGOs to participate in these events, and be accessible to community members. This activity also helps to deter the occurrence of, or increase ability to report or act on, violence that does occur at the festivals, including abductions, forced recruitment or the recruitment of children soldiers. The number of festivals with an international presence increased this year, as this coordinated initiative allowed some agencies to work at festivals in their project areas alone. There was an indication that the investment of INGO/IOs to participate in festivals, including engaging temple committees beforehand, did have an effect on the pattern and occurrence of violence this year.

The reports were that focused, open violence including abductions of dozens of youth at a time, happened primarily in smaller, more remote or unsupported communities and festivals. There was also information of fewer, more discrete acts of violence at the larger festivals or ones internationals participated in, including forced recruitment of children

and youth. But like last year, the continued engagement of INGO's agencies in the temple festivals in the areas they worked allowed agencies to document, act and support parents in quick action or appropriate recourse. It also allows a larger circle of actors to know and therefore engage on the child or forced recruitment issues, including concerned actors or political officers of the LTTE. In all of these efforts, timing and near-immediate action are one of the greatest requirements for positive outcomes. After a debrief was held with all the INGOs involved, there are plans to continue next year and to develop further a coordinated and strategic approach. Families have reported to international agencies including NP that their presence encourages them to attend these important festivals. Booths set up by and attended by international agencies supported local staff and implementing partners to disseminate information about their training opportunities and programmes and to provide entertainment, while a local working women's collective ran a successful refreshment/food booth.

The team's work seems to be evolving from work that was initially more involved with individuals, to groups coming together to talk, to starting to take action together. One group of women and a local peace activist chose to make an appeal regarding their missing husbands and sons to the North East Secretariat on Human Right created by the LTTE after the cease-fire. They did this because they had NP's support, facilitation and accompaniment. Previously the women had felt restricted to visiting military and intelligence camps where they were given conflicting information, no information or were told not to come.

Another group of concerned citizens and peace activists or families who have lost a member to the current post-war cycle of violence are working together with NP and some of NP's trusted and most worked-with allies. The group is exploring ways to address issues of violence and peace, of respect for human life or the impact the current one and a half year of assassinations has had on communities and families. This includes speaking out about these issues and the impact of violence in what is currently a near vacuum of dialogue on these topics. The participation of an international organization with a transparent mandate and commitment to nonviolence has eased the increase of their collaborations and network of likeminded concerned persons or effected families. Although NP does not show any leadership in this group, they have explicitly only been comfortable exploring and carrying out some activities because of NP's presence or participation and hope to their intentions to be understood by others. The team continues to work hard to maintain critical relationships and build new ones across large distances made larger by poor roads, lack of phones, and the necessity of crossing between government-controlled and LTTE-controlled areas.

The Batticaloa team continues to visit vulnerable individuals and communities to provide support and encouragement and to investigate nonviolent solutions to their issues, to connect them to needed resources and redress for problems, and to generally provide encouragement during very difficult times. Often this work is done at the request of other NGOs in the area with which we work closely. One recent team report mentions:

“The level of fear and intimidation has increased in Batti district, even people who have been quite open before are putting their heads down now. It seems that the open space that had somehow appeared during the Karuna split is now firmly closing down again,

with the additional strain of the factional fight on the people. To gain trust in such an atmosphere we have to carefully reconsider our activities and strategies.”

The team continues to help coordinate the Human Security Work Group, which is trying to plan and execute responses to the increased violence and to bring the attention of other internationals outside the east to the volatility and difficulties here. Ian Martin, the UN special Human Rights Advisor, visited Batticaloa in early October and the NP Batti team helped make a meeting happen between him, local activists and local and international NGOs.

The Batticaloa team continues to help Sarvodaya build its vision of a “Rapid Deployment Peace Brigade” (RDPB) with its Shanthi Sena (peace army) programme. The Shanthi Sena has hired a local organizer, and has held two trainings for members who hope to serve to prevent and reduce violence in the district. The team looks forward to the ongoing collaboration between NP and Sarvodaya’s Shanthi Sena’s RDPB.

Finally the Batti team has spent a great deal of time in careful deliberation and planning for the new FTMs, the opening of an office south of Batti town, acquiring the needed housing, furnishings, etc., for the new FTMs, developing a long term work plan and planning for various kinds of emergencies. As the violence increases and tensions with it, it is ever more critical to be prepared at all levels.

Trinco/Mutur

This period saw rapid growth in both the work and the staff in Mutur/Trinco. Oloo (Charles) Otieno joined the team in August. Midori left the team and NP in October after two full years that included the distinction of being the only FTM to work in all the field sites. We will miss her flexibility and contributions. Atif was on leave for part of September. Given the expanding work in Trinco town itself and the areas nearby, and the difficulty of transportation between Mutur and Trinco town, NP opened a Trinco town office in September, thus we now have two offices in Trinco district. At the very end of September new FTMs joined both teams, bringing the number of FTMs in Trinco district to nine.

Very tragically the Mutur team lost Joseph Sellar, their translator who died of a heart attack in July. Joseph played an important role with the team, helping to develop plans and relationships, helping to interpret not just words but situations and complexities. He is deeply missed. He was a kind and peaceful man, choosing to work for a peace NGO even after losing four of his sons to different incidents of violence by different armed groups in the district. Umar Jaleel, who has worked with NP as a translator, became a NPSL Field Officer.

Trinco area continues to be quite volatile. In many ways it is similar to Batti, as described above, with heightened levels of violence, militarization in various communities, and heightened insecurity. Tensions continue over the Buddha statue raised in town without permit and the related increase in military presence. Trinco town itself is about one third each Tamil, Muslim and Singhalese, however. This adds to the potential for more complex ethnic tensions. In the rural areas, while one ethnic group or another may **occupy** a particular small area, overall these areas combine to make a patchwork pattern. By the end of this period, the LTTE seems to have closed most or all of their local offices and have become much harder to connect with. This contributes to a sense of unease and

makes it more difficult for NP to support various individuals and groups in contacting the LTTE to work on critical issues.

The Trinco teams find themselves increasingly involved in a complex set of communities, relationships and tensions among fisherman societies. NP has played a useful role in helping to defuse tensions between different fishing societies, between fisherman and either the LTTE or the Sri Lankan Navy, and between fishing societies and various aid agencies. This work has helped to develop new relationships with local NGOs that also work in these communities and with local community leaders. On occasion NP has been able to help people connect to important new resources, contributing positively to the overall situation. Unfortunately the settlement that NP helped to facilitate between Muslim and Tamil fisherman in the Mutur area has not been fully implemented. Field team members continue to be involved in supporting a peaceful resolution of this conflict.

Another highlight of the work in this period was supporting a Tamil drama group to perform a drama about war and peace at one of the temple festivals for which NP provided presence. It was very well received and was a significant break in the culture of silence in the area.

The Trinco teams regularly visit a set of villages and areas that are vulnerable for various reasons. This has allowed the teams to assist villagers in resolving various conflicts nonviolently, including encouraging Sinhalese paddy farmers to get to their fields in LTTE controlled areas, and helping various communities affected by the tsunami to resolve issues of aid and identity cards. The team has also, by their presence, helped deescalate threatening behaviour aimed at community leaders through fostering relationship-building across the communities. The team has been able to bring to the attention of other NGO and INGOs such as UNHCR, UNICEF, etc., the increased levels of militarization observed and reported by community members in some of these communities. Our presence in these areas also enables us to learn about child abductions and to support those families who choose to take action on this. Additionally the teams have been asked to address the perception that most NGO and INGO attention and aid go to Tamil communities in the area. Although each organization has their own criteria for implementing their programmes, the overall impression of neglect by NGOs and INGOs of the Sinhalese communities in particular causes great frustration, anger and distrust.

During these three months the team was present during a variety of violent or tense situations of conflict between various groups including the Sri Lankan Army, LTTE and various community groups. Several times our presence seems to have been a significant factor in de-escalation. For instance, one night there was LTTE troop movement toward the Mutur Jetty army area. This caused fear amongst civilians and NP staff went out, talked to residents leaving the area, and called the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and others to bring this to their attention. The situation defused with no violence at that time. This work has led to closer collaboration as needed with SLMM and other INGOs concerned with human security. Additionally the team has been working with the local Foundation for Co-Existence (FCE) staff to develop an early warning and violence prevention plan. This plan has enabled us to collaborate on interventions.

As the work in Trinco town itself has increased, the Trinco team has reached out to various communities, trying to establish good relationships with people and organizations in all three ethnic groups. In all communities in the district, the team has worked to

support people in exploring non-violent alternatives to address problems, tensions and violence. This includes supporting peace committees in several areas and the development of zones of peace plans should higher levels of violence occur.

Jaffna

Due to holiday leave and then sick leave, the Jaffna office was mostly empty until mid August. In August, Susan returned and then was joined by Kathy Orovwigho on her return from recovery leave. During this report period, Susan has been out of the district for significant amounts of time to provide training and consultation in collaboration with Ahimsa (local NGO that NP occasionally works with) to the partners of one of our funders, Cordaid. In addition, Kathy continued to have health issues from her tsunami injury that required periodic medical attention in Colombo.

The situation in Jaffna is becoming more violent. September and early October saw a significant increase in violence and killings. Some of this seems to have political motivations and some reflects the tensions between various smaller communities. There is also a report of an increase in child recruitment and abductions in this area and pressure and training for civil society to militarize.

The Jaffna team played a role in addressing the violence between two communities, developing some nonviolent options and inquiring into the well being and process for youth that were detained by the LTTE seemingly as a response to violence between communities and not due to crimes. The youth were later released. The team has also come together with various leaders, NGOs and INGOs to address the increased violence. In September the team also undertook a rigorous review of the programme in Jaffna so as to better focus their work, and determine the future of the Jaffna NP office.

Colombo Office

The Colombo team underwent significant changes during this time period. William Knox, after two intense years of framing and starting the project, left at the end of August. His contribution to the development of NPSL was both significant and essential and he is missed. In September the hiring process drew to a close and three new management staff were hired. Marcel Smits (Netherlands) is the new project director, Eldred de Klerk (South Africa) became the new Team Manager and Angela Pinchero (Canada), one of the first FTMs in Sri Lanka, fills the newly created position of Programme Manager. Jan Passion, who has been the acting project director these last months, became the Deputy Director. In August, Ellen Furnari began as the (voluntary, part time) position of Learning and Evaluation Officer.

Other big changes and accomplishments during this period include acquiring official NGO registration in Sri Lanka (many thanks to Assistant Team Manager Ayomi Miriyagalla), moving the office to a new site in Colombo and improving financial accounting procedures under the leadership of NPSL Accountant Priyaneel Wijekularatne. Efforts were made throughout the period to improve the quality and quantity of vehicles for the field and other equipment. The Sri Lanka project continues to receive visitors and this period saw visits from a German film making crew, a

photographer from the US, and a funder from Europe. At the end of September a two day staff meeting was held to integrate all the FTMs together and into their new teams.

Election Monitoring

Presidential elections are scheduled for 17 November. Once again, NP is working closely with PAFFREL to provide international observers for pre-election and election work. In September, a Memorandum of Understanding was developed and signed, to provide better clarity to the working relationship between NP and PAFFREL. NP will provide one FTM to work full time with PAFFREL to organize the international observers and one FTM to work for a week to organize the logistics for eight NP FTMs who will then go out in the field to be pre-election observers. The pre-election observation teams will consist of two internationals, a PAFFREL staff person/translator and a driver. NP is also working to ensure that 35-40 international election monitors come from NP Member Organizations, to join the expected 20,000 Sri Lankan observers mobilized by PAFFREL. At the time of this writing over 90 applications from people with connections to NP had been received by PAFFREL.

Doubling size, more than doubling impact

As of this report, the NPSL team has more than doubled in size. With 21 FTMs, several field staff, better support structures – and most importantly utilizing the lessons of the last two years, we are well positioned to more than double our impact.

D. Assessment

Overall the NPSL project is maturing and showing early signs of impact. As NP is asked more often to be involved in relevant issues and events, as our networks of relationships connect us to vital information on a timely basis, as our relationships deepen as trust builds over time and as our own understanding of situations matures, we are able to have more impact. In specific incidents with specific individuals and communities, we have clearly been a key factor in diffusing violence, preventing escalation of violence, and supporting civilian involvement in peace with justice activities. Our work has contributed to the release of individuals from abductions and detainment in a variety of circumstances, and helped prevent abductions and harassment in others. It has opened avenues for families seeking justice or resolve and reduced the violent obstacles they face, though their search is long and ongoing. Our presence and ability to connect various groups has visibly lead to reductions of violence, for instance at the Mutur jetty and in Trinco town. A few activists and community leaders are doing work for which they frequently ask our accompaniment or protective association with – such as in Batti and Trinco. It is clear that our presence supports their engagement. We are having an impact on the lives of specific people and in specific communities. Our work shows promise of deepening impact. We often play a role of weaving together networks and helping those networks function more effectively. However, this is happening in a climate of stalemate of the peace process and an election where many questions are being raised as to the path towards peace and where there appears to be no change in some fundamental power relationships that would lead to a broader peace rather than a ceasefire. The NPSL

project is not designed to address the “track one” peace processes but it is deeply affected by them.

E. Needs and budget implications

The teams need more durable and more dependable vehicles to access the remote communities in which we work, given the often poor road conditions. The team needs additional SAT Phones to insure safety when out of range of other communication technologies, and also needs support to continue language learning.

In order to maintain the present level of work, and to meet our goal of 25 FTMs in the field, and to prepare for normal attrition (FTMs leaving the field for various reasons), NP needs to begin a new recruitment of FTMs soon. We also are getting increased requests from other NP areas for various levels of assistance from FTMs (possible staff for new projects, help on committees, speaking tours, international conferences, trainings and meetings etc.). There have been further suggestions that we explore opening an office in Mannar, but we are unable to respond with the existing level of resources.

Glossary of Abbreviations and Names

AHAM=AHAM/SCiSL, an organization working on post-tsunami issues
 CBO = Community-based Organisation
 Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (SLFP, president since 1994)
 CSO = Civil Society Organisation
 EPDP = Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (Tamil party opposing the LTTE)
 Erik Solheim: Norwegian Special Envoy
 FCE = Foundation for Co-Existence
 FTM = Field Team Members
 GOSL = “Government of Sri Lanka”.
 ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross
 ISGA = Interim Self Governing Authority (of the Tamil Tigers)
 JHU = National Heritage Party (party of Buddhist monks)
 JVP = Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (Maoist party, in coalition with SLFP) People's Liberation Front
 LTTE = Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (led militarily by Velupillai Prabhakaran)
 NACPR = National Advisory Council on Peace and Reconciliation
 NESOHR = North East Secretariat of Human Rights
 NGO = Nongovernmental Organisation
 P-TOMS = Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure
 PWA= People’s Welfare Association
 SLFP = Sri Lanka Freedom Party (governing party. Prime Minister is Mahinda Rajapaksa)
 SLMC = Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (Muslim Party)
 SLMM = Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. (Set up under the cease-fire agreement to monitor breaches of the agreement. Staffed mainly by Scandinavian military personnel in civilian clothes. Ca 50 personnel)
 TNA = Tamil National Alliance (LTTE presenting party in parliament)
 Uncleared Areas = GOSL term for areas under LTTE control
 UNICEF = United Nation Children’s Fund
 United People's Liberation Front (UPLF) governing party coalition
 UNP = United National Party (concluded cease fire agreement with LTTE in 2001/2002, had majority until elections in 2004- Prime Minister was Ranil Wickremesinghe)
 WACCO= Woman’s And Children Care Organization