



**Understanding Women's Livelihood
Outcomes and Economic Empowerment
in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka**

Nayana Godamunne

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LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES AND
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN
THE EASTERN PROVINCE OF
SRI LANKA**

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the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

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by

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Acronyms

DFID	Department of International Development
DS	District Secretariat
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KPI	Key Person Interview
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NHREP	National Human Resource and Employment Policy
SLTDA	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
WDO	Women's Development Officer
WRDS	Women's Rural Development Society

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Abstract

Since the end of the war in 2009, the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka has benefited from state and non-state investments in large-scale infrastructure, resettlement, and reconstruction. However, ten years on, the province continues to have significant populations in poverty. Unemployment figures are also high with the figure for women being three times that of men. These poverty and unemployment figures persist despite the government and donor-assisted programmes that aim to rebuild livelihoods through investments in improving connectivity, developing the tourist industry, and expanding access to credit in the years following the war.

Using qualitative methods, this study explores how these interventions have impacted on women's livelihoods in two districts, Batticaloa and Trincomalee, and the barriers they have faced in accessing and engaging in employment and livelihood activities. The study concludes that women continue to encounter challenges and restrictions in accessing employment and livelihood opportunities; where they do, they are often in conditions of informality and in work that lacks recognition and dignity.

Introduction

Sri Lanka's protracted war, that lasted more than thirty years, ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by government forces in May 2009. In the aftermath of the war, the Rajapaksa regime prioritised high investment development interventions in the war-affected North and East based on the notion that economic under-development had been the root cause of ethnic conflict. Fast-paced mega development and economic growth thus came to symbolise the transitioning of Sri Lanka from a country ravaged by war to one that would become the "miracle of Asia".¹ The change of regime in January 2015, continued the emphasis on economic development whilst linking it with justice and reconciliation. Well-paying jobs in skill sectors, such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and tourism, were to replace low-paying jobs in the hitherto production-based economy. Thus, employment creation has been an important target of the government economic agenda.² But, has the end of the war resulted in significant changes in livelihood support and livelihood recovery for people affected by war? The question is pertinent in the context of the post-war development agenda pursued by both the Rajapaksa and Wickremesinghe governments, particularly as evidence that state-sponsored post-war development initiatives have contributed to employment generation and livelihood improvement is sparse.³ It is in this context that the present study was conceptualised, specifically to understand livelihood recovery of women in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The province is unique in many ways, it hosts a rich and diverse community, culturally, ethnically and religiously. It is endowed abundantly in resources, situated in the heart of the country's rice granary and rich in both freshwater and coastal fisheries. Pristine sandy beaches and an ocean renown for recreational activity makes the province a prime location for tourism.

The province was at the forefront of the war but came under government control in 2007, two years before the bloody war ended. Since the end of war, the province has benefited by reconstruction, rehabilitation and development interventions. Government initiatives were led by the *Negamahira Navodhaya* (Eastern Revival) between 2007 and 2010 and; donor assistance has focuses on reconciliation and livelihood rebuilding initiatives. However, the province's contribution to the

1 Department of National Planning 2010

2 News.lk 2015

3 Gunasekera, Philips and Nagaraj 2016

overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has remained stagnant at around six per cent over the past five years. It lags behind on other indicators too. Whilst national poverty headcount figures have shown a steady decline,⁴ they are high in the districts within the province. In 2017, the figure for Batticaloa was 11.3 per cent and Trincomalee 10 per cent,⁵ with many income earners engaged in informal and often precarious work. Whilst these figures are lower than in some war-affected districts in the North, the high incidence of poverty is of concern in a province which is blessed with natural resources and has been a beneficiary of substantial government and donor assisted investments for rebuilding and reconstructing both tsunami- and war-ravaged lives and livelihoods. Undoubtedly, war has exerted significant impacts on women's lives and livelihoods, but formal and informal structures and processes and the availability of livelihood options determine women's livelihood choices and strategies resulting in very different livelihood outcomes for different groups of women.⁶ In this respect obtaining a deeper understanding of how development and livelihood rebuilding initiatives have contributed to supporting women's livelihood strategies is likely to provide insights on women's livelihood trajectories in a post-war context.

Official figures indicate that the unemployment rate of women in the province at 38 per cent, is more than double that of men, which stands at 9.3 per cent.⁷ Empirical evidence on women's participation in the labour market in the East is sparse. Unpacking the high incidence of unemployment of women calls for a deeper exploration of women in work, both paid and unpaid, to understand the nuances of women's work in the Eastern Province. It is in this context that the present study was commissioned to understand: livelihood strategies of women, impacts of war on women's livelihood activities, and the role of livelihood interventions in supporting women's livelihood recovery in a post-war context.

This study is organised in five chapters. The first situates livelihoods in the wider context of the political economy of the Eastern Province in the post-war period. The second reviews livelihood actors and programmes, both state and non-state, with a particular focus on credit and debt, which is a post-war phenomenon. The third, discusses women's livelihood strategies and the fourth considers the barriers that girls and women encounter when making livelihood choices

4 4.1 per cent of the population living below the poverty line in 2016, a drop from 8.9 per cent in 2009/2010

5 Department of Census and Statistics 2017

6 Fernando and Moonesinghe 2012: vi

7 Department of Census and Statistics 2015

and how they negotiate spaces of empowerment in a context of fragility. The fifth chapter reflects in the search for moving women from survival to secure livelihoods and highlights key points for policy consideration.

The study concludes that, more than a decade after the end of the war, women in the East remain trapped in survival livelihoods, with few or no safety nets to cope and recover from shocks at household or community levels. Public sector employment is aspirational for those seeking opportunities in the labour market and education is the vehicle for upward economic and social mobility.

Research questions and methodology

The purpose of the study was to provide empirical evidence, qualitatively gathered, on the impact of war on women's livelihood activities in Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts after 2007; and to understand how livelihood (re)building initiatives have contributed to supporting their livelihood strategies. In line with the study's focus on livelihood recovery the primary research question is: ***Are there significant changes in livelihood support and recovery after the war ended?*** To enable the study to zone into livelihood strategies and support, the primary research is broken down into three sub research questions: *What are the livelihood activities that women are engaged in? Has the war influenced women's livelihood activities? How have livelihood interventions helped women in their livelihood activities?*

The study hypothesises that women's participation in livelihood activities has been disrupted as a result of war due to loss or disruption of previous livelihoods, loss of assets, loss of family members, and disability. Post-war livelihood interventions in this respect have been concerned primarily with helping to rebuild and support women's livelihood strategies.

Research design

This qualitative study was designed to contribute to an existing body of evidence undertaken by a similar study on women's livelihoods in the Northern Province in 2017. As such, the research design and methodology are guided by the previous study and also complements a quantitative study undertaken simultaneously in both Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts.

Whilst much of the current work on livelihoods is concerned with different types of livelihoods and the relationships between them at household level, in this study we explore how women are coping and recovering using their capabilities and assets. We are particularly interested in the social and economic fault lines across gender, class, and ethnicity and their intersections. Examining these intersections is important to understand how vulnerabilities and fragilities are generated or exacerbated and how they contribute to poverty, marginalisation, and exclusion (Murray, 2001: 5).

Data sources

Both secondary and primary data sources were used in the study. Secondary sources included newspaper articles, academic articles (both published and unpublished) and research reports. These secondary sources enabled the researcher to identify gaps in the literature prior to the conduct of field research. A second round of literature was sourced to fill in the gaps in the primary research which was undertaken by perusing hitherto unpublished and forthcoming academic articles.

Primary research was primarily qualitative in nature in the two districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa and included a combination of Household Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Person Interviews (KPIs) to obtain an understanding of women's livelihoods during and after the war, and the structures and process that influence women's choices on work.

Sample and Tools

The districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa form the geographical focus of this study. They are districts are the largest in the Eastern Province. They are culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse with Trincomalee representing Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim communities and Batticaloa hosting both Tamil and Muslim populations. The districts have a combination of more prosperous locations, usually on the coastal belt and poorer ones, concentrated mostly in the interior. The Divisional Secretariat (DS) divisions in each district were selected to correspond to the sample in the quantitative study. In Trincomalee it comprised Trincomalee Town, Gravette's DS, and Muttur DS and in Batticaloa Eravur Pattu, Manmunai North, and Manmunai Pattu. Thus, a total of five DS divisions were selected across the two districts. Within each DS division, two or three Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions were selected to capture ethnic, age, and religious diversity in respondents.

Respondents for the household interviews were selected randomly; first in each GN division and then a snowballing approach to capture specific attributes such female-headed households. The KPIs were selected using local networks. For instance, the Field Coordinator is a resident of Batticaloa and attached to the Eastern University. Initially he suggested names for the interviews. During data collection, some changes were made to the initial list depending on the type of data required and availability/non-availability of the respondents. The respondents for the FGDs were selected in conversation with the local GNs to ensure that every day experiences of men and women in the community were captured in the data.

Some obstacles were encountered during the data collection process. The rains and subsequent flooding in Batticaloa in October 2018 disrupted fieldwork which was temporarily called off. Once the situation was stable some of the households identified were temporarily displaced and could not participate in the survey. KPIs with government officials were difficult to schedule since many were involved in providing humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the flooding.

The table below provides details of the DS and GNs in the sample

District	DS Division	GN Division
Trincomalee	Trincomalee Town and Gravette’s	Uppuveli Linganagar Abeyapura
	Muttur	Pattithida Palikudiruppu Azath Nagar
Batticaloa	Eravur Pattu	Kommanthurai East Iyankerny
	Manmunai North	Thandavanvely Karuveppankerny
	Manmunai Pattu	Arayampathy

Table 1: Sampled locations

In Trincomalee a total of 10 women were interviewed at household level from the six GN divisions which included six Tamil, two Sinhala and two Muslim. The ages of the women ranged from 28 to 56 years and included women who were the heads of households (widowed, never married) and married.

Two FGDs were conducted in Langanagar (Trincomalee Town and Gravette's DS) and Sampoor (Muttur DS). Each FGD comprised 15 male and female members of the community. In addition, five KPIs were conducted with a Women's Development Officer (WDO) at the district level, A Women's Rural Development Officer (WRDS) at the GN level, a Programme Coordinator of a local Non-governmental Organisation (NGO), a lecturer of the Trincomalee campus of the Eastern University and a Coordinator of a women's network in Trincomalee.

In Batticaloa a total of eight Tamil women were interviewed at household level from the five GNs. The sample included a widow, an abandoned woman, and married women between the ages of 26 and 55.

Data analysis

In keeping with the mandate of the assignment, the analysis of the data was broadly guided by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.⁸ The framework was particularly useful for understanding the different types of assets women have access to, how they use them to build livelihoods, and how they convert them to livelihood outcomes. It also allows for an analysis of policies, structures, and processes which were important to determine access to capital, activities, and decision-making processes which are essential for livelihood choices and strategies. These factors also impact on women's perceptions of inclusion, which were useful to determine access to assets and how they influence decisions about livelihood strategies.⁹ Finally the framework was useful for assessing women's vulnerability in the contexts of livelihood loss and their ability to mitigate, cope, and recover. The framework thus provided the foundation for understanding livelihood choices, strategies and outcomes and was helpful in assessing how development interventions fit with livelihoods of women.

Limitations and delimitations

Within the limited resources available the sample size was small. We have tried not to generalise findings but to provide insights and highlight context-specific

8 Kollmair and Gamper 2002

9 Dfid 2000

issues. The study encountered some issues with primary data collection for the Batticaloa component of the study which was delayed due to the floods of November 2018. An issue with the field coordinator resulted in the inability to analyse data from FGDs and KPIs in the district. However, additional literature, which is hitherto unpublished, was accessed and used to fill gaps in the data.

Chapter 1: The Context

The people of the Eastern Province bore the brunt of a brutal war and catastrophic natural disaster – the 2004 tsunami. The two phenomena have taken a physical and emotional toll on the land and its people. Many women lost their primary income earners, often men in the household, had education disrupted, and faced socio-cultural barriers in engaging in the labour market during and after the war. Their lives have been marked by displacement, dispossession, death and disappearances of loved ones. It is within this context that Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim women in the Eastern Province are negotiating their livelihoods in the war to no-war transition.

After the end of the war, government, NGOs and the private sector introduced many livelihoods programmes. They included cash handouts, in-kind assistance such as agricultural and livestock inputs, and housing assistance to help war-affected communities and women affected by war in particular, to rebuild their livelihoods by providing employment and income-generation support. From 2009, the Rajapaksa regime prioritised fast-paced economic growth and infrastructure development in the war-affected areas. Centrally-driven, high-investment, mega development, particularly in rebuilding infrastructure, was prioritised. Since 2015 the government's thrust has been to move people away from low-paying production related jobs to "well-paying ones done by qualified people". This was articulated by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in a parliamentary address in 2015 when he said, "*We need to look into sectors like ICT [information and communication technology] and tourism to create employment opportunities in the short run.*"¹⁰ Despite these proclamations, evidence that post-war development interventions have contributed to employment and income-generation remains sparse.¹¹

Whilst the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were militarily defeated by government forces in the East in 2007, conflict continued and still exists in much of Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. Militarisation, and its resultant features of roadblocks, harassment, and corruption are issues faced by women in carrying out their day-to-day activities. The involvement of the military in trade such as running food outlets and grocery stores, activities that are traditionally associated with women's livelihoods, are in competition with women's income-

¹⁰ News.lk 2015

¹¹ Gunasekera et al 2016

generation, bringing local women into direct conflict with the military. Pockets of highly localised conflict thus remain in tandem with relative peace. More recent reports suggest that the government's post-war rhetoric of employment creation has not satisfied demand.¹² Of more concern are income figures for the province. The official poverty rate in Batticaloa for example at 11.3 per cent in 2016 is one of the highest in the country.¹³ The growth of household indebtedness, the increasing number of attempted and actual suicides, and the nutritional status of children in both districts are reflective of widespread deprivation, poverty, and marginalisation.¹⁴ The figures for women are particularly significant, with women's unemployment in the province at 38.4 per cent, compared to 9.3 per cent for men.¹⁵ Set within the context of the relatively high poverty head count, it is likely that a significant number of women in the province are in poverty. The province's resource-richness and post-war development drive thus stand in stark contrast to the economic and social wellbeing of many of its people. Within this context it is pertinent to discern how women are negotiating income-generation after war, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of women's work, poverty, marginalisation and exclusion in the province.

What are livelihoods and why should policy and programmes focus on it?

Drawing on the work of Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway (1992), The UK Department of International Development (Dfid) describes livelihoods as “... *the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.*” Broadly speaking, livelihoods are fundamentally about what people do to meet their needs and how they cope and recover from shocks.¹⁶

The link between war (or end of war) and livelihood recovery gained traction after the publication of a World Bank Report which stressed that job creation programmes are important to stabilise countries emerging from conflict.¹⁷

12 Central Bank 2016

13 Department of Census and Statistics 2017

14 Central Bank 2016

15 Department of Census and Statistic 2015

16 Maxwell, Mazurana, Wagner and Slater 2017

17 World Bank 2011; Maxwell et al in 2017

This interest in rebuilding livelihoods after war stems also from the idea that livelihoods are a means of achieving social cohesion. The notion that livelihoods can create stability and social cohesion however are not without contestation. Fernando and Moonesinghe (2012), in their study note that whilst the ceasefire between the government and the LTTE in 2002 was seen as boosting access to markets, civilians did not regard this as particularly important,¹⁸ signalling that livelihood trajectories can be widely different depending on the institutional structures, both formal and informal, and livelihood options that determine livelihood strategies.¹⁹ Furthermore, it highlights that livelihood trajectories can be highly contextual making generalisations difficult, particularly in the context of war and its legacies.²⁰

Legacies of war: How did war affect livelihoods?

A recurring theme during this study was that the legacy of war and its deep roots impact on both the lives and livelihoods of women. These impacts manifest in many ways. All of the women respondents in the study were displaced, twice at least, with a few three times. That war and resultant displacement disrupted education was articulated several times. One Muslim woman from Muttur told us she had aspirations of entering the university as the first step towards securing a public sector job. But her family had been displaced three times which made it impossible for her to stay in education continuously.²¹ Other studies note how, during the war, women were tasked with taking produce to the market, as it was easier for women to negotiate the military checkpoints on the way as the risk of men getting arrested at the checkpoint was higher.²² Empirical evidence from the present study indicate that some women were still negotiating post-war military checkpoints, but were now also at risk of sexual harassment by the military illustrating the different kinds of insecurities women faced as a result of war.²³

The foundation on which livelihoods are built are based on the availability of and access to different types of capital. As in most post-war contexts, women's access to the different kinds of capital in Trincomalee and Batticaloa is restricted or in

18 Fernando and Moonesinghe 2012

19 Maxwell et al 2017

20 Ibid

21 Interview with Muslim woman, Muttur

22 Wanasundara 2006

23 FGD Muttur

some instances, simply unavailable. Whilst some women were able to return to previous agro-based livelihoods (such as paddy cultivation) quite quickly, others (who had been displaced for prolonged periods) found recovery more difficult in the wake of loss and damage to physical assets. Women respondents in this study recalled the state of their physical assets on returning to their villages and homes – houses pop-marked with gun shots, home gardens overrun with weeds, and overgrown paddy fields. For some women, access to raw materials impeded livelihoods they had engaged in during the war. For instance, a group of women who had been displaced from Trincomalee Town to a rural area recalled how they accessed raw materials from the forest, from which they produced cane and rush handicrafts and earned an income. Once resettled back in the town, they had no access to the forest and were forced to purchase the cane from the market which made the handicrafts too expensive to produce. They had since given up making handicrafts.²⁴ This story illustrates how a livelihood born out of displacement started but failed in a post-war context. Another young woman recollected a pre-war livelihood which her family was unable to resurrect in a post-war context. Her parents had run a “hotel” in Trincomalee Town before the war escalated. Subsequently they had to flee, losing their livelihood. After the end of the war, they had no financial resources to restart the “hotel”. They now run a small grocery store in town which is less profitable than the “hotel” they ran previously.²⁵ These stories are indicative of the challenges faced when trying to rebuild livelihoods after the ravages of war.

The war took a toll on women's financial assets too. When the war reached the villages they fled with a few or no assets. When they returned “home” after the war, they converted these assets to cash to restart livelihoods. As *Vani* recounted, *“My husband and I were both public servants. During the war my husband was imprisoned and lost his government job. When he was released I sold my highland property and gave him the money and my savings so he could start a small business.”*²⁶ *Vani's* story is not an isolated one, many women sold their gold sovereigns and drew on their savings to rebuild their houses and fund their self-employment start-ups.²⁷

The inability to reclaim access to the commons after the war was best articulated during conversations with villagers in Sampoor. The continued occupation

24 FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

25 Interview with Sinhala woman, Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

26 Interview with Tamil woman, Manmunai North

27 Interview with Tamil woman, Eravur Pattu

of arable and pasture land by the military was restricting access by villagers and has been a point of contestation between the government and resettled communities since the end of the war. Prior to the war, many women used the land to graze cattle and for agro-based cultivation. However, since returning, restrictions on the use of land left the women with few livelihood options. Whilst the government asserts that new wage labour options are available for Sampoor residents in the on-going construction projects, in reality the engagement of the military in these projects has effectively left few vacancies for locals. Sampoor presents a sub set of issues faced by resettled women such as restrictions in livelihood options, job creation and livelihood strategies, but it also highlights that livelihood trajectories are highly contextual.²⁸

The impact of war on community relations however was mixed. As revealed during a discussion in Sampoor, displacement pulled communities together in the face of common challenges and strengthened during fresh challenges once resettled in a post-war context.²⁹ Furthermore, new forms of community networks, such as membership of the Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS), opened up new opportunities for resettled women to access government and non-government livelihood intervention programmes.

Death and disappearances were everyday reminders of war for women. One indication of this is the number of female-headed households, which is disproportionately higher in the North and East. Whilst recent figures indicate as many as 25 per cent of households in Sri Lanka are female-headed the figure is significantly higher in the Eastern Province.³⁰ The challenges to eke out a living, whilst balancing responsibilities related to the care for the elderly, disabled, and children, was a recurring theme during this study.

A more recent phenomenon is the prevalence of gender-based harassment and violence, which exist side-by-side with the visibility of sex trade. The incidence of gender-based violence whilst not a new phenomenon, was a recurring theme across the primary data. During the discussion in Sampoor women indicated the challenges faced by girls and young women within and outside of the household which is articulated in this quote "*Many young widows and girl children from women-headed households are frequently subjected to sexual violence by*

28 FGD Muttur

29 Ibid

30 KPI, Academic at the Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University

neighbours, family members, and strangers. Victimisation of girl children of remarried women is a real problem now".³¹ Furthermore, the expanding nature of women's livelihoods, which included sex trade as a post-war phenomenon, was articulated by an NGO worker in Trincomalee, "*.....In the war-affected regions women are suffering like anything to survive. Some of the women use their sexuality to earn an income to feed their children.*"³²

Undoubtedly, the stresses of war have deep-rooted physical and psychosocial impacts on the lives of the women. One woman in Manmunai North articulated that she is both physically disabled and mentally traumatised, restricting her ability to productively engage in the labour market. At the age of 58, she could still be economically productive, but a permanent physical disability caused by shrapnel and the disappearance of her son during the war was both physically and emotionally debilitating, restricting her ability to engage in full-time work. These legacies of war continue to shape women's lives and livelihoods in the East. Coupled with under-developed infrastructure, weak human resource capacity and social institutions, the challenges to bring the lagging province up to speed with the rest of the country, was immense. It is within this context that the government embarked on an ambitious programme of work centred around building infrastructure, expanding credit, and rebuilding livelihoods and enhancing employment creation.

³¹ Ibid

³² KPI, Programme Coordinator

Chapter 2: Supporting Jobs and Livelihoods

Policy framework for enterprise development and tourism growth

Assumptions on the role of livelihood programming in a post-war context are premised on the idea that livelihoods need to be protected and (re)built. It is important to stress that (re)building women's livelihoods in particular increases their access to economic resources and are linked to their ability to access justice and; for their physical security. What this means is when women's economic and social rights, such as access to land and housing, equity in the distribution of household resources, participation in household decision-making, and freedom of movement, are secure, the likelihood of remaining poor and or marginalised is less.³³ Livelihood programmes in this respect play an important role in shaping people's livelihoods through providing and strengthening trade, markets, and institutions. The role of the state in providing an enabling policy environment, prioritising infrastructure rebuilding, and supplying the required "soft" infrastructure through public services delivered by bureaucrats, the police, and the military. Additionally, non-state actors, such as non-governmental organisations and the private sector, play an important role in implementing livelihood programmes and creating jobs and employment opportunities. Together, these livelihood actors play a central role in shaping people's livelihood opportunities and choices.

Soon after the LTTE was militarily defeated in 2009, the Rajapaksa government embarked on a programme of rebuilding and reconstructing the war-affected areas. In the East the slogan of *Negenahira Udawa* (Awakening of the East) was popularised by state authorities. State-led development activities translated to rebuilding infrastructure ravaged by decades of war. Economic development was prioritised both for economic growth first and later, under the Wickremesinghe government, also as a means of encouraging reconciliation. Two sectors singled out for priority in the East were entrepreneur development and tourism.

Motivations for entrepreneurship as a livelihood strategy in a post-war context are driven by several factors – predominantly by the idea that poor people can be empowered to move out of poverty and that entrepreneurship is a vehicle of self motivation to achieve that end.³⁴ This assumption is premised on the

³³ Ibanez and Moya 2006

³⁴ Rayan 2005 in Ranawana and Senn 2018

idea that peacebuilding interventions that enhance the voice of war-affected people can increase social status and networking skills. In Sri Lanka, the promotion of entrepreneurship is influenced by two broad themes. First, that entrepreneurship activity is embedded in the Sri Lankan economy and can therefore promote growth.³⁵ This idea is underpinned by the belief that small and medium entrepreneurs are drivers of economic growth because they can diversify and expand the domestic economy.³⁶ Secondly, that networks formed through micro, small and medium entrepreneurship are important for creating a sustainable peace in a post-war context through the linkages that are built.³⁷

Enterprise promotion thus was given an early impetus in the post-war economic development and poverty alleviation strategy with the government introducing several initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, particularly amongst women. Work on formulating the National Human Resource and Employment Policy (NHREP), under the auspices of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) began as far back as 2011 and is the foremost policy document promoting entrepreneurship. The NHREP has a section specifically dedicated to women, detailing the difficulties faced by women in the labour market and ways in which they can be empowered through entrepreneurship. The policy document promotes entrepreneur development as a way of improving women's access to services such as markets, credit, technology, and business knowledge. It specifically recognises the vulnerability of women affected by war, reinforces the need for social security as a safety net for women in self-employment and recommends setting up a fund to be maintained by contributions made by women in self-employment.³⁸ Entrepreneurship has thus been specifically earmarked as a means to both boost income-generation and improve the living conditions of women affected by war.³⁹

As part of the push to build “economic democracy”, *Vision 2025* provides details of government sponsored interventions to promote entrepreneurship by embracing a “social market policy”. The “*Enterprise Sri Lanka*” programme for example, is part of the *Vision 2025* initiative. This programme aims to provide a series of credit lines to entrepreneurs in the war-affected and other regions in Sri Lanka as part of a government-sponsored scheme to support

35 Marambe 2015

36 Ranawana and Senn 2018

37 Yoosuf and Premaratne 2017

38 Lokuge, Senn and Ranawana 2018

39 Ibid

entrepreneurship development.⁴⁰ Creating female entrepreneurs is an important component of the programme which targets young people who have not gained admission to higher education institutions by offering an alternative livelihood to engaging in low-skilled labour. Supported by UNDP, measures to introduce entrepreneurship to the school curricula are currently underway as a way of inculcating basic concepts of entrepreneurship as a practical alternative option to academic learning.⁴¹ More importantly, the programme recognises the difficulties that entrepreneurs coming out of war face and provides additional support to such communities. For example, obtaining a loan from a financial institution to start up a micro, small, or medium enterprise requires collateral. Many entrepreneurs in the war-affected areas have lost documentation such as land titles which are commonly used as collateral. To overcome this obstacle, *Enterprise Sri Lanka* offers government-backed guarantees for entrepreneurs who require collateral.⁴² Programmes like *Enterprise Sri Lanka* in principle, are indicative of the government's focus on promoting entrepreneurship to boost economic growth by supporting individuals to engage in entrepreneurship as a means of improving wellbeing.

The thrust to promote entrepreneurship in the war-affected areas has also been given an impetus through the National Action Plan on Women-headed Households 2017-2019 which focuses on promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship amongst women-headed households in war-affected areas. Together with the Reconciliation Plan of 2017 and the Policy Framework for SME Development, the government aims to provide a comprehensive policy framework to generate employment opportunities and reduce poverty through regional development. The promotion of entrepreneurship thus has a political objective in addressing unemployment through both job creation and in livelihood rebuilding, particularly for women affected by war. Programmes like *Enterprise Sri Lanka* and policies such as the National Action Plan for Women-headed Households are important in that they support more inclusive growth with the aim of transforming “lagging regions to emerging regions of prosperity”.⁴³

Thus far, government policy has sought to provide the necessary macro-economic framework, infrastructure support, and institutional capacity to provide the foundations for enterprise development based on the concept of “maximum

40 Ranawana and Senn 2018

41 Ibid

42 Ibid

43 Ministry of Industry and Commerce 2016: 1; Ranawana and Senn 2018

support but minimum intervention”,⁴⁴ thus allowing market forces to take advantages of the new opportunities for expanding enterprise development.

The second key sector marked for economic growth in the East is tourism. Blessed with pristine sandy beaches, the scenic location of the province has the potential to become a major tourist destination. Prospects for developing tourism started with plans by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) in 2007 and implemented when civil administration was re-established in the province in 2008. Tourism development was part of the development plan under the state-sponsored *Nagenahira Navodhaya* programme.⁴⁵ The recognition of the potential of the tourist industry to become a major foreign exchange earner was reflected in state policy discourse and emerged in the policy domain through the Tourism Development Strategy 2011-2016. The strategy acknowledged the potential of the tourism industry to develop not only as a major income generator for the government, but also to create employment opportunities in the locations earmarked as tourist zones. The industry would create both direct employment opportunities, and generate income-earning opportunities to a number of linked sectors through opportunities for self-employment and growth of micro and SMEs. This would result in a “multiplier effect” allowing for the distribution of wealth by a variety of economic activities.⁴⁶ To achieve the objectives of the strategy, the government formulated a number of strategic priorities including the provision of high quality accommodation, value addition, and product segmentation. These activities would be linked to livelihood creation and employment generation through food and beverage consumption, construction, arts and crafts, transportation and cottage-based small-scale industries. Similar to enterprise development, the role of the government in the tourism sector was to enable a favourable environment through formulating policy, rebuilding infrastructure, and institutional capacity for market forces to take advantage of the economic potential of tourism as an income earner in the province. The prioritisation of tourism development in the state's national development plan was thus based on the assumption that investments in developing the industry can directly and indirectly improve the socio-economic lives of people through job creation, and that it can absorb surplus labour particularly in the unskilled and semi-skilled labour sectors.⁴⁷

44 Task Force for Small and Medium Enterprise Development Programme, 2002; Lokuge et al 2018

45 Gunasekera et al 2016

46 Ministry of Economic Development 2011: 4

47 Mitchell and Faal 2006

Livelihood programmes

Livelihood programmes in the East can be broadly categorised as state, non-governmental, consisting of local and foreign NGOs, and the private sector. It is not within the mandate of this study to assess the relevance, effectiveness and coverage of current programmes, but the types of programmes that are being implemented will be discussed in this chapter to enable a more grounded understanding for the high unemployment and poverty figures of women in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts.

In a post-war context, aid funded livelihood programmes are often intended to perform a dual function; to contribute to peacebuilding and generate material benefits for the communities.⁴⁸ It is important however to acknowledge that when engaging in livelihoods there are risks of loss or disruption due to a variety of factors at the household and community levels. Livelihood programmes thus need to understand livelihoods within this broader framework of protection and risks.

Government interventions in the province have focused on rebuilding infrastructure- roads, schools and hospitals, through the *Nagenahira Navodhaya* programme. Several initiatives at the village level have been initiated through the *Gama Nagume*⁴⁹ (Village Re-awakening) programme. State sponsored social protection programmes which have a livelihood component such as *Divi Neguma*,⁵⁰ were introduced in the Batticaloa district after 2007 and earlier in the Trincomalee district. The *Divi Neguma* programme for example, distributed agro seedlings – coconuts, fruits and vegetables, to households to encourage cultivation of crops in home gardens. Women in particular benefitted from *Divi Neguma* once resettled. However, the programme was not without shortfalls as articulated in this quote.

“Certain village level development projects have been implemented, such as Divi Neguma, Gama Neguma, and these programmes support rural women and help them in various ways. Government projects are implemented with monitoring of the processes for which the financial assistance was given.

48 Jasper and O’Callaghan 2010

49 state sponsored rural development programme rolled out in 2006 by the central government to improve the standard of living in non-urban areas. It included building/rehabilitating village infrastructure - roads, electricity, irrigation, water supply and community services

50 social protection programme with a focus on creating rural employment

However, selecting beneficiaries and releasing funds on time are still not very efficient in government livelihood programmes.”⁵¹

Both donor-funded and government livelihood interventions were singled out for criticism, with government officials such as the Women's Development Officer (WDC), at the district level and the GN, at the village level, being directly implicated for not: conducting context assessments, identifying livelihood strategies, and selecting beneficiaries effectively.⁵² The resulting mismatch between contextual conditions and assistance provided was expressed at a discussion in Sampoor.

“Some were given cattle, but they do not have pasture land to graze them and some were given water pumps for cultivation, but they do not have lands, since both arable and pasture lands are still occupied by the Navy.”⁵³

Moreover, poor beneficiary selection was blamed for some women being unable to enrol in skill building programmes in their chosen livelihoods. For example, a group of women in the Trincomalee Town and Gravette's DS expressed interest in engaging in floristry and mushroom farming as a livelihood. Whilst training programmes were being conducted by non-governmental organisations in these fields these women have yet to be selected for training.⁵⁴

Livelihood programmes that targeted woman-headed households were a point of contention between families. The responses from women in the study who were not the head of the family mirrored the responses from a previous study on programmes for women headed households done in the Northern Province in 2015.⁵⁵ Common issues raised were on the criteria used to define women headed households and the rationale for singling them out for assistance.

Data gathered provided some positive stories too. Donor assistance programmes that were most valued were those that had a leadership training component. Women in Batticaloa (Eravur Pattu DS and Manmunai North DS) and Trincomalee (Muttur DS) were especially appreciative of such training received with some using the skills received in leadership positions in the local Women's

51 FGD Muttur

52 KPI, Programme Coordinator

53 FGD Muttur

54 FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

55 UN Colombo 2015

Rural Development Societies (WRDS). Holding official positions within the WRDS had many advantages including the opportunity to select and be selected as a beneficiary of both government- and donor-funded livelihood interventions. It was thus not a surprise that obtaining a position in the WRDS was fiercely competitive and revered at the same time. Another woman in Manmunai North who had benefitted from a cake-making training programme conducted by an NGO, had a thriving cake-making business. The money was useful, she said, in supplementing household income and the work was flexible to allow her to work around her care responsibilities in raising two school-going children.⁵⁶ Similarly, women who had established food outlets, through developing skills by a government-led project to empower women in Muttur, were particularly happy and successful with their self-employment ventures.⁵⁷ These stories illustrate that when skill building training programmes match a woman's interest and the selection process is fair and transparent, the chances of translating livelihood assistance to positive livelihood outcomes are much greater.

The third actor involved in providing income-generation opportunities for women is the private sector. The entry of private capital to the East is a relatively new, post-war phenomenon. It is different to the other two sectors in that income is generated for local people through job creation and providing direct employment opportunities outside of their homes. Private capital in the districts studied is concentrated around specific sectors – garments, financial services (leasing, banking and insurance), retail (super markets), and tourism and hospitality. The take-up of jobs in the private sector by local women however is “very low”.⁵⁸ Many reasons were indicated for this – long hours of work, shift work often entailing work after dark and work unsuited for women. Much of the East still lacks basic security and privacy services for women. The lack of transportation to facilitate night work and insufficient public services such as women's toilets at bus terminals often deter women taking up shift work.⁵⁹ The lack of required skills and knowledge was also cited for the low take up of jobs in the private sector: “*Many educated and unemployed women do not have employable skills like vocational and technical skills, or the required personality and leadership skills and communication skills. They do not try to get those skills.*”⁶⁰ In the tourism sector, for example, work that is traditionally taken up

56 Interview with Tamil woman in Manmunai North

57 FGD Muttur

58 KPI, Programme Coordinator

59 KPI, WRDS

60 KPI, Academic, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University

by women – front office, laundry, house-keeping and catering, require certain skills at the supervisory level which are lacking in a generation of young people who were born in a culture of war. A study conducted on tourism in Passikudah in the Batticaloa district indicated that many of the local women employed in the resorts were concentrated in the lower levels of the human resource chain, as cleaners, kitchen helps, and laundry workers, with supervisory-level jobs occupied by women from other regions, often Sinhala women from the South, thus indicating an ethnic bias in the concentration of higher level jobs in the sector.⁶¹ The third reason cited for low take up of jobs in the private sector is the perception that public sector work is the most appropriate type of work for women.⁶² Furthermore, evidence of the stigma associated with certain sectors, for example employment in the resorts and work in the hospitality industry generally, was described as deterring uptake of employment in this sector.⁶³ Many women working in the resorts were unwilling to openly talk about their work due to the negative perceptions associated with work in the hospitality industry.⁶⁴ Evidence from the present study supports this view. One woman we spoke with in Trincomalee Town worked in a kitchen of a resort, but the reason she felt comfortable talking about her work was because her mother also worked in the same kitchen.⁶⁵ Thus the link between employment creation and improved economic and social wellbeing is difficult to establish in the tourism industry in the East and resonates with other studies which question the “multiplier-effect” of tourism.⁶⁶ Furthermore, perceptions of exploitation, insecurity, and sexual harassment and abuse in the hospitality industry exist. Conditions of exploitation by sexual abuse, delayed wage payments, non-payment of benefits such as service charge have been documented and result in many women working in conditions of informal labour in the formal labour sector.⁶⁷

An important phenomenon in the private capital market is the expansion of micro finance organisations in the post-war era. Traditionally, micro finance targeted women and this holds for how the sector operates in Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Together with the emphasis on self-employment through home-based livelihoods and micro entrepreneurship, micro finance organisations have and continue to flourish at the disadvantage of women in the two districts. A study

61 Gunasekera et al 2016

62 KPI, Official at the Trincomalee District Secretariat

63 Gunasekera et al 2016

64 *ibid*

65 Interview with Tamil woman in Eravur Pattu

66 Lee and Kang 1998

67 Gunasekera et al 2016

undertaken in Passikudah notes that micro credit linked livelihoods targeting women was first introduced by NGOs after the tsunami but has significantly increased in the post-war period.⁶⁸ The impact of micro finance on women's lives (not merely on livelihoods) will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Has livelihood assistance made a positive difference?

In 2018, the Asian Development Bank pledged \$12.6 million to promote women's entrepreneurship development in Sri Lanka. As detailed in the previous section, whilst government and non-governmental initiatives to rebuild women's livelihoods exist, it is unclear whether they have resulted in positive changes in women's livelihoods since the end of the war. Evidence of positive changes in livelihood recovery is thin and spotty. In the following paragraphs we attempt to lay out evidence and potential explanations to support our findings.

As previously discussed, employment creation and livelihood rebuilding in the East has focused on two primary sectors – entrepreneurship development and tourism. In post-war Sri Lanka, the dominant discourse for rural development has been to focus on different types of self-employment as a way to boost entrepreneurial activity.⁶⁹ At the onset, it is important to differentiate between self-employment and entrepreneurship. Whilst both categories of work are often used interchangeably or seen as the same, there are differences. A shared characteristic is that they both own a business. The major difference, however, is that whilst the self-employed owns the business and works for oneself as a freelancer, the entrepreneur organises and operates a business by employing people and taking on financial risks. An entrepreneur, in this sense, has a larger operation in terms of capital and risk and can be viewed as a next step from being a self-employed or an own-account worker.

In post-war Sri Lanka entrepreneurship has been idealised in the policy discourse as a robust means to achieve economic growth. Facilitating innovative ways of promoting an entrepreneurship society has thus become a preoccupation of policy makers who subscribe to the idea that entrepreneurs can drive growth. In this mindset, small and medium entrepreneurs are seen as the drivers of economic growth, with the discourse of entrepreneurship becoming embedded

68 *ibid*

69 Bastian 2013; Lokuge et al 2018

in the economy.⁷⁰ This appears to be what is happening in Sri Lanka. However, in the Eastern Province the drive to focus on enterprise development through entrepreneurship, might well be a case of putting the cart before the horse.

The drive to promote entrepreneurship is premised on the idea that a good part of Sri Lanka's economic growth potential lies in developing small or medium scale enterprises.⁷¹ This belief has entrenched the idea that developing micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) should be the dominant approach to livelihood development for war-affected women, particularly for female-headed households.⁷² The rationale for MSME promotion is based on current economic indicators which affirm that women in war-affected areas are faring much worse than their male counterparts in terms of assets and wealth creation. The figures are even lower for women of minority ethnicity. However, there is little evidence that programmes to promote entrepreneurship development have resulted in increased incomes, assets and wealth of women from conflict contexts. A study undertaken by de Mel et al (2008) notes that: *“For women already in business, we find that although training alone leads to some changes in business practices, it has no impact on business profits, sales or capital stock”*. The finding lends support to the idea that, when there is a combination of interventions, such as the infusion of capital coupled with capacity building, monitoring, and follow-up, the foundation for building a successful and profitable business is stronger.

Many questions on the rationale for promoting enterprise development amongst women have been raised. The key one being, can/do all women want to become successful entrepreneurs and run profitable businesses? A study on women led enterprises in the East notes that the push for promoting enterprise development as a livelihood has resulted in more opportunities for women and FHH to take up entrepreneurship as a livelihood option. However, many women take up the option not from a particular interest or desire but from the lack of alternative options.⁷³ This finding resonates with responses from the present study, in that, self-employment is not the preferred option but in some cases, the *only* option available to women.⁷⁴

70 Marambe 2015

71 Ranawana and Senn 2018

72 Attygale 2017 in Ranawana and Senn 2018

73 Lokuge et al 2018

74 KPI, Coordinator Trincomalee women's network

One of the assumptions in the promotion of enterprise development is that successful self-employment ventures can be scaled-up to become fully-fledged enterprises.⁷⁵ Evidence from a study conducted in 2008, which used a sample of 450-620 respondents, concluded that two-thirds to three quarter of own-account workers will not become employers or create more jobs.⁷⁶ Other scholars have also questioned the promotion of enterprise development as an effective livelihood activity for women. Gamage (2014) argues that war-affected areas are not conducive for enterprise development.

Some positive outcomes from engagement in self-employment have been noted in the tourism sector. Micro enterprises and home-based livelihoods related to the industry have been promoted by the state as way of rebuilding livelihoods for vulnerable households such as FHH and those with people with physical or mental disabilities. Handicraft production, stitching of beach wraps, and packaging of local food products were common home-based livelihoods women engaged in. The livelihood outcomes for some of these women were positive. Success was more likely when external support matched beneficiary interest, skills, and knowledge.⁷⁷ This finding resonates with the present study. For example, a woman engaging in a home-based cake making activity was earning an income sufficient to be economically independent of her husband. Her interest in cake making was matched by selection to a programme that built her skills in her chosen livelihood activity. Her income-generation potential, at the time of data collection, far exceeds her ability to meet the demand for her products. Whilst she had no immediate intention of scaling up her self-employment to an “enterprise”, the potential exists which she might exploit once her care responsibilities were over.⁷⁸

The role of non-state actors in livelihood programmes has traditionally been to step in where state support is weak or non-existent. Much of the livelihood support by these actors in the East has been one-off, through provision of training and capacity building at the local (district and GN) levels. The programmes usually complement state interventions such as distribution of seeds, tools, and fertiliser with training and capacity building. The interventions are usually short term and one-off, and evidence that they have positive or long-term impact is

75 Gamage 2014

76 de Mel et al 2008; Lokuge et al 2018

77 Gunaskera et al 2016

78 Interview with Tamil woman in Manmunai North

weak.⁷⁹ Whilst there were few instances where training and capacity building was useful, there is a dearth of evidence to support the view that programmes have had a significant impact in livelihood recovery. Many programmes were signalled out for poor implementation, citing reasons such as lack of contextual understanding, unsuitability of interventions, lack of transparency in selecting beneficiaries, and timeframes being too short for effective changes. All of these suggest that programmes need better monitoring and evaluation and post-project follow-up.

An important “gap” in livelihood programming is the lack of safety nets to help women cope and recover in the event of a livelihood risk. Livelihood risk comes in many forms; the death or disability of a household income earner or a natural calamity such as a drought, flood or landslide – all of which could result in loss or disruption of livelihoods. The lack of state support to address livelihood risk, much needed for vulnerable communities such as women affected by war, has been previously documented.⁸⁰ Evidence from this study substantiates these views. Data from the study indicate that women have few or no assets which they could draw on in the event of loss or disruption of livelihoods. When asked who and where they would go for assistance to cope and recover, the most common response was “family”, with close relatives coming in as the second source. Whilst the current focus is on protecting and building livelihoods, there is a pressing need to also address livelihood risk at the policy and programming levels.

Livelihood actors in the East are working with communities that have been affected by long years of war, and whose social and economic vulnerabilities are yet to be adequately addressed. For many women, income streams are still low and irregular and they face many socio-economic and cultural barriers in seeking a livelihood. Yet these women are navigating restricted spaces and strengthening and expanding existing possibilities for positive livelihood outcomes.

79 FGD, Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

80 Mayadunne and Philips 2016

Chapter 3: Livelihood Strategies

What livelihood activities are women engaged in?

Livelihood strategies are often determined by the need to manage household risks through both adjusting intra-household economies and accessing external support.⁸¹ In the East, women are steering livelihoods depending on their specific contexts – contexts which are marred by violence and exploitation. Women thus learn to navigate their livelihood spaces through adoption of new livelihoods or by rebuilding old livelihoods. Livelihood rebuilding and adoption, however, calls for continuous negotiation of strategies and activities.

At the time of the study, women's engagement in livelihood and income-generating activities could be categorised into three broad sectors – wage labour; public sector employment; and self-employment and entrepreneurship. However, it is important to note that many women are in unpaid work which contribute to household incomes through full- or part-time engagement in income-generating livelihoods mainly in agriculture, fisheries, and home-based self-employment.

Wage labour

Women who engage in wage labour do so both in the informal and formal sectors. The informal wage labour market is concentrated mainly around the agricultural and domestic labour sectors. Women in Trincomalee Town for example, are engaged in daily wage labour working as domestic helps and wage labourers in commercial establishments in the area. At a discussion in Trincomalee Town, a group of women stated that they had been engaged in self-employment whilst displaced. They earned an income by making handicrafts from cane they sourced from a nearby forest. However, after resettlement in the town, they were unable to access the raw material required to continue their self-employment. Since they lacked any particular skills they now engage in daily wage labour, offering their services as cleaners and cooks in the commercial and domestic sectors.⁸²

Whilst the above example is of women in casual wage labour in the informal sector, evidence that women are working in the formal sector in informal

81 Korf 2004

82 FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

wage labour arrangements has recently been documented. A study conducted in the resort sector in Passikudah for example, highlight informality within the formal sector where employees are unaware of the terms of employment, have no understanding of their rights, and are in precarious employment conditions which lack stability and security. One such example documents a woman gardener employed at a resort. She does not receive entitlements such as Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) or the Employees' Trust Fund (ETF), contradicting regulations stipulated by the Department of Labour which requires every employee be entitled for such benefits.⁸³ The study further states that the lack of awareness of rights by the women have enabled resorts to avoid adhering to labour regulations. Evidence from the present study corroborate this finding in that, lack of awareness of rights creates and perpetuates the culture of exploitation and precariousness.⁸⁴ This finding is particularly alarming in that this lack of awareness allows employers to avoid adhering to labour regulations, and to treat various categories of employees differently, resulting in inherent discrimination on how entitlements are paid out. What these examples illustrate is that women are in livelihoods which are highly precarious, characterised by lack of job security and enforcement of worker's rights. They often work in conditions where they work long hours, are poorly paid, and lack entitlements such as paid leave, sick leave and access to benefits such as service charge and long-term social security like EPF and ETF. Women are thus in livelihoods that are not secure – with no guarantee of providing a steady and reliable income.

Why are women in the East in precarious and unstable work? The most common response we received was, for many women there are few choices given their low skills and educational attainments. The need to eke out an income in the absence of male income earners in the household, have left few options for FHHs but to take up casual wage labour in both informal and formal sectors as gardeners, kitchen helps, and cleaners in the formal sector.

Home based - self-employment

As discussed in the previous Chapter, in a post-war context, promoting self-employment and enterprise development has been a preoccupation in the policy domain. In the East, home-based self-employment is a livelihood for many women and vulnerable groups such as FHHs and Muslim women in particular. These women engage in a variety of home-based ventures – running road side

83 Gunasekera et al 2016

84 KPI, Academic, Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University

food outlets, stitching clothing items, home gardening and dry fish making being common activities.⁸⁵ Agro based activities are also popular – home gardening, horticulture, and poultry and dairy farming being the most popular livelihoods. Many of these activities received raw materials such as seedlings, equipment (tools and machinery), training and capacity building and financial assistance through micro finance and SME loans.

Whilst many interventions promoting self-employment are prevalent, the outcomes are mixed. As articulated during field work in Trincomalee, there are more failures than successes in self-employment projects.⁸⁶ As discussed in the previous Chapter, a self-employment venture was more likely to be successful when the woman was motivated and her interest was matched with the required skills and knowledge to engage in her chosen livelihood activity. This was articulated by a NGO worker who said “there are *several forms of self-employment, such as sewing or raising milk cows. Where these micro enterprises succeed or fail depend on a number of conditions, as well as the determination, capacity and persistence of the women involved.*⁸⁷

There were several examples of self-employment ventures that had contributed to positive livelihood outcomes. For instance, when self-employment was part of a multiple-livelihood portfolio there was more likelihood that it contributed to positive outcomes. This is because it allowed risk to be shared across a variety of livelihood activities such as agricultural and home-based activities at the individual and household levels. An example was illustrated by a woman in Eravur Pattu, whose husband was an alcoholic and contributed little to the household income. The woman supplemented his meagre contribution by juggling two home-based self-employment activities; rearing poultry for eggs and running a sewing business.⁸⁸ This narrative illustrates that through a strategy of diversifying her portfolio, spreading her risk across activities and engaging in an enterprise from home, this woman was able to make a positive livelihood outcome within a fragile household context. The fact that self-employment can act as a buffer against destitution was articulated by a single, older woman in Trincomalee Town. The supply of “short eats” to a local eatery was her only income source without which she would be “on the streets”, she said.⁸⁹

85 FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette’s

86 KPI, Coordinator Trincomalee Women’s Network

87 KPI, Programme Coordinator

88 Interview with Tamil woman in Eravur Pattu

89 Interview with Tamil woman in Trincomalee Town

Home-based self-employment can also be a double-edged sword for women. A woman in Manmunai Pattu running a grocery store, as an extension of her home, was able to attend to her care responsibilities and run the grocery store, giving her the flexibility to attend to her domestic chores and run a business.⁹⁰ However, the blurring of the physical space between her work in the livelihood sphere and “work” in the domestic sphere meant that one flows into the other.⁹¹ As another woman in Muttur told us, “*The shop is open till late, and because I am home, I have to open the shop at 7 a.m. and then close it again at 8 p.m.*”⁹² Working late, even though in a home-based enterprise, exposed the woman to other vulnerabilities – sexual advances by men, she said was the most common occurrence. Home-based self-employment thus does not always shield women from physical and verbal harassment.

Whilst there was some evidence that home-based self-employment contributed to household incomes, there was no evidence to support the view that it was singularly enough to move women out of poverty. Further, the question, if self-employment is a magic bullet for women in war-affected areas has been raised in recent studies.⁹³ Whilst self-employment can be useful for women when they are part of a diversified portfolio of livelihood activities and supplements other sources of income, it is futile to assume that all women have the desire or capability to engage in a self-employment activity. This was articulated in an interview in Trincomalee Town, “*Many women in our area don't have an interest in self-employment. They also have no time.*”⁹⁴ Adding that it is more useful to identify and strengthen existing business start-ups as not every woman who is seeking employment is ready to or wants to start a self-employment activity or an enterprise. Indeed, as Karnani (2007) suggests, many people do not have the vision, skills, creativity or the persistence to become entrepreneurs.

Studies have also indicated the need to understand self-employment within the broader context of the political economic relations that exist in a given society. As indicated in a study on tourism, whilst self-employment may offer an alternative for those who cannot find employment in the formal economy, or do not wish to engage in wage labour, by promoting self-employment, development

90 Interview with Tamil woman in Manmunai Pattu

91 Interview with Tamil woman in Muttur

92 Interview with Tamil woman in Manmunai North

93 Kodikkara 2018

94 KPI, WRDS

interventions are perpetuating the informal economy and by extension, working conditions with little or no rights and entitlements.⁹⁵

Undoubtedly women face many challenges in carrying out self-employment activities, which begs the question, are women in the East ready to run fully-fledged enterprises and become entrepreneurs in the full sense of the word? Evidence of successful women entrepreneurs exists. For example, a Sinhala woman in Trincomalee Town was running her husband's textile business since his death. She experiences some financial difficulties due to seasonal fluctuations in sales and recovery of money for goods sold on credit. But was still able to survive when revenue dipped.⁹⁶ A second Sinhala woman was profitably running an eatery with her father in Trincomalee Town. There were commonalities in the two ventures. Both enterprises were not new, they had existed before the war. Finally, they were both driven by the need to survive rather than by deliberate choice of the women concerned.

Public sector employment: decent and secure work

The most coveted livelihood amongst women in the study was the ability to secure a job in the public sector. There were many reasons cited for the demand for government jobs. As one woman in Muttur stated: *“For me, government jobs like teaching and Development Officers are most appropriate for women who have a degree. Women should earn money from permanent employment which, I think, most probably is from government jobs. I don't like farming and other cultivation and self-employment since I think that those don't give permanent and regular income.”*⁹⁷ This quote resonated in key person interviews and lends support to evidence from studies which reiterate societal views that government jobs are most suited for women as the hours match with their domestic responsibilities.⁹⁸ Why are public sector jobs so sought after? Benefits and security of employment scored high in the responses. Typically, public sector jobs have well-regulated hours, clear worker's rights such as paid leave, ample public holidays, and access to a state pension upon retirement. Public sector employment thus provides both job security and entitlements. Women interviewed spoke of their dreams of securing a teaching job in a state school – dreams that remained unrealised in the context of a protracted war and

95 Gunasekera et al 2016

96 Interview with Sinhala woman in Trincomalee

97 Interview with Muslim woman in Muttur

98 Gunasekera et al 2016

disruption to education due to multiple displacements. One woman narrated her hopes of entering university as the first step in achieving her dream. Her journey was interrupted by disrupted schooling due to war. Instead, she married young and started a home-based self-employment venture.⁹⁹ Another woman had graduated from the Eastern University and secured a job as a teacher in the local school. This was her ideal job as the hours coincided with her care responsibilities towards her children and domestic chores. The pay was good too she said at Rs 38,000. It was a job for life and she would have a government pension when she retired.¹⁰⁰ Another woman stated that government jobs like teaching are well respected in the community, as it was “a decent job”. She was admired and respected in her community as her job symbolised her educational attainments.¹⁰¹ Access to public sector jobs was viewed as transparent. A university degree and passing of an entry test were both required. One woman had sat the test multiple times but had failed to pass it. She attributed her failure to the lack of certain skills.¹⁰² For a woman, securing a public sector job thus was widely recognised as securing a decent and secure job.

The issue of unpaid work

Another, undocumented category of work women engage in is unpaid work in the informal economy. Women's engagement in unpaid labour in the fisheries industry has been described in a PhD research thesis on women's livelihoods in Trincomalee. The study¹⁰³ notes, that the prevalence of documented evidence on women's engagement in conditions of unpaid labour has traditionally been poor. However, with recent research interest, a body of evidence now exists that women play specific gender-based roles in the fisheries sector. Activities such as mending nets, preparing fishing gear and food for fishers are traditionally considered women's work but not recognised as productive employment.¹⁰⁴ Whilst women engage in these activities, they are paid in kind, usually two or three baskets of fish, unlike the men who are paid in cash,¹⁰⁵ thus underscoring that women's contribution to fisheries-based livelihoods is unrecognised, underestimated, and unpaid.

99 Interview with Muslim woman in Muttur

100 Interview with Muslim woman in Muttur

101 Interview with Tamil women in Eravur Pattu

102 Interview with Tamil woman in Trincomalee Town

103 Lokuge 2019

104 Lokuge 2019

105 *ibid*

Evidence that women engage in unpaid work was also found in the present study. For example, two women we spoke with in Muttur were working their paddy fields. The work was hard, they said, and it was not the kind of work they desired. One had inherited the paddy fields from her father, the other from her husband. Both hired wage labourers to till the fields but invested time daily in supervising and assisting the paid workers. The time they invested however, was not paid for and the money from the harvest contributed to the household income.¹⁰⁶ These accounts illustrate that women are engaged in unpaid work in the agriculture sector which they have no particular interest in but the revenue contributes to household incomes. Evidence of women in unpaid home-based self-employment was also found. One woman in Eravur Pattu helped her husband manage a grocery store. She was tasked with sourcing the goods, and sometime worked long hours in the shop, often being a victim of verbal abuse by male patrons. The time she allocated to this work was not accounted for in terms of payment, but was considered as her “share of work” needed to contribute to the household income.¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, the woman did not perceive that her work was “unpaid”. This understanding illustrates how women have come to internalise their unpaid work as something they ought to do as their “share”, much like how they perceive domestic chores and care responsibilities as part of their gendered roles in patriarchal societies.

Evidence from the present study reaffirm the notion that many of those in informal labour are women, concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, farming, and domestic work. These types of work are often “socially undervalued and considered less productive”.¹⁰⁸ This social under-valuing has other implications too. In a culture where women are often lower in the social hierarchy obtaining equal pay and entitlements are a challenge and contribute towards many women working long hours at very low pay rates.¹⁰⁹

Unpacking unemployment

The impetus for promoting livelihood recovery in a post-war context is premised on “putting people to work” by engaging war-affected people in the labour market and thereby building peace and helping recovery.¹¹⁰ Livelihood rebuilding, in

106 Interviews with Tamil women in Muttur

107 Interview with Tamil woman in Eravur Pattu

108 KPI, WRDS

109 Ibid

110 Ferguson 2015 in Ranawana and Senn 2018

other words, is an important buffer against violence and insecurity, particular amongst young people. In this respect the high unemployment rate at 11.3 per cent in Batticaloa and 10 per cent in Trincomalee is of concern. Recent studies validate the high incidence of unemployment amongst youth aged 18-25 in Batticaloa district.¹¹¹ Our conversations with officials in the District Secretariat in Trincomalee also corroborate this view. Within these figures the low participation of women in the labour force begs the questions, why?

Certain factors are attributed to the high unemployment of women in the province; early marriage amongst both Tamil and Muslim women in Batticaloa, family restrictions, mainly amongst Muslim families, but also amongst Tamil families, low educational attainments, and care responsibilities were the most commonly cited reasons. However, other causes for non-participation in the labour force were also indicated, such as waiting for a job of choice and not taking up opportunities within specific sectors such as fisheries.¹¹² Other studies attributes the high unemployment figures amongst women in the province to: invisibility of women in the labour force, inadequate working conditions such as opportunities for part-time working, and flexible working hours to facilitate women's care responsibilities.¹¹³ A factor which resurfaces across studies, including in the present, is the existence of patriarchy and the unequal distribution of work in the household which affects women's decision-making powers.¹¹⁴

An important insight from the present study is that whilst some women choose not to engage in the labour market unless they get the job of their choice, patriarchal structures exclude other women from engagement in some sectors. The underlying reasons for not being in the labour force therefore are nuanced and call for a deeper exploration of women's "unemployment" as a phenomenon. In our conversations with communities in Sampoor, some men said that new livelihood opportunities in the fisheries sector had opened for women in the post-war period.¹¹⁵ The dry fish sector for example, had opportunities for women's engagement. The women, however, were not taking up these types of work. Ethnographic research undertaken in Trincomalee as part of a PhD study, sheds light on the issue. Although women can engage in many fisheries related

111 Gunasekera et al 2016

112 KPI, Coordinator Trincomalee Women's Network

113 IPS 2010

114 KPI, Coordinator Trincomalee Women's Network

115 FGD Muttur

activities, their involvement is restricted by kinship networks which ensure that women only play gendered roles such as cooking in the beach sein waadi, collecting firewood, and fetching water.¹¹⁶ This narrative suggests that within a community masculinities and femininities are constructed and women's access to economic and social power is constantly negotiated in contexts where patriarchal power networks exclude women from participating in some livelihood activities.¹¹⁷

Some examples of women “choosing” not to be in the labour force were illustrated in the present study. A few educated young women in both Trincomalee and Batticaloa were falling in the “unemployed but seeking work” category. They were awaiting jobs in the public sector. As described previously, employment in the state sector was the coveted job for women. However, demand far exceeds supply. Whilst jobs were available in the private sector, particularly in the retail and garment sectors, and in the hospitality industry, these women chose to remain unemployed as they perceived only public sector jobs as decent and secure.

A recurring theme was the challenge women faced in balancing livelihood engagement with care responsibilities and domestic chores. To illustrate, an educated woman who had a job in a public sector institution gave it up to care for her young children on a fulltime basis when her husband, who was also a government employee, was transferred to the Mullaitivu district.¹¹⁸ There was also little evidence that husbands and male relatives in the household helped women in carrying out domestic chores. Many women responded that they could not carry the double burden and had resigned to the fact they could not work.¹¹⁹

Finally, do the official statistics compiled by agencies such as the Census and Statistic Department capture all women in productive work? A PhD study on women engaged in the fisheries sector notes that women's contribution in fisheries livelihoods are “invisible”. Whilst women engage in labour intensive and time consuming tasks such as gathering mollusks and oysters, they have minimum recognition and support, she notes.¹²⁰ For example, current statistics in Sri Lanka only provide for recording fishermen and fisher households as

116 Lokuge 2019. ayadunne and Philbserver.lk/2rirable tha, Philips and Nagaraj 2016 secure livelihoods and highlights key points for policy cons

117 Higate and Henry 2004

118 Interview with Tamil woman in Manmunai North

119 FGD Muttur

120 Lokuge 2019

occupational categories. The role of women in the fisheries sector is thus largely undocumented, with no gender-disaggregated data.¹²¹ The researcher further argues that these women are in fact “productively employed” in fishing activities and making significant contributions not only to household incomes – for some FHHs they are their sole survival incomes.¹²²

What these examples illustrate is that factors that contribute to women's “unemployment” are complex and requires deeper analysis. A quick-fix through private sector job creation or the drive to promote enterprise development are unlikely to address the structural causes that keep women out of the labour force.

Debt: Cost of entry to livelihoods or livelihood strategy?

As discussed previously, livelihood strengthening through self-employment schemes has been a focus of state development policy. To this end, government grants and low-interest rate loans have been promoted to generate income streams for people affected by war. Whilst the government offers a variety of loans schemes through Regional Development Banks, the National Development and the SANASA Bank for example, they are not easy to access for women who are often unable to provide the documentation required for collateral. Micro finance and leasing services have thus mushroomed to fill the gap and become a symbol of accessible cash in much of the war-affected areas. This focus on expanding finance has been supported by international development actors such as the World Bank who propagate micro finance and micro credit as a way of supporting self-employment to overcome poverty.¹²³

The idea that women are “financially responsible”¹²⁴ supports the view that women should be targeted for credit expansions. Consequently, targeting women has become the business strategy of many NGOs, banks, and financial institutions promoting micro finance. Since the end of the war, micro finance has expanded substantially in the East. Resettled communities incurred a number of costs in rebuilding and restarting livelihoods and credit has played a key role in financing livelihood rebuilding. The relationship between access to credit and access to livelihood assistance for fisher communities has been discussed by

121 Ibid

122 Ibid

123 Sanyal 2007; Gunasekera et al 2016

124 McClean 2012: 8

previous studies.¹²⁵ Women interviewed in this study confessed that they sold assets – property and gold sovereigns to restart lives once resettled.¹²⁶ Some of it went towards rebuilding houses, others in starting self-employment with many indicating that they sold personal assets to help husbands start self-employment ventures. All households we interviewed had some level of debt to fund self-employment or consumption, suggesting that debt is a serious phenomenon amongst women in the region.

Whilst the objective of micro finance is to help lift people out of poverty by providing credit to sustain livelihoods, the detrimental impacts of microfinance on women’s livelihoods has been documented by recent studies and the entrapment of vulnerable communities in cycles of debt, has been widely critiqued.^{127 128} In Sri Lanka the promotion of entrepreneurship and loan-giving and loan-taking in the pursuit of entrepreneurship as a post-war livelihood option has been consistently articulated as worrying, within the academic and activist circles.¹²⁹ The seriousness of the issue was emphasised by UN Independent Expert Juan Pablo Bohoslavskyin in September 2018, when he remarked “*Despite women seeking loans to fund their businesses, many of them do not succeed in their projects – unsurprising, given the lack of an enabling environment for micro and small enterprises (such as extremely high interest rates), coupled with very modest economic growth*”.¹³⁰ More worryingly, he states that “the micro finance crisis” is particularly alarming in the war-affected areas where women are being targeted for financing loans. Many women are taking these loans to cover basic family consumption expenses whilst others borrow to pay off previous loans in a culture of multiple loans from differently lenders concurrently.¹³¹ The World Bank has stated that post-war Sri Lanka is increasingly consumerist and aspirational with people looking not only to achieve livelihood stability but also to ascend the economic ladder.¹³² In a culture where accessing long-term capital is restricted, micro finance provides a viable alternative to households who cannot meet stringent lending requirements of formal financial institutions. The expansion of informal credit to facilitate consumption without investment in productive assets, is a matter of grave concern. Many women in the present

125 Mayadunne and Phipps 2016

126 interview with Tamil woman in Muttur

127 Gunasekera, Kulasabanathan and Munas 2016

128 Price 2018

129 Kadirgamar 2017

130 Sunday Observer, March 19th 2019

131 Ibid

132 World Bank 2016

study have taken credit to lease motor bicycles, trishaws and consumer durables. In some instances, formal channels of credit were being repaid through informal actors. Whilst the drive to promote entrepreneurship is premised on creating stable livelihoods and wealth creation, the incidence of multiple debt-taking to fund consumption is entrapping women in exploitative cycles of debt.

These issues suggest that self-employment programmes spear headed by micro finance have been put in place without understanding the contexts or transparency in the obligations and risks incurred by beneficiaries of credit. The findings of this study thus resonate with the idea that microfinance must be situated within the broader context of cash flow, consumption, and overall debt within a household. It is thus imperative that the broader context of debt taking and giving is reflected in both scholarship and policymaking to change current thinking on the microfinance-poverty alleviation nexus.¹³³

133 Dhattasharma et al 2015 in Ranawana and Senn 2018

Chapter 4: Barriers and Exclusion

What drives girls and women to reject or be blocked from pursuing certain livelihoods?

During fieldwork, the barriers that women face when engaging in productive labour were frequently cited. The reasons were wide and ranged in a spectrum from the prevalence of cultural norms to low educational attainments, to lack of safety to discriminatory practices. What this means is that women's decision-making processes on employment and livelihood engagement are influenced by multiple factors, many of which are structural. Women seeking employment face barriers in three broad spheres; the lack of gender sensitive public services such as female toilets restrict women engaging in employment outside of their locality, care responsibilities restrict women from engaging in economic activity outside of the home, and prevalent cultural norms and practices which restrict women from making decisions about their lives exclude women from engaging in the labour force.

Whilst private capital offers many new employment opportunities in the post-war era, many women do not take up these jobs. Common reasons for not engaging in employment outside of home were: the lack of gender sensitive public spaces and non-availability of public transport after dark increasing the risk of sexual harassment as articulated in this quote: *“Public buses are most dangerous places for women. Other public places like roads, bus stations, market places, and toilets are other places where women face sexual abuse and harassment. Women even fear to go to government offices because they get harassed. These are very insecure places for women. Therefore, families do not wish to let their women engage in outside work.”*¹³⁴ The lack of required skills such as in communication and leadership were also cited as reasons for keeping women out of certain jobs. This deficiency in skills has resulted in women suffering major disadvantages relative to men in the search for employment; the low level of women in supervisory and higher levels of employment categories also attributed to this factor. The lack of skills has also been attributed to differential pay levels and pay gaps between men and women.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ KPI, Coordinator Trincomalee Women's Network

¹³⁵ KPI, Academic, Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University

A protracted war has taken a toll on the wellbeing of communities. Many families have suffered death and disability with much of the burden of care falling on women in the household. Additionally, demographic changes due to migration and the emergence of an ageing population has resulted in growing numbers of people needing care services with the burden disproportionately falling on women as articulated in this quote: *“In the past, most women did not go out to work. They did all the domestic work. Now, if women want to go to work they first have to do all the house work. Women therefore have to bear the burden of two jobs – workplace and home.”*¹³⁶ The quote illustrates that the war has exacerbated an existing issue which restricts women's mobility and going out to work. Another factor cited was the high incidence of alcoholism and domestic violence being on the rise in the East. Coupled with the high incidence of women headed houses, women who have girl children are particularly reluctant to leave young girls unattended, as the risk of sexual harassment is greater.¹³⁷

What role does gender power dynamics play in livelihood interventions?

By far the most cited reason for keeping women out of the labour force were cultural norms and practices. In some communities, little has changed since the end of the war. Sampoor, for example was a conservative community with few opportunities for women to engage in work outside of their village. Their work was mostly concentrated in livelihood activities close to their homes – cattle rearing, poultry, and dairy farming. These were livelihoods they were engaged in before the war and little had changed for the women of Sampoor since the end of war.¹³⁸

Patriarchal beliefs are a major impediment for women to engage in the labour force as illustrated in this quote, *“Society has many myths about women... that women are born with weak intelligence; that their brainpower is as long as a spoon, and that they are the weaker sex. These beliefs continue to undervalue women and restrict them to an inferior position in the social hierarchy.”*¹³⁹ The prevalence of these beliefs constrain women's livelihood decisions and opportunities. Evidence of this was present soon after the tsunami when a

136 KPI, Coordinator, Trincomalee Women's Network

137 FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

138 FGD Muttur

139 KPI, Academic, Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University

number of NGOs created employment opportunities for women, but they were unable to take up these opportunities because “*The community doesn’t recognise a woman’s right to work and much of the resistance is by those who do not want to see women gain an economic foothold that might enable greater autonomy or a shift in gender roles.*”¹⁴⁰ Perceptions that a woman’s economic autonomy would create threats to existing social relations and structures have both patriarchal and ethnic dimensions which sometimes intersect. For instance, if a woman was Muslim her decision-making power was more likely to be restricted. This included her ability to choose a livelihood as such decisions were more likely to be made by men in the household.¹⁴¹

Two particular dimensions of control over women’s livelihoods have been noted in the tourism sector, that of policing women in the work they can do and preventing women from engaging in certain types of work based on stigma attached to that work. The policing of women working in the hotel industry is based on the belief that hotels are spaces for “cross ethnic fraternising”¹⁴² which provide opportunities for girls and women to interact with “outsiders” who are not approved of. This gendered opposition to women working in hotels is influenced by fears that women are acting in ways that threaten local culture by breaking established boundaries of behaviour.¹⁴³ Thus, entrenched forms of gendered social control emerge to police the women and protect them from the “other”.

The second is when the concept of stigma is attached to certain types of work and operate to deter women from engaging in them. An example to illustrate the point is drawn from a study of resorts in Passikudah. The emergence of new resorts is a post-war phenomenon, enabled by capital from the albeit, Sinhala South. Whilst many local Tamil women work in the resorts, they are considered Sinhala-dominated male spaces and local Tamil women working in these resorts are stigmatised in their communities for working in these spaces. Such women are labelled as “morally dubious in character” highlighting that families have fears and anxieties when women in their community are working in spaces which are considered as occupied by “others” and outsiders.¹⁴⁴

140 Gunasekera et al 2016

141 KPI, WRDS

142 Gunasekera et al 2016

143 Ibid

144 Minoia and Pain, 2015; Gunasekera et al 2016

Whilst women's exclusion from the labour market is the dominant narrative, positive examples of changes that are taking place in the socio-economic and political spheres have been documented recently. One such account is during the local government election in the Eastern Province held in early 2018. Quotas for women representatives was a turning point for women's political representation which was embraced and negotiated within gendered spheres of influence in the East as indicated in this observation. "*There is a general feeling of confusion, cynicism, humour, and even fear about all the women who are suddenly in the political process. In one pre-election official meeting, women candidates were instructed on how they should dress, how they should behave in order to uphold morality.*"¹⁴⁵ Despite these challenges, women's political activity created ripples in existing power structures. To illustrate, the author cites an example of a Muslim cleric who spoke out openly against Muslim women campaigning in Batticaloa, calling them "un-Muslim and shameful".¹⁴⁶

Whilst the above illustrates that women are challenging gender norms and practices in the political sphere, for many women, the ability to gain employment, or start and maintain a livelihood is an everyday struggle of fighting patriarchal forms of social controls. Yet there are those women who have defied and, at times, borne social disapproval, because of the dire need to eke out a living. This is reflected in the increasing number of Muslim women from Batticaloa district who have sought migration to the Middle East as a means to overcome economic hardship. A District Study of Batticaloa conducted in 2017 records statements from officials of the Batticaloa District Secretariat and NGOs workers highlighting the growing number of Muslim women who are seeking employment in the Middle East. In 2013, the largest number of women migrants from Batticaloa district were from Kattankudy, one of the most conservative Muslim towns in the country. Many of the women migrants fell under the housemaid category, indicating that they were from the poorest segments of the Muslim community in the district.¹⁴⁷ This account from Kattankudy bears testament that women are fighting patriarchal structures of power to seek incomes to support their families. Whilst these changes are taking place, they are not necessarily examples of empowerment, but through constant negotiation often under conditions of precariousness.

145 Emmanuel 2018

146 Ibid

147 Lall and Godamunne 2017

Despite these restrictions, women have dreams and aspirations for themselves and their children which are varied. Whilst some aspire for a secure job with a regular income, others dream of a better future for their children and education is the first step towards achieving that end. Whilst one woman who is a teacher in a government school wants to run a tutoring and a charitable school to help poor children in the future,¹⁴⁸ another, in fulltime household care work seeks to educate both her children and see them in secure and stable employment in the public sector,¹⁴⁹ illustrating the different dream and aspirations of women.

148 Interview with Muslim woman in Muttur

149 Interview with Muslim woman in Muttur

Chapter 5: Policy Considerations

The previous chapters attempted to highlight the struggles that women face in seeking a secure livelihood which would provide a stable income, dignity and decent working conditions. As previously discussed, the government's economic growth focus in the East has been two pronged: firstly, on developing the tourism sector and job and livelihood creation through it; and secondly, to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship. Whilst infrastructure development such as rehabilitation of roads and public services such as markets, transport, schools, and hospitals have been restored and improved, some of these activities have negatively impacted women's livelihoods. During a conversation in Trincomalee Town, the impact of the influx of cheap imported readymade clothing on local producers was discussed.¹⁵⁰ Before the war, much of the clothing was locally made by women in cottage industries. However, improved road connectivity and resulting access to new markets were negatively affecting these women's livelihoods.¹⁵¹ A similar example was noted in another study on the impact of imported footwear on local enterprises.¹⁵² These and other examples discussed previously illustrate that the peace dividend has not translated to an economic dividend for many women in the East who are still struggling to secure livelihoods and rebuild their lives amidst a number of fault lines across gender, class and ethnicity.

One of the biggest shortfalls is the failure to situate economic development within the fragile context of war and its legacies. State economic policies first need to recognise war-related fragilities such as food and nutrition status, health and education, and living conditions which are the social foundations on which economic development is built. These factors need to be strengthened to ensure that war-affected communities are able to fully participate in development. In our conversations with women in both Trincomalee and Batticaloa, there was an overlying sense of fatigue in the lack of physical and emotional strength to carry out their daily activities. Our conversations began with a description of their daily activities, and the similarities across the different women were astounding. The day always started early, at 4 or 5 a.m., and their first task was making tea for family members. It ended with making dinner and watching television with bedtime being 10 p.m. Responses such as "*After the war, I can't work as*

¹⁵⁰ FGD Trincomalee Town and Gravette's

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² Lokuge et al 2018

much as I used to,” were frequent comments made during the conversations suggesting that legacies of war such as trauma, and mental and physical fatigue continue to plague their everyday lives, impeding their economic and social recovery.¹⁵³ Additionally, the emotional impact of the death of family members and non- “closure” due to family members being labelled as “missing” continue to influence the psychological life of the women. This begs the question: do they have the right frame of mind to embark on enterprise development and employment opportunities offered? These legacies of war influence women’s ability to take control of their lives and livelihoods and raise important questions for policy consideration.

Firstly, is enterprise development the magic bullet in livelihood recovery and poverty alleviation? Several studies have raised this question.¹⁵⁴ As outlined in this study, women are barely able to sustain themselves through running a home-based self-employment venture. There is little evidence that they can scale-up these ventures to profitable and sustainable enterprises. More alarming is the rise of micro finance which has grown as a means of supporting self-employment and enterprise development. Evidence that opportunities for borrowing money has contributed to livelihood improvement and alleviated poverty is sparse. To the contrary, that micro finance loan repayments have impoverished women, particularly when they have been used to fund consumption rather than invested in productive capital, has been documented by previous studies.¹⁵⁵ An alternative view is that micro finance loans should be disbursed only after a thorough assessment of debt, cash flow and consumption of the potential recipient.¹⁵⁶

Secondly, have donor interventions helped livelihood recovery? There is limited evidence to support that they have. Many instances of mismatch between donor agendas and beneficiary interests, motivations and skills were illustrated. Programmers thus need to rethink pushing supply-driven interventions and instead assess which initiatives are working and why, across sectors. Relatedly, donors and programmers need to assess how impacts of programmes are assessed. Questions such as: What is the definition for identifying specific

153 Somasundaram and Sivayokan 2013

154 de Mel et al, 2008; Gamage 2014; Kodikara 2018; Lokuge et al 2018

155 Ranawana and Senn 2018

156 Dhattasharma et al 2015 in Ranawana and Senn 2018

categories such as FHH? Why are occupational categories such as women in the fisheries sector not captured in official data? How is “success” and “failure” of programmes assessed? are some of the most basic of questions which need to be addressed.

Thirdly, have jobs and new livelihood opportunities been generated? Whilst some jobs and livelihoods have been generated they are not the types of jobs and livelihoods which are expected. Many jobs are precarious and concentrated in the informal sector, with the demand for secure and decent jobs is unfulfilled. Furthermore, there are more failures in self-employment livelihoods than successes. There is thus a disconnect between expectations and experiences in job creation and livelihood improvement.

Specific issues relevant for policy were also identified.

To view livelihoods temporally in the war/post-war binary is misleading in that, livelihoods face many risks. The presumption that war was the primary driver of vulnerability fails to take into account the multiple factors that influence household and community-level vulnerability such as chronic poverty, economic shocks, and natural hazards. Failing to recognise these multiple factors that contribute to vulnerability results in the inability to fully understand poor livelihood outcomes.¹⁵⁷

Job creation should be in line with women's desire for “decent work”, by recognising that women are seeking less exploitative jobs which provide regular incomes, in conditions where they are treated with dignity which would both improve their wellbeing and social status.

Policy classification of all women as vulnerable is problematic in that vulnerability is context specific and takes away from women's agency to negotiate. It thus undermines women that are making positive changes in search of better outcomes for themselves and their families.

Finally, there needs to be regulations on issues related to health and safety at work, and harassment and violence in workplaces, with mechanisms for enforcement.

¹⁵⁷ Mallett and Slater, 2012; Huot and Pain 2017

In pursuit of decent and secure livelihoods

The overarching finding from the study is that women are in survival strategies characterised by subsistence incomes, debt, dispossession, and precariousness born out of poverty and the dire need to survive. Efforts to rebuild women's livelihoods and create jobs must be concerned with decent and secure jobs rather than creating more opportunities for women to work and earn livelihoods in conditions of precariousness. This means bringing more women to the formal sector by removing the barriers that currently exist. A recurrent theme was that women lacked the skills to engage in jobs at the higher levels of the wage pyramid in the formal sector. This lack of education in general and skills in particular act as a barrier and prevent employers from both considering women as suitable candidates for jobs and restricts women's mobility in reaching higher levels in the employment ladder. This skill gaps needs to be addressed to facilitate women's entry to decent and secure jobs in the formal sector.

Secondly, decent and secure jobs are ones that have regular working hours, salaries and benefits for all categories of work irrespective of people's gender, ethnicity or whether they are local or migratory. It means that employees are paid EPF and ETF, and employers are registered with the local Department of Labour. This will enable Labour Officers to enforce regulations under the Employment Registration Act and ensure that employees are paid and are able to access their entitlements.

A recurrent theme was that livelihood programme time cycles were just too short. As a rule-of-thumb, livelihood interventions which seek to support self-employment and enterprise development should have a duration of at least three years to begin to break-even and make profits. The timeframes for current programmes however, are too short to facilitate a meaningful recovery of livelihoods. Livelihood rebuilding interventions are also often preoccupied with developing individual capacities such as skills development, vocational training, and micro credit; however, equal attention needs to be paid to working conditions, employee-employer relations and social networks which are necessary to secure the role and place of women in their chosen livelihoods. At the community level, Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS) provide a pivotal role in acting as a self-help group which facilitate members to obtain services such as small loans to improve livelihoods. Livelihood interventions therefore, need

recalibration through more local level engagement to improve understanding of women's vulnerabilities and more transparency and fairness in the distribution of resources to avoid perpetuating corruption and discrimination.

Conclusions

Livelihood rebuilding in the Eastern Province sits within a broader post-war reconstruction strategy which revolves around self-employment promotion, credit expansion, and encouraging private capital investments to support two dominant sectors – tourist growth and enterprise development. Evidence that this approach has significantly improved employment and livelihood opportunities or increased incomes for women, is weak. What is evident is that these interventions have failed to realise expectations that peace would enable growth and development through secure and decent work. The resulting outcome is that many women are still in survival livelihood strategies, driven by need than choice.

A particularly important shortfall in current programmes is the lack of a clear understanding of post-war legacies and recognition of the fragility of a population coming out of war. As Goodhand et al (2000) state, livelihoods are determined by political geographies of war,¹⁵⁸ which are often in a state of flux, in a constant state of negotiation and manipulation. In such circumstances, women do “what they have to do to survive economically”, engaging in livelihood activities for survival which, paradoxically, are engaging in precarious forms of work. In many instances these survivalist livelihoods are ones that are carried forward from the war era, as wage labourers in the agriculture and domestic sectors or in unpaid work in the agriculture and fisheries sectors and in household care work. When women are engaged in home-based self-employment, they are rarely paid for their time and labour. As in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, women’s unpaid work is considered her “share” in contributing to the household income. Women’s engagement in the informal and unpaid sectors is no different from before or during the war, symbolising that there are no significant breaks from the past.

Legacies of war continue to disadvantage women in the formal sector and exclude them from accessing new jobs in the post-war context. Whilst new employment opportunities have opened up in the lucrative hospitality industry, there is little evidence that local women have benefitted from job creation. Multiple displacements and disruptions to education have resulted in poor human resource development which plague women’s entry into supervisory and higher

¹⁵⁸ Goodhand, Hulme and Lewer 2000; Fernando and Moonesinghe 2015

level jobs in the formal sector. Many therefore remain in the bottom rung of the employment pyramid, often in conditions of informality in the formal sector.

Patriarchal norms and cultural practices continue to block women from accessing certain types of jobs and livelihoods. Notions of stigma attached to working in the hospitality industry and the policing of women working in the industry are new barriers that women are forced to negotiate in accessing new job opportunities in the post-war era. There are however, groups of women who are fighting these patriarchal forms of social control and seeking work as a desperate attempt to survive. The large numbers of women from Muslim towns in Batticaloa migrating to the Middle East as housemaids is an illustration that women are fighting cultural barriers due to economic hardship.

There is also evidence that women's engagement in livelihoods face new constraints in the post-war era. For example, whilst improvements in infrastructure such as greater road connectivity and access to markets are visible, the influx of cheap new products is driving some women out of livelihoods due to their inability to compete. Moreover, the presence of the military has restricted and sometimes blocked women's livelihood activities. The existence of high security zones in areas such as Sampoor, for example, has blocked women's access to arable land and restricted their movement in pursuit of livelihoods. Whilst military involvement in civilian activities has resulted in curtailing women's engagement in certain types of livelihoods such as running food outlets and grocery stores, with the added threat of violence against and sexual harassment of young girls and women, fuelling a real or perceived sense of insecurity.

The push towards self-employment and enterprise development has driven many women to be entrapped in debt, much of it in the informal sector which is more easily accessible than borrowing from banks and other formal financial institutions.

Overall, we found little evidence of a direct relationship between the end of the war and livelihood recovery, indicating that the peace dividend has not translated to an economic dividend. Consequently, there is a mismatch between women's aspirations and expectations and livelihood outcomes. Whilst women are seeking stable incomes, dignity of work and decent working conditions, the opportunities they can access are often the opposite; informal and unpaid work

that guarantees no regular income or stability which are often in precarious conditions. Improving access to jobs requires investments in educational skills so women can catch-up and apply for jobs in the formal sector with equal pay and benefits as men. Similarly, improving livelihoods require long-term, coordinated and sustained investment and support from the government and donors.

One of the motivations for this study was to understand the high incidence of unemployment amongst women in the Eastern Province. Two potential explanations were identified. The first is that official statistics do not reflect women in unpaid work in the agricultural, fisheries, domestic and self-employment sectors. Consequently, a large number of women in the productive labour force working in the informal sector are not captured in the employment figures. The second is the prevalence of cultural norms and practices and the lack of required educational attainments and skills which serve to block and reject girls and women from certain types of jobs in the formal sector.

The incidence of high unemployment, poverty and increasing indebtedness, calls for rethinking livelihood policy and practice within the wider context of livelihood as a coping strategy. This must include a more informed understanding of the post-war legacy of the Eastern Province. Additionally, moving women from survival strategies to secure livelihoods must include a more integrated approach to livelihood improvement with equal opportunities for women to access and engage in livelihood strategies of their choice.

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Understanding Women's Livelihood Outcomes and Economic Empowerment in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

Nayana Godamunne

Since the end of the war in 2009, the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka has benefited from state and non-state investments in large-scale infrastructure, resettlement, and reconstruction. However, ten years on, the province continues to have significant populations in poverty. Unemployment figures are also high with the figure for women being three times that of men. These poverty and unemployment figures persist despite the government and donor-assisted programmes that aim to rebuild livelihoods through investments in improving connectivity, developing the tourist industry, and expanding access to credit in the years following the war.

Using qualitative methods, this study explores how these interventions have impacted on women's livelihoods in two districts, Batticaloa and Trincomalee, and the barriers they have faced in accessing and engaging in employment and livelihood activities. The study concludes that women continue to encounter challenges and restrictions in accessing employment and livelihood opportunities; where they do, they are often in conditions of informality and in work that lacks recognition and dignity.



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