



INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR  
ETHNIC STUDIES

# Exploring Women's Empowerment



Edited by  
**Ranmini Vithanagama**



# **Exploring Women's Empowerment**

**Edited by  
Ranmini Vithanagama**

**International Centre for Ethnic Studies  
February 2018**

## Exploring Women’s Empowerment

© 2018 International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)

2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka

E-mail: [admin@ices.lk](mailto:admin@ices.lk)

URL: [www.ices.lk](http://www.ices.lk)

ISBN: 978-955-580-217-8

This work was carried out with financial support under the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) initiative. GrOW is a multi-funder partnership with the UK Government’s Department for International Development, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The opinions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, or IDRC.

Copyright to this publication belongs to the International Centre for ethnic Studies (ICES). Any part of this book may be reproduced with due acknowledgements to the author and publisher. The interpretations and conclusions expressed in the study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the ICES or the donors.



INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR  
ETHNIC STUDIES



Front Cover design: Ranmini Vithanagama

Cover Photograph: “Angel of Love” by Leonid Afremov

# **Exploring Women's Empowerment**

**Edited by  
Ranmini Vithanagama**

**International Centre for Ethnic Studies  
February 2018**



# Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Contributors</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acronyms</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Chapter 1: Exploring women’s empowerment: experience from Sri Lanka’s North	1
<i>Ranmini Vithanagama</i>	
Introduction	1
The Context	3
Economic Empowerment of Women in the North	10
Conclusion	30
References	34
Chapter 2: Women’s Economic Empowerment: A Literature Review	36
<i>Ranmini Vithanagama</i>	
Introduction	36
Defining Empowerment	37
Why Empower Women and Why Economic Empowerment?	51
Factors that Influence Women’s Economic Empowerment	57
Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Sri Lankan Context	87
Conclusion	94
References	96

Chapter 3: Women’s Labour Market Outcomes and Livelihood Interventions in Sri Lanka’s North After the War <i>Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama</i>	110
Introduction	110
Data and Overview	148
Factors Associated with Labour Market Outcomes	206
Livelihood Interventions and Self-Employment Outcomes	269
Conclusions and Implications for Policy	317
References	329
 Chapter 4: Post-War Realities: Barriers to Female Economic Empowerment <i>Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake</i>	 338
Introduction	338
Background	339
Methodology and Theoretical Framework	343
Findings and Analysis	347
Conclusion	374
References	378
 Chapter 5: Doing This and That: Self-employment and economic survival of women heads of households in Mullaitivu <i>Chulani Kodikara</i>	 380
Introduction	380
Reconstruction, Development and the Dominant Approach to Livelihood Development in Post-War Sri Lanka	385

Seven Women Living in Post-War Mullaitivu	399
Making a Living in Post-War Mullaitivu	406
Women's Labour in the Aftermath of Violence	427
References	440
Chapter 6: Impact of Intimate Relationships on Livelihood Activities of Women Affected by War in Northern Sri Lanka	445
<i>Iresha M. Lakshman</i>	
Introduction	445
Background	446
Conceptual Framework	450
Research Methods	458
Intimate Relationships of War-affected Women and their Livelihoods in Northern Sri Lanka	459
Impact of Marriage and Severance of Marriage on Women's Livelihoods	461
Conclusion	483
References	487
Chapter 7: War and Recovery: Psychosocial Challenges in Northern Sri Lanka	491
<i>Jeevasuthan Subramaniam</i>	
Introduction	491
Conceptual and theoretical approach	496
Methodology	505
Psychosocial challenges	507
Economic Challenges	508

Social Coping Strategies	534
Conclusion	544
References	547
Index	551

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Principal Investigator of this research project Dr. Mario Gomez for being a constant source of guidance, inspiration and support throughout the study. I am also indebted to Dr. Ramani Gunatilaka who has been a kind mentor to me and taught me more than I could give her credit for here. Special thanks go out to Danesh Jayathilaka, the coordinator of this project, and Viyanga Gunasekera, for their support in the finalization of this book.

I am thankful to everyone who reviewed the papers in this collection, which have immensely benefited from the constructive and thorough feedback that was received.

I am also grateful to all the staff at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies for their assistance in the administrative, financial, IT and library services.

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies would like to thank the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) initiative for its general financial support which facilitated the project. GrOW is a multi-funder partnership with the UK Government's Department for International Development, the William and Flora Hewett Foundation, and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

## *Contributors*

**Ramani Gunatilaka** works as an independent consultant in Sri Lanka and the region, conducting econometric analyses related to labour markets, income distribution, poverty, education, and subjective well-being. She holds a BSc in economics from University College London, an MSc in development economics from the University of Oxford, and a doctorate in applied econometrics from Monash University. Her recent work has looked at issues related to women's employment and education in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and the Maldives, while ongoing research focuses on the gendered dimensions of migration and poverty in fishing communities in Sri Lanka, India and Cambodia. She has several publications in internationally refereed journals.

**Iresha M. Lakshman** (PhD, Monash) is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Her fields of interest include education, gender, urban studies, international migration, and forced migration.

**Jeevasuthan Subramaniam** is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka and a researcher at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He obtained a Ph.D in Social Work from University of Science, Malaysia and has a Master in Social Work at the University of Madras. He is also a visiting lecturer at the Sri Jayawardenepura University, Ruhuna University, Sri Lanka Open University and National Institute of Social Development.

**Chulani Kodikara** is currently reading for a PhD at the University of Edinburgh. She worked as a Researcher with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies from 1998-2002 and 2008-2016. She has also worked as a researcher with the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms the Muslim Women's Research and

Action Forum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2004-2006, she worked with the government of Sri Lanka's Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process which was responsible for coordinating peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eealm (LTTE), following the ceasefire of 2002. She is the author of *Muslim Family Law in Sri Lanka: Theory, Practice and Issues of Concern to Women* (1999) and *Only Until the Rice is Cooked? The Domestic Violence Act, Familial Ideology and Cultural Narrative in Sri Lanka* (2012).

**Ranmini Vithanagama** is a researcher attached to ICES. She holds a B.A. in Economics and a Masters in Economics from the University of Colombo, and is currently reading for her Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Colombo. Her research interests include women's labour force participation and economic empowerment, internal displacement and its effects on livelihoods as well as disability and its economic implications for households with disabled individuals.

**Rapti Ratnayake** is currently an O'Brien Human Rights Fellow at McGill University where she is completing her LL.M. She completed her LL.B from the University of Edinburgh in 2014. In 2015, she received The Asia Foundation's Lanka Corps Fellowship to work in research and advocacy at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES).

**Kethaki Kandanearachchi** was a Programme Officer at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) from 2015 to 2016. She graduated from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura with BA (Hons) in English Language and Literature. She also completed the Diploma in International Relations offered by the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) and the Diploma on Human Resource Management offered by the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM).

## *Acronyms and Abbreviations*

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIPW	Augmented Inverse-Probability Weights
A' Levels	Advanced Level
ATE	Average Treatment Effect
ATET	Average Effect of the Treatment on the Treated
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEFE	Competency Based Economic Formation of Enterprise
CENWOR	Centre for Women's Research
CEPA	Centre for Poverty Analysis
DCS	Department of Census of Statistics
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	Department for International Development
DS	District Secretariat
EGLR	Employment Generation and Livelihoods through Reconciliation
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FHH	Female-Headed Households
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GA	Government Agent
GAD	Gender and Development
GCE AL	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
GCE OL	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GO	Governmental Organizations
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GROW	Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women
GS	<i>Gramasevaka</i>

HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRBA	Human Rights-based Approach
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IPM	Institute of Personnel Management
IPW	Inverse-Probability-Weighting
IPWRA	Inverse-Probability-Weighted Regression Adjustment
Km	Kilometre
LASUI	Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality
LDO	Land Development Ordinance
LED	Local Economic Development
LEED	Local Empowerment through Economic Development
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LFP	Labour Force Participation
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupee
LLRD	Link with Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimation
Mn	Million
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
MSc	Master of Science
NBT	Nation Building Tax
NEDA	National Enterprise Development Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
O' Levels	Ordinary Levels

PAMA	Public Assistance Monthly Allowance
Ph.D	Doctor of Philosophy
R	Regression Adjustment
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
Rs	Rupees
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLA	Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SNA	System of National Accounts
TRRO	Tamil Rehabilitation and Relief Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UKAID	United Kingdom Agency for International Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAT	Value Added Tax
VDO	Village Development Organization
WDO	Women's Development Officers
WHH	Women Heads of Households
WHO	World Health Organization
WID	Women in Development
WUSC	World University Service Canada

## *List of Figures*

Figure 1.1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework	146
Figure 2.1: Marital status of women heading their households, and of women in male-headed households, Sri Lanka's Northern Province	152
Figure 2.2: Distribution of women heading their households, and women in male-headed households by age cohort, Sri Lanka's Northern Province	153
Figure 2.3: Women's main activity outcomes	158
Figure 2.4: Percentage of respondents by type of livelihood strategy	160
Figure 2.5: Labour force participation rates by age cohort	161
Figure 2.6: Percentage of households by livelihood strategies	163
Figure 2.7: Composition of household income by source and by decile, women-headed households and male-headed households	164
Figure 2.8: Per capita household expenditure by district	167
Figure 2.9: Perceptions about how total household income has changed compared to the situation five years ago	168
Figure 2.10: Perceptions about how income from different sources had changed over the last five years Women heads of households	169
Figure 2.11: Labour force participation rates by decile of per capita household consumption	171
Figure 2.12: Own perceptions of health status	172
Figure 2.13: Educational attainment of women heading their households and women in male-headed households, in the Northern Province (2015) and Sri Lanka (2014)	174
Figure 2.14: Ownership of houses and land in the Northern Province 2015	175
Figure 2.15: Average size of landholding held by respondent by district, 2015	177
Figure 2.16: Average number of minutes taken to go to the nearest market in northern districts 2009 and 2015	178
Figure 2.17: Average value of jewellery owned by respondents in the districts of the Northern Province (Rs.)	180

Figure 2.18: Access to friends and relatives who can provide material as well as emotional support (%)	181
Figure 2.19: Change in network of friends and relations since the respondent first started managing a household	183
Figure 2.20: Vulnerability context: war-related experiences of household members, Northern Province	185
Figure 2.21: Perceptions about the helpfulness of the security Establishment	190
Figure 2.22: Percentage of households that participated in livelihood interventions, Northern Province	191
Figure 2.23: Shares of assistance and livelihood intervention programmes implemented by various agencies	192
Figure 2.24: Percentage of participating households who believed that the assistance was helpful for their livelihood strategy	194
Figure 4.1: Sources of information of livelihood interventions	278
Figure 4.2: Appropriateness of livelihood assistance programmes	281
Figure 4.3: Selection method for participation in livelihood interventions	281
Figure 4.4: Helpfulness of livelihood interventions	282
Figure 4.5: Perception of helpfulness of livelihood intervention by type of household headship	283
Figure 4.6: Follow up of livelihood interventions	286
Figure 4.7: Follow up to livelihood interventions: women heading their households and women in male-headed households	286

## *List of Tables*

Table 2.1:	Distribution of sample population across districts in the Northern Province	151
Table 2.2:	Perceptions of respondents about the helpfulness of Institutions	187
Table 2.3:	Percentage of respondents who agreed with each of the following reasons for engaging in self-employment	195
Table 2.4:	Percentage of women who agreed with each of the following reasons for not engaging in self-employment	201
Table 3.1:	Factors associated with the probability of labour force participation of women heading their households: Marginal effects of logistic regression	220
Table 3.2:	Factors associated with the probability of women heading their households and women in male-headed households, participating in the labour force: Marginal effects of logistic regression	227
Table 3.3:	Factors associated with the probability of labour market outcomes: Marginal effects of multinomial logistic estimation	241
Table 3.4:	Means and proportions of factors associated with labour market outcomes	245
Table 3.5:	Estimation of factors associated with the monthly wages of employees, women heading their households and women in male-headed households: Results of Heckman MLE	260
Table 3.6:	Estimation of factors associated with the earnings of employers, own account workers, and contributing family workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors: Results of Heckman MLE for women heading their households	264
Table 4.1:	Distribution of sample by interventions and labour market outcome	298
Table 4.2:	Factors associated with the probability of participation in livelihood interventions: Marginal effects of multinomial logistic estimation	304

Table 4.3:	Independent variables included in the outcome and treatment models, women heading their households and women in male-headed households	309
Table 4.4:	The impact of participating in livelihood interventions on self-employment in agriculture: women heading their households and women in male-headed households	314
Table 4.5:	The impact of participating in livelihood interventions on self-employment in non-agriculture: women heading their households and women in male-headed households	315
Table 5.1:	Defining SMEs in Sri Lanka	398
Table 5.2:	Summary of livelihood activities and support	413

# **Chapter 1: Exploring women's empowerment: experience from Sri Lanka's North**

*Ranmini Vithanagama*

## **1. Introduction**

The issue of women's empowerment is of critical policy importance in any country aiming to bring about greater gender equality. This is even more so in a post-conflict environment where women's roles are likely to have undergone diverse and complex changes. However, most post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation, and livelihood intervention programmes tend to ignore transformations that may have taken place in women's lives during a conflict and its aftermath. As a result, instead of using a potential opportunity to relax gender norms in the post-conflict environment, most intervention efforts run the risk of passively encouraging women's traditional responsibilities.

Sri Lanka's Northern Province sustained the worst damage in the 29-year-old armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government. But it also benefited significantly from the multitude of post-war interventions that were rolled out aimed at reviving the economy and its livelihood activities. How these interventions have panned out in creating opportunities for women in the North is an intriguing question, given its small regional economy, high poverty levels, and traditionally patriarchal gender relations.

This book attempts to find answers to this question by exploring different aspects of women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, after the conflict ended in 2009. It

focuses on three key aspects – women’s gender roles, women’s economic empowerment, and the post-war context that forms the backdrop in which both these aspects are looked at. This includes factors particularly pertinent in a post-war context such as women’s physical and psychological well-being, the impact of traumatic experiences in the war on their livelihood activities and lives in general, and the institutional environment that women have to operate in with access to different kinds of assets and capital. Different dimensions of their autonomy are also investigated.

Specifically, this book is a collection of essays that utilizes primary data collected from all five districts of the Northern Province during 2015-2016. Quantitative data was collected from a household survey of a total of 4,000 households, of which approximately 3,000 were from households that women head, and the remaining 1,000 made up of male-headed households. The qualitative information in the form of in-depth interviews was collected from a total of 120 female respondents heading their households from all five districts. The multi-disciplinary approach to data analysis adopted aims to present to the reader the many lenses through which the issues, challenges and opportunities for women in the North are discussed.

The mixed method approach adopted has enabled the study to be both comprehensive and representative, as well as nuanced in its analysis of issues related to women’s economic empowerment. Although the data used is not longitudinal, information based on the recall of events both during the war and after its end has allowed researchers to explore and gain insights about women’s economic empowerment in the medium to long term in a post-conflict set up. Therefore, to some extent, this book contributes

to the accretion of long-term empirical evidence about factors impinging on women's empowerment in a post-war context.

While the effectiveness of Sri Lanka's post-conflict development initiatives has been generally looked at, the impact of these programmes on women in the North continues to remain conspicuously under-researched and this book is arguably the most comprehensive effort at addressing this gap in the literature, both in terms of data and analysis. This lacuna is clearly evident when compared with the literature on livelihood and other interventions and their impact on livelihoods of people affected by the Tsunami of 2004 which also affected Sri Lanka.

Although this study is specific to the post-war context of Northern Sri Lanka, many of its findings and policy implications may be relevant outside the Sri Lankan context, particularly in other developing countries that are in post-conflict situations. It is hoped that this book will provide valuable insights about the design of post-conflict development initiatives through its exploration of the Sri Lankan experience, and a useful resource for different agents engaged in helping women in their livelihood activities, even outside the context of a conflict.

## **2. The context**

Sri Lanka's Northern Province has historically been an economically backward part of the country, with a relatively lower endowment of resources and connectivity disadvantages due to its geographic positioning. With the outbreak of the war in 1983, the Northern Province was also denied the ability to experience the benefits of trade liberalization in 1977. Many development initiatives undertaken in other parts of the country could not take

place in the North due to the conflict. In the absence of reliable information on the economic activities in the Northern Province prior to the conflict, it is difficult to estimate a base against which to compare how the economy has performed after the end of the conflict.

### **Economic background**

As government agencies could not collect data in LTTE-controlled areas during the period of conflict, most of the macro-economic level statistics are only available from 2010 onwards. However, provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics for the Northern Province are available from 1996, when they were first compiled. During 1996-2016, the contribution from the Northern Province to the national GDP has remained broadly stagnant, rising from 2.4 per cent in 1996 to only 3.5 per cent in 2016. In terms of the composition of the GDP, the Northern Province continues to account for the smallest manufacturing sector among all nine provinces in Sri Lanka. Although the manufacturing sector's contribution to the Northern Province's GDP has expanded from 9 per cent in 1996, to 17 per cent by 2015, it is still the lowest provincial manufacturing sector in the country. On the other hand, the agricultural sector continues to contribute about 15 per cent to the provincial GDP, a share which is on the high side compared to the rest of the country. It is difficult to make an informed assessment of the growth in the economic activities as real GDP growth statistics at the provincial level are unavailable at the time of the publication of this book.

However, there are more economic indicators that can be used as a proxy to understand the state of economic well-being in the post-

conflict North. In the 2009/10 household income and expenditure survey, where data was collected from the Northern Province<sup>1</sup> for the first time in about 25 years, the poverty head count ratio in the province stood at 12.8, higher than a national average of 8.9, but lower than that of the Eastern Province (14.8) and the Uva Province (13.7) which was not directly affected by the conflict. By 2016, the poverty head count of the Northern Province dropped to 7.7, but intriguingly was the highest in the country, compared to a national average of 4.1. Even though these statistics are not particularly useful in making a before and after-conflict comparison of the state of the economy in the Northern Province, its slow progress after the end of the conflict alludes to the possibility that the North was economically backward compared to the south-western parts of the country, even before the outbreak of the conflict.

### **The cost of the conflict**

The Northern Province sustained the worst damage from the 27-year-old conflict between the LTTE and the government, as it was the LTTE headquarters and the main focus of the Sri Lankan government's offensive. Furthermore, while the Eastern Province was liberated by the military by 2007, the conflict dragged on for another two years in the North before coming to an end in May 2009.

Over the course of its life, Sri Lanka's armed conflict has claimed over 100,000 lives, displaced over a million civilians, caused loss of property, assets and livelihoods and devoured a significant portion of national expenditure that could have been otherwise channelled

---

<sup>1</sup> However, this data collection still excluded Mannar, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya districts in the Northern Province.

for productive activities. Arunatilaka et al (2001) and presents an evaluation of the costs of the (still ongoing) have quantified the economic cost of the conflict only up to 1996 at least at USD 20.6 billion, which was 168.5 per cent of the GDP in 1996. This figure excluded substantial but non-quantifiable negative impacts on the economy such as the emigration of skilled labour, the slowdown in investments, and the costs of insecurity for the average citizen. Although the costs incurred by the LTTE on the conflict have not been calculated because of the unavailability of raw data, one report estimated that up to 1998, the LTTE has incurred a cost of approximately USD 473 million on its military, which represents about 10 per cent of the economy of the Northern and Eastern Provinces combined (Hart 2002). Furthermore, Kelegama (2005) noted that the economic cost incurred by the conflict has resulted in a lower standard of living than that could have been achieved had peace prevailed. More recently, Ganegodage and Rambaldi (2014), using macroeconomic data during the period 1960-2008, have estimated that the conflict has had a negative impact on Sri Lanka's economy both in the short term and the long term. They have estimated that a one per cent increase in the "war effort"<sup>2</sup> results in a 9 per cent reduction in the annual average GDP in the long run. The results also hold true for the short run at higher statistical significance levels. Although the real cost of any conflict cannot ever be computed, these statistics suggest the extent to which an armed conflict can hold back development and actually cause economic development in certain regions to regress.

---

2 This is an index that is made up of two variables: 1) the ratio of the number of personnel in the armed forces to the number of people in the labour force and 2) the ratio of military expenditure to GDP.

## Post-Conflict Development Initiatives

The end of the 27-year-old armed conflict in Sri Lanka was marked by optimism about the future of Sri Lanka's economy. Given that Sri Lanka's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an average of approximately 5.0 per cent over 1983-2008 despite the conflict, it was to be expected that the economy would take off after the removal of the main obstacle that was hampering the realization of the country's full growth potential. Thus, the resuscitation of economic activities of the Northern Province ranked very high in the government's post-conflict redevelopment agenda, which led to the roll out of a number of reconstruction and reconciliation programmes in the aftermath of the conflict. These development initiatives carried out in the North were broadly in line with the overall macroeconomic plan of the country.

In 2010, the government rolled out a mega infrastructure project in the North titled "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" (Flourishing North) that was instrumental in setting up and restoring road networks, electricity, water supply, telecommunications, agriculture, irrigation, settlement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and housing in the region. A total of USD 2,000 million from government allocations and international donors was channelled into this massive development initiative.<sup>3</sup> Although comprehensive and reliable information about the providers, types and values of other interventions is hard to come by as there is no unified database, a painstaking, livelihood mapping exercise that pieced

---

3 The total cost of the entire project is not available from government sources. The budgeted value has been sourced from the policy document of the previous government titled 'Mahinda Chinthana: Vision for the Future' available at <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-sri-2012-2016-oth-01.pdf>

together the available information as part of this study suggests that while the bulk of the livelihood interventions were carried out by the government, at least 50 international and local non-governmental organizations were also involved in different types of livelihood intervention projects in the Northern Province.<sup>4</sup> Of these interventions, approximately 26 per cent were focused on livestock, 18 per cent on creating self-employment opportunities and a further 17 per cent on non-livestock based agricultural activities. In addition, there was also a significant inflow of private sector investments to the Northern Province, both local and multinational, aimed at generating livelihood opportunities for people, directly and indirectly.

However, despite this multitude of post-conflict development infusions, the economy of the Northern Province did not take off as well as it was anticipated. In fact, the peace dividend on the country's economy that many had counted on, tapered off significantly faster than anticipated when the national GDP slowed to 3.4 per cent by 2013, having registered over 8 per cent growth during the 2010-2012 period. While much of the surge in this economic growth in the immediate aftermath of the conflict could be attributed to pent up demand and the fiscal stimulus of reconstruction and infrastructure development, particularly in the conflict-affected regions, economic growth rates reverted to that experienced before the war, partly as a result of lower-than-expected economic progress in the North and East. Clearly, the massive investments undertaken in the two provinces to revive economic activity, the expansion of the private sector into these

---

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1 for an overview map of livelihood activities by agency in the Northern Province. The information presented in the map is based on data collected on livelihood interventions rolled out in the North, as part of this research study.

areas, and the better investment climate have not been effective in driving economic growth as expected.

### **3. Women's Economic Participation in the North**

The Northern Province, dominated by a 93 per cent Tamil majority appears to be characterized by a strong patriarchal value system, with a much more rigid adherence to traditional gender roles, compared to a more secular Sinhala community. For example, the stigma attached to the widowhood is much more pronounced in the Hindu-dominant Tamil community than in a comparative Sinhala community (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). Furthermore, although the customary *Thesawalamai* Law that governs the property inheritance and matrimonial rights of the Tamils in the North favours women's ownership of land, it does not necessarily allow women free command over the use or disposal of property, and the selling of property requires the husband's consent. These gender rigidities are often reflected in cultural values and institutional arrangements, and act as internal and external barriers for women's economic empowerment (Sarvananthan 2015).

How women in the Northern Province have fared as economic agents in this backdrop of strongly upheld gender ideologies, a feeble economy and a protracted armed conflict is an important question. The gender-disaggregated data on employment shows that while labour force participation among men in the Northern Province (72 per cent) is mostly on par with the national average (75 per cent), women's participation in the formal labour market, at 25 per cent, is both significantly below that of the average for males in the Northern Province, as well as below the national

average of female labour force participation, which stood at 40 per cent in 2016 (Department of Census and Statistics 2017). However, it does represent a modest increase from 21 per cent in 1985/86 (Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) 1987).

Even so, labour force participation does not necessarily amount to economic prosperity among women. For example, using the 2009/10 household income and expenditure survey data (which includes only Jaffna and Vavuniya districts from the North) Gunatilaka (2015) found that that the incidence of poverty among working women in the North (15 per cent) was higher than that of working men (11 per cent), indicating that being engaged in paid market work has not helped women come out of poverty. The study also showed that the Northern Province had one of the highest rates of poverty incidence among women in the country at the time of the end of the conflict.

### **Economic Empowerment of Women in the North**

The juxtaposition of long-term economic stagnation, implications of a protracted armed conflict, and the domination of patriarchal values are likely to have made the Northern Province a particularly sensitive environment in which to roll out initiatives to bring about women's economic empowerment. The conflict itself has had mixed implications on women's socio-economic activities, as has been the case in many other conflict situations in the world.

Although there is no strong evidence to show that women were deliberately subjected to violence as part of warfare in the Sri Lankan context, there is enough evidence to show that sexual violence was perpetrated both by the armed forces as well as by the LTTE both during and after the end of the conflict (Mohan

2016). In fact, that women have borne an unfair portion of the burden of the conflict is a recurring observation in much of the literature that looks at Sri Lanka's conflict.

However, the conflict has also presented some fleeting windows of opportunities for women to break free from their traditional gender roles, and engage in activities that have advanced their agency. For example, Hyndman and de Alwis (2003) wrote about the training of young women by NGOs in both government and LTTE-controlled areas in vocations that were not conventionally feminine, such as mechanics, as these were useful vocations during times of transition. In a discussion of how the conflict has altered women's role, Korf (2004) described how women and elderly were used to bring agricultural produce to markets outside the LTTE-controlled areas in order to go through the Sri Lankan Army-controlled security check points to minimize inconvenience. Furthermore, Manoranjan (2010) cites the observations of psychologists working in the region, about how recruitment into the LTTE as cadres was found to be a liberating experience for young women, and a symbol of freedom and power, even though many joined the LTTE in the first place to escape threats of physical insecurity by the government military forces. On the other hand, Bandarage (2010) has posited that even in refugee camps, women may have found themselves at greater liberty to take up new economic responsibilities and challenge domestic violence, as it is difficult to adhere to traditional family roles and values in such arrangements.

Nonetheless, in line with empirical evidence on conflicts in other contexts, any conflict-induced empowerment women in the North have experienced has also mostly been short-lived.

For instance, Jordan and Denov (2007) explained how despite putting up a façade of gender equality in their policies, it was men in the LTTE that dominated the peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. The authors also talk of the LTTE's double standards of women's war-time empowerment. They discuss how despite being conditioned by the LTTE into believing that taking up weapons and protecting the nation is an act of emancipation, upon the return to peace, these women have had to hide this truth to prevent their being victimized by those who suffered under the LTTE. Such women have had to meekly return to traditional household responsibilities in the aftermath of the conflict.

Irrespective of how women's agency has been affected by an armed conflict, creating an environment in which they are empowered is critically important in a post-conflict development agenda. The permanent changes to the household unit inflicted upon by the conflict directly or indirectly – demographically, financially, spatially and psychosocially – makes it necessary that post-conflict development initiatives are aware of the complex situations women may find themselves in, after a conflict. But what constitutes a successful rehabilitation process after a conflict continues to elude a common consensus in the post-war literature (Bowden and Binns 2016). Moreover, the sheer spectrum and complexity of issues that needs to be addressed in a post-conflict development initiative, and their perceived relative importance, are likely to influence how much of a weight is placed on women in the overall economic rehabilitation and peace building process.

Sri Lanka's post-conflict development agenda has clearly prioritized economic issues in its post-conflict development agenda. The economic backwardness that has been characteristic of the

Northern Province for a long time and the damage it sustained in the conflict do indeed make a strong case for its economic revival. But as Winslow and Woost (2004) have pointed out, the needs of an economy at the end of a conflict are likely to be very different from those that existed before the conflict. In addition to the restoration of the economy and its infrastructure, there are also other pressing and sensitive issues a government typically has to look at – such as the resettlement of IDPs, generating employment, and addressing psychosocial issues of the victims (Bowden and Binns 2016).

In this complex context, how the peace dividend has cascaded down to women at the grassroots in the Northern Province has remained an open question until now. Was the restoration of law and order, revival of economic activities and livelihoods, improvements in infrastructure, better investment climate and overall stability sufficient to create better economic opportunities for women in the post-conflict North, or do deep-rooted structural and social constraints continue to trap women into their traditional activities? How do women heading their households navigate the new economic landscape and the patriarchal value system in providing for their families? And, how are their challenges different to women who have male heads of households? The analyses in this book, drawing from quantitative and qualitative data some useful insights about these issues.

### **Women's Employment Outcomes after the Conflict**

Women who are pushed to take up household headship in the aftermath of a conflict often do so under extremely precarious conditions – the trauma of loss of loved ones, property, displacement, loss of livelihoods – all such ramifications

aggravate the vulnerability of women heading their households, compared to women whose household dynamics have not been reshaped by the conflict. In fact, in Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama find that more women heading their households have experienced each shock that was enumerated in the household survey than women in male-headed households.

Data from a comparison group of 1000 male-headed households allowed Gunatilaka and Vithanagama to compare and contrast factors associated with women's labour force participation patterns to understand issues that may be unique to women heading their households. The authors find that women heading their households are in fact characterized by a very high labour force participation rate (of 59 per cent), compared to a national average of about 40 per cent for women in general and 39 per cent for women in male-headed households. On the other hand, the labour force participation patterns among women in male-headed households mimic the patterns and characteristics of women's labour force participation in the rest of the country.

However, an analysis of the factors associated with women's decision to become employed clearly indicates that the decision of women heading their households to engage in livelihood activities is primarily stemming from economic distress, than from a place of empowerment. Women heading their households are broadly characterized by poor health, relatively lower access to human and physical capital and are likely to be compelled to take up work unless they receive transfer income, or help from friends and relatives.

While women heading their households are more likely to defy gender norms and become employed, women in male-headed

household appear to be more bound by them, either because they can afford to be selective in whether to engage in a livelihood or not due to the presence of a primary income earlier in the household, or because the male headship has confined them into the domestic sphere. However, women in male-headed households appear to be better able to direct assets and navigate the institutional environment in their livelihood activities, possibly due to the support and networks of their husbands.

Women's preference to engage in self-employment in the non-farm sector, irrespective of the type of household headship, reflects their desire to engage in a livelihood activity within the confines of her household. In many ways, these perceptions embody their deep-rooted gender values. In Chapter 5, Chulani Kodikara posits that self-employment in fact was the only vocation that allowed women to maintain harmony between their need to earn income and take care of household responsibilities. On the other hand, despite such preferences, women heading their households tend to be engaged in agricultural self-employment, suggesting the lack of other alternatives to earn income.

These findings are in line with Gunatilaka's (2013) observation that engaging in market work has not offered a way out of poverty for most women in the North. Although poverty may force women to confront gender norms in the form of engaging in livelihood activities, they often return home to fulfil their 'unpaid care' portion of responsibilities, thus being burdened with the responsibilities of both paid and unpaid work. On the other hand, according to Kabeer (2005), being forced to engage in economic activities out of economic necessity is a reflection of a lack of 'real choice' available to these women, and is in fact a manifestation of their disempowerment.

However, that is not to say that all women who are employed continue to work due to economic hardships. For example, in Chapter 5, Iresha Lakshman observes that some of the widowed and separated women have gained confidence and become empowered as a result of becoming employed, irrespective of what factors led them to seek employment in the first place. Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake discuss in Chapter 4 that despite having undergone many atrocities of the conflict, women have shown their ability to recover from such traumatic experiences and make the most of the economic opportunities available to them. In doing so, most women have found strength and support in female solidarity in the form of family, friends, and other social networks. In fact, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama in Chapter 3 also note that irrespective of who heads the household, women's labour market outcomes were positively associated with the strength of their friendships and memberships in organizations. Moreover, women heading their households also had greater access to social capital than women in male-headed households, indicating that it may be necessary for female heads of households to build such networks to compensate for the absence of a husband. However, in Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama also observe a negative relationship between women's decision to become employed and the strength of bonds with relatives. A plausible explanation could be that, unlike friends, relatives are more likely to be concerned about a woman's "prestige" and "family honour" than friends, thus acting as a deterrent for women's employment. However, whether such female solidarity in the form of friendships and networks act to expand a woman's agency, or is part of a survival mechanism in the form of increased social capital, a repository of information

that would otherwise be unavailable to women heading their households, or a prerequisite for the receipt of transfer income or charitable donations, is an open question.

As the qualitative essays show, there is also a handful of women who have launched and expanded livelihood activities successfully, irrespective of whether it was necessity or skill that pushed them into income generating activities. These women typically exhibit entrepreneurial skills, an aptitude for savings and investments, and leadership traits. There are also women who have engaged in market work to pay for their children's education and expand their own skill set. Nonetheless, by and large, an overwhelming majority of women have taken up employment due to economic hardships in the post-conflict environment.

### **Effectiveness of livelihood interventions**

Generating employment opportunities is a critical element of a post-conflict development frameworks for several reasons. Firstly, the ability to earn income brings about a sense of normality and dignity to victims who have been battered by the conflict. Secondly, it also provides a means of survival and recovery. Thirdly, but equally importantly, it provides a productive alternative for individuals, particularly the youth, to resorting to violence, thereby reducing the risk of a resurgence of conflict. However, as has been witnessed in many post-conflict situations in the world, the urgency of employment creation is often felt only in the short-term. Most of the "quick impact" job creation activities which are carried out at the humanitarian assistance phase following a conflict are only aimed at smoothening the transition from conflict to peace and are innately short-term. These income generating activities

are bound to fail unless supplemented by long-term strategies for employment generation. In fact, the lack of employment opportunities, poorly developed livelihood interventions and delays and insufficiencies in livelihood interventions were some of the reasons that have been cited to explain why many households in the post-conflict Northern Province were living below the poverty line (Fonseka and Raheem 2011).

Another pitfall of post-conflict employment generation activities is the naïve over simplification of women as “victims”, bundling them together with children to form one “vulnerable group”, and focusing narrowly on war widows or women heading their households. Therefore, many of the programmes and models designed to generate employment opportunities for women suffer from a “cookie cutter” approach which are both ingrained in and passively supportive of dogmatic gender ideologies. It comes as no surprise then that even the programmes and projects with the best interests of women in mind are likely to go wrong when implemented within a flawed gender strategy.

A UN publication in 2015 that has mapped the effectiveness of women-targeted intervention programmes carried out in the Northern Province confirms these views. This mapping exercise has found that while some groups of women have been excluded from intervention programmes due to inconsistencies in the definition of a Female-Headed Household (FHH), singling out war widows has added to their stigmatization and isolation. It highlights the need for a holistic approach in how programmes are designed and implemented and, an understanding of the context, needs, relevance and the sustainability are a must at the programmes’ design phase itself.

However, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama observe in Chapter 3 that, many of the respondents in the sample survey, who had taken part in livelihood intervention programmes have found such support to be useful. Moreover, they note that the handouts appear to be well-targeted, reaching more women heading their households than women in male-headed households. The institutional environment within which these programmes were rolled out also appears to have been helpful overall.

Despite having had a decent outreach as found in the quantitative research, most of the livelihood programmes have displayed a lack of understanding of the ground realities of the target recipients, and a divorce from the context in which they were implemented, as explained in both the quantitative work and qualitative essays.

For example, in Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama find out that livelihood interventions have been more helpful in getting women to work in farming activities, and not non-farm activities, although the preference of the overwhelming majority of women is to work in non-farm self-employment activities.

Moreover, in Chapter 5, Chulani Kodikara is critical of the simplistic assumptions that appear to be espoused in the livelihood intervention programmes that have been rolled out in Mullaitivu. She argues that not every woman becomes an entrepreneur or sets up a lucrative livelihood activity solely by virtue of such support, and that for most of these women livelihoods are a survival strategy than an entrepreneurial undertaking. The gendered nature of the interventions, the seeming “vacuum” in which these interventions are rolled out – without taking into account women’s traumatic

experiences in the conflict, their skills, capabilities, resources, the availability of markets etc. – have made most livelihood intervention programmes redundant as far as the objectives of pulling women out of poverty and empowering them are concerned.

In Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama discuss that follow up activities were almost non-existent for many types of livelihood interventions, and even when there were follow up activities to such programmes, they were often narrowly focused. The weaknesses in the design, implementation and follow up to livelihood development programmes are also highlighted by Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake in Chapter 4. They discuss how livelihood programmes seemed to have been designed on the presumption that recipients knew exactly how to use handouts given to them for income generating activities. Furthermore, the absence of follow up activities also suggests that for many actors, these intervention programmes were most likely a one-time-only exercise. This could perhaps partly explain why women do not perceive livelihood interventions, or support from state and non-state actors, as important factors that have contributed to their decision to engage in income-generating activities, as shown in the quantitative research.

Nonetheless, Chulani Kodikara explains in Chapter 5 that much of the livelihood intervention programmes that were rolled out in the immediate aftermath of the conflict were meant as humanitarian assistance aimed at food security, and not necessarily designed to recuperate the economic situation of the recipients. This could partially explain the glaring disparities between conceptual frameworks behind the undertaking of colossal investments in the

Northern Province and the markedly traditional, narrowly defined and gendered nature of post-conflict livelihood development activities. On the one hand, the revival of the Northern economy is ambitious and forward looking – of what the Northern economy could become – while, on the other hand, at the grass-roots level, livelihood interventions were designed based on what the Northern economy was – basic, agricultural and unsophisticated.

It is reasonable to posit that in the absence of information that would have helped devise a meaningful variety of livelihood development programmes, interventionists failed to appreciate the heterogeneity of the needs, skills and aspirations of the potential recipients. As a result, most of the livelihood interventions designed for women appear to be narrowly defined as the hand out of a “stock of items” – capital, working capital, cash, farm animals – without an element of training, monitoring, follow up or evaluations. Handouts such as poultry, sewing machines, goats and cows are often representative of preconceived notions of what livelihoods suit women the best, and a “one-size-fits-all” mind-set. Moreover, many of the interventions do not seem to have factored in important criteria that contribute to the sustainability of livelihoods. The creation of backward and forward linkages with buyers and suppliers, providing basic training on managing funds, negotiation skills, and marketing skills appear to be conspicuously absent in many livelihood interventions.

Kennedy et al. (2008) who examined how the theory of “build back better” was put to practice in the aftermath of the Tsunami in Aceh and Sri Lanka note several points that could have been put to use in the post-conflict development agenda. Firstly, the involvement of the community from the beginning to the long-

term in the aftermath of the armed-conflict is important in exchanging accurate and realistic information, in order to avoid exacerbating existing issues and cause new problems. Secondly, these programmes should include a capacity building and development element among local and national partners in order to leave a development legacy. However, many of the livelihood interventions that have been initiated in the North do not seem to reflect these learnings.

### **The Role of Gender Norms**

The lack of opportunities for economic advancement and traditional gender ideologies are both instigators of disempowerment for women in the Northern Province, and it is very likely that the armed conflict had a multiplicative effect rather than a trigger effect on the hardships and inequalities faced by women in the North. As Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake have argued in Chapter 4, while the role the armed-conflict has played in shaping the lives of women cannot be overlooked, in many ways, it has only exacerbated the already vulnerable situation of women within the household and the society. They explain that the gender roles are so ingrained in the minds of women that many of them have self-imposed restrictions that hindered their ability to make decisions, find employment outside home, or become employed altogether. In Chapter 6, Iresha Lakshman resonates these views when she observes that the narratives of the respondents make it abundantly clear that women were expected to stay at home.

In Chapter 4, Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake highlight how the pressure to maintain the family “prestige” and “honour” has forced women to forego not only employment

opportunities, but also the opportunities for education. In fact, it is not necessarily the issues of safety that limit women's mobility – rather, it is the perception of where women belong that is discouraging women from leaving the confines of their homes. For most women, the attitudes and the influence of the community they lived in were tremendously powerful in determining their economic progress. In fact, Sarvananthan et al (2017) argue that although much blame is pinned on the external barriers to women's economic empowerment (such as the government or the private sector) in a post-conflict setting, barriers created internally by oneself, family or community are just as important, if not more so, in creating a restrictive environment for women's empowerment.

Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake also discuss in Chapter 4 how marriage and religion play a critical role in indoctrinating gender ideologies among women. Drawing from the narratives of a number of respondents, the authors discuss that while the marriage is seen as an institution that provides women security and recognition in the community, in truth, most married women did not feel secure or content within this institution. Many women believed that men held the power in the relationship, while they were meant to abide by their husband's decisions and choices. As a result, most women were accustomed to subjugating themselves to violence and abuse from the spouse as part and parcel of her role as a wife. The problems of accumulating a dowry substantial enough to attract potential suitors for daughters is also a pressing issue for mothers, particularly those heading their households. In a post-conflict context, where households have experienced a sharp depletion in their assets, that the dowry continues to remain a determining factor in a matrimonial

arrangement clearly shows that while the conflict unquestionably has compounded women's hardships, long-held gender ideologies have been a powerful medium through which many of the debilitating economic effects of the conflict have been channelled to women.

Religion often compounds gender norms, by helping women justify and accept their disempowerment as destiny or a karmic effect, and not see it as a manifestation of underlying societal beliefs and practices. In Chapter 2, Ranmini Vithanagama discusses how religion has been found in the international literature to be a powerful structural arrangement in enforcing gender values in societies, while Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake in Chapter 4 discuss how religion hinders some women's economic freedom. Iresha Lakshman in Chapter 6 also explains that religion, caste and ethnicity, which make part of a woman's social capital, may discourage a woman from engaging in livelihood activities.

None of these factors have been precipitated by the conflict, although each may very well have aggravated its effect on women's predicament in the post-conflict North. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the disempowering effect the conflict (and the subsequent role of the external factors) has had on women, and the disempowering effects the more pernicious internal factors that long predates the conflict at least at a conceptual level.

For example, in Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama do not find that the conflict-related shocks have had an overwhelming impact on women's labour market outcomes and livelihood strategies, at least not after nearly 6-7 years after the end of the conflict – compared with other demographic and

household characteristics and the asset structure, although these variables irrefutably have been impacted by the conflict. Thus, the important take away is to understand whether it is useful to narrowly pin the blame on women's economic hardships on the armed conflict, or to widen the focus to understand and address underlying internal and structural ideals that have likely contributed to women's disempowerment before, during and after the conflict. It is unreasonable to expect economic reforms to bring about women's empowerment when societal values relegate women to a role of secondary value to men.

### **Influence of Psychosocial Factors**

Traditionally in South Asian societies, issues pertaining to people's psychosocial well-being are often kept under the radar, as such issues often stigmatized in these cultures. As a result, mental health and psychosocial dimension are often overlooked, unaddressed or even forgotten altogether even in situations where it is extremely important to look at these issues – such as in a post-war context.

However, as Somasundaram and Sivayokan (2013) have noted, these complex mental health and psychosocial problems that individuals, families and communities experience during a conflict tend to impair their recovery and may in fact be counterproductive in achieving post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction objectives. Equally important is the focus on women's physical well-being, which also seem to be taken for granted in the post-conflict development agenda, despite the many hardships individuals and families have coped with during and after the conflict.

It is important to acknowledge that those who design livelihood intervention programmes may lack the expertise to build a psychosocial dimension into their work, while it is also possible that time and resource constraints may inhibit these programmes from tackling these sensitive issues. Furthermore, people may be more open to accepting impersonal livelihood initiatives that do not take an interest in or force them to discuss their psychosocial issues.

Nevertheless, the physical and psychosocial well-being of recipients, particularly women, is of paramount importance in sustaining livelihoods. On the one hand, the death or disappearance of the spouse during the conflict may very likely have pushed many women into household headship, assigning them new responsibilities in the household while grappling with the sorrow of death, among many other complications of her new situation. The disintegration of families, loss of assets and livelihoods and the burden of having to rebuild their lives while coming to terms with their new realities are likely to weigh on a woman's physical and emotional well-being irrespective of whether she heads the household or not. The oppressive gender ideologies add another layer of difficulties for women, particularly those who are no longer married, in engaging in income-generating activities. Thus, to expect these women to build a livelihood, generate income and provide for her family from a livelihood handout that is so strikingly apathetic to their state of emotions is, at the very least, unrealistic; or, it alludes to the gendered expectation of women to be resilient, pick up the pieces and take care of her family, irrespective of what trauma she is undergoing herself.

In Chapter 5, Chulani Kodikara discusses how many women have internalized their caregiver responsibilities and see themselves primarily as “mothers”. This may be because, as Jeevasuthan Subramaniam writes in Chapter 7, women, mostly younger women heading their households, do not know how to deal with the emotional turmoil they are going through, or because they do not want to learn from past lessons because they are too traumatic to recall. As a result, perhaps they find solace in submitting to their gender roles, rather than confronting their psychosocial issues.

Witting et al (2016) who studied depression, family adjustment and health among women heading their households in the Kilinochchi district of the Northern Province found that women with greater access to resources reported lower levels of depression. As women heading their households typically tend to have a lower resource base, such women, then, are more likely to be prone to mental health issues. However, this may not always be the case. In Chapter 6, Iresha Lakshman contends that an unscathed self-dignity is a vital ingredient in determining a woman’s success. Even if women were widowed, if they have not been abused at the hands of their husbands, they tend to be better able to carry out their livelihood activities than those who have suffered domestic abuse. In fact, she notes that the loss of self-dignity appears to have far more detrimental effects on women’s livelihoods than a lack of access to financial capital. These findings are in line with the observations of Goodhand et al (2003), who look at social capital formation in Sri Lanka’s conflict-setting and conclude that it is not the amount of social capital that matters, but its character.

Therefore, it may not be correct to assume that women heading their households are at a greater risk of suffering from psychosocial

issues. On the contrary, acts of domestic abuse and violence by their husbands, which may possibly have been aggravated by the conflict experience, may make married women susceptible to physical and emotional vulnerabilities as well.

In Chapter 3, Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama identify being of poor health as having a negative association with women's employment among women heading their households. This is also the most cited reason for why women heading their households are not engaged in productive economic activities. Although they do not differentiate between physical and mental health here, the findings highlight the importance of paying greater attention to the physical and psychosocial well-being of women at a broader policy level. However, as Jeevasuthan Subramaniam notes in Chapter 7, the importance of women's psychosocial well-being appears to have been overlooked in the post-conflict development agenda by the government as well as other actors. Therefore, it is not surprising that even the most stringently planned livelihood initiatives run the risk of failing if women's deep-rooted pains and sufferings are not addressed.

That women are resourceful, conscious of their responsibilities and develop their own coping mechanisms in the absence of a reliable and empowering support system should in no way be interpreted as a trait of their resilience. At the very least, it is important that livelihood interventions acknowledge and understand that women in a post-conflict environment have experienced many traumas, and may need more support to maintain their physical and emotional well-being, than women who have not experienced a conflict.

## **Women's Empowerment as Economic Justice**

Sri Lanka's post-conflict reconciliation activities have polarized women into two extremes – either as ex-combatants who have been an active participants in the conflict, or passive victims who have suffered in the conflict. This crude dichotomization of women has clearly taken away from the post-conflict development initiatives the ability or the need to look at and understand women who are not at either extreme.

As several authors in this collection have pointed out, many livelihood interventions programmes rolled out in the post-conflict North seem to have discounted the myriad of complex issues women are struggling with, and hypothesized that women could generate a stream of income from an infusion of support that is disconnected from her needs, skills, strengths, health and state of mind. These findings point to a lack of commitment on the part of interventionists for addressing sustainability issues of women's economic activities.

As Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama have observed in Chapter 3, poor health and low educational attainments are two important factors withholding women who head their households from engaging in economic activities altogether. They also note that higher educational attainments are associated with more prestigious employment outcomes such as public sector jobs. However, neither women's health and nor their education can be improved in the short term, and needs to be factored into long term policy measures on human capital investments. In other words, while a "toolkit" approach to livelihood interventions, as Rajasingham-Senanayake (2009) puts it, might be helpful for

women in the short term, a more concerted effort is required to create opportunities for more sustainable economic activities in the Northern Province.

However, a practical problem with translating the intensity of interventions in the immediate aftermath of a conflict into devising comprehensive long-term solutions is the gradual loss of interest in state and non-state actors with the lapse of time, and even the possible diversion of their attention to other and newer problems that surface. That women should go through the many atrocities a conflict sets in motion, to be helped as “beneficiaries” upon the return to peace, only to be forgotten and left to fend for themselves in the long term then begs a profoundly moral question – are livelihood interventions a means of providing employment and income-generating opportunities? Are they a vehicle of women’s economic empowerment? Or should they be conceptualized at a more fundamental level – as an economic right of women, and an obligation of the part of everyone responsible to fulfil this right?

#### **4. Conclusion**

Even though an armed conflict may alter women’s traditional roles, such changes are often short-lived and snap back to what they were upon the return to peace. Although a post-conflict development programme may be capable of consolidating some of the economic empowerment women may have experienced during a war, such opportunities are often missed due to a variety of complex and practical difficulties in the aftermath of a conflict, such as the non-availability of data, the large number of actors involved, and the order of priorities in the overall peacebuilding process.

Sri Lanka's Northern Province was battered for 29 years due to the armed conflict between the LTTE and the government, causing its already backward economy to become retarded during the prolonged conflict. In this context, Sri Lanka's post-development initiatives placed special importance on restoring the economic activities in the North by investing heavily in its infrastructure, connectivity and livelihood generation. Although the state was by and large the biggest actor to roll out livelihood interventions, there were a number of non-state actors who were also carrying out different livelihood programmes in the North. However, despite concerted efforts to restore the Northern economy, it failed to register any remarkable growth in the medium term after the end of the conflict.

The investigation of women's economic empowerment in the North against this backdrop has produced several insightful results. Firstly, the overarching idea emerging from both the quantitative and qualitative research is that most women, particularly those heading their households, are driven to livelihood activities out of economic necessity. They are further disadvantaged by lower access to human capital compared to women in male-headed households. Many women engage in and prefer to be engaged in home-based self-employment activities, alluding to the patriarchal values the Northern Province seems to be broadly characterized by. But they also tend to draw strength from social capital that support their agency and self-dignity.

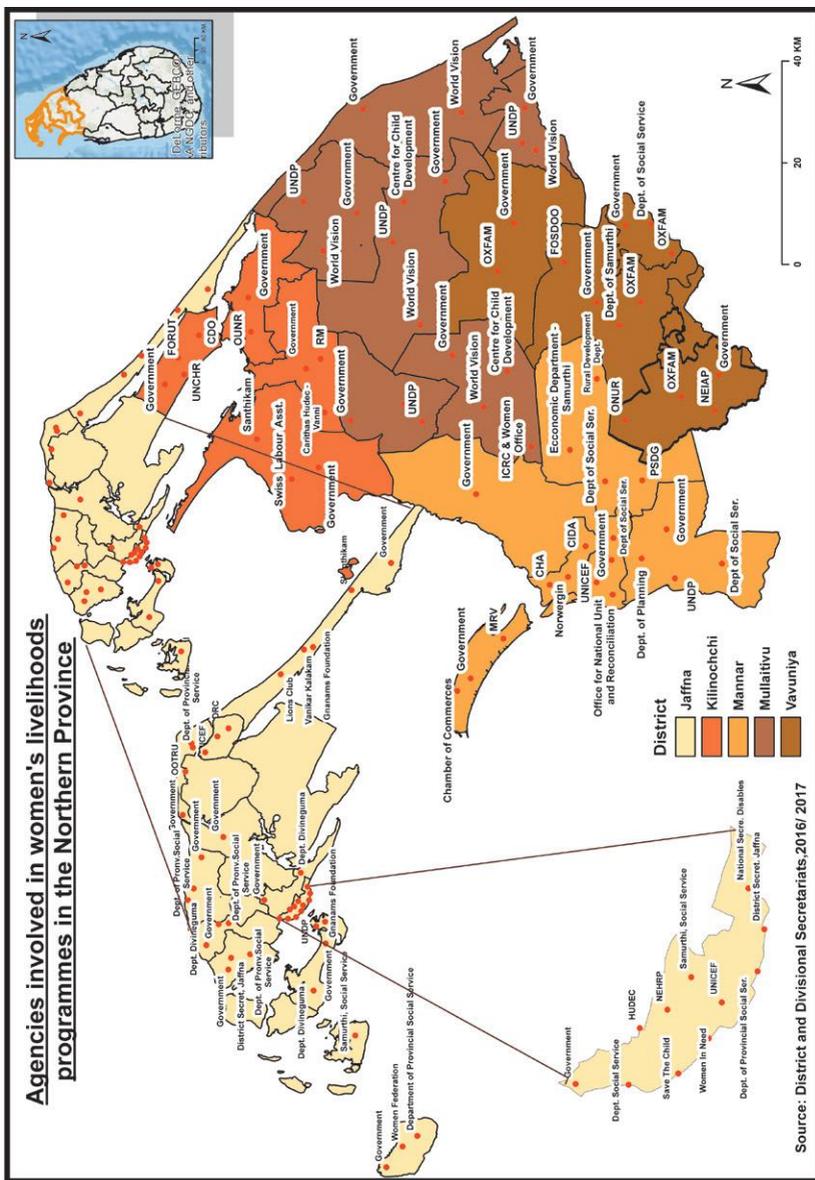
Although very broadly speaking, livelihood interventions carried out in the North appear to have been well targeted, and helpful to the recipients, they also seem to suffer from a narrow view of women as "recipients" of aid, an oversimplification of women's needs

and capabilities, a poorly defined range of livelihood handouts, and a conspicuous absence of follow-up activities that have challenged the sustainability of most of the livelihood intervention programmes. Moreover, the divorce of the importance of women's social capital and their physical and psychosocial well-being in livelihood initiatives may also have contributed to challenging the sustainability of these programmes.

While the institutional environment, primarily manifested through the helpfulness of grassroots level government officials, appears to be conducive to women in general, women in male-headed households appear to be better able to navigate institutional arrangements, possibly due to the support of the husband. The conflict itself does not appear to have created profound effects on women's employment decisions in the medium-term. In fact, many of the personal, societal and structural barriers women face in engaging in employment and achieving some level of economic empowerment in the Northern Province are rooted in traditional gender roles which long pre-dates the conflict.

However, that women's education, good health and strong social networks are positively associated with better employment outcomes for women indicates that it is possible to create a more favourable economic landscape for women in the North in the long-term. In doing so, some of the most relevant, useful and required are policies and frameworks aimed at investing in the human capital of women and girls, better healthcare facilities, gender sensitized institutional structures and more comprehensive livelihood development initiatives. Even so, macroeconomic and investment policies that are congruent with the ground realities of the Northern Province are the most critical in creating sustainable and decent employment opportunities for women in the long-run.

# Appendix 1



Source: Livelihood support mapping activity undertaken as part of the GROW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015

## References

- Arunatilake, N., Jayasuriya, S. and S. Kelegama. 2001. "The Economic Cost of the War in Sri Lanka". *World Development* 29 (9): 1483–1500.
- Bandarage, A. 2010. "Women, Armed Conflict, and Peacemaking in Sri Lanka: Toward a Political Economy Perspective". *Asian Politics & Policy* 2 (4): 653–67.
- Bowden, G. and T. Binns. 2016. "Youth Employment and Post-War Development in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka". *Conflict, Security & Development* 16 (3): 197–218.
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2007. Annual Report, Colombo: Sri Lanka: Central Bank of Sri Lanka
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2016. Annual Report, Colombo: Sri Lanka: Central Bank of Sri Lanka
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2017. Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey: Annual Report, 2016. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 1987. Labour Force and Socio Economic Survey - 1985/86. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Fonseka, B. and M. Raheem. 2011. "Land in the Northern Province: Post War Politics, Policy, and Practices". Colombo, Sri Lanka: Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Ganegodage, K. R. and A. N. Rambaldi. 2014. "Economic Consequences of War: Evidence from Sri Lanka". *Journal of Asian Economics* 30: 42–53.
- Goodhand, J. 2003. "Enduring Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of the Linkages Between War and Chronic Poverty". *World Development, Chronic Poverty and Development Policy*, 31 (3): 629–46.
- Gunatilaka, R. 2013. "Women's Participation in Sri Lanka's Labour Force: Trends, Drivers and Constraints". Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Labour Organization.
- Gunatilaka, R. 2015. Women and Poverty in Sri Lanka, in, CENWOR (2015), Review of the Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action, Colombo, CENWOR: pp. 17-65.
- Hart, J. 2002. "Children and Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka: A Discussion Document Prepared for UNICEF Regional Office South Asia". Discussion Paper. Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.
- Hyndman, J. and M. de Alwis. 2003. "Beyond Gender : Towards a Feminist Analysis of Humanitarianism and Development in Sri Lanka". *Women's Studies Quarterly* 31 (3/4): 212–26.
- Jordan, K. and M. Denov. 2007. "Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam". *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9 (1): 42–62.

- Kabeer, N. 2005. "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal 1". *Gender & Development* 13 (1): 13–24.
- Kelegama, S. 2005. "Transforming Conflict with an Economic Dividend: The Sri Lankan Experience." Research paper 2005/48. UNU WIDER, United Nations University (UNU).
- Kennedy, J., Ashmore, J., Babister, E. and I. Kelman. 2008. "The Meaning of "Build Back Better": Evidence from Post-Tsunami Aceh and Sri Lanka". *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 16 (1): 24–36.
- Korf, B. 2004. "War, Livelihoods and Vulnerability in Sri Lanka". *Development and Change* 35 (2): 275–95.
- Manoranjan, T. 2010. "Beaten but Not Broken: Tamil Women in Sri Lanka View from the Ground". *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 11: 139–48.
- Mohan, R. 2016. "The Fear of Rape: Tamil Women and Wartime Sexual Violence". In K. Jayawardena and K. Pinto-Jayawardena (eds.) *The Search for Justice: The Sri Lanka Papers*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. 2004. "Between Reality and Representation Women's Agency in War and Post-Conflict Sri Lanka". *Cultural Dynamics* 16 (2–3): 141–68.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. 2009. "Transnational Peace Building and Conflict: Lessons from Aceh, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka". *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 24 (2): 211–35.
- Sarvananthan, M. 2015. "Impediments to Women in Post-Civil War Economic Growth in Sri Lanka". *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management* 2 (1): 12–36.
- Sarvananthan, M., Suresh, J. and A. Alagarajah. 2017. "Feminism, Nationalism, and Labour in Post-Civil War Northern Province of Sri Lanka". *Development in Practice* 27 (1): 122–28.
- Winslow, D. and M. D. Woost, eds. 2004. "Economy, Culture, and Civil War in Sri Lanka". Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Witting, A. B., Lambert, J., Wickrama, T., Thanigaseelan, S. and M. Merten. 2016. "War and Disaster in Sri Lanka: Depression, Family Adjustment and Health among Women Heading Households". *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 62 (5): 425–433.

# **Chapter 2: Women's Economic Empowerment: A Literature Review**

*Ranmini Vithanagama*

## **1. Introduction**

'Women hold up half the sky' is a Chinese proverb that succinctly sums up the ideal of women's equal contribution to the world. Yet, the reality across many developed and developing countries alike is that gender gaps persist across many domains of life – education, health, labour market opportunities, paid and unpaid work. Therefore, quite obviously, women's empowerment is a concept that cuts across many disciplines.

The term empowerment has gained rising popularity since the 1990s, but much earlier studies of 'women's status' also looked at various aspects of women's empowerment. Although concerted efforts by development agencies and practitioners over the years to reduce gender disparities have borne some results, the discriminations against women are still strong enough to have placed gender equality as the fifth goal of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2015–2030.

This chapter reviews an extensive part of existing literature on women's empowerment, with a specific focus on economic empowerment. The first section looks at the definition of empowerment, sifting through many nuances on what constitutes empowerment. The second section studies the importance of empowering women and how and why economic empowerment could be key to the overall empowerment of

women. The third section analyses different factors that promote or deter women's economic empowerment, looking specifically at gender norms, women's time use, paid and unpaid work, education, economic and financial resources and conflict. This section is followed by a conclusion summarizing the key ideas pertaining to women's economic empowerment.

## **2. Defining Empowerment**

Although the term 'Empowerment' is often used liberally in development literature, there is no universally accepted definition on what it actually constitutes. Perhaps the usage of the term across a wide range of disciplines, from community development to economics, makes a clear-cut definition of the term more complex. In fact, Delgado (2015) notes that it is not surprising that a popular concept like empowerment would in fact have many different definitions. Thus, empowerment has become a term that 'means different things to different people' (Prah, 2013). As a result, many refrain from defining the term at all, while others explain its meaning very narrowly, specific to the discipline or the programme under which the term is being used (Page & Czuba, 1999). This has led to empowerment being often viewed as a 'buzzword' (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Rowlands, 1997; Page & Czuba, 1999; Batliwala, 2007).

Rapport (cited in Novek, 1992) wrote in 1985 that 'Empowerment is a little bit like obscenity; you have trouble defining it but you know it when you see it'. Closer to two decades later, Strandberg (2001) wrote along similar lines – that

empowerment can be understood intuitively, as something positive. In fact, Novek (1992) argued that attempts to arrive at a working definition of empowerment by different social sciences have made ‘the term per se a problematic concept at best’ (p. 8). Similarly, Cochran (1986 as cited in Whitmore, 1988, p. 4) pointed out that the concept of empowerment has not been clearly defined due to the range of thinkers discussing it.

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) also noted that empowerment is ‘inadequately conceptualized and loosely defined’ (p. 572), and this lack of clarity on what empowerment is becomes a concern because it is a term that is so ubiquitous that, in fact, avoiding the term is difficult. Page and Czuba (1999) explained that in some of the literature at the time, the concept of empowerment was ‘often assumed rather than explained or defined’. This could be because, as Rappaport (1984) noted, defining empowerment is much easier in its absence – powerlessness, helplessness, emptiness, alienation – but not so in its presence as empowerment could take different forms for different individuals and in different contexts. Moreover, constructing a singular definition of empowerment may in fact make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription-like, thereby contradicting the very concept of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990). However, that has not prevented attempts being made to understand and explain the term. In fact, definitions on the concept of empowerment ‘abound’ (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), and unsurprisingly so, given the popularity of this multi-disciplinary term (Delgado, 2015).

Central to the conceptualization of empowerment is the notion of power (Kabeer, 1999b; Eyben, Kabeer, & Cornwall, 2008; Sardenberg, 2008), which itself is not clearly defined (Pratto, 2016). Gaventa (2003) wrote that the definition of power is often assumed, instead of being ‘defined or addressed or used in a coherent manner’ (p 12). An almost similar view on the empowerment definition was noted earlier.

In fact, the anomalies related to the term ‘empowerment’ stem from confusion about the understanding of power (Rowlands, 1997). Rowlands explained that most frameworks on power did not explain how power was distributed in a society or consider power dynamics of gender, race or other categories, upon which oppression is based. Moreover, studies of power are often focused on the agency of the powerful, neglecting the point of view of the less powerful (Pratto, 2016).

Traditionally, power is associated with domination or ‘power over’ someone or something. Russel (1938, cited in Kreisberg, 1992, p. 40) lists out three ways in which a person could exert power over another – through coercion, inducement or propaganda, where intended effects are caused through control or manipulation. While this interpretation of power is criticized in empowerment literature (Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 2005), when power is interpreted as ‘power to’ act on choices and decisions, even despite others’ opposition, it alludes to what is intuitively understood as empowerment. Similarly, transformational power, which despite entailing unequal social relations just like in dominative power, is characterized by actors

who are not defined by self-interest, and look to reduce social inequality through development (Pratto, 2016). This goes to show that the manner in which power is interpreted can have significant implications over how empowerment is operationalized (Luttrell, 2007).

Power could be thought of as a mutual interaction between agency (actors and processes) – and structure – (social norms and beliefs), and empowerment as a process that requires changes in both dimensions (Pettit, 2012). However, power is not always visible or obvious, and could also be hidden or invisible as classified in the Power Cube, a model that explains power using a three-dimensional cube of space (closed, invited, claimed), levels (local, national, global), and forms (visible, hidden, invisible) (Gaventa, 2003; Gaventa, 2005).

While formal power is often visible and lies within recognizable structures, informal power often tends to be hidden or invisible inside social norms and practices inbuilt into our lives. Gaventa (2006) explains invisible power as one in which ‘conflict is more invisible, through internalization of powerlessness, or through dominating ideologies, values and forms of behaviour’ (p. 29). Therefore, it may be in fact easier to engage with visible power holders to influence power structures, than invisible power that is embedded in social norms and practices (Pantazidou, 2012). As a result, one could become submissive to informal power unintentionally as it is often seen as natural or normal (Pettit, 2012). Thus, for empowerment to be effective, it has to create changes not just in formal and visible forms of power, but also in

the more subtle versions of it. In other words, creating increased access to and distribution of resources as well as changing traditional patriarchal gender relations are both equally important elements of empowerment. It is important, therefore, for empowerment to draw from a wide range of conceptualizations of power (Ibid).

The conception of power as a zero-sum game is quite old (Read, 2012), and is predicated on the assumption that power is of finite supply, where one person's gain comes at another person's loss. Within the context of a household, this means that if the woman's decision-making power improves, it would be by reducing the man's decision-making power. In other words, empowerment leaves one party better off and the other worse off. Pantazidou (2012) writes that the positions of power i.e. who has power, becomes a more productive discussion when power moves away from the zero-sum logic, and instead becomes circumstantial. In other words, the level of power someone has depends on each context and setting. A person who is in a dominant position in one context, may enjoy less power in another context. Thus, although power is regarded as a zero-sum game in many situations, it could also be a positive-sum game, which creates opportunities for everyone to benefit (Singh, 2007). Positive-sum power is thus generative in nature, creating room for someone to gain greater power, without necessarily reducing the power the other person has. This makes empowerment more acceptable and practical, as opposed to in a zero-sum situation (Craig & Mayo, 1995). If the total power in society is not fixed, but variable, this means that the

empowerment of the powerless could be achieved without a significant dilution in the power of the powerful, resulting in a total increase in the power in society (Ibid).

The term 'empowerment' formally entered social services practices and literature in Barbara Bryant Solomon's publication in 1976 titled *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* (Hardina, Middleton, Montana, & Simpson, 2006; Calvès, 2009; F. J. Turner, 2011;), and also provided one of the first insights into what empowerment means. Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as 'a process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of valued social roles' (as cited in Hardina et al., 2006, p. 8). Another elaboration of the concept of empowerment by Solomon is that it is 'a process whereby the social worker engages in a set of activities with the client that aim to reduce powerlessness that has been created by negative valuations based on membership in a stigmatized group' (p. 19, as cited in Delgado, 2015, p. 80).

From this second explanation on empowerment, one could deduce that the initial definitions of empowerment likely relied on the zero-sum interpretation of power, particularly given their ethnocentric approach. The empowerment of the marginalized and stigmatized ethnic groups, in this case black communities, could be viewed as being achieved by diluting the power of those exerting power over them, in this case, the whites. In the 1980s, following Solomon's work, the term empowerment has been

widely used in association with a process of social transformation, to enable oppressed groups in society such as women, disabled people, homosexual people and the poor to 'define and claim their rights collectively' (Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton, & Bird, 2009).

Berger and Neuhaus were two other writers who had an early influence on the meaning of 'empowerment'. In 1977, they proposed a theory of mediating structures in order to bridge the gap between individuals and large public institutions such as the government and business corporates. These institutions are generally alienating for an individual. Therefore, the role of mediating nonprofit organizations is to act as a vehicle of empowerment by connecting disempowered individuals with the larger civil society they live in, thereby creating a sense of belongingness to them ( B. S. Turner, 1993; LeRoux & Feeney, 2014).

Although the initial use of the term 'empowerment' stemmed from social movements, it has later been picked up by a multitude of academic disciplines. Among the earliest to develop the concept theoretically was Julian Rappaport, a community psychologist, who wrote 'By empowerment I mean that our aim should be to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives' (1981, p. 15). This, and subsequent definitions of empowerment, despite their nuances, bear important tenets of those early meanings of the term.

However, in the development discourse, the theoretical conceptualization of empowerment has been strongly informed by the popular education philosophy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the feminist movement (Luttrell et al., 2009). The popular education methodology looks to bring about more equitable social, political and economic relations by creating an environment in which people who historically lacked power can acquire and expand their knowledge to remove social inequalities. During and beyond Freire's lifetime, popular education has been associated with numerous revolutionary movements in influencing adult literacy, health education and a means of raising consciousness and organizing people to reclaim their rights (Wiggins, 2011).

On the other hand, increased awareness of the role of gender relations in development led to a conceptual shift in development initiatives in the 1980s from the Women in Development (WID) approach to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach. The GAD approach was rooted in social feminism, and was inspired by the experiences and writings of grassroots organizations and Third World feminists. It argued that the status of women was influenced by (1) their material conditions and their positioning in society and (2) the degree of patriarchal power exercised at the household, community and national levels (Luttrell et al., 2009; Taşlı, 2007; Parpart & Barriteau, 2000). Therefore, gender as a social construct, instead of women (in WID), is the focal point of GAD. Moreover, it inverts women's role from one of passive recipients of development interventions in previous approaches to agents of

change (Taşlı, 2007; Dagenais & Piché, 1994). Therefore, empowerment is very much an integral part of the GAD approach, and has become ‘an essential part of feminist theory’ (Rowland-Serdar & Shea, 1991). However, the discussion of empowerment must distinguish between different theoretical understandings of ‘gender equality’ to delineate what constitutes empowerment under each construal of the term.

Liberal feminism claims that gender differences are not based on biology, and that therefore women and men should have equal rights to education and work opportunities. Therefore, for them, empowerment was about exploring ways that women could get more individual power to be equal to men, and the vehicle for such empowerment was through legal, political and constitutional reforms (Lorber, 1997; Rowland-Serdar & Shea, 1991). They were less interested in political and societal transformation as a catalyst of women’s empowerment (S. G. Turner & Maschi, 2015).

On the other hand, Marxist and Socialist feminists positioned housewives within the structure of capitalism (who were conspicuously absent in Marx’s own analysis of the social structure of capitalism) and criticized family as a source of oppression and exploitation for women (Lorber, 1997). They posit that the gender division of labour in the household was expanded from the private to the public sphere due to capitalism, and therefore that both capitalism and patriarchy are responsible for the gendered division of labour (Calasanti & Bailey, 1991).

Radical feminists posit that traditional gendered roles are an integral component of patriarchy (Liu & Dyer, 2014). They argue that women are a social group that are oppressed by men as a social group, and shows how male domination is exercised in every sphere of a woman's private and public life such as marriage, reproduction, forced heterosexuality, household, the economy etc. Therefore, radical feminists call for a total transformation of social structures and the removal of processes of patriarchy for women's empowerment (Rowland & Klein, 1996).

In many ways empowerment is a 'process' than an end outcome. Rapport (1984) stated that empowerment is viewed 'as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives' (p. 3). Chamberlin and Schene (1997) argued that empowerment is a process rather than an event, with attributes such as having decision-making power, access to information and resources, choices, optimism, self-confidence, and assertiveness. Page and Czuba (1999) identified empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their lives. Similarly, Mayoux (2008) explains empowerment as a process through which those who are currently disadvantaged achieve equal rights, resources and power. In short, empowerment 'entails a process of change' (Kabeer, 1999b). This implies that to be empowered, one must first be in a state of disempowerment. Therefore, it is critical to understand the causes of disempowerment and power relations that may negatively impact choices, opportunities and individual well-being (Luttrell et al., 2009).

Kabeer (1999b, 2005) defined being disempowered as being denied choice, and empowerment as the process through which such individuals are given the ability to make choices. She distinguished between first order choices (strategic life choices) and second order choices. First order choices are those that constitute the defining parameters of people's lives (such as what livelihood to engage in, whether to get married, whether to have a family), while second order choices are those that may impact the quality of day-to-day life, but not life as a whole. To be empowered then is to have a greater control over first order choices. Alsop et al (2005) associate empowerment with making effective choices, or more elaborately, making choices which are then transformed into desired actions and outcomes.

Kabeer (1999a, 1999b) identified three dimensions along which evaluating the ability to make choices must be carried out – resources, agency and achievements. Resources are the material, social and human resources that underpin the ability to make choices. Agency is the 'power within' or the ability to understand what one wants in life and act upon those goals, and the process that transforms resources into achievements. Sen (1985) explained agency as 'what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important' (p. 203). Therefore, agency is something more than actions that can be observed, although it is 'operationalized as "decision-making" in social science literature' (Kabeer, 1999b). The 'inner transformation' that creates a shift in perceptions is central to agency, that makes them understand that they are not only capable of but also entitled to making choices (Malhotra,

Schuler, & Boender, 2005). However, in the context of empowerment, agency is not just about actively making choices, but doing so in ways that challenge existing power relations (Kabeer, 2005).

The interplay of resources and agency leads to achievements through which empowerment or the lack of it will be reflected. There again, Kabeer (1999a) differentiated between inequalities in the ability to make choices and differences in the choices made, where only the former is taken into consideration in relation to empowerment. The structural constraints that impose limitations on the choices that an individual could make may result in empowerment occurring at different levels – immediate at the individual level, intermediate at the institutional level and deeper at the level of structural relations of class, caste and religion (Kabeer, 2001).

The World Bank framework for understanding and measuring empowerment considers resources more as an indicator of agency, than a prerequisite. How effectively those resources can be used for empowerment would depend on the interaction between agency and opportunity structure. This would result in varying degrees of empowerment as measured by the following: (1) if there is an opportunity to make a choice; (2) whether the opportunity is used to make the choice; and (3) if the choice made leads to the desired outcome (Samman & Santos, 2009; Alsop et al., 2005). This framework, though quite similar to and influenced by Kabeer's conceptual framework, elaborates on the third facet in her model – achievements – by breaking it down

into three elements. This draws attention to the possibility that the institutional environment may constrain individuals from transforming their choices into desired outcomes (Samman & Santos, 2009).

These models broadly reflect Sen's capability approach. It looks at human life as a set of 'doings and beings' – functionings – and capability as a derived notion of functionings and therefore, a reflection of a person's freedom to choose between different ways of living (A. Sen, 1995, 2003). Robeyns (2003) explained that the difference between functionings and capabilities is similar to that of an outcome and an opportunity. The interplay between opportunity and outcome is embedded in both conceptual frameworks, where the opportunities created through agency (enabled by resources or opportunity structure) lead to the outcome of empowerment, or some degree of it.

Building on Sen's capability approach, Nussbaum (2000) developed a list of central human capabilities, and argued that a focus on them as social goals was 'closely related to a focus on human equality' (p. 86). At the same time, she noted that women had unequally failed to achieve these central capabilities, despite the choice to doing so being open to all human beings.

Some or many of the constraints that limit women's empowerment could be interpreted as a violation of human rights. The many definitions on empowerment point to the agency of a person – the ability to make choices from a social science perspective – as the essence of empowerment. Therefore,

the introduction of the concept of rights itself is the ‘most fundamental way in which empowerment occurs’ (OHCHR, 2006, p. 4). Rights create a legal and moral obligation on the part of duty-holders, who are accountable to safeguarding people’s rights, which is different to a needs-based approach which in principle can be achieved through benevolence and charity, and does not necessarily involve overcoming marginalization in accessing resources (Jonsson, 2003; OHCHR, 2002, 2006). Thus, the United Nation’s Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) to development recognizes that poverty, suffering and injustice stem from the violation of people’s human rights, which implies a lacking on the part of duty-holders to safeguarding and fulfilling rights (Pena, Maiques, & Castillo, 2008). This means that achieving empowerment is a two-part process – on the one hand, vulnerable and disempowered communities understanding and learning their rights, and on the other hand, creating accountability within the realms of legal and administrative institutions that have an impact on the rights of people.

The World Bank’s definition of empowerment is more oriented towards poor people, in that it explains empowerment as ‘expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives’ (Narayan-Parker, 2002, p. 14). The definition also implies that empowerment is not just about gaining effective control over their lives, but also pushing the underlying dynamics that catalyze the process of empowerment.

### **3. Why Empower Women and Why Economic Empowerment?**

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that empowerment is necessary for people who are suffering from powerlessness, because disempowerment is deeply rooted in the inability to make choices for oneself. There are several reasons why empowerment could be most relevant for women, among such disadvantaged and socially excluded groups. The most powerful is perhaps that discrimination against women could begin as early as pre-birth, via the selective elimination of female fetus, a manifest violation of human rights. UNFPA (2012) estimates the number of missing women to be around 117 million, at the time of writing, with the majority reported from China and India.

Malhotra and Schuler (2005) have pointed out several more reasons why women's empowerment is important. Firstly, women are not just one of the many groups of disempowered individuals such as the poor, the disabled or ethnic minorities, but rather a cross-section representative of all other groups. Secondly, women's disempowerment could be stemming from household and interfamilial links, which is not the case for other disempowered groups, and therefore thirdly, although empowerment requires institutional transformation as a whole, women's empowerment specifically requires systemic transformation of institutions that support patriarchal structures.

All these reasons make a powerful case for empowering women. However, the approach to women's empowerment is dichotomous. Feminists advocate that empowerment should have an intrinsic value (Malhotra et al., 2005; O'Neil, Domingo, & Valters, 2014; Chopra & Müller, 2016). That is to say, the process of empowerment should consider women as ends of their own right, and not supporters of the ends of others (Nussbaum, 2000). However, development initiatives recognize the importance of empowerment both for its intrinsic value and for its positive contribution towards economic growth, health, education and poverty reduction (E. M. King & Mason, 2001; Golla, Malhotra, Nanda, & Mehra, 2011). In fact, the recognition of the positive effects of empowerment in the broader development goals framework has allowed non-gender specialists to be interested in tackling gender inequality, a topic that could have otherwise been restricted to gender advocates (O'Neil et al., 2014).

Moreover, the intrinsic value approach to empowerment tends to position empowerment initiatives targeting women as a zero-sum game where men have to relinquish their power to women (Sharp, et al., 2011; Spencer, 2013). But, from an instrumentalist perspective – one that combines gender equality with its positive spillover effects on the economy – empowerment need not be a zero-sum game, making it more familiar to development agencies (G. Sen, 1997; Kabeer, 1999a). The United Nations identifies achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls as the fifth of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. Ending violence and discrimination against

women and girls, improving their participation in decision-making activities, strengthening women's access to economic and other resources, recognition of unpaid care work and promotion of shared responsibilities among the household members, and strengthening of the policy framework for gender equality are some of the salient sub-objectives to be achieved by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, 'realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets' (Ibid, para. 20). Similarly, the World Bank views the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of promoting gender equality and empowering women as vital to ending poverty and encouraging shared prosperity.

This could be because while on the one hand discrimination against women hinders economic development, on the other hand economic development itself can play a key role in reducing the inequality between men and women (Duflo, 2012). Empirical evidence shows that in India, if the female to male ratio of workers rose by 10 per cent, GDP could grow by 8 per cent. Similarly, in Africa, if women could access the same amount of agricultural input that men do, agricultural output could rise by up to 20 per cent (OECD, 2012). Thus, women's empowerment leads to greater gender equality, which the World Bank refers to as 'smart economics' which then improves economic efficiency by contributing to productivity gains, in turn leading to other development outcomes such as greater spending on children and more representative and inclusive institutions, policies and development (World Bank, 2011; Revenga & Shetty, 2012).

Some studies have identified women's economic empowerment as the single most important domain of empowerment in creating gender equality and driving inclusive economic growth, and therefore a prerequisite for the achievement of MDGs (Sida, 2009b; DFID & UKAID, 2010; UNIDO, 2010; OECD, 2012). When a woman is economically independent, it opens up space and finances for her to invest in children's health and education, as well as her own health, overcome gender biases within her family, and even to become involved in the political life of her community (DFID & UKAID, 2010). Moreover, women's economic empowerment is a powerful route to advancing their rights (Golla et al., 2011).

Another argument in support of women's economic empowerment is that women tend to utilize more of their earnings on their families and communities than men (OECD, 2012). Christabell (2009) notes that women who earned not only brought in additional income to the family, but also gained greater autonomy about how income was disposed. In fact, many studies have shown that child survival, nutrition, and education are positively correlated with women's economic empowerment (Kennedy & Peters, 1992; Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995; Smith, Ramakrishnan, Ndiaye, Haddad, & Martorell, 2003; Christabell, 2009; Bold, Quisumbing, & Gillespie, 2013). This leads to a multiplier effect of empowered families and communities and thereby, empowered future generations (Aladesanmi, 2013). In fact, given the positive correlation between gender equality and economic development, if the potential of both men and women is utilized for economic development, it would lessen the need

for special compensatory support for women (Sevefjord & Olsson, 2001). Therefore, women's economic empowerment is in fact a win-win strategy ( Kabeer, 2001; Golla et al., 2011).

If empowerment is about being able to make effective choices, then economic empowerment is the ability to do so in the context of economic activities. The World Bank (2006) identifies both a top-down and a bottom-up aspect to women's economic empowerment – making markets work for women at the policy level and empowering women to compete in the markets at the agency level. However, other efforts to explain economic empowerment go beyond the market. For example, Eyben et al. (2008) defines economic empowerment as the capacity to 'participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth' (p.9-10). Similarly, Golla et al. (2011) explain economic empowerment as a virtuous cycle of economic advancement and improvement in their power and agency, each promoting the other.

Pereznieto and Taylor's (2014) definition of economic empowerment as the process whereby women 'experience transformation in power and agency, as well as economic advancement' is based on a similar notion (p. 234). Sida's definition of women's economic empowerment calls for not just equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, but also the removal of structural gender

inequalities in the labour market, including a better sharing of unpaid care work (Sida, 2009b).

Economic empowerment would lead to greater access for women to economic resources and opportunities such as jobs, financial services, property, other productive assets, skills development and market information (OECD, 2012). However, to be economically empowered is not simply to earn income through these opportunities, but also to have greater autonomy in how it is spent, so that it contributes to reducing gender disparity. Thus, economic empowerment is also about changing social norms and institutions that limit women's economic participation, such as attitudes towards child care and stereotyping the type of economic activities women can engage in (Pettit, 2012).

Strandberg (2001) wrote that while poverty reduction initiatives in general may spur a woman's empowerment by creating leisure for her, unless these improvements are matched with changes in the value systems that limit women's economic participation, the freed up time would be eaten up by new domestic tasks. Therefore, it is important to understand factors that contribute to women's economic empowerment, or in other words, 'how much gender inequality stems from differences, from choice, from structure' (Brückner, 2004).

#### **4. Factors that Influence Women's Economic Empowerment**

A range of factors influences the ways in which women can attain economic empowerment. There is a plethora of empirical evidence that socially constructed gender norms are often at the root of gender biases that work against women's empowerment. The demands placed on women as primary caregivers often limit both the time and opportunities to participate in the formal labour market.

However, the degree to which gender roles are stereotyped, and therefore, inhibit women's economic empowerment is also an economic problem. For example, an economy that is heavily dependent on agriculture, has limited or no technology, and does not have decent infrastructure tends to exacerbate gender inequality. Similarly, a woman's agency cannot be improved if her access to economic and financial resources is limited. Oftentimes, women are discriminated in the formal credit market. This is to some extent stemming from their limited awareness of existing laws, rules and regulations in accessing resources.

A conflict is a uniquely powerful event that can reverse development, and therefore cause immediate disempowerment for all involved. However, even then, the impact on women is the strongest, both as direct and indirect victims of conflict. The following section is an in-depth analysis of such factors that influence women's economic empowerment.

#### **4.1 Gender Norms, Women's Time Use and Unpaid Work**

Gender and cultural norms play an important role in shaping opportunities for women's engagement in paid work outside home. A cursory examination of the Labour Force Participation (LFP) data compiled by the World Bank (2014) shows large gendered differences, ranging from 16 per cent in Afghanistan, 25 per cent in Pakistan to 73 per cent in Vietnam and 83 per cent in Burundi in 2014. These sizeable variations in the LFP allude to cultural preconceptions on women's role in the public sphere. More pointed empirical evidence is abundant to support this claim. For example, in Turkey, conservatism and social norms have a strong impact on determining female LFP (Göksel, 2013). In Mozambique, patriarchal and parental control had a strong hold on women's participation in the labour market by both preventing women from working outside the home, and cutting off access to workplaces where they could come into contact with other men (Oya, 2010). Isran and Isran (2012) explain that most women in Pakistan are engaged in informal work because traditional patriarchal norms limit employment opportunities in the formal sector. In India, women's labour force participation is to a large extent determined by caste, religion, marital status and other social norms which operate at multiple levels in society and restrict women's access to paid work in the formal economy (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). The study explains that husbands and in-laws play a key role in limiting a woman's movement outside the household.

Ester Boserup, cited in Alesina et al. (2011), explains how agricultural societies that practiced capital-intensive plough agriculture traditionally had specialized in a gender-based production pattern, where men worked out in the fields and women in the house. These gendered practices have influenced norms about the appropriate role for women in society, which have continued to persist even after economies moved out of agriculture. ILO and UNDP (2009) explain that the separation of domestic work and economic activities, where women took up most of care work at home while men engaged in income-generating activities, was created by the process of industrialization. The study elaborates that this gender-based division of labour gradually transformed into natural specializations, making female domesticity a concept that is ‘more cultural than real’ (p.61).

World Bank (2014), citing several studies, observes that families and broader communities transmit such gender norms from one generation to the other. Therefore, these social norms which are akin to informal laws have been in existence for 100 or even 1,000 years, and have become heavily rigid over such a long period of time (Morrisson & Jütting, 2005). Moreover, these norms operate at multiple aspects of the society such as religion, caste and region (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014).

Roland (2004) described social norms as ‘slow-moving institutions’ and explains that the stickiness of these ideologies could be due to the fact that they are rooted in religions, the tenets of which also have undergone little change, if at all, over

centuries. Williamson (2000) in his stratification of institutions ranked social-embeddedness at the overarching Level 1 which consists of traditions, customs, norms, etc., and where religion is of significant importance. The author explains that these Level 1 informal institutions 'have a lasting grip on the way society conducts itself' (p. 597). The formal institutional environment (Level 2), governance (Level 3) and resource allocation and employment (Level 4) are all beneath these informal institutions.

The gender roles prescribed by such an informal social value system are in fact learned (UNICEF, 2006) from social agents such as parents, teachers, peers and media, at a very young age (Witt, 2000; Mahalik et al., 2005). Mahalik et al. (2005), citing Gilbert and Scher (1999), write that these norms provide guidance on how men and women are to think, feel and act and control their behaviour to fit their gender roles. A study by Cunningham (2001) using intergenerational panel data from the US showed that the mothers' early gender roles consistently shaped their adolescent children's attitude towards the ideal division of tasks in the household. Along similar lines, Witt (2000) wrote that gender roles learned at home, reinforced by friends and school, and media as the child's socialization increases, causes gender stereotypes to be ingrained beliefs in their minds. As women do not make decisions in isolation, and are influenced by their environment, these gender ideologies can very well impact their decision-making (Göksel, 2013). Therefore, it is logical to assume that social norms tend to promote conformity for social acceptance' sake, and tend to limit

women's choice on whether to engage in paid work at all, and where to work.

However, that is not to say that gender ideologies towards paid work are identical across all countries. This could be explained using data from the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report's Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index which measures the participation, remuneration and advancement gaps in income earning activities among men and women. The sub-index shows that in comparison to many countries in Latin America, North America, Europe and Central Asia that enjoy higher rankings, South Asian, Middle-Eastern and North African countries are positioned at much lower rungs. Another striking feature is that of the 145 countries in the ranking, the last 15 countries (from ranks 130-135) are mainly Islamic. These statistics complement the World Value Survey (2010-2014) where 40 per cent or more of both women and men in the Middle-East, North Africa and South Asia agree that 'when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than a woman'.

Such discriminating gender ideologies tend to have a detrimental impact on women's labour force participation (World Bank, 2014). Using data from OECD countries, Fortin (2005) estimated that if the number of people who thought that 'scarce jobs should go to men first' increased by 10 per cent, it reduced women's employment rate by as much as 5 to 9 per cent. The author notes that it is not only discrimination against women in the labour market, but also women's own attitudes and preferences towards work that influence their participation in

paid work, stressing the role of gender norms and ideology in determining labour market opportunities for women.

Sida (2009b) has identified unpaid work both in economic activities and on the domestic front as the single most important barrier for women's economic empowerment. Although the ability to engage in an income generating activity is a central necessity of their economic empowerment, a fundamental challenge to this is the demands on a woman's time, which tend to be exacerbated by gender norm rigidities. Although time is an equally distributed resource in society, how it is allocated between paid and unpaid work is unequal between men and women. Time allocation for activities can be grouped as paid work, where remuneration is received for work, unpaid work, which is non-remunerated, and no work where time is spent on leisure and personal care (Antonopoulos, 2009). The study notes that while many factors such as age, gender, the number of children in the family, household structure, social class, and the level of development in the economy influence the time spent on unpaid work, a striking feature of unpaid work is that women spend disproportionately more time on it than men. This could be primarily because social and cultural norms are an important factor in determining and sustaining the gender division of labour (Kes & Swaminathan, 2006).

A different classification of time use is presented by Kes and Swaminathan (2006) where time use is conceptualized as of two types. They are (1) paid and unpaid System of National Accounts (SNA) work (which includes market work, formal and informal

work, including subsistence production such as fetching water or collecting firewood) and, (2) unpaid non-SNA work, which includes domestic and care work and voluntary tasks. The bulk of such unpaid work, consisting of child care, attending to the sick and elderly, the preparation of food and other domestic chores are stereotypically assigned to women and girls (Brines, 1994; Kes & Swaminathan, 2006). Therefore, as Abdourahman (2010) aptly notes, “Women’s time does not belong to them” (p.17).

As women spend a disproportionately large amount of time on such unpaid care work, it constrains women from acquiring capabilities and autonomy that could enable them to both negotiate a more favourable balance of care work and seek out other opportunities (Marphatia & Moussié, 2013). Harvey and Taylor as cited in Hirway (2015) referred to time spent on unpaid work as household overhead time i.e. the minimum number of hours a household needs to maintain and manage itself, while Palmer as cited in Walker (2013) conceptualized unpaid work as reproductive tax. Harvey and Taylor explained that in general a household with low overhead time is better off (Hirway, 2015). In other words, a household where a person (a woman in most cases, as discussed throughout this section) spends less time on unpaid work is better off than one where a person allocates more time for such tasks.

Ferrant et al. (2014) write that every additional minute a woman works on unpaid care work is equivalent to one less minute that she could spend in market-related activities or improving her

skills and capabilities, because time is a limited resource which has to be spent between labour, leisure, productive and reproductive activities and paid and unpaid work. Their study shows that while women across the world spend between three to six hours on unpaid care work, men typically spend between thirty minutes to two hours. Another important observation of the study is the negative correlation between the wealth of a country and the level of gender inequalities in unpaid care work. This alludes to a positive relationship between poverty and the burden of unpaid care work on women.

Furthermore, despite the number of women in the labour force rising in the past few decades, gender gaps continue to persist in the responsibility for house and care work (World Bank, 2011). This means that while women work outside home for remuneration, they also continue to engage in unpaid work at home. The term 'second shift' was coined by Hochschild in 1989 to describe this dual burden of women (Van Gorp, 2013). In a study using the 500 Family Study data of the US, Offer and Schneider (2011) note that in dual-earner families, where both the husband and wife engage in paid work, gender inequality in multitasking was present both in terms of quantity and quality. Moreover, men's share in unpaid work, such as household repairs and gardening, tends to be less time consuming than the unpaid tasks women undertake – cooking, cleaning, child rearing etc. (McGinnity & Russell, 2008).

Interestingly though, an analysis by Budlender (2008) on a time use survey shows that the value of unpaid care work was as high

as 63 per cent of the GDP in India and Tanzania, indicating that the reported GDP figures are probably lower than its total value if unpaid care work is included. These findings, together with the fact that women spend disproportionately more time attending to unpaid care work, strongly suggests that ‘poverty has a woman’s face’ (UNDP, 1995, p. 4). This was articulated more strongly again in 2010, when the UN Under-Secretary-General Heyzer noted that ‘a woman’s face remains the picture of poverty’ (Mendoza, 2010).

Unpaid domestic work carried out by women is often referred to as boring, repetitive and unpleasant (Coltrane, 1997; ActionAid, 2013b; Abbey, 2014; Hess & Sussman, 2014). The ILO and UNDP study (2009) shows that poor women tend to spend the most time on housework, showing the greater rigidity of gender roles in low-income families. Similarly, Carmona (2013) notes that poverty and social exclusion tend to increase the amount, intensity and the drudgery of unpaid care work for women. Hirway (2015) also notes that household overhead time tends to be higher in poor countries and poor households limiting time available for leisure and the acquisition of skills and education.

Thus, when income-poor families assign the bulk of the pressure of unpaid domestic care work to women, it leads to two consequences that deter women’s economic empowerment – a) it reduces the amount of time available for them to allocate for productive, remunerated work and b) if a woman engages in paid work in addition to unpaid care work, she would have to forego her rest and leisure working long hours. The first stands directly

in the way of women's economic empowerment. ILO and UNDP (2009) argue that women typically tend to have a short paid work day than men. The second is a situation of woman's time poverty constraining her economic empowerment directly and indirectly.

Bardasi and Wodon (2009) explain time poverty as a concept that refers to the lack of time for rest and leisure after the time spent on work in the labour market and/or domestic unpaid work. The authors write that the woman has no choice but to work long hours because she cannot find time for rest and leisure without either increasing the level of monetary poverty in the household or causing the household to fall into monetary poverty due to the reduction in the household income if she cuts back on her paid work. On the other hand, a trade-off between a woman's income-generating activities and domestic activity may have negative spillover effects on her family such as increased health risks or use of child labour, mostly girls, to substitute for the mother (Masika & Baden, 1997).

Among factors that contribute to and even reinforce the greater burden of care work on women are limited access to public services, the lack of adequate infrastructure such as electricity, piped water, and sanitation facilities, and the lack of resources to pay for care services and time-saving technology (Ilahi, 2000; Wodon & Ying, 2010; Walker, 2013; Woodroffe & Donald, 2014; Hirway, 2015). In other words, the availability of such infrastructure facilities is likely to release women from time-consuming unpaid domestic activities to economic activities

which would generate a second source of income for the family. While infrastructure in general is important for pro-poor growth (Ferrant et al., 2014), improvements to rural water and irrigation systems, domestic energy, rural transportation etc., tend to create a positive multiplier effect on reducing women's unpaid care work (Fälth & Blackden, 2009; Wodon & Ying, 2010). Resonating similar views Abdourahman (2010) argues that while providing infrastructure helps both poor men and women alike, the lack thereof typically has a more profound negative impact on women's time use, due to the gender-based labour division in the household.

However, if greater access to water, energy, transport or technology is not complemented by access to credit facilities or markets, the time saved on unpaid domestic work due to such improvements may not necessarily be utilized for income generating activities (Masika & Baden, 1997). This suggests that while greater time availability may be a necessary condition in allowing a woman to engage in paid work, there are a number of other factors that are intricately linked to whether she can trade her free time for income in the labour market. As discussed in depth in the preceding section, gender ideologies pervade the whole concept of women's economic empowerment. The more the social constructs on gender limit a woman to unpaid work in the household, the less time and energy she has to work for pay. Given that the gender division of labour is more pronounced in poorer households as noted earlier, this in fact limits the possibility to earn a second source of income for the family, which could be precisely what it needs.

## **4.2 Education**

Sen (2003) manifestly wrote of education as a factor that may likely directly influence one's ability to exercise freedom, and proposed that development of the educational sector was at the crux of the capability-based approach. This is because empowerment catalyzes women's economic empowerment in many ways: (1) it gives the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to explore economic opportunities (OECD, 2012); (2) it enables them to escape vulnerable employment, get better quality jobs and overcome occupational segregation (Mowla, 2009); (3) it helps them out of poverty (Oxaal, 1997); (4) helps make the best out of existing resources and opportunities to generate alternative opportunities, roles and support structures (Grown, Gupta, & Kes, 2005) and (5) creates positive spillover effects on the family and society (Herz & Sperling, 2004), and facilitates transmission of human capital from one generation to another (Cooray & Potrafke, 2011).

The all-encompassing importance of education for women's economic and overall empowerment is highlighted by World Bank (2014) which cites several empirical studies to explain that girls with little or no education are far more likely to be married as children, face domestic violence, suffer from poverty and lack a voice in household spending and their healthcare, all of which disempower women. Clearly, educational attainment is often a critical factor in determining opportunities in the labour market. This is because education is an investment that converts unskilled labour into skilled labour, which can command higher

returns in the labour market. The positive relationship between education and women's employment is based on three underlying reasons. First, the economic inactivity of an individual with education has a higher opportunity cost than one without. Secondly, education improves a woman's capability to take advantages of choices that employment provides. Thirdly, education determines income aspirations (Mowla, 2009). This could explain why the past three and a half decades have seen developing countries invest in substantial amounts of resources in order to improve female education (E. King M. & Hill, 1993; Herz & Sperling, 2004) due to girls' schooling being a popular policy approach to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth (Summers, 1994; Paul Schultz, 2002; Herz & Sperling, 2004).

Reviewing 37 empirical studies on the relationship between education and women's employment, Pande et al. (2005) conclude that women's earnings on market work are conditional upon the level of education attained, and sometimes on the type of education received i.e. academic or professional. This means that the positive correlation between education and women's labour force participation is more relevant at higher levels of education.

For example, in Brazil, all else equal, the more educated a woman was, the more likely she was to participate in the labour force, and the growth in labour force participation was highest with higher education levels (Evans & Saraiva, 1993). A study on female labour force participation in Sri Lanka shows that

university education was the most potent factor in propelling women to enter the formal labour market (Gunatilaka, 2013). Verick (2014) also notes that access to quality education beyond secondary education is crucial to improve employment outcomes for women. This is because in a cost-benefit analysis of the returns to a woman's job and the cost of childcare, the benefits have to outweigh the costs in order to justify the woman taking up paid work in an economic sense. This means highly educated women are more likely to be employed than less educated women because they can earn over and above childcare costs (England, Gornick, & Shafer, 2012). Separately, Grown et al. (2005) note in their report that post-primary education creates a profound impact on women's lives in terms of their own health and well-being, opportunities, their autonomy within the household and society as well their political participation. Thus, higher education is not important not just to open up more income generating activities for women, but also for enhancing their overall empowerment.

Education empowers women in many indirect ways as well. It can delay the age at which a woman gets married, reduce the number of children she has, lessen child mortality, improve children's well-being and reduce maternal mortality (World Bank, 1995; Oxaal, 1997). For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, in South Asia and in West Asia, one in eight girls is married off as a child bride, and one in seven girls gives birth by the age of 17. With only primary education, child marriages could be reduced by 14 per cent, and with secondary education the reduction improves to 64 per cent (Rose, 2013). These observations are

important because early marriages and early parenthood among women tend to catalyze disempowerment by limiting their strategic life choices at a young age.

An educated woman is also less likely to suffer from domestic violence (Kabeer, 2005). This could be due to several reasons. Education boosts a woman's self-confidence and self-esteem, expands her social networks, makes her capable of accessing and using information and resources in the society, and even questioning and changing the world they live in ( P. Sen, 1999; Jewkes, 2002). Furthermore, education allows a woman to enjoy greater autonomy in her choice of partner. For example, a study on the relationship between mass education and married women's experience with domestic violence in rural Nepal shows that a woman's education protects her from domestic violence by prompting her to choose an educated partner who is less likely to resort to violent behaviour (Ghimire, Axinn, & Smith-Greenaway, 2015).

Purna Sen (1999) concluded from a study of domestic violence in Calcutta that while employment by itself 'was not an empowering experience' (p. 83), 'secondary stages of education may have an important contributory role in enhancing women's capacity to exercise control in their lives' (p. 84). Another study by Boyle et al. (2009) using National Family Health Survey statistics of India also shows that the protective influence of women's education against intimate partner violence was proportionately stronger at higher levels of education. While some level of education would positively influence the liberality

of a woman's ideas, the protective properties of education against domestic violence was likely to be realized only beyond a certain threshold (Jewkes, 2002). Nevertheless, education is not a stand-alone tool for women's overall or economic empowerment. Grown et al. (2005) explain that these positive impacts of education on women depend on factors such as the economic development of a country, its labour market dynamics and gender stratification.

Poverty often precludes educational opportunities for girls. As expenses related to education increase, families are less inclined to invest in girls' education. For poor households, the opportunity cost of sending girls to school is higher, given their contribution to the unpaid care workload in the household (Global Campaign for Education, 2005). This could be because, notably in developing countries, returns on girls' primary schooling is limited, compared to the returns on a boy's primary schooling (Patrinos, 2008). Attitudes towards a girl child as someone who is dispensable – someone who would eventually leave her natal home – and not support her parents in their old age (Nussbaum, 2000) give additional motivation for poor households to deny schooling to girls in the family. Thus, poverty tends to reinforce gender stereotypes by limiting girls' access to education.

Gender norms in a society have a strong bearing on not just whether girls have access to education, but also on more complex matters such as benefiting from the education they receive. For example, a society in which a woman's role is strictly defined in

reproductive terms, education would become a means of teaching girls to become better wives and mothers or to secure a suitable husband (2005). Schooling may in fact reinforce gender roles and poverty for girls, if their aspirations are not raised by the education system to seek opportunities in the formal labour market (Oxaal, 1997).

Moreover, even when opportunities for education are available for women, and they make the best use of such opportunities, gender-based discrimination outside the sphere of education may still prevent them benefiting fully from these opportunities (Subrahmanian, 2005). Therefore, rights to education alone cannot inspire women's economic empowerment; there should also be rights within education (for equal treatment and opportunities) and rights through education (outcomes of education that promote gender equality) (Wilson, 2004; Subrahmanian, 2005).

Longwe (1998) challenged the commonly held view that it is the lack of education that holds women back. Instead, the author posited that this may not necessarily be the reason for women's lower socio-economic status. To do so, she distinguished between education for self-reliance and education for empowerment, by looking at conservative and more radical takes on the term 'empowerment'. A conservative definition of empowerment as women's capacity to make choices in her own life, makes being literate, educated and having productive skills key to empowerment. However, citing empirical evidence from Zambia and the US, the author argued that despite higher

education among women, their participation in the political system was static, an area she referred to as a ‘male club which operates a system to keep women out’ (p. 24). The author reasoned that this was because formal schooling which gives education for self-reliance imparts patriarchal values and trains girls to accept patriarchal authority. The purpose of education therefore should not be merely to make one self-reliant, but also to transform the traditional patriarchal society.

### **4.3 Economic and Financial Resources**

Although over the years women’s education attainments and the share of paid work has improved considerably, gender inequalities in the distribution of economic and financial resources continue to exist, supported by discriminatory social norms and practices (United Nations, 2009). Sida (2009a) had identified women’s access to land and property as key to women’s economic empowerment because land serves multiple purposes – a base for food production, income generation, collateral for credit and holding future savings. Similarly Pallas (2011) noted that secure land rights are crucial for women’s economic empowerment. According to Odeny (2013), land rights are critical in determining economic well-being and the social status of women. Furthermore, women who do not own property are very unlikely to undertake economic risks and therefore will not realise their full economic potential (ICRW, 2005). Nevertheless, a World Bank study (King & Mason, 2001) showed that many women cannot own land, and even when they do, their landholding tends to be smaller than that of men, of an

inferior quality (FAO, 2010) and the tenure of land ownership, insecure (FAO, 2011). Moreover, women are often limited to secondary land rights, i.e. they hold these land rights through male family members (FAO, 2010).

Although the inequitable distribution of land and other productive resources is largely a context-specific problem, generally the barriers to women's access to and control of these resources include inadequate legal standards or their ineffective implementation at national and local levels, and discriminatory cultural norms and practices at the institutional and community level (UN Women & OHCHR, 2013). Discriminatory inheritance practices, unequal access to land markets and gender-bias in land reforms also aggravate gender inequality in access to land (United Nations, 2009).

The rigidity of social norms in resource distribution biases towards males is alluded to by Bradshaw and Linneker (2003) who noted that while female-headed households may experience poverty as limited resources, the challenge for women with male partners is the limited access to and control over resources and assets. The Food and Agriculture Organization (2011) shows that, on average, women constitute 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. However, female farmers are less likely than their male counterparts to own land and gain exposure to modern technology, education and financial services, which are important for agricultural productivity. The report also estimates that if women owned as many productive resources as men, the yields of their farms

could increase by 20 to 30 per cent, which in turn raises the agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent. This highlights not only the gender disparity in terms of resource ownership, but also its potential negative spillover effects on the overall economy. This is paradoxical in the context of empirical evidence where rural women who produce 60 to 80 per cent of food in developing countries own only between 1–2 per cent of titled land in the world (Carpano, Izumi, & Mathieson, 2008).

On the other hand, women's lack of or limited awareness of their own rights leads to demand side problems in women's access to productive resources (Shahriari, Danzer, Giovarelli, & Undeland, 2009). Other similar factors could include lower levels of literacy and education, and their limited access to justice (Pallas, 2011). These disparities in productive resource allocation among men and women constrain women's ability to participate in development and to contribute to improving their families' standards of living. Instead, they create vulnerability and risk for women in personal or family crises, old age and economic shocks (King & Mason, 2001). Women's limited access to productive resources also makes them prone to marital abuse and domestic violence (King & Mason, 2001; Shahriari et al., 2009). On the other hand, women's ownership of land and other productive resources have far reaching positive impacts on their economic empowerment. These include greater bargaining power and autonomy in their households and communities, improved confidence and security, reduced threat of forced eviction or poverty and improved public participation (UN Women & OHCHR, 2013), and reduced vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

(Carpano et al., 2008). Several studies show that women who own land tend to have a stronger ability to make decisions (Allendorf, 2007; Swaminathan, Lahoti, & J.Y., 2012; ActionAid, 2013a), a manifestation of her agency.

Operationally, there is a difference between access to land and right to land. An ActionAid study (2013a) finds that land access in itself is not a catalyst of empowerment for women if, among other factors, such access is insecure and their control over land is constrained. Women may gain access to land through their fathers, brothers or husbands, it may be harder for them to acquire secure legal rights to such property (Dohrn, 2006). In other words, while women may have land use rights, that may not necessarily mean ownership or property control rights (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014). The study, citing Duncan and Ping (2001), identifies three facets to a complete definition of legal rights, namely, that the rights are legally recognizable, socially recognizable and enforceable by external authorities. Formalized legal titles reduce the risk of land expropriation for women (Dohrn, 2006), and lowers the risk of losing the resource at times of economic or political turmoil (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014).

In order for access to land and other productive resources to propel women's economic empowerment, it has to be complemented with factors that encourage women to generate and expand income earned from these resources. Women are often at a disadvantage in obtaining credit from formal financial institutions due to their limited mobility compared to men (if the

financial institution is located far away), lower education or illiteracy which complicates documentation procedures for them, and lack of ownership in traditional collateral such as land (Saito, Mekonnen, & Spurling, 1994), minimum loan sizes and sectoral priorities of formal lending in manufacturing and services, where female participation is limited (King & Mason, 2001). Sometimes, the perception of women farmers as being too high-risk may deter formal financial institutions and cooperatives from providing finances to them (ActionAid, 2015). Thus, in developing countries, female-run enterprises are relatively undercapitalized with lower access to credit, extension information, machinery and fertilizer compared to male-run enterprises (King & Mason, 2001).

Although legal ownership of land may encourage women to use it as collateral that financial intermediaries often require when granting loans, Dohrn (2006) writes that the legal title has no effect on land owners' access to credit, because titles alone cannot facilitate investment in the absence of basic infrastructure and public utilities. On the other hand, mere ownership of land may not make a strong business case for credit facilities, if women lack the complementary education, skills and access to information and technology to improve the productivity and thereby income from such resources. This has led to many women seeking informal financing from family, friends and relatives, which create two limitations in their capacity to enhance their income – firstly the loan amount tends to be small, and secondly the interest rates are high in such informal borrowing arrangements (Saito et al., 1994).

However, the development of microfinance programmes has allowed women to access credit on more favourable terms. Such programmes usually tend to have the added benefit of improving participants' social capital through the development of women's networks (ILO, 2008). Nonetheless, microfinance must not be misunderstood as having inbuilt female empowerment properties (Vonderlack & Schreiner, 2002), or the ability to correct the power imbalances that result from gender inequalities engrained in society (Johnson, 1999). For example, women may have no control over their loan, with male members of household making decisions regarding the utilization of the loan (Islam, Nguyen, & Smyth, 2015; ILO, 2008) . Moreover, inequitable access to property rights, differences in literacy rates and social attitudes towards women may limit the positive impact of microfinance facilities on women's economic empowerment (ILO, 2008).

#### **4.4 Conflict**

An armed conflict has been referred to as 'development in reverse' as it incurs economic and social costs in the process, contributing to or intensifying a significant part of global poverty (Collier et al., 2003). The study identified a variety of economic and social costs incurred by a conflict. Firstly, a war diverts resources from production to destruction, both by the government and rebel groups, reducing economic growth. Secondly, the violence of war destructs the existing resources of the economy, including infrastructure, housing, schools and health facilities. Thirdly, fear induced by war leads to flight of

people, giving up their assets, submission to subsistence level activities where investments are not required and a disintegration of social capital. Social costs include fatalities and casualties as well displacement and forced migration that are intricately linked with the aforementioned economic costs.

The social norms that define gender roles cause people to experience war in a 'gendered' way (Lindsey, 2001). Although at face value, it is the men who are directly impacted by war because combatants are predominantly male (International IDEA, 2003, Plümper & Neumayer, 2006; ESCWA, 2007), oftentimes, women and children tend to become the long-term victims of a civil war (Ormhaug, Meier, & Hernes, 2009). In fact, Plümper and Neumayer (2006) show in their study that looks at a sample of 145 countries to evaluate the impact of war on the gender gap of life expectancy, that on average, women are more negatively affected by conflict than men, overall. The authors explain that these results indicate that the indirect effects of war are much stronger than the direct and more obvious effects.

Vulnerability of women and girls during an armed conflict typically originates from the socially constructed perception of their roles. This is why sexual abuse and victimization of women is often used as a deliberate strategy in warfare (USAID, 2007). In many countries, the honour of a community heavily depends on the control of sexual activity of women and girls. Such ideologies on the one hand allow the use of rape and sexual abuse as a means of humiliating the enemy (Pratt et al., 2004; Ward & Marsh, 2006; Bastick, Grimm, & Kunz, 2007; Brown,

2012) and on the other hand have instilled in women and girls a notion that their bodies could be violated and mutilated against their will (Amnesty International, 2004b). Notably, sexual violence is the only crime for which the community's reaction is to stigmatize the victim instead of prosecuting the perpetrator (Jefferson, 2004). The abduction of women during times of conflict for the forced roles of 'wives' to carry out household chores and provide sexual services to combatants is also another example for ways in which a conflict mimics peacetime gender roles (Ibid).

An armed conflict intensifies the burden of unpaid work of women in less direct and atrocious ways too. The caretaker role of women limits their mobility during conflict and thus puts their own security in the back seat, while the damage to infrastructure renders household activities much more laborious (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). The limited access to resources compared to their male counterparts, the disruption of services and the loss of income from the male head of household all accentuate women's vulnerability during conflict (Jansen, 2006).

The collapse in primary healthcare caused by an armed conflict has a disproportionately larger impact on women than men, given their distinct healthcare needs (Amnesty International, 2004a). Yet, women have often been lumped together with children as 'vulnerable groups' (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). However, women should be distinguished from this large group for several reasons. Firstly, as women are the primary care givers for children, their physical and psychosocial well-being is critical for

the well-being of their children (McKay, 1998). Secondly, gender-based sexual violence and resultant pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and trauma often generate additional healthcare needs for women (El Jack, 2003). Thirdly, biological differences of women and girls makes healthcare a particularly pressing concern for women (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002).

Dislocation and displacement following an armed conflict may also aggravate women's disempowerment. Although technically displacement is a temporary phenomenon, in reality the period of displacement could be much longer, and is often a war strategy to break down social networks (El Jack, 2003). Traditional gender inequalities in terms of access to resources, information or basic services, and income are likely to be compounded by displacement (Birkeland, 2009). Even where women benefit from displacement – in the form of training and development programmes in health, education and income-generating activities – such benefits do not necessarily help create more equitable gender relationships (El Jack, 2003).

Empirical studies show that prolonged exposure to conflict increases domestic violence faced by women at the hands of her partner. Sometimes, weapons used in the war are used to abuse women and children once combatants return home (Kudakwashe & Richard, 2015). Post-traumatic stress disorder also turns the very victims of a conflict into perpetrators of violence in a household (Justino, Leone, & Salardi, 2015). Gallegos and Gutierrez (2011) note that women who are exposed to conflict tend to believe that it is reasonable for a husband to

beat a wife, and are tolerant of violence, making them victims of violence, long after war. Even if a war empowers a woman economically, as discussed next, she may not escape abuse from her intimate partner as the husband may resort to abuse to ascertain his sense of power in the household (Calderón, Gáfaró, & Ibáñez, 2011). This negates any economic empowerment women may have achieved as a consequence of war.

Although in many ways armed conflict magnifies already existing gender inequalities, and intensifies a woman's disempowerment, a conflict may also create opportunities to challenge traditional gender roles, and promote women's economic empowerment. One obvious way is by positioning women as the sole providers for their families (ESCWA, 2007). Changes and transformations brought on the household by an armed conflict make women take up non-traditional roles (UNDP, 2001) such as earning income, making household decisions and controlling assets. As primary breadwinners of the family, women often resort to entrepreneurship in the informal sector rather than paid employment, such opportunities often created by the conflict – selling supplies to the rebels or food to the displaced (Hudock, Sherman, & Williamson, 2016). This is important because an armed conflict makes it dangerous for people to engage in traditional income-generating activities such as agriculture in the open (Petesche, 2011).

Although armed conflicts do change gender roles, the question remains (1) if such changes tend to persist in the long term and (2) if these roles actually amount to an expansion of women's

agency. The cessation of an armed conflict introduces a new layer of challenges to women. Men returning from war may in fact be 'shocked' by women's empowerment (Handrahan, 2004). Therefore, as mentioned earlier, they may harbour a grudge against wives, leading to the use of violence to reassert their dominance. Overall, upon return of the husband from war, the woman may go unrecognized for her own heroic acts to keep the household intact during war, because she has not fought the war (Handrahan, 2004). On the other hand, if the war claims the lives of the male head of the households, or disables them, women are burdened with the household financing responsibilities, precisely when income-generating opportunities are on the decline (Hudock et al., 2016).

The disintegration of stereotyped gender roles during war times, and its positive consequences for women are likely to be short-lived post-conflict for many other reasons as well. The many factors discussed earlier that hinder a woman's economic empowerment are not likely to be changed by conflict, unless a concerted effort is made in the direction. For example, Kumar (2000) explained in his paper that in post-conflict Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique and Rwanda, widows had challenges in obtaining legal ownership of their husbands' land. Even where they had land, they lacked the finances to purchase seeds, fertilizer or livestock. Such challenges then push women into working as casual labourers for meagre pay (Kumar, 2000; Sørensen, 1998).

A case study in six conflict-affected countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda – showed that most women worked in the informal sector selling cooked food, vegetables, fruit and household items. A notable observation was the increase in the number of women in the informal sector in the post conflict transition period, which the study called a ‘feminization of the informal sector’ (Kumar, 2001). This could be because unlike the formal sector, that needs investments that will kick in only when political stability is restored, the informal sector of an economy resumes almost immediately after the cession of a conflict (Bouta & Frerks, 2002).

Thus, conflicts create situations and opportunities that make women acquire skills that can contribute to an economy’s productivity and growth. Yet, because women tend to earn income in the shadow economy during conflict, and even afterwards, women’s economic participation goes unmeasured and ignored in post-conflict reconstruction initiatives (Hudock et al., 2016). Therefore, when post-conflict reconstruction programmes focus only on training and employing men who have returned from war, it indirectly causes an economic loss to the country, by displacing women from the labour market (Zuckerman, Dennis, & Greenberg, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is empirical evidence that show how conflicts have positively influenced women’s agency. A study of the impact of 1996–2001 civil conflict in Nepal shows that women’s likelihood of employment was strongly and positively related to the conflict while an economic shock such as the loss of job for a

man at home had no impact on a woman's employment decision (Menon & Van der Meulen Rodgers, 2015). In Somalia, women who were essentially treated as second-class citizens before its socio-political upheaval in 1991, have made significant progress in social, political and economic spheres, against the backdrop of the civil conflict (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013).

But, to a larger extent, evidence of women's empowerment in the long-run post-conflict remain mixed and is limited by a lack of longitudinal studies (Herbert, 2014). While most empirical research discusses increased economic participation of women during an armed conflict, and even in its aftermath, the question is if such changes actually constitute women's economic empowerment. Even the Somali civil war, that tangibly advanced women's status is described as 'not a revolution but at best an incidental reform' (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013, p. 314). This is because the fundamental challenge to women's empowerment is embedded in gender ideologies, which may not necessarily be transformed by an armed conflict.

Although necessity may expand women's agency during a conflict, as combatants, sole providers of a household, or even peace negotiators, the end of a conflict often restores pre-conflict gender norms, pushing women back to a state of disempowerment. Even where post-conflict reforms incorporate gender equality, gender biases continue to persist against women in how such reforms are actioned, as the underlying institutional gender inequality remains unchanged despite the conflict experience (Zuckerman et al., 2007). Moreover, even where

women have managed to attain some level of economic empowerment, their political participation remains strikingly limited (Sow, 2012). To summarize, ‘Once the “war” is over and the implementation phase is activated’ the gains women have realized from the collapse of order ‘are easily lost as conventional conceptions of masculinity, femininity, and gender roles reassert themselves with vigor’ (Aolain, Haynes, & Cahn, 2011, p. 41).

## **5. Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Sri Lankan Context**

In Sri Lanka, the term empowerment is used in a wide array of literature ranging from academic papers and reports to development strategies and plans. However, an engagement with the definition of women’s empowerment is missing, and appears to be taken for granted (CENWOR, 2015; ADB, 2008). Overall, women’s empowerment is perceived as a desirable goal in areas ranging from the economic and social to the political spheres. In fact, Sri Lanka has committed itself to achieving gender equality long before it became a state party to UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (ADB, 2008) (CEDAW).

In 1931, both women and men were granted universal suffrage. In 1947, universal free education from Kindergarten to University was made available. Health reforms from the 1930s culminated in the abolishment of charging user fees at government hospitals in 1951, creating universal access to healthcare. Propelled by such rapid growth in social welfare, Sri

Lanka has achieved a lot in terms of women's status compared to many other developing countries (Malhotra & Mather, 1997). For example, women's literacy rate of 94.6 per cent is only marginally below the men's literacy rate of 96.9 per cent. Moreover, women's educational attainments tend to be higher or at least on par with the educational attainments of men at higher levels of education. For example, in 2012, 13.7 per cent of female students passed the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level examination compared to 10.9 per cent of male students. Similarly 2.7 per cent women obtained degrees in 2012, compared to 2.6 per cent of men (DCS (Department of Census and Statistics), 2015). On the health front, female life expectancy at 78.6 years is higher than 72 years for men. The maternal mortality rate per 100,000 births has dropped from 61 in 1995 to 32 by 2014, among the lowest ratios globally (Medical Statistics Unit, Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine, 2016).

Such macro level achievements in narrowing the gender gap is reflected in a Gender Inequality Index of only 0.307 for Sri Lanka (UNDP, 2015), a value that is stronger than in many other developing countries. However, a ranking of 72 at this index value shows that there is more to be done for women's empowerment.

Blatant manifestations of gender discrimination in the form of female feticide or infanticide, dowry deaths or widow immolations are not reported in Sri Lanka (Jayaweera, Wijemanna, Wanasundera, & Vitarana, 2007). But glaring

disparities do exist between women's social welfare and their economic participation.

Despite commendable health and educational attainments, women's labour force participation rates have remained consistently low, hovering around 35 per cent over the last decade (Gunatilaka, 2013; Gunewardena, 2015; DCS, 2015). This could be, on the one hand, because the growth in Sri Lanka's economy has lagged behind the achievements in terms of social welfare (Malhotra & Mather, 1997). On the other hand, the lower economic participation among women indicates the persistence of gender norms towards work.

A study on why Sri Lankan women do not translate their relatively high educational gains into labour force advantages (Gunewardena, 2015) indicates that while women and men have similar skill sets, these are not rewarded equally by the labour market, and that cultural norms in relation to the gender division of household work constrain women from entering the workforce. This is especially true for married women (Gunatilaka, 2013). Even among employed women, the majority are concentrated in what is deemed to be 'feminine' areas of employment – as garment and textile workers, plantation workers and overseas migrant workers (Jayaweera et al., 2007), emphasizing the influence of gender norms in the labour market. At the other extreme, a study that estimates the earnings function for Sri Lanka from a gendered and ethnic perspective shows that even where women had superior labour market attributes, male average earnings are higher, entirely due to

gender discrimination in favour of men (Arun & Borooah, 2011). This evidence clearly brings out the influence of gender ideologies in displacing the benefits of education in catalysing women's economic empowerment.

Although Sri Lanka has produced the first female Prime Minister as early as in 1960, and has had a female Executive President, the overall political participation of women in Sri Lanka is insignificant, and where women hold office, portfolios offered to them tend to be low-key (ADB, 1999; H. M. A. Herath, 2015). Iwanaga (2008) makes two observations on women's political participation in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, they are active voters, fundraisers and campaigners during times of election, but on the other hand, they are hardly present at the decision-making levels of the party structures. Thus, universal suffrage has in fact done little to change the status of the critical mass of women, beyond allowing them to vote (Ibid). The paucity of female representation at decision-making levels limits opportunities to address interests of women, and to instigate socio-economic transformations required to close gender inequalities.

Samarasinghe's (1998) study of the feminization of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange income provides a compelling example of how the absence of women at decision-making levels leads to gender discriminations against women. The garment and textile sector, the tea industry and migrant labour, particularly to the Middle East, are predominantly female-labour driven. Yet, these women do not enjoy effective worker rights, suffer from long drawn

hours, low wages, and minimal benefits. On the other hand, ‘the state, by omission or by commission, seems to take the role of a bystander, rather than that of an active agent looking after the interests of its important foreign currency earning labour force—perhaps because employment in the FTZs and in domestic service is deemed to be temporary’ (Samarasinghe, 1998 p.321).

Access to resources, another key ingredient in women’s economic empowerment, also shows gender biases in practice. Although, in theory, most customary laws in Sri Lanka allow women to enjoy equal inheritance rights with men over land, this may not necessarily be put into practice (ADB, 2008). The Land Development Ordinance (LDO) of 1935 that has been commended for its pro-poor approach for facilitating the allocation of rural lands for settlement and expansion to the landless has contributed to women’s unequal access to land. Specifically, the inheritance schedules of the LDO had stipulated that if the allottee died intestate, only the eldest son could inherit the land holding (Alailima, 2000). The civil conflict has added another layer of complexity for women’s land ownership in Sri Lanka. The application of the ‘head of the household’ concept, often understood as the male member of the family has resulted in discrimination against women in issues related to property and land ownership (Rai, 2014). Although empirical evidence on gender biases in Sri Lanka’s formal credit market and access to other productive resources is limited, there are studies on the role of microfinance in women’s economic empowerment. For example, Herath et al. (2016) found in their analysis that participating in microfinance programmes had a strong positive

impact on a woman's ability to make decisions about the use of credit, income generated from it as well as how it would be used.

The thirty-year long armed conflict that Sri Lanka experienced until May 2009 has also had significant consequences for gender relations in Sri Lanka. The loss of over 70,000 lives in the conflict, displacement of over 1 million people, sometimes many times over due to both the conflict and the Tsunami disaster, disability, widespread destruction of property and assets, damages to infrastructure and losses of cultivable land (Arunatilake, Jayasuriya, & Kelegama, 2001; Ofstad, 2002) are some of the many negative consequences women in the North and East of Sri Lanka have had to deal with during and in the aftermath of the conflict.

Although rape as a war strategy is less prominent in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, there is a possibility that rape by state armed forces, or any other armed groups will never be known (Bandarage, 2010). Although displacement due to conflict has been common to men, women and children of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim ethnic origins, the majority of the victims happen to be Tamil women. Life in displacement has disintegrated traditional gender roles for women, yet the new economic responsibilities have not been accompanied by opportunities for women's long-term empowerment (Bandarage, 2010). The return to gender status quo and the absence of sustainability of women's empowerment during conflict could be possibly because there is no culturally appropriate idiom to articulate and support women's transformed gender roles during peacetimes

(Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004). Disability often compounds women's barriers to social, economic and cultural empowerment. A study that looks at women with disabilities in the North Central and Eastern Provinces shows that women who had acquired disabilities due to the conflict were mostly confined to the home, and had no facilities or support to extend their agency beyond that (Samararatne & Soldatic, 2015).

The lacuna of a gender dimension to post-conflict livelihood interventions has in many ways contributed to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms. For example, in the former North Eastern Province, women who have survived the conflict and experienced its trauma have expressed displeasure in having been removed from the planning process of the rebuilding process (Wanasundera, 2006). Moreover, the exclusive focus on war widows and female headed households has caused intervention programmes and projects lose track of many other categories of women and their needs as well (Wanasundera, 2006).

Still, the community induced barriers such as institutional factors (Thesawalamai law that allows women to own land, but not to exercise command over it) and socio-cultural factors seem to play a more dominant role than any business (gender discriminations against women in business) or state-inflicted barriers (security phobia) in impeding women's economic empowerment (Sarvananthan, 2015). This shows once again that unless gender norms entrenched in a society are not transformed

by conflict, there is little or no positive change a conflict brings about for women's overall agency.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed a substantial extent of existing theoretical and empirical literature on women's economic empowerment. It has looked at the definition of empowerment, the rationale for women's economic empowerment, and a range of factors that shape women's economic empowerment globally, followed by a section on women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka.

The literature points to the overarching nature of gender norms that influence the division of labour within the household which in turn have a strong bearing on many other factors that catalyse women's economic empowerment. Transforming gender norms, greater access to education and other resources such as land and finances are all important in driving women's economic empowerment. Conflicts on the one hand may lead to women's economic empowerment during and after conflict, due to the disintegration of traditional gender roles, but very often such developments are only short-lived.

The literature on women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka shows an interesting mix of information. On the one hand, women enjoy educational and health attainments, on par with, if not better than, men. Yet, gender norms on women's roles tend to keep women away from the formal labour market. The armed

conflict of thirty years has added a new dimension to women's roles by increasing the number of female-headed households. Like elsewhere in the world, Sri Lanka's conflict has generated short-lived opportunities for women outside their traditional roles. But many of them have been left out in the post-conflict rebuilding and development processes.

Although this literature review is by no means exhaustive, it provides sufficient context and depth to design the questionnaire for the quantitative survey of the research evaluating women's economic empowerment in the North of Sri Lanka. We expect that the research generated by the GROW project will build on and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

## References

- Abbey, R. (2014). *The Return of Feminist Liberalism*. Routledge.
- Abdourahman, O. I. (2010). Time poverty: a contributor to women's poverty. *The African Statistical Journal*, 11, 16–36.
- ActionAid. (2013a). From marginalisation to empowerment: The potential of land rights to contribute to gender equality – observations from Guatemala, India and Sierra Leone. (ActionAid's women's rights to land project year II). Johannesburg, South Africa: ActionAid.
- ActionAid. (2013b). Making care visible: women's unpaid care work in Nepal, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. ActionAid.
- ActionAid. (2015). *Delivering Women Farmers' Rights (Policy Brief)*. Johannesburg, South Africa: ActionAid.
- ADB. (1999). *Women in Sri Lanka (Country Briefing Paper)*.
- ADB. (2008). *Country gender assessment: Sri Lanka*. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank.
- Aladesanmi, L. (2013). The multiplier effect of investing in gender equality and women empowerment.
- Alailima. (2000). Chapter 3: The Human Development Perspective. In W. D. Lakshman & C. A. Tisdell (Eds.), *Sri Lanka's Development Since Independence: Socio-economic Perspectives and Analyses*. Nova Publishers.
- Alesina, A., Giuliano, P., & Nunn, N. (2011). Fertility and the Plough. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
- Allendorf, K. (2007). Do Women's Land Rights Promote Empowerment and Child Health in Nepal? *World Development*, 35(11), 1975–1988.
- Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M., & Holland, J. (2005). *Empowerment in Practice: From Analysis to Implementation*. The World Bank.
- Amnesty International. (2004a). *Lives Blown Apart: Crimes Against Women in Times of Conflict*. London: London, England: Amnesty International.
- Amnesty International. (2004b). *Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: sexual violence against women in the armed conflict*. London.
- Antonopoulos, R. (2009). *The unpaid care work – paid work connection (Working paper No. 86)*. Geneva: ILO.
- Aolain, F. N., Haynes, D. F., & Cahn, N. (2011). *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Arun, T. G., & Borooah, V. K. (2011). The Gender impact in Earnings Inequality: Evidence from Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Economic Sciences and Applied Research*, 4(2), 71.
- Arunatilake, N., Jayasuriya, S., & Kelegama, S. (2001). The Economic Cost of the War in Sri Lanka. *World Development*, 29(9), 1483–1500.

- Bandarage, A. (2010). Women, Armed Conflict, and Peacemaking in Sri Lanka: Toward a Political Economy Perspective. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 2(4), 653–667.
- Bardasi, E., & Wodon, Q. (2009). Measuring time poverty and analyzing its determinants: concepts and application to Guinea (Policy Research Working Paper No. 4961) (p. 75).
- Bastick, M., Grimm, K., & Kunz, R. (2007). Sexual violence in armed conflict: global overview and implications for the security sector. Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic of Armed Forces.
- Batliwala, S. (2007). Taking the power out of empowerment – an experiential account. *Development in Practice*, 17(4–5), 557–565.
- Birkeland, N. M. (2009). Internal displacement: global trends in conflict-induced displacement. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91(875), 491–508.
- Bold, M. van den, Quisumbing, A. R., & Gillespie, S. (2013). Women’s empowerment and nutrition – An evidence review (Discussion Paper, International Food Policy Research Institute No. 1294). IFRPI.
- Bouta, T., & Frerks, G. (2002). Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction. The Hague, The Netherlands: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.
- Boyle, M. H., Georgiades, K., Cullen, J., & Racine, Y. (2009). Community influences on intimate partner violence in India: Women’s education, attitudes towards mistreatment and standards of living. *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(5), 691–697.
- Bradshaw, S., & Linneker, B. (2003). Challenging women’s poverty: perspectives on gender and poverty reduction strategies from Nicaragua and Honduras. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.
- Brines, J. (1994). Economic Dependency, Gender, and the Division of Labor at Home. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(3), 652–688.
- Brown, C. (2012). Rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Torture: Quarterly Journal on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture*, 22(1), 24–37.
- Budlender, D. (2008). The statistical evidence on care and non-care work across six countries. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Geneva.
- Calasanti, T. M., & Bailey, C. A. (1991). Gender Inequality and the Division of Household Labor in the United States and Sweden: A Socialist-Feminist Approach. *Social Problems*, 38(1), 34–53.
- Calderón, V., Gáfaró, M., & Ibáñez, A. M. (2011). Forced migration, female labor force participation, and intra-household bargaining: does conflict empower women? *Documento CEDE*, (2011–28).

- Calvès, A. E. (2009). « Empowerment » : généalogie d'un concept clé du discours contemporain sur le développement [Empowerment: The History of a Key Concept in Contemporary Development Discourse]. *Revue Tiers Monde*, 200(4), 735–749.
- Carmona, M. S. (2013). Unpaid Care Work, Poverty and Women's Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities for the Post-2015 Agenda. *Poverty and Women's Human Rights: Challenges and Opportunities for the Post-2015 Agenda*
- Carpano, F., Izumi, K., & Mathieson, K. (2008). Gender, Property Rights and Livelihoods in the Era of AIDS. In FAO Technical Consultation. Rome: FAO.
- CENWOR (Ed.). (2015). Review of the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action – Sri Lanka, 1995-2014. Colombo: Centre for Women's Research.
- Chamberlin, J., & Schene, A. H. (1997). A working definition of empowerment. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 20, 43–46.
- Chaudhary, R., & Verick, S. (2014). Female labour force participation in India and beyond (ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series). New Delhi: ILO.
- Chopra, D., & Müller, C. (2016). Introduction: Connecting Perspectives on Women's Empowerment. *Connecting Perspectives on Women's Empowerment*, 47(1A), 1–9.
- Christabell, P. J. (2009). *Women Empowerment Through Capacity Building: The Role of Microfinance*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Collier, P., Elliott, V. L., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Reynal-Querol, M., & Sambanis, N. (2003). *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington DC: World Bank ; Oxford University Press.
- Coltrane, S. (1997). *Family man: Fatherhood, housework, and gender equity*. Oxford University Press.
- Cooray, A., & Potrafke, N. (2011). Gender inequality in education: Political institutions or culture and religion? *European Journal of Political Economy*, 27(2), 268–280.
- Craig, G., & Mayo, M. (1995). *Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development*. Zed Books.
- Cunningham, M. (2001). The influence of parental attitudes and behaviors on children's attitudes toward gender and household labor in early adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(1), 111–122.
- Dagenais, H., & Piché, D. (1994). *Women, Feminism and Development*. McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP.
- DCS (Department of Census of Statistics). (2015). *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2014*. Colombo: Ministry of Finance and Planning.
- Delgado, M. (2015). *Urban Youth and Photovoice: Visual Ethnography in Action*. Oxford University Press.

- Department of Census and Statistics. (2015). *Statistical Abstract 2015*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning.
- DFID, & UKAID. (2010). *Agenda 2010: Background paper*. In *The turning point on poverty*.
- Dohrn, S. (2006). *Governing land: reflections from IFPRI research*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Duflo, E. (2012). Women Empowerment and Economic Development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4), 1051–1079.
- El Jack, A. (2003). *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report*. Brighton: BRIDGE.
- England, P., Gornick, J., & Shafer, E. F. (2012). Women’s employment, education, and the gender gap in 17 countries. *Monthly Lab. Rev.*, 135, 3.
- ESCWA. (2007). *The impact of armed conflict on women*. Beirut-Lebanon: United Nations.
- Evans, M. D. R., & Saraiva, H. U. (1993). Women’s Labour Force Participation and Socioeconomic Development: Influences of Local Context and Individual Characteristics in Brazil. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 44(1), 25.
- Eyben, R., Kabeer, N., & Cornwall, A. (2008). *Conceptualising empowerment and the implications for pro-poor growth: a paper for the DAC Poverty Network*.
- Fälth, A., & Blackden, M. (2009). *Unpaid Care Work (Policy Brief No. 1)*. New York: UNDP, New York, USA.
- FAO. (2010). *Gender and Land Rights: Understanding Complexities; Adjusting Policies (Policy Brief No. 8)*. Rome: FAO.
- FAO. (2011). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–2011: Women in Agriculture – Closing the gender gap for development*. Rome: FAO.
- Ferrant, G., Pesando, L. M., & Nowacka, K. (2014). *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*. Centro de Desarrollo de La OCDE, 5.
- Fortin, N. M. (2005). Gender Role Attitudes and the Labour-market Outcomes of Women across OECD Countries. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 21(3), 416–438.
- Gallegos, J. V., & Gutierrez, I. A. (2011). *The Effect of Civil Conflict on Domestic Violence: The Case of Peru*. SSRN Working Paper Series.
- Gaventa, J. (2003). *Power after Lukes: an overview of theories of power since Lukes and their application to development*. Typescript, Brighton: Participation Group, Institute of Development Studies.
- Gaventa, J. (2005). *Reflections on the uses of the “power cube” approach for analyzing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement*. Prepared for Dutch CFA Evaluation ‘Assessing Civil Society Participation as Supported In-Country by Cordaid, Hivos, Novib and Plan Netherlands.

- Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6), 23–33.
- Ghimire, D. J., Axinn, W. G., & Smith-Greenaway, E. (2015). Impact of the spread of mass education on married women's experience with domestic violence. *Social Science Research*, 54, 319–331.
- Global Campaign for Education. (2005). *Girls Can't Wait: Why Girls' Education Matters and How to Make It Happen Now: Briefing Paper for the UN Beijing+10 Review and Appraisal*. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 19–22.
- Göksel, İ. (2013). Female labor force participation in Turkey: The role of conservatism. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41, Part 1, 45–54.
- Golla, A. M., Malhotra, A., Nanda, P., & Mehra, R. (2011). Understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment.
- Grown, C., Gupta, G. R., & Kes, A. (2005). *Taking Action: Achieving gender equality and empowering women (UN Millenium Project - Task Force on Education and Gender Equality)*. Earthscan.
- Gunatilaka, R. (2013). *Women's Participation in Sri Lanka's Labour Force: Trends, Drivers and Constraints*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: ILO.
- Gunewardena, D. (2015). *Why Aren't Sri Lankan Women Translating Their Educational Gains Into Workforce Advantages? (The 2015 Echidna Global Scholars Working Papers)*. Washington DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
- Handrahan, L. (2004). Conflict, gender, ethnicity and post-conflict reconstruction. *Security Dialogue*, 35(4), 429–445.
- Hardina, D., Middleton, J., Montana, S., & Simpson, R. A. (2006). *An Empowering Approach to Managing Social Service Organizations*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Hennink, M., Kiiti, N., Pillinger, M., & Jayakaran, R. (2012). Defining empowerment: perspectives from international development organisations. *Development in Practice*, 22(2), 202–215.
- Herath, H., Guneratne, L. H. P., & Sanderatne, N. (2016). Impact of microfinance on women's empowerment: a case study on two microfinance institutions in Sri Lanka. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(1).
- Herath, H. M. A. (2015). Place of Women in Sri Lankan Society Measures for Their Empowerment for Development and Good Governance. *Vidyodaya Journal of Management*, 1(1), 1–14.
- Herbert, S. (2014). *Links between women's empowerment (or lack of) and outbreaks of violent conflict (Helpdesk Research Report)*. GSDRC.
- Herz, B., & Sperling, G., B. (2004). *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence and policies from the developing world*. USA: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Hess, B., & Sussman, M. B. (2014). *Women and the Family: Two Decades of Change*. Routledge.

- Hirway, I. (2015). Unpaid work and the economy: linkages and their implications. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 1–21.
- Hoddinott, J., & Haddad, L. (1995). Does Female Income Share Influence Household Expenditures? Evidence from Côte D’Ivoire. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 57(1), 77–96.
- Hudock, A., Sherman, K., & Williamson, S. (2016). Women’s economic participation in conflict affected and fragile settings (Occasional Paper Series). Washington DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.
- ICRW. (2005). Property Ownership for Women Enriches, Empowers and Protects: Toward Achieving the Third Millennium Development Goal to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women (ICRW Millennium Development Goals Series).
- Ilahi, N. (2000). The intra-household allocation of time and tasks: what have we learnt from the empirical literature? Washington DC: The World Bank.
- ILO. (2008). Small Changes, Big Changes: Women and Microfinance. Geneva: ILO.
- ILO, & UNDP. (2009). Work and Family: Towards new forms of reconciliation with social co-responsibility (Decent Work in Latin America and the Caribbean).
- Ingiiriis, M. H., & Hoehne, M. V. (2013). The impact of civil war and state collapse on the roles of Somali women: a blessing in disguise. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7(2), 314–333.
- Islam, A., Nguyen, C., & Smyth, R. (2015). Does microfinance change informal lending in village economies? Evidence from Bangladesh. *Journal of Banking & Finance*, 50, 141–156.
- Isran, S., & Isran, M. A. (2012). Low Female Labour Participation in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)*, 32(2), 453–468.
- Iwanaga, K. (2008). Women’s Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges. NIAS Press.
- Jansen, G. G. (2006). Gender and War The Effects of Armed Conflict on Women’s Health and Mental Health. *Affilia*, 21(2), 134–145.
- Jayaweera, S., Wijemanna, H., Wanasundera, L., & Vitarana, K. M. (2007). Gender Dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals in Sri Lanka. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Centre for Women’s Research.
- Jefferson, L. R. (2004). In war as in peace: sexual violence and women’s status. Human Rights Watch World Report.
- Jewkes, R. (2002). Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention. *The Lancet*, 359(9315), 1423–1429.
- Johnson, S. (1999). Gender and Microfinance: guidelines for good practice. Manuscript, Suzanjohnson@Compuserve. Com.

- Jonsson, U. (2003). *Human Rights Approach to Development Programming*.
- Justino, P., Leone, M., & Salardi, P. (2015). Does War Empower Women? Evidence from Timor Leste. *IDS*.
- Kabeer, N. (1999a). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464.
- Kabeer, N. (1999b). The conditions and consequences of choice: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment (Vol. 108). UNRISD Geneva.
- Kabeer, N. (2001). Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. In *Discussing Women's Empowerment - Theory and Practice* (pp. 17–54). Stockholm.
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13–24.
- Kennedy, E., & Peters, P. (1992). Household food security and child nutrition: the interaction of income and gender of household head. *World Development*, 20(8), 1077–1085.
- Kes, Q., & Swaminathan, H. (2006). Gender and time poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. In C. M. Blackden & Q. Wodon (Eds.), *Gender, Time Use, and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 13–26). The World Bank.
- King, E. M., & Hill, M. A. (1993). Women's education in developing countries: an overview. In E. King M. & M. A. Hill (Eds.), *Women's education in developing countries : barriers, benefits, and policies*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- King, E. M., & Mason, A. D. (2001). *Engendering development through gender equality in rights, resources, and voice* (A World Bank policy research report No. 21776) (pp. 1–388). Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Kreisberg, S. (1992). *Transforming Power: Domination, Empowerment, and Education*. SUNY Press.
- Kudakwashe, M. A., & Richard, B. (2015). Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women. *International Journal*, 77.
- Kumar, K. (2000). *Women and Women's Organizations in Postconflict Societies: The Role of International Assistance*. Center for Development Information and Evaluation, US Agency for International Development.
- Kumar, K. (2001). *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- LeRoux, K., & Feeney, M. K. (2014). *Nonprofit Organizations and Civil Society in the United States*. Routledge.
- Lindsey, C. (2001). *Women facing war* (ICRC study on the impact of armed conflict on women). Geneva: ICRC.

- Liu, X., & Dyer, S. (2014). Revisiting radical feminism: Partnered dual-earner mothers' place still in the home? *Women's Studies International Forum*, 47, Part A, 1–10.
- Longwe, S. H. (1998). Education for women's empowerment or schooling for women's subordination? *Gender & Development*, 6(2), 19–26.
- Lorber, J. (1997). The variety of feminisms and their contributions to gender equality. *Bis*.
- Lord, J., & Hutchison, P. (1993). The process of empowerment: Implications for theory and practice. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 12(1), 5–22.
- Luttrell, C. (2007). Empowerment: A framework for an understanding of empowerment within SDC. Luttrell, C., Quiroz, S., Scrutton, C., & Bird, K. (2009). *Understanding and operationalising empowerment*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Mahalik, J. R., Morray, E. B., Coonerty-Femiano, A., Ludlow, L. H., Slattery, S. M., & Smiler, A. (2005). Development of the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory. *Sex Roles*, 52(7–8), 417–435.
- Malhotra, A., & Mather, M. (1997). Do Schooling and Work Empower Women in Developing Countries? *Gender and Domestic Decisions in Sri Lanka*. *Sociological Forum*, 12(4), 599–630.
- Malhotra, A., & Schuler, S. R. (2005). Women's empowerment as a variable in international development. In D. Narayan-Parker (Ed.), *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives* (pp. 71–88).
- Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R., & Boender, C. (2005). Women's empowerment as a variable in international development. *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, 71–88.
- Marphatia, A. A., & Moussié, R. (2013). A question of gender justice: Exploring the linkages between women's unpaid care work, education, and gender equality. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(6), 585–594.
- Masika, R., & Baden, S. (1997). *Infrastructure and poverty: a gender analysis*. Brighton: BRIDGE (development and gender), Institute of Development Studies.
- McGinnity, F., & Russell, H. (2008). *Gender inequalities in time use: the distribution of caring, housework and employment among women and men in Ireland*. Dublin, Ireland: Equality Authority : Economic and Social Research Institute.
- McKay, S. (1998). The effects of armed conflict on girls and women. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 4(4), 381–392.
- Medical Statistics Unit, Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine. (2016). *Annual Health Bulletin 2014*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine.

- Mendoza, D. (2010, February 17). DEVELOPMENT-ASIA: 'Poverty Still Has a Woman's Face'. Inter Press Service.
- Menon, N., & Van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2015). War and women's work evidence from the conflict in Nepal. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(1), 51–73.
- Morrisson, C., & Jütting, J. P. (2005). Women's discrimination in developing countries: A new data set for better policies. *World Development*, 33(7), 1065–1081.
- Mowla, S. A. (2009). Education and Economic Empowerment Of Women in Egypt (Working paper No. 2). New Cairo, Egypt: Social Research Centre, American University in Cairo.
- Namubiru-Mwaura, E. (2014). Land Tenure and Gender: Approaches and Challenges for Strengthening Rural Women's Land Rights.
- Narayan-Parker, D. (2002). Empowerment and poverty reduction: a sourcebook. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Novek, E. M. (1992). Newsmaking, a Tool for Self-Determination: Urban High School Students Publish a Community Newspaper.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). Women and Human Development. Cambridge University Press.
- Odeny, M. (2013). Improving Access to Land and strengthening Women's land rights in Africa. In Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, Washington, DC, April (pp. 8–11).
- OECD. (2012). Women's economic empowerment. In Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: The Role of Empowerment.
- Offer, S., & Schneider, B. (2011). Revisiting the gender gap in time-use patterns multitasking and well-being among mothers and fathers in dual-earner families. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6), 809–833.
- Ofstad, A. (2002). Countries in Violent Conflict and Aid Strategies: The Case of Sri Lanka. *World Development*, 30(2), 165–180.
- OHCHR. (2002). Draft Guidelines: A Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies.
- OHCHR. (2006). Investing in development: a practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Geneva: OHCHR.
- O'Neil, T., Domingo, P., & Valters, C. (2014). Progress on women's empowerment.
- Ormhaug, C., Meier, P., & Hernes, H. (2009). Armed conflict deaths disaggregated by gender. PRIO Paper, 23.
- Oxaal, Z. (1997). Education and poverty: a gender analysis. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.
- Oya, C. (2010). Rural inequality, wage employment and labour market formation in Africa: historical and micro-level evidence. Geneva: ILO.

- Page, N., & Czuba, C. E. (1999). Empowerment: What Is It? *Journal of Extension*, 37(5). Retrieved from Pallas, S. (2011). Women's land rights and women's empowerment: one and the same? C. Verschuur (Hg.): *Du Grain À Moudre*. Genre, Développement Rural et Alimentation. Geneve.
- Pande, R., Malhotra, A., & Grown, C. (2005). Impact of investments in female education on gender equality. In *Session 03: Schooling (Vol. 35)*. France: International Center for Research on Women.
- Pantazidou, M. (2012). What next for power analysis? a review of recent experience with the powercube and related frameworks. Brighton: IDS.
- Parpart, J. L., & Barriteau, E. (2000). *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*. IDRC.
- Patrinos, H. (2008). Returns to Education: The Gender Perspective. In M. Tembon & L. Fort (Eds.), *Girl's Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment and Growth* (pp. 53–64). Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Paul Schultz, T. (2002). Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls. *World Development*, 30(2), 207–225.
- Pena, N., Maiques, M., & Castillo, G. E. (2008). Using rights-based and gender-analysis arguments for land rights for women: Some initial reflections from Nicaragua. *Gender & Development*, 16(1), 55–71.
- Pereznieto, P., & Taylor, G. (2014). A review of approaches and methods to measure economic empowerment of women and girls. *Gender & Development*, 22(2), 233–251.
- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5), 569–579.
- Petesche, P. (2011). *Women's Empowerment Arising from Violent Conflict and Recovery: Life Stories from Four Middle-Income Countries*. USAID.
- Pettit, J. (2012). *Empowerment and Participation: bridging the gap between understanding and practice*. United Nations Headquarters.
- Plümper, T., & Neumayer, E. (2006). The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy. *International Organization*, 60(3).
- Prah, M. (2013). *Insights Into Gender Equity, Equality and Power Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa*. African Books Collective.
- Pratt, M., Werchick, L., Bewa, A., Eagleton, M.-L., Lumumba, C., Nichols, K., & Piripiri, L. (2004). *Sexual terrorism: Rape as a weapon of war in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*. USAID/DCHA Assessment Report.
- Pratto, F. (2016). On power and empowerment. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(1), 1–20.
- Rai, A. (2014). Landless despite laws: land rights of women in post-conflict Nepal and Sri Lanka. *Journal of Social Review*, 3(1), 16–23.

- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (2004). Between Reality and Representation Women's Agency in War and Post-Conflict Sri Lanka. *Cultural Dynamics*, 16(2-3), 141-168.
- Rappaport, J. (1981). In praise of paradox: A social policy of empowerment over prevention. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 9(1), 1-25.
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in Empowerment: Introduction to the Issue. *Prevention in Human Services*, 3(2-3), 1-7.
- Read, J. H. (2012). Is power zero-sum or variable-sum? Old arguments and new beginnings. *Journal of Political Power*, 5(1), 5-31.
- Rehn, E., & Sirleaf, E. J. (2002). *Progress of the world's women 2002*. New York, NY: United Nations Development Fund for Women.
- Revenga, A., & Shetty, S. (2012). Empowering women is smart economics, 49(1), 40-43.
- Robeyns, I. (2003). Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 61-92.
- Roland, G. (2004). Understanding institutional change: fast-moving and slow-moving institutions. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 38(4), 109-131.
- Rose, P. (2013, September 25). Why girls' education can help eradicate poverty. Reuters.
- Rowland, R., & Klein, R. (1996). Radical feminism: History, politics, action. *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, 9-36.
- Rowlands, J. (1997). *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*. Oxfam.
- Rowland-Serdar, B., & Shea, P. S.-. (1991). Empowering Women: Self, Autonomy, and Responsibility. *Political Research Quarterly*, 44(3), 605-624.
- Saito, K., A., Mekonnen, H., & Spurling, D. (1994). *Raising the Productivity of Women Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Samararatne, D. W. V. A., & Soldatic, K. (2015). Inclusions and exclusions in law: experiences of women with disability in rural and war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. *Disability & Society*, 30(5), 759-772.
- Samarasinghe, V. (1998). The Feminization of Foreign Currency Earnings: Women's Labor in Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 32(3), 303-326.
- Samman, E., & Santos, M. E. (2009). Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence.
- Sardenberg, C. (2008). Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment: a Latin American Feminist Perspective on conceptualising women's empowerment. *IDS Bulletin*, 39(6), 18-27.
- Sarvananthan, M. (2015). Impediments to Women in Post-civil War Economic Growth in Sri Lanka. *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management*, 2(1), 12-36.

- Sen, A. (1985). Well-Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 82(4), 169–221.
- Sen, A. (1995). *Inequality Reexamined*. Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (2003). Development as capability expansion. *Readings in Human Development. Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, 3–16.
- Sen, G. (1997). *Empowerment as an Approach to Poverty*. Background Paper to Human Development Report. Retrieved from
- Sen, P. (1999). Enhancing Women's Choices in Responding to Domestic Violence in Calcutta: A Comparison of Employment and Education. *European Journal of Development Research*, 11(2), 65.
- Seveffjord, B., & Olsson, B. (2001). Gender issues in development practice: Two perspectives from a development cooperation agency. In *Discussing Women's Empowerment – Theory and Practice* (pp. 10–16). Stockholm.
- Shahriari, H., Danzer, A. M., Giovarelli, R., & Undeland, A. (2009). Improving women's access to land and financial resources in Tajikistan.
- Sharp, J., Briggs, J., Yacoub, H., & Hamed, N. (2011). Women's empowerment: a critical re-evaluation of a GAD poverty alleviation project in Egypt. In S. H. Chant (Ed.), *The International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sida. (2009a). *Quick Guide to What and How: increasing women's access to land (Women's Economic Empowerment)*. Stockholm: Sida.
- Sida. (2009b). *Women's economic empowerment: Scope for Sida's engagement (Working paper)*. Sida.
- Singh, N. (2007). Decentralization and Legal Empowerment. In D. A. Rondinelli & G. S. Cheema (Eds.), *Decentralizing Governance: Emerging Concepts and Practices*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Smith, L. C., Ramakrishnan, U., Ndiaye, Haddad, L., & Martorell, R. (2003). *The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries (Research report No. 131)*. Washington DC: Intl Food Policy Res Inst.
- Sørensen, B. (1998). *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources (War-torn Societies Project No. 3)*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Sow, N. (2012). Women's Political Participation and Economic Empowerment in Post-conflict Countries: Lessons from the Great Lakes region in Africa. *International Alert*, 1–47.
- Spencer, G. (2013). *Empowerment, Health Promotion and Young People: A Critical Approach*. Routledge.
- Strandberg, N. (2001). Conceptualising Empowerment as a Transformative Strategy for Poverty Eradication and the Implications for Measuring Progress. In *Topic 2: Empowerment of women as a transformative strategy for poverty eradication*. New Delhi: United Nations.

- Subrahmanian, R. (2005). Gender equality in education: Definitions and measurements. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 25(4), 395–407.
- Summers, L. H. (1994). Investing in all people: educating women in developing countries (pp. 1–40). Presented at the EDI Seminar, World Bank Institute, Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Swaminathan, H., Lahoti, R., & J.Y., S. (2012). Women's Property, Mobility, and Decisionmaking: Evidence from Rural Karnataka, India (IFPRI Discussion Paper No. 1188). IFPRI.
- Taşlı, K. (2007). A conceptual framework for gender and development studies: from welfare to empowerment (1. Aufl). Wien: Südwind-Verl.
- Turner, B. S. (1993). *Citizenship and Social Theory*. SAGE.
- Turner, F. J. (2011). *Social Work Treatment: Interlocking Theoretical Approaches*. Oxford University Press.
- Turner, S. G., & Maschi, T. M. (2015). Feminist and empowerment theory and social work practice. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 29(2), 151–162.
- UN Women, & OHCHR. (2013). *Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
- UNDP. (1995). *Human Development Report 1995 (Annual report)*. Oxford University Press, New York: UNDP.
- UNDP. (2001). *Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*. UNDP.
- UNDP. (2015). *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- UNFPA. (2012). *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications*. Bangkok, Thailand: UNFPA.
- UNICEF. (2006). *The state of the world's children 2007: Women and children—the double dividend of gender equality*. New York: UNICEF.
- UNIDO. (2010). *Women's economic empowerment, accountability and national ownership (Workshop report)*. Vienna, Austria: UNIDO.
- United Nations. (2009). *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. United Nations.
- USAID. (2007). *Women and conflict: an introductory guide for programming*.
- Van Gorp, K. (2013). The Second Shift: Why it is Diminishing but Still an Issue. *Undergraduate Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research*, 14(1), 31–37.
- Verick, S. (2014). Female labor force participation in developing countries. *IZA World of Labor*.

- Vonderlack, R. M., & Schreiner, M. (2002). Women, microfinance, and savings: lessons and proposals. *Development in Practice*, 12(5), 602–612.
- Walker, J. (2013). Time poverty, gender and well-being: lessons from the Kyrgyz Swiss Swedish Health Programme. *Development in Practice*, 23(1), 57–68.
- Wanasundera, L. (2006). Rural women in Sri Lanka's post-conflict rural economy. Bangkok: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.
- Ward, J., & Marsh, M. (2006). Sexual violence against women and girls in war and its aftermath: Realities, responses and required resources. In *Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond* (Vol. 21, p. 23).
- Whitmore, E. (1988). Evaluation as Empowerment and the Evaluator as Enabler.
- Wiggins, N. (2011). Critical pedagogy and popular education: towards a unity of theory and practice. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 43(1), 34–49.
- Williamson, O. E. (2000). The new institutional economics: taking stock, looking ahead. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 38(3), 595–613.
- Wilson, D. (2004). Human Rights: Promoting gender equality in and through education, 34(1), 11–27.
- Witt, S. D. (2000). The Influence of Peers on Children's Socialization to Gender Roles. *Early Child Development and Care*, 162(1), 1–7.
- Wodon, Q., & Ying, Y. (2010). Domestic Work Time in Sierra Leone. *Gender Disparities in Africa's Labor Market*, 333.
- Woodroffe, J., & Donald, K. (2014). *Unpaid Care: A priority for the post-2015 development goals and beyond*. London, UK: Gender and Development Network.
- World Bank. (1995). *Development in practice: Priorities and strategies for education*, A World Bank review. Washington DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2006). *Gender equality as smart economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (Fiscal years 2007–10)*.
- World Bank. (2011). *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. The World Bank.
- World Bank. (2014). *Gender at work: A companion to the World Development Report on Jobs*.
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1990). Taking aim on empowerment research: On the distinction between individual and psychological conceptions. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1), 169–177.
- Zuckerman, E., Dennis, S., & Greenberg, M. E. (2007). *The gender dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction: the World Bank track record*. Washington DC: Gender Action.

# **Chapter 3: Women’s Labour Market Outcomes and Livelihood Interventions in Sri Lanka’s North After the War**

*Ramani Gunatilaka and Ranmini Vithanagama*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Objectives and research questions**

The end of Sri Lanka’s decades-old conflict saw Sri Lanka’s government invest heavily in post-war reconstruction and the development of infrastructure and connectivity in the conflict-affected region, to generate economic growth and employment. Various government agencies, non-government organizations, and bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors also supported livelihood interventions programmes that focused on generating livelihoods for women, particularly those heading their households. However, there is little information or analysis about the extent to which such programmes achieved their objectives.

This paper investigates the labour market outcomes and livelihood strategies of women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province after the war ended in 2009. It focuses especially on the situation of women heading their households with a view to identifying the nature and magnitude of barriers to women’s economic empowerment and informing policy aimed at closing gender gaps in earnings and productivity. Using DfiD’s (1999) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, this study looks at the extent to which demographic, skills-related, and household-

related characteristics, including ownership of assets, are associated with different labour market outcomes for women heading their households. The study also looks at the extent to which conflict-related shocks are associated with such outcomes, as well as at the role played by participation in livelihood interventions implemented by government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and donors.

Specifically, this study on women's labour market outcomes addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the labour market outcomes of women heading their households in the Northern Province?
2. What are the individual, skills-related and household-related factors, including access to different types of assets, associated with these outcomes?
3. Have conflict-induced shocks that the women experienced, been associated with any of these outcomes?
4. Has participation in livelihood programmes implemented by government, non-government or donor agencies been associated with any positive outcomes?

The data used for the analysis is drawn from a survey of roughly 3000 women-headed households, and 1000 male-headed households conducted for the purpose of this study in all five districts of the Northern Province during the second half of 2015.

The next section provides the motivation and justification for the study by contextualising the study and identifying the research

and policy gaps related to the subject. This is followed by a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature and the conceptual framework adopted for the investigation. Section 2 describes the data, and provides an overview of the data in terms of this framework. Section 3 is devoted to the econometric analysis of several dimensions of women's labour market outcomes in the Northern Province: participation; employment outcomes; and determination of wages and earnings. Section 4 looks for evidence that interventions in livelihood strategies by government and non-government actors and donors have influenced these outcomes. Section 5 concludes and draws the implications of the findings for policy formulation.

## **1.2 Background and rationale**

An adverse geography constrained economic growth and development in the Northern Province long before the war broke out in 1983, and continues to challenge efforts to generate employment in the region even after the conflict ended in 2009. Much of the province's land mass is located in the dry zone which depends on the north-east monsoon, while the Jaffna peninsula and the province's western seaboard belongs to the arid zone, even though irrigated by underground aquifers. Many lagoons and islands impede intra-provincial connectivity. The province's capital city, Jaffna, is located in the northern-most part of the country, nearly 400 km from Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, and even now, seven and a half hours by road. Nearly half of the province's population of one million inhabitants lives in the Jaffna peninsula while the rest is distributed thinly across

its four southern districts, making Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and Mannar the least densely populated of all of Sri Lanka's districts other than for Monaragala in the Uva Province (Department of Census and Statistics 2012). The province's share of the total number of non-farm commercial establishments is also correspondingly small and may even have been smaller before the war and before such data was first collected. While Jaffna District accounted for three per cent of such establishments nation-wide in 2013/14 (Colombo, Gampaha, Kurunegala and Kandy accounted for 13, 13, 9 and 6 per cent respectively), the other four northern districts accounted for less than one per cent each (Department of Census and Statistics 2015).

The Northern Province suffered the worst damage during the long military conflict as the region was the LTTE's headquarters and the focus of government's offensives to defeat it. The war also prevented the region from benefiting from the economic liberalization policies of 1977, which catalyzed economic growth in the southern part of the country. Northern economic activities have been confined to agriculture and service-sector jobs, particularly in government. Foreign remittances from relatives in the Tamil Diaspora continue to sustain many northern households today, just as inflows of remittances from migrant workers in Malaya and other British colonies in the East were an important part of the local economy during colonial times (Ganeshanathan 2013).

The conflict also prevented the gathering of economic data which makes trends analyses and before-after comparisons difficult. However, while the Northern Province was the least industrialized in 1996 when provincial GDP data was first estimated, it still remains the province with the smallest manufacturing sector, and the largest services sector. For example, manufacturing continued to contribute only nine per cent of provincial nominal GDP and the service sector an overwhelming 70 per cent until the war ended in 2009, after which manufacturing's contribution rose to 17 per cent, and services' contribution dropped to 60 per cent in 2015 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2007, 2008, 2010, 2016). While the end of the conflict clearly enabled economic growth to take place, there is no real GDP data to show the rate at which the province's economy really expanded. However, the region continues to contribute the least to national output: its share of 2.4 per cent in 1996 has increased only marginally to 3.5 per cent in 2015 whereas the Western Province, where the country's capital city of Colombo is located, continues to account for at least 40 per cent of GDP (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2007, 2016).

Structural change is more apparent in employment figures, and fortunately, employment data is available for the early period from the Department of Census and Statistics' Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey of 1985/86. While the Northern Province accounted for only six per cent of 5 million Sri Lankans working in 1985/86, this share had slipped to 4.5 per cent by 2015 due to outmigration from the province. In fact, the most recent Population Census figures of 2012 suggest that while

there is considerable movement of people within the province, there is also considerable movement of people out of the province. For example, of people who had settled in Jaffna by 2012, 30 per cent were from Kilinochchi, 24 per cent from Mullaitivu and 7.2 per cent from Vavuniya. But there also appears to be a drift out of the province southwards. Of those who moved out of Jaffna, a fourth migrated to Colombo (Department of Census and Statistics 2015). Meanwhile, whereas agriculture accounted for 55 per cent of employment in the Northern Province in 1985/86 and industry for 13 per cent and services for 27 per cent, by 2015, the contribution of agriculture in total employment in the province had dropped to 33 per cent, the contribution of industry had expanded to 20 per cent, while that of services had expanded to nearly half the region's total employment, at 47 per cent.

Structural change is also evident in the distribution of employment across job status categories. In 1985/86, 47 per cent of total employment was made up of employees; employers accounted for nearly three per cent, own account workers or self-employed workers for 33 per cent and unpaid family workers for 18 per cent. By 2016, the proportion of employees in total employment had risen to 58 per cent (public employees 15 per cent and private employees 41 per cent) and the share of unpaid family workers had dropped to eight per cent. The proportions of the other categories of workers remained more or less the same (Department of Census and Statistics 2017).

The rate of women's participation in the labour force in the Northern Province remains one of the lowest in the country. In 1985/86, 18 per cent of females aged 10 years and above were in the workforce, whereas in the country at large, 32 per cent were. Only in the Eastern Province were women's participation rates lower, at 15 per cent of the population of females more than 10 years of age (Department of Census and Statistics 1987). By 2016, only the participation rates of women 15 years and older were reported at the district level, but even according to these data, while the national average was 36 per cent, only women's participation rates in Vavuniya district was on par with the national average, whereas Jaffna and Mannar reported some of the lowest rates of female labour force participation country-wide, at 21.9 and 20.6 respectively (Department of Census and Statistics 2017). Women's share in total employment in the province has also remained low but experienced some improvement from 21 per cent in 1985/86 to just 25 per cent in 2016. In contrast, women's share of total employment in the national economy has been higher, and has risen more rapidly from 29 per cent to 36 per cent over the same period (Department of Census and Statistics 1987, 2017).

Structural change in the status of employment by gender has been more noticeable. Nearly half of all employed women worked as employees in 1985/86, a fourth as own account workers, and as many as contributing family workers. By 2016, 56 per cent of women (compared with 59 per cent of men) worked as employees, and the share of women working as contributing family workers had dropped to 17 per cent, but still

exceeding the share of males working as contributing family workers, which stood at nearly three per cent (Department of Census and Statistics 2017). Unemployment in the region at 6.3 per cent of workforce in 2016 was the highest in the country. The youth unemployment rate, at 24.7 per cent, is also marginally higher than the national average (21.6 per cent) but lower than the youth unemployment rates of the Southern Province (30.3 per cent) and the Sabaragamuwa Province (30.0) (Department of Census and Statistics 2017). Gender-wise disaggregated data on unemployment by province has not been published.

The most recent poverty statistics suggest that Mannar has made the most remarkable progress in terms of reducing poverty levels, with a dramatic drop in the poverty headcount ratio from 20.1 per cent in 2012/13 to just one per cent in 2016 (Department of Census and Statistics 2017). Jaffna district, with its historically better infrastructure and human capital has also been able to more than halve its poverty incidence from 16 per cent in 2009/10 to 7.7 per cent by 2016. The reduction in poverty in Mullaitivu has also been impressive, declining from nearly 30 per cent in 2012/13 to a little below 13 per cent in 2016. In marked contrast, poverty levels in Kilinochchi have risen from 12.7 per cent to 18.2 during the same period, and in Vavuniya, where poverty levels have been the lowest, from 2.3 in 2009/10 to 3.4 by 2016. Despite the recent reduction in poverty in Mullaitivu, it reports the second highest rate of poverty incidence in the entire country, behind Kilinochchi. These two districts were two of the worst affected by conflict and were also the most

economically backward even before the conflict began in the early 1980s.

The issue of women's labour market outcomes in the Northern Province is of critical policy significance in efforts to reduce poverty in the region. Analysis based on national household income and expenditure sample survey data of 2009/10 from the more prosperous districts of Jaffna and Vavuniya shows that the Northern Province had one of the highest rates of poverty incidence among women in the country at the time the conflict ended: 12.47 per cent of women in the Northern Province were poor, while the incidence of poverty among men in the same province was only slightly higher at 12.78 per cent (Gunatilaka 2015). Moreover, the incidence of poverty among working women in the North during the period was higher than among men (14 per cent of employed women as opposed to 11 per cent of employed men), suggesting that engaging in market work had not enabled women to come out of poverty (*ibid.*). This underlines the fact that what is of critical importance in terms of welfare is not really whether a woman engages in market work or not, but whether the work she finds offers decent terms and conditions. Most employed Sri Lankan women are in low-skilled occupations, which are unlikely to offer good wages, a protective working environment or social security.

While the literature on women's labour market outcomes in Sri Lanka has grown in recent times (see Gunatilaka 2013, 2016; Gunewardena et al. 2008, Gunewardena 2015), few studies using national sample survey data have been able to include the

Northern Province in their analyses due to data constraints. For example, Gunatilaka (2013) analysed data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2009/10 of the Department of Census and Statistics to investigate the probable drivers of married women's, single women's, and women heads of households' labour force participation decisions. She found that the likelihood of female heads of households' participation increased with: age, though at a diminishing rate; university education; the presence of a large informal sector in the district of residence; and being resident on estates. Factors found to constrain the participation of women heads of households were: remittances from abroad, earnings of male members of households; belonging to the Islamic Moor or Up Country Christian Tamil ethno-religious categories; disability; having children less than five years of age; and, more people employed in manufacturing and services relative to agriculture in the district. However, although the study included Batticaloa and Ampara districts from the Eastern Province, it did not include the Northern Province as HIES 2009/10 did not cover the province in its entirety.

Therefore, addressing this gap in the literature on women's labour market outcomes in the Northern Province is of immense policy significance in relation to two critical issues related to post-conflict recovery and growth of women's employment outcomes. First, it is important to identify the factors associated with women's labour market outcomes in the Northern Province after the conflict. At the same time, it is as important to assess the extent to which government, non-government, and donor

initiatives at generating employment opportunities among women have succeeded in achieving their objectives.

### **1.3 Review of the theoretical and empirical literature**

A large body of empirical research in many countries has shown that women's access to employment and resources in women's hands increase human capital and capabilities within households and promote economic growth (Kabeer 2012). Engaging in market work and thereby having access to independent means of income are also essential for women's greater economic empowerment. Therefore, increasing women's participation in paid work is likely to increase economic expansion while reducing gender inequalities.

Nevertheless, the UNDP's (2015) Human Development Report on work (not jobs) shows that even today, women's share of unpaid work is three times that of men, while their share of paid work is a little more than half of men's share of paid work. And even while women carry out a fifth of the world's paid work, they are paid less for the work they do, face more discrimination, and face fewer prospects of advancement and promotion. Even so, while in much of the world female labour force participation rates have been increasing, driving employment trends and reducing gender gaps in participation (Lim 2002), this has not been the case in Asia.

In fact, while education and health gaps between females and males in Asia and the Pacific have been closing, the labour

market still offers women lower wages and lower quality jobs than it offers men. Asian women are on average 70 per cent less likely than men to be in the labour force, and average participation rates vary from a minimum of three per cent to a maximum of 80 per cent. This gap persists despite economic growth, decreasing fertility rates, and increasing education (ADB 2015a). The analysis identifies the lower wages and lower quality jobs that women access primarily as major constraints to women's participation. This is largely because of the way in which women allocate their time between market and nonmarket activities, but the fact that women are perceived as being less skilled also contributes. On the other hand, the way women divide their time between market and non-market activities is in turn largely determined by social norms that emphasize domestic work as the primary responsibility of women.

Cross country empirical analyses such as ADB's (2015) study of women in the workforce, as well as country-specific analyses, draw on a vast body of theoretical work related to women's labour force participation. In what follows, we briefly review these theories as well as the supporting empirical evidence.

### *Women's labour force participation*

The standard neo-classical labour supply model was probably the first theory to emerge in the mainstream economics literature to explain the factors underlying the supply of labour of both men and women. According to the theory, the supply of labour increases with the expectation of one's own wage because

of the income effect, but higher wages in turn encourage the individual to substitute work for leisure, thus reducing her supply of labour. The substitution effect can also apply when other sources of household income are present.

However, the static model cannot explain the labour supply decisions of households, especially those made up of husbands and wives, and how the resulting income is shared between household members. For this, we need to turn to the theoretical literature that uses household models to explain labour supply. Household models recognize that individuals form a household when it is more beneficial to them than remaining alone, as household goods can be produced more efficiently than when single and economies of scale can be exploited when producing and sharing goods. The unitary model pioneered by Becker (1965) was one of the first of this kind and predicted that an increase in women's wages would increase women's participation through the reallocation of time within households. But the model did not permit the analysis of intra-household welfare (Chiappori 1992). Meanwhile, empirical studies rejected the hypotheses of income pooling and of jointly determined family labour supply behaviour (Schultz 1990, Thomas 1990, Lundberg 1988). These weaknesses in the theory were addressed by theories of bargaining models of households (Manser and Brown 1980; McElroy and Horney 1981; Chiappori et al. 1998). Bargaining models assumed that households maximize the product of each member's utility in excess of a reservation level or threat points. Threat points are the utility levels individuals in a marriage could reach in the absence of an agreement or a sharing rule with the partner. Factors relevant for a threat point

could range from the existence of a marriage market and the probability of remarriage, or the nature of divorce settlements. In this way, individuals' labour supply was determined through its impact on the sharing rule. Thus, a change in the wage structure which caused a rise in women's wages could induce an increase in female labour force participation through the reallocation of time within households as well as by enabling women to renegotiate the gains from marriage on the basis of the new earnings opportunity (Hoddinott et al. 1997).

While the literature based on bargaining models has been largely limited to advanced economies, there has been some work on extending the theory to a developing country context. For example, Dasgupta (1999) incorporated a Nash-bargained household labour supply model into a Harris-Todaro type of framework to show that expanding employment opportunities for women may actually weaken their bargaining power inside the household, even when agents have perfect foresight. As the informal sector acts as a gateway to women's employment, employment generation programmes that encourage more women to enter the sector actually reduce their wage rate in the informal sector or their chance of entering the formal sector. So while it may be individually rational for women to enter the labour market in response to an expansion of labour demand, the aggregate outcome is a reduction in their welfare and a possible increase in intra-household gender inequality. And while the literature on the experience of developing countries is scarce, a recent study applies the household bargaining model to

real data to argue that paid work can actually increase the incidence of domestic violence for some women. For example, using data collected in sixty villages outside of Dhaka, Bangladesh, Heath (2014) suggests that less-educated working women who are younger at first marriage can increase the risk of domestic violence as their husbands seek to neutralize their increasing bargaining power on entering the labour market, by resorting to domestic violence.

Feminist economists have argued that women's ability to bargain within the household is constrained by socialized gender roles where women are burdened almost exclusively with unpaid work related to reproduction and social production (Badgett and Folbre 1999; Malhotra and De Graf 2000; West and Zimmerman 1987; Braun et al. 2008; Rupanner 2010). For example, using eight years of quarterly labour force data from the UK, Chevalier and Viitanen (2002) showed that the presence of young children negatively influenced the participation of women in the workforce, whereas childcare provision increased participation. Meanwhile, a cross-sectional study of 26 countries in Africa showed that both the number of recent births and short birth spacing negatively affect women's non-farm employment. More highly educated women and urban women were likely to suffer most from these effects (Longwe et al. 2013)

Occupation segregation can reinforce these gender norms as women crowd into certain occupations and sectors that are considered socially appropriate, thereby losing out on jobs with better wages and conditions of work that are available to men

(Badgett and Folbre 1999). Women from wealthier social strata or certain ethnic groups can be constrained in their activities because of concerns about sexual purity or social status and discouraged from venturing out of the domestic and social spheres (Malhotra and De Graf 2000).

Cultural norms and issues of status may also interact with structural change in the economy resulting in a U-shaped relationship between female labour force participation and economic development (Goldin 1995; Mammen and Paxsen 2000). For example, women's labour force participation may be high in agricultural economies where women work on family-owned farms. With industrialization men earn more and discourage women from working so as to preserve the household's new-found social status. Women's labour force participation rises again as the expansion of the services sector generates white-collar job opportunities which women, who are now better educated, are able to take up. However, though intuitively appealing, there is little empirical evidence in support of this theory and that only from cross-country analyses.

A U-shaped relationship between economic or educational status and women's labour force participation at a given point in time has also been posited (Klasen and Pieters 2012). Poorly educated women are forced to combine farm work with care work, and better education may keep women back from paid work if the available work does not meet social aspirations. However, much higher levels of educational attainment may open up opportunities in high-skill occupations associated with better

social status, encouraging highly educated women to enter the labour market. In advanced economies, too, education is highly correlated with workforce participation. For example, using data comprising around 10,000 educationally homogenous heterosexual couples from five European countries, Haas et al. (2006) have shown that women are more likely to work when both partners are highly educated. However, the strength of the effect of education was found to vary between countries and across the life cycle.

In addition to human capital, the social capital that women have access to is also important for the participation decision. Using the Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality (LASUI) to examine the role that social networks play in constraining and driving women's labour force participation Stoloff et al. (1999) found that the greater the quality and diversity of the social resources available to a woman through her social networks, the more likely that she was to be found working for pay.

A further strand in the literature argues that women's labour force participation moves counter cyclically in added-worker effects during recessions and times of economic hardship (Fallon and Lucas 2002; Attanasio et al. 2005). This phenomenon may also be expected to take place in labour markets operating in an environment of war and conflict, and even for some time after the conflict has ended.

However, when analyses of the different rates of female labour force participation across countries are controlled for per capita

income, education and the specialization of the economy in female-friendly industries, what remains are important differences in gender roles that have persisted over time. Periodic withdrawal from the labour market to bear children is likely to have resulted in women's historical specialization in household work rather than market work (Friedberg and Stern 2003). Others have argued that men's greater marginal productivity in market production is likely to have developed through millennia of production activities which depended overwhelmingly on brawn rather than brains, which may have in turn given rise to cultural beliefs about what role women should play in society (Boserup 1970; Fernández et al. 2004; Fernández 2007; Fortin 2005; Alesina et al. 2011).

### *Factors associated with women's employment outcomes*

Different characteristics or endowments appear to mediate women's employment outcomes when they do decide to participate in the workforce. First, human capital, proxied by educational attainment is almost always associated with women's job outcomes in advanced as well as developing economies. For example, Bbaale and Mpuga (2011) use data from the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006 to show that while post-secondary level education increases the probability of female labour force participation, education at and beyond secondary levels increases the likelihood of wage employment. Second, husband's earnings, whether from self-employment or wage employment, as well as his business knowledge and experience can influence the wife's choice of

employment either as an entrepreneur or as an employee. For example, Caputo and Dolinsky (1998) use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Labor Market Experience in the US to investigate the effects of the financial and human capital resources available to a woman in her household on her choice between entrepreneurship and wage employment. The authors found that while higher levels of husbands' earnings from self-employment greatly increased the likelihood of the women being self-employed, his earnings from wages had no impact. Meanwhile, the husbands' business knowledge and experience made it more likely that the wife was self-employed, and the husband's provision of childcare if the family included young children also contributed to women being self-employed. In contrast, marital status per se did not influence women's employment choice, and these financial and human capital effects were restricted to the married couple and did not apply to other adults in the household. Rahman (2000) draws attention to the factors determining the demand and supply of women's labour in crop production in Bangladesh. He points out that as the size of women's landholdings increase, they become better educated, and the diversity of crops increase, the demand for hired female labour increases. However, as women's landholdings decrease and their membership in non-governmental organizations increases, the supply of female family labour decreases. The first of these observations resonates with Agarwal's (1994) claim that a woman's economic and social situation is strongly linked to her having independent land rights. Women who have membership in non-governmental organisations in this study are specifically those who are landless

and/or depend mostly on selling labour. On the other hand, Bhaumik et al. (2016) point out that the ownership of assets such as land may empower women, but it may not improve household welfare if markets and complementary resources such as capital remain inaccessible to them. Rahman (2000) notes that low participation as hired labour by these women is largely due to cultural constraints that are not applicable to men. Where women's mobility is restricted, demand for female family labour may also decrease if agriculture becomes less viable and non-farm production becomes more attractive for the household's livelihood strategy.

### *Conflict and women's labour market outcomes*

An armed conflict is 'development in reverse' as it generates economic and social costs that contribute to or intensify poverty in many ways (Collier et al. 2003). Firstly, a war diverts resources from production to destruction, both by the government and rebel groups, reducing economic growth. Secondly, the violence of war destroys infrastructure, housing, schools and health facilities. Thirdly, fear induced by war leads to people's flight, disintegrating social capital, forcing them to leave their assets and thereafter take up subsistence level activities which require little investment and consequently, low returns. The social costs of war include fatalities, casualties and disabilities, as well as displacement and forced migration that exacerbate economic costs. Blattman (2010) also draws attention to health status as a dimension of human capital which is often impaired during conflict due to poor nutrition and psychological

trauma. When life is lost, human capital is lost; families are destroyed and with them, social networks, social capital and extended families, the principal mechanism of insurance in poor communities. Households become poorer and less able to generate income. At the same time, while war has found to diminish social and institutional strength in Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia at the micro-level, there is also evidence that war and violence can have unexpectedly positive social and political effects after it ends. A growing empirical literature suggests that war-related violence is highly correlated with greater levels of social capital and higher levels of peaceful political engagement afterwards (Blattman 2010).

Since social norms define gender roles, men and women can experience war differently, or in a 'gendered' way (Lindsey 2001). Although men appear to be more directly impacted by war because combatants are predominantly male (Plümper and Neumayer 2006; ESCWA 2007), women and children tend to become the long-term victims of a civil war because the indirect effects of war often far outweigh its direct impacts (Ormhaug et. al. 2009). In fact, while the theoretical literature on women's labour supply offers rich insights about the factors that push and pull women into the labour market, it is generally agreed that conflict can drive women's labour force participation as economic distress forces women into work that is often precarious, and generally consisting of self-employment and unpaid family work (Iyer and Santos, 2012).

In terms of employment outcomes, though, an armed conflict changes women's labour market prospects in myriad different ways. First, it intensifies women's burden of unpaid work, especially their work in providing care. In turn, playing the role of caregiver constrains mobility during conflict and endangers women, while damage to infrastructure renders household activities much more laborious and time consuming (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Dislocation and displacement following an armed conflict destroys all types of assets necessary for income generation, the formation of skills and human capital due to disrupted schooling, equipment, arable land, productive trees, livestock and equipment. Less obviously, but more damagingly for livelihood activities, dislocation and displacement destroys social capital and disrupts social networks (El Jack 2003). In fact, traditional gender inequalities in terms of access to resources, information or basic services, and income are likely to be compounded by displacement (Birkeland 2009). Even where women benefit from displacement – in the form of training and development programmes in health, education and income-generating activities – such benefits do not necessarily help create more equitable gender relationships (El Jack 2003).

However, conflict may also help challenge traditional gender roles, and force women's labour force participation and economic empowerment. Changes and transformations brought on by an armed conflict can leave women as the sole providers for their families, forcing them to take up non-traditional roles such as earning income, making household decisions and controlling assets (UNDP 2001; ESCWA, 2007). As primary

breadwinners, women can take to entrepreneurship in the informal sector, exploiting opportunities often created by the conflict such as selling supplies to the rebels or providing food to the displaced (Hudock, Sherman, and Williamson 2016). Since armed conflict makes it dangerous for people to engage in traditional income-generating activities such as agriculture in the open, such opportunities for informal livelihood activities can enable survival in labour markets stressed by conflict (Petesche 2011). For example, a study of six conflict-affected countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda – showed that most women worked in the informal sector selling cooked food, vegetables, fruit and household items (Kumar 2001). In fact, women’s informal employment in these countries increased in the post-conflict transition period as the informal sector, with little need for heavy investment, continued to provide livelihood opportunities. In contrast, the formal sector needing larger investments, resuscitated only after political stability was restored (Kumar, 2001; Bouta and Frerks 2002). A study of the impact of the 1996–2001 civil conflict in Nepal showed that women’s likelihood of employment was strongly and positively related to the conflict while an economic shock such as the loss of job for a man in the household had no impact on a woman’s employment decision (Menon and Van der Meulen Rodgers 2015). Somalian women who were treated as second-class citizens before the socio-political upheaval of 1991 made significant progress in social, political and economic spheres since then, against the backdrop of the civil conflict (Ingiriis and Hoehne 2013).

Although armed conflicts have been found to change gender roles, the question remains whether (a) such changes tend to persist in the long term and (b) if these roles actually amount to an expansion of women's agency. The cessation of an armed conflict can introduce a new layer of challenges to women. Men returning from war may in fact be 'shocked' by women's empowerment and changed power relations (Handrahan 2004). They may harbour a grudge against their wives, leading to the use of violence to reassert their dominance (Calderón, Gáfaró, and Ibáñez 2011). After the conflict, the women's heroic efforts at keeping the household together during war may be undervalued since she was not a combatant (Handrahan 2004). On the other hand, if male heads of households are found to be killed or disabled at the end of the war, women are left burdened with the household financing responsibilities precisely when income-generating opportunities related to the conflict have declined (Hudock, Sherman, and Williamson 2016).

There is some encouraging evidence of the positive impacts of livelihood interventions in a post-conflict environment. For example, Blattman et al. (2016) found that a package of US\$150 cash, five days of business skills training, and ongoing supervision targeting extremely poor, war-affected women in northern Uganda had high returns. A little more than a year after grants, participants doubled their microenterprise ownership and incomes, mainly from petty trading. And while the ultra-poor women had very little social capital, group bonds, informal insurance and cooperative activities could be encouraged and gave rise to positive returns. Supervision of how the participants

spent their cash grant increased business survival into the second year.

### *The Sri Lankan literature*

#### *Women's participation in the labour force*

Roughly 8.8 million Sri Lankans 15 years of age and more are either currently employed or are looking for work. Of them, 65 per cent is male and 35 per cent per cent is female (Department of Census and Statistics 2015). Women's participation rates have been consistently half that of male participation rates. A decline in the unemployment rate and a rise in the employment-population ratio appear to underlie the stability in participation. Thus, while a reasonable rate of economic growth (5.12 per cent annually since liberalization in 1977 according to World Bank data) and better education (women have more years of education than men according to the World Bank's STEP 2012 data, see Gunewardena 2015), may have succeeded in reducing the numbers of the unemployed, neither has been able to draw more women into the labour force. Meanwhile, low rates of workforce participation and parliamentary representation have negated Sri Lanka's achievements in health and education in the country's Gender Inequality Index (UNDP Sri Lanka 2012).

Recent analyses of female labour force participation at national level have identified underlying factors such as unpaid care and household work mediated by social norms, skills deficits and unfavourable demand conditions including discrimination

(Gunatilaka 2013, 2016; Solotaroff et al. 2017). For example, econometric analysis of data from HIES 2009/10 data has shown that the most important contributors to the probability of married women's participation appear to be spatial variables, demographic characteristics and education characteristics (Gunatilaka 2013). These factors accounted for 68 per cent of the probability of participation. Local labour market characteristics account for 15 per cent, and household characteristics for 10 per cent. In contrast, demographic characteristics, particularly Islamic Moor ethnicity, and disability, account for half the probability of single women participating in the labour market. Education accounted for 24 per cent and household characteristics another 11 per cent of individuals belonging to this group engaging in market work. Among female heads of households, the most important contributors to the probability of participation were variables related to wages and household income, as well as demographic variables. Spatial variables (16 per cent) and household characteristics (11 per cent) were found to be somewhat less important (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, the World Bank (2015) in its Systematic Country Diagnostic has drawn attention to the need to increase women's labour force participation rates to ensure social inclusion for shared prosperity and poverty reduction. Based on an analysis of national labour force survey (LFS) data from 2003 to 2012, the report notes that participation rates declined for those with only primary education or less, relative to those with at least university education. Among constraining factors, it suggests that marriage and childcare, social norms about women's roles and culturally appropriate employment, gender wage gaps and

occupational segregation, as well as discrimination in hiring practices (though hard to prove) are holding back women's engagement in market work. A more recent study using data from a time use survey of married women in Western Sri Lanka found that education beyond secondary level, lower levels of household consumption, husband being a blue-collar rather than a manual worker, and residence on estates, were associated with an enhanced probability of women's labour market participation (Gunatilaka 2016). The study also found that husbands' and wives' perceptions of gender roles and time spent on household chores and care work were significant predictors of whether wives engaged in market work.

### *Women's employment outcomes in Sri Lanka*

Sri Lankan women who do decide to participate in the workforce, however, face a host of other problems. First, employment opportunities for women are concentrated only in four out of ten industrial sectors. The proportion of employed women in agriculture exceeds that of men, possibly because as men take up better jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors, women get the farming jobs that men have left. In contrast, the proportion of women in manufacturing exceeds that of men, as Sri Lanka's industrialization process has been based on the feminization of export manufacturing. Trade, restaurants and hotels have the fourth highest concentration of women workers, but men's employment concentration levels in these sectors are higher. There are also proportionately fewer women in the

growing construction, transport and communication sectors (Gunatilaka 2013).

Second, the gender wage gap where women are on average paid less than men even when they share the same productive characteristics has been highlighted in several previous studies (see Gunatilaka (2008) using LFS 2006, Gunewardena (2010) using LFS 1996-2004). In fact, Gunewardena's (2010) decompositions of the gender wage gap showed that women are underpaid in all sectors and for all ethnic groups, even when unconditional wage gaps favour women. More recently, Gunewardena (2015) used the World Bank's STEP 2012 data to show that Sri Lankan women have higher measured cognitive skills than men, that they possess non-cognitive skills that the market values almost as much as men do and that they are just as extraverted (i.e. concerned with the social and physical environment), open, agreeable, good at decision-making and risk-taking as men are. Even so, women earn more only for their openness. If women have high decision-making ability, they actually get paid less. In contrast, men are rewarded for all these qualities as well as for being neurotic and for displaying hostile attribution bias. Given these findings, Gunewardena (2015) argued that skills acquisition alone will not eliminate gender gaps in earnings and that affirmative labour market policies are necessary to ensure gender equity.

Many women looking to engage in market work appear to prefer jobs in self-employment, or even in the family business, rather than in the private sector (Gunatilaka 2016). But many such

businesses do not seem to be viable. In a study of the effect of ‘treatment’ grants on male- and female-owned enterprises in three tsunami-affected districts in Sri Lanka, de Mel et al (2007) found that returns to capital were zero among female-owned microenterprises but in excess of 9 per cent per month for male-owned enterprises. They also found that large returns for males showed that, on average, male-owned enterprises were more likely to generate the return on investment necessary to repay microloans. Differences in ‘treatment’ effects by gender did not appear to be due to differences in access to capital, differences in ability, differences in risk aversion, or due to females taking the grants out of the business and spending them on household investments. Differences in type of industry accounted for some of the difference but the rest remained unexplained.

In a more recent study of business training, female enterprise start up and growth in greater Colombo and greater Kandy, Sri Lanka, de Mel et al. (2014) suggested that providing training plus a grant to potential female business owners was found to speed up the process of starting a more profitable business. But this entry effect was found to dissipate after 16 months after training. So, “getting women to start subsistence businesses is easier than getting these businesses to grow” and the authors point out that “the binding constraints on growth may lie outside the realm of capital and skills” (de Mel et al. 2014, p. 207). Brudevold-Newman et al. (2017) in their evaluation of a multifaceted franchise programme which provided poor young women in Nairobi with business and life skills training, vocational training, business-specific capital and supply chain

linkages, and ongoing mentoring, agreed. They found that while both the cash grant and the franchise programme increased the likelihood of self-employment among participants and had significant impacts on increasing incomes a year after, these impacts did not persist into the second year. The authors concluded that credit constraints were not the main obstacle preventing the poor — particularly poor women — from launching and expanding profitable, sustainable businesses. In fact, Andersen and Muriel (2007) found that the entire gender gap in profitability in urban microenterprises in Bolivia seems to derive from the much smaller scale (with less productive capital and fewer employees) of women-owned enterprises than those which men owned. And one of the reasons why women preferred not to grow their enterprise was because the business would then lose some of the features that made a micro-business particularly attractive for women, such as not depending on others, the ability to care for children at the same time, flexible working hours and daily revenues.

Indeed, the difficult environment that Sri Lankan women face in running viable businesses could derive from many factors. Where cultural norms dictate that women are the principal caregivers, their domestic responsibilities make it difficult for them to work outside the home, procuring inputs and technologies, enforcing contracts in the informal economy, transporting inputs and raw materials, and marketing the output. Cultural norms can themselves dictate what sort of business is appropriate for women, and these may be exactly those activities that have the lowest returns.

*The implications of Sri Lanka's armed conflict for women's participation and employment*

The international and Sri Lankan literature on Sri Lanka's conflict is dominated by its political and ethnic dimensions, although several studies have pointed to its economic roots (for example, see Shastri, 1990; Abeyaratne 2004). A couple of early studies attempted to estimate the economic costs of the war at macro level (Arunatilake et al. 2001; Ofstad 2002), but the numbers of lives lost and people displaced in the North and the East as well as other parts of the country during the course of the conflict are uncertain and may never be known. Other studies used mainly qualitative methods of data collection and analyses to focus on conflict-related socio-economic experiences of specific groups. For example, Silva (2003) looked at the impact of armed conflict and displacement on poverty among selected displaced populations, while Korf (2004) used the Dfid's revised sustainable rural livelihoods framework to demonstrate the importance of social and political assets in enabling individuals, households and economic agents in villages in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province to stabilize, and in some cases expand, their livelihood options and opportunities. Amirthalingam and Lakshman (2009a) looked at how displacement impacted agricultural livelihoods and raised poverty levels in the Eastern Province. More recently, Kulatunga and Lakshman (2013) studied the impact of the conflict on livelihood strategies, protection strategies, and the relationship between them, of Sinhalese and Muslims in some villages which bordered the direct conflict zone of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The gendered socio-economic impacts of the conflict have also received some attention. Ruwanpura and Humphries (2003) looked at female headship of households across ethnic communities in the context of conflict in the Eastern Province. The authors argued that while the conflict may have increased their number, women-headed households were poor even before the war began. Their reliance on their children for labour is likely to have had negative impacts on the children's schooling and future earning capacity. These women were also heavily dependent on support networks of relatives and community and financial support from male relatives outside the immediate family was much less important than the women's own efforts and the contributions of their children. Amirthalingam and Lakshman (2009b) investigated how women leveraged assets that they held, mainly jewellery, to survive the economic consequences of displacement brought about by both the war and the tsunami. In another study of gendered differences in the holding of assets after the war ended in the Eastern Province, Kulatunga (2017) found considerable differences between female-headed and male-headed households. She attributed these differences to ethnic differences, differences in the age of household head and gender of children, as well as to differences in access to public resources, labour markets and locational factors. In fact, Bandarage (2010) observed that even though women's traditional gender roles eroded and new economic responsibilities were thrust upon them as a result of displacement, this was not accompanied by opportunities for long-term empowerment.

Undoubtedly, nearly thirty years of military conflict have further complicated women's labour market prospects in Sri Lanka's north. Kulatunga (2014) used data from a sample of 144 households in the Trincomalee District after the war to suggest that while economic backwardness and gender-based marginalization are important in explaining gender-based differences in patterns of income generation, some of the differences can be attributed to cultural, religious and social attributes. The conflict may have also compounded institutional disadvantages that Sri Lankan women face in accessing resources. For example, the Land Development Ordinance (LDO) of 1935, though commended for facilitating the allocation of rural lands for settlement and expansion to the poor and landless, has contributed to women's unequal access to land. This is because the inheritance schedules of the LDO stipulates that if the person allotted with the land dies without making a will, only the eldest son could inherit the land holding (Alailima 2000). Similarly, the customary law of *Thesawalamai* that applies to those born in Sri Lanka's Northern Province allows women to own land, but not to exercise command over it. It has been argued that socio-cultural factors such as the as well as sub-nationalist agendas may play a more dominant role than any corporate (e.g. gender discrimination against women in business) or state-inflicted barriers (e.g. presence of military in the North) in impeding women's economic empowerment (Sarvanathan 2015; Sarvanathan et al. 2017). For example, Sarvanathan et al. (2017) argue that the objections of women's rights activists in the North and elsewhere including in the Tamil Diaspora, to Tamil women's recruitment into Sri Lanka's

national armed forces, are driven by covert sub-nationalist agendas that conflict with the desirability of women pursuing such non-traditional forms of employment. They also points out that since 90 per cent of Tamil women recruited by the army have remained with it even four years after being first recruited, it is apparent that for these women at least, employment in the military has remained an attractive job option.

Interventions targeted at improving women's capacities to earn a living also appear to have suffered from gender biases. For example, the application of the 'head of the household' concept, often understood as the male member of the family has resulted in discrimination against women in issues related to property and land ownership especially in the allocation of new lands in the conflict-affected region for settlement after the war (Rai 2014). Godamunne (2015) records an incident where a woman from Jaffna was denied a loan to buy fishing equipment from the government's main livelihoods development programme because officials regarded fisheries to be a man's occupation, not a woman's. There is also some evidence that women who survived the conflict and experienced its trauma were removed from the planning process of the rebuilding process (Wanasundera 2006). Meanwhile, livelihood intervention programmes and projects that focused exclusively on war widows and female-headed households lost track of many other categories of women in need (Wanasundera 2006). On the other hand the experience of other countries shows that when post-conflict reconstruction programmes focus only on training and employing men who have returned from war, it displaces women from the labour

market (Zuckerman, Dennis, and Greenberg 2007). Kulatunga (2013) investigated whether livelihood interventions and assistance implemented by government, donors and others after the war were successful in achieving their objectives among 120 households from Trincomalee district in the Eastern Province. She found that women's conflict-driven vulnerabilities and post-conflict responses were not adequately addressed by both the market and by policy makers with the result that the women remained economically vulnerable despite the interventions.

In Sri Lanka as in other conflict-affected countries, it is likely that unless a conflict transforms gender norms entrenched in a society, the conflict itself rarely brings about sustainable changes in women's overall agency. In the next section we set out the conceptual framework used in our study of women's individual labour market outcomes in a post-conflict environment.

#### **1.4 Conceptual framework**

In developing countries, households make their labour supply decisions by weighing both productivity and risks in their livelihood strategies, with diversification of livelihoods the norm in environments vulnerable to uncertainties (Stifel 2008). In most poor countries, the climatic shocks and attendant crop and price risks force diversification in households' labour supply decisions as the lack of well-functioning land and capital markets preclude the mitigation of risk through land and financial asset diversification (Barrett, et al., 2001; Bhaumik, et al., 2006). This is particularly true of communities that have endured decades of

conflict. Conflict depresses productivity by destroying capital and assets while it lasts, and even after it ends, risks associated with livelihoods remain high because of weak financial and land markets and the erosion of trust on which trading and social networks typically rely. In such a context, “the ability to take up particular activities will distinguish the better off household from the household that is merely getting by” (Dercon and Krishnan 1996 as cited in Stifel 2008).

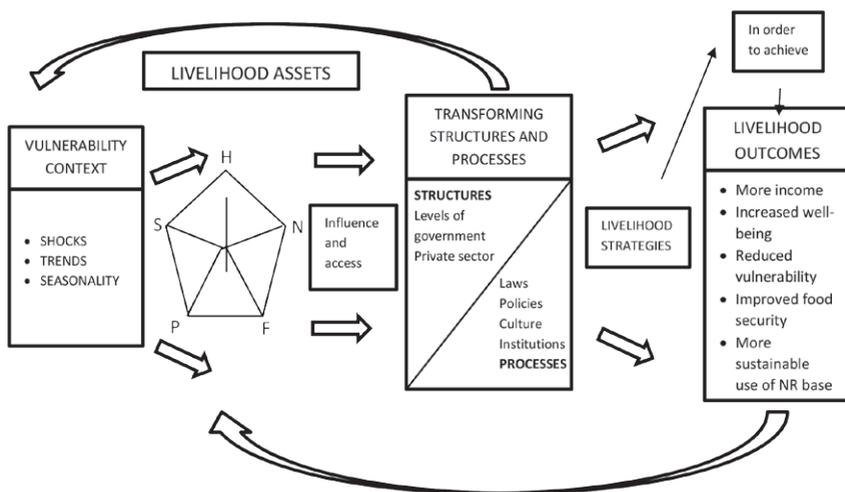
This study uses the conceptual framework of DfiD’s (1999) Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to analyse women’s labour market outcomes and livelihood strategies (Figure 1.1).

The framework is particularly appropriate for this study as it can be easily adapted to represent the conditioning factors that underlie labour market outcomes and diversification strategies in a post-conflict socio-economic environment. It has also been used before by other analysts in their studies of the impact of Sri Lanka’s war on livelihoods (for example see Korf, 2004, and Kulatunga and Lakshman, 2013). And, as Collinson (2003) argues, it provides a ‘comparatively safe way of investigating sensitive issues in insecure environments’ (p. 4), even though it cannot be used to capture the effect of power and politics on livelihoods (Baumann 2000; de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). Nevertheless, its vulnerability context is flexible enough to accommodate the war-related experiences of individuals and families such as displacement, death and disappearance of family members, disruption to education and loss of employment, which are likely to have influenced women’s labour

market outcomes and households' livelihood strategies in Sri Lanka's Northern Province after the war.

Furthermore, this aspect of the institutional environment is particularly important in a post-war situation, as households that have lost assets during the war would require more support from the institutional environment to rebuild livelihoods.

*Figure 1.1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework*



Source: DfID (1999)

Further, as a strength-based approach that looks at how things should happen instead of what should happen (Mazibuko 2013), the SLA takes a bottom up approach to livelihoods, and looks at how things should happen based on the assets people have (ibid). Therefore, the asset pentagon, a critical component of the SLA, can be thought of as the starting point of an investigation into individuals' labour market outcomes and household's livelihood choices. Accordingly, this research looks in detail at the portfolio of households' and individuals' assets and investigates the extent to which assets condition these outcomes.

Thus, we are able to look at the role of human capital of individuals in terms of education and health, as well as the physical and financial assets of households, in mediating labour market outcomes. This is particularly important in a post-war conflict situation where the demographic structure of the household may have changed because death and disability in the family have transformed women into heads of households. The study also assesses how social networks and capital mediate the probability of different labour market outcomes.

The structure and processes component in the SLA framework informs this study's assessment of a range of institutions – local government, provincial government, the decentralized administration, financial institutions, as well as the armed forces and the police – in supporting the resuscitation of livelihoods in a post-conflict environment. This aspect of the institutional environment is particularly important in a post-war situation as households that have lost assets during the war would require

more support from the institutional environment to rebuild livelihoods.

The main focus of post-conflict efforts at resuscitating growth and employment has been on interventions targeted at rebuilding livelihoods after the conflict. In fact, livelihood interventions that have been implemented by government, NGOs and donors in the North after the conflict are a critical component of the institutional environment. A key research question addressed is the extent to which livelihood interventions are positively associated with individuals' labour market outcomes and households' livelihood strategies and to do this, we examine whether different types of interventions, from simple cash handouts to business loans, have been associated with women's self-employment outcomes.

## **2. Data and Overview**

### **2.1 Sample design and data**

Available national sample survey data is limited in terms of both sample size and the information gathered to facilitate analysis targeted at providing answers to the research questions detailed above. For example, while the Department of Census and Statistics' Household Income and Expenditure Survey data covers about 1800 households from the Northern Province, the number of female-headed households covered would have been too small, and that number not representative of the districts, for the purpose of our analysis. Therefore, we conducted a questionnaire-based household survey in the region during the

latter half of 2015 to collect data that could be analysed to answer the specific research questions set out in Section One.

The survey covered 3021 households headed by women and 1004 women in neighbouring households headed by men, in all five districts of the Northern Province. We faced two critical issues in selecting our sample. The first issue related to defining what a woman-headed household was. The second and related issue pertained to finding those thus defined.

Women-headed households have been defined variously as households where there are no males present or households whose members identify a woman as their head. Alternatively, ILO defines female-headed households as being those households where either no adult male is present, owing to divorce, separation, migration, non-marriage, or widowhood; or where the men, although present, do not contribute to the household income, because of illness or disability, old age, alcoholism or similar incapacity (but not because of unemployment) (ILO 2007).

However, to select a sample of women defined in any of these ways, one would first need to conduct a complete listing of households and obtain the information necessary to define them in any of these ways, before selecting the sample and conducting the survey proper. As this would have been a costly and time-consuming exercise, we instead randomly selected the sample of women-headed households from the lists of women-headed households available from the Divisional Secretariats in the five districts. While acknowledging that the official basis of

identification may have contained some flaws and that some households may have identified a female member as its head only for the purpose of accessing certain benefits targeted at this group, we were left with little choice but to go with the official definition. The closest male-headed household to every third female-headed household in the sample was selected to make up the sample of women in male-headed household. The respondents in the sample of female heads were thereafter selected for interview only if they were between 20 and 65 years of age and were primarily responsible for managing household affairs. The women in male-headed households were selected as the primary respondents if they were of the same age cohort, and if they were either married to the male head (as was found to be the case with 94 per cent of them), or were female relatives of the male household head (six per cent), and were responsible for managing the household.

Of the entire sample, 57 per cent were from Jaffna district, which accounts for half the population of the Northern Province, according to the Population Census of 2012 (Department of Census and Statistics 2015). The distribution of households among the five districts is presented in Table 2.1 below.

*Table 2.1: Distribution of sample population across districts in the Northern Province*

	% Share of Population in the Northern Province 2012	% Share of sample population	
		Women heading their households	Women in male-headed households
Jaffna	55	57	58
Kilinochchi	11	10	10
Mullaitivu	9	10	10
Vavuniya	16	13	12
Mannar	9	10	10
Total (number)	1,061,315	3,021	1,004

Source: Data on total population by district in the Northern Province is based on the Population Census of 2012 from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015)

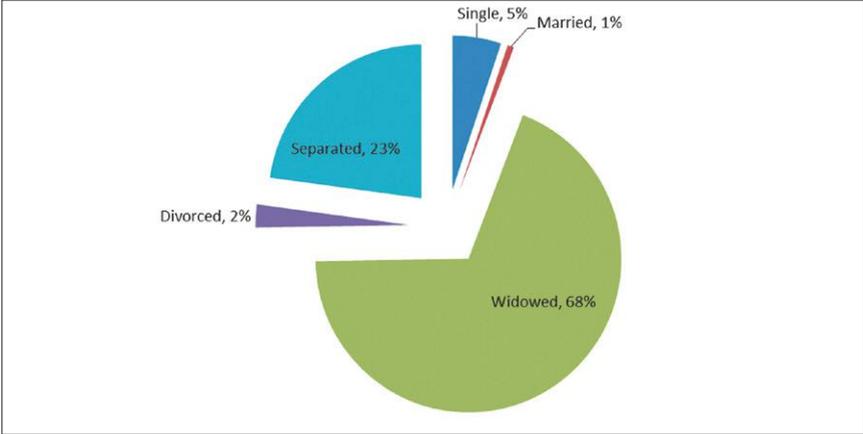
An overwhelming 92 per cent of the sub-samples of female- and male-headed households were of the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic group. Moors accounted for about five per cent of both samples, and Sinhalese for three per cent. In terms of ethnicity too, the sample selected for this survey was in line with the ethnic breakdown of the population of the Northern Province at large, according to the Population Census of 2012.

Of the women heading their households, 68 per cent were widows, 23 per cent had separated, five per cent were single and just one per cent was married (Figure 2.1). Of the sub-sample of female respondents from male-headed households, 93 per cent were the wives of the male heads of those particular households, while the rest were the immediate female relatives of the male

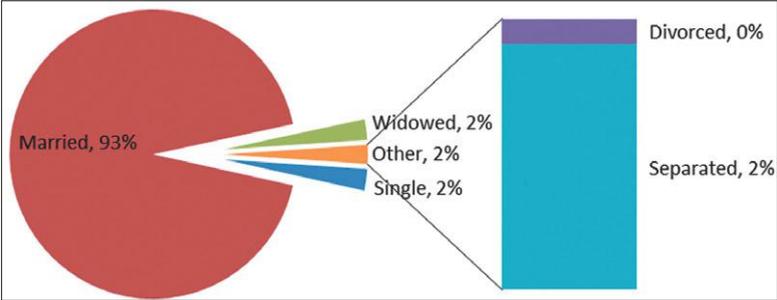
heads who did not have wives (mother, sister, daughter, aunt) and therefore managed the households instead.

*Figure 2.1: Marital status of women heading their households, and of women in male-headed households, Sri Lanka's Northern Province*

*Women heads of households*

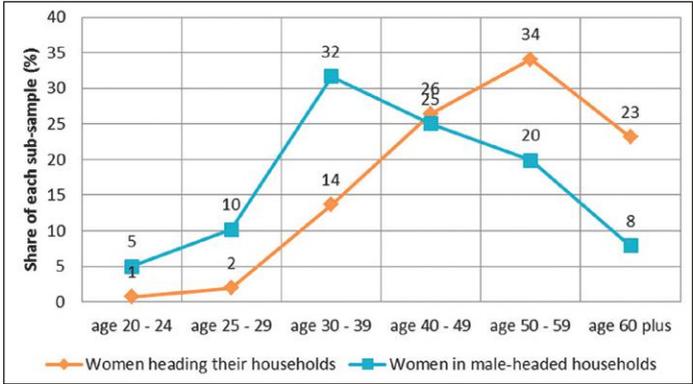


*Women in male-headed households*



Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

*Figure 2.2: Distribution of women heading their households, and women in male-headed households by age cohort, Sri Lanka's Northern Province*



Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

The distribution of the populations of the sub-samples across age groups suggests that female headship of households is associated with being older, as a fifth of all women heading their households are at least 60 years of age, while 60 per cent are between 40 and 60 years of age (Figure 2.2). Their circumstances are likely to have been brought about by widowhood. A little less than a fifth, or 17 per cent, to be precise, of women heading their households are less than forty years of age. The equivalent proportion for women from male-headed households is 47 per cent or nearly a half.

Of the households surveyed, 91 per cent of women heading their households said that they were currently in their original place of

settlement. This is a notably high proportion for an area which had undergone a 30-year old conflict which had ended six years before the survey was conducted. Nine per cent of females heading their households, and 15 per cent of women interviewed in households with male heads, had migrated to the place of residence at which they were interviewed. Of the newcomers to the area, 40 per cent had moved to the area following resettlement after displacement and 11 per cent had moved upon marriage. But there were notable differences in the reasons for in-migration between the two samples. An overwhelming 63 per cent of women heading their households had moved into the location following displacement, whereas the equivalent figure for women in male-headed households was 39 per cent. In contrast, 49 per cent of women in male-headed households had moved there on marriage, whereas marriage was a reason for moving for 17 per cent of women heading their households.

Analytical techniques depended primarily on estimating the probability of labour market outcomes against a series of characteristics identified by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the theoretical and empirical literature, as conditioning such outcomes. The outcomes that are the focus of this analysis are primarily labour force participation and employment outcomes, as well as returns to employment in the form of employees' wages or earnings from self-employment in the agricultural or non-agricultural sectors. The employed are defined as those who were engaged in any income generating economic activity during the previous month. This definition is somewhat broader than the standard ILO definition of employment which uses the previous week as the reference

period.<sup>1</sup> Although this analysis is probably the first to use data from such a large survey of households in northern Sri Lanka for this purpose, it has its limitations. First, since the study is based on a one-off survey, it can only look at associations between outcomes of interests and characteristics that are correlated with those outcomes. It cannot provide any inferences about the causal relationships between characteristics and outcomes as some of the independent variables may be endogenous. Even in terms of the impact of past experiences on current outcomes, we can only infer them through the perceptions of respondents themselves whose recollection of past events may not always be reliable.

Nevertheless, the study and the survey on which it is based can always provide a particularly rich and useful baseline for follow up surveys and so help build a longitudinal panel data set that can seek to establish causal relationships between conditions and outcomes in the future. In fact, this is exactly what Blattman (2010) writing about post-conflict recovery in Africa recommends that researchers do in conflict-affected development country contexts where little pre-conflict data exists.

Second, there are many other barriers to labour force participation, employment outcomes and economic empowerment, which a study of this nature cannot identify and analyse. For example, Pfaffenberger (1994) has drawn attention

---

<sup>1</sup> The definition based on the reference period of a week is the definition that the Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka uses to define employment in its reports based on Labour Force Survey data.

to the role played by caste in intra-ethnic distributional conflict among Tamils in Sri Lanka's north since at least the late 1960s. There is also anecdotal evidence to show that despite relatively equitable access to publicly provided education over several decades, caste continues to present a formidable barrier to the upward economic and social mobility of those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy in northern Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, given ethical considerations as well as the difficulty of addressing issues such as caste identity and its ramifications in a quantitative survey, the only information about the relationship between caste and women's labour market decisions was elicited in the form of perceptions of respondents about the reasons for quitting wage work. This information was insufficient to enable the econometric testing of this factor in the models of women's labour market outcomes estimated in this study.

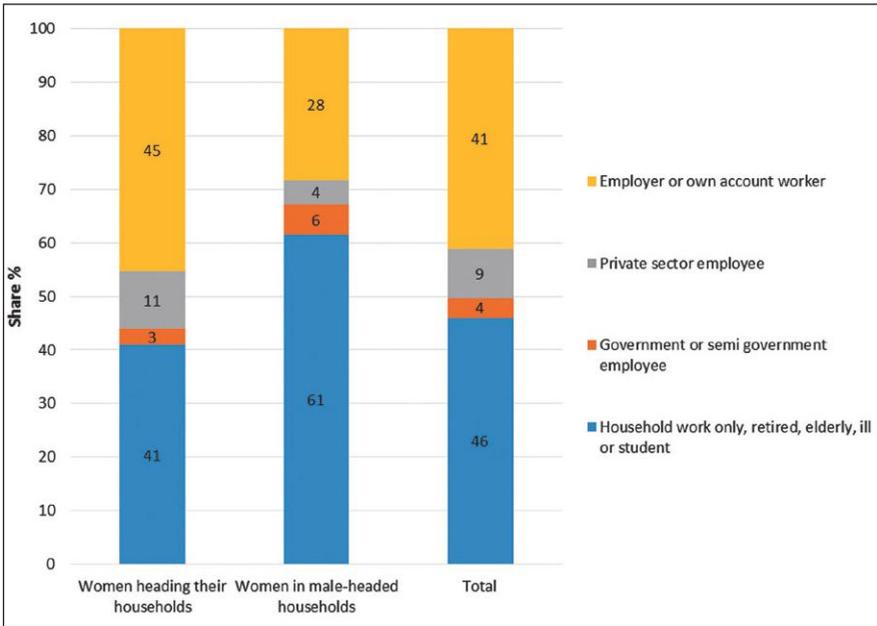
## **2.2 Overview of the data**

In this section we provide a brief overview of the sample in terms of our outcomes of interest and the characteristics of respondents that we think may be associated with them. The descriptive statistics are presented in terms of the components of the SLA framework discussed in section 2.1 above. As this paper is primarily concerned with the labour market outcomes of women and their livelihood strategies, we present this information and associated information on employment and livelihood outcomes first. The later parts of this section provide an overview of the data in terms of possible explanatory variables or characteristics associated with these outcomes.

## *Labour market and livelihood outcomes*

We first present the findings from the survey about the labour market outcomes and livelihood activities that women heading their households are engaged in. As the study also looks at similar outcomes for women in households headed by men for comparison, Figure 2.3 presents the distribution of each sub-sample of women across activities. The employment outcomes denoted in the figure relate to the respondents' main occupations. While the majority in both groups is engaged only in household work, is retired, is ill, or is a student and is therefore not participating in the labour market, the proportion is much higher among women in male-headed households (61 per cent) than among women heading their households (41 per cent). Almost none is a contributing family worker, unlike in the population at large, where seven per cent of women of working age are contributing family workers (Department of Census and Statistics 2015). The only other difference in activity outcomes between women heads of households and women in male-headed households that is of any significance is that proportionately more women heads of households are self-employed or are own account workers (45 per cent) than women in households headed by males (28 per cent). In fact, self-employment is the predominant employment outcome for women who have decided to participate in the labour market, with the private sector providing employment for only about nine per cent of all principal female respondents in the sample of working age. Government jobs engage only three per cent of female heads of households and six per cent of women from households headed by males.

Figure 2.3: Women's main activity outcomes

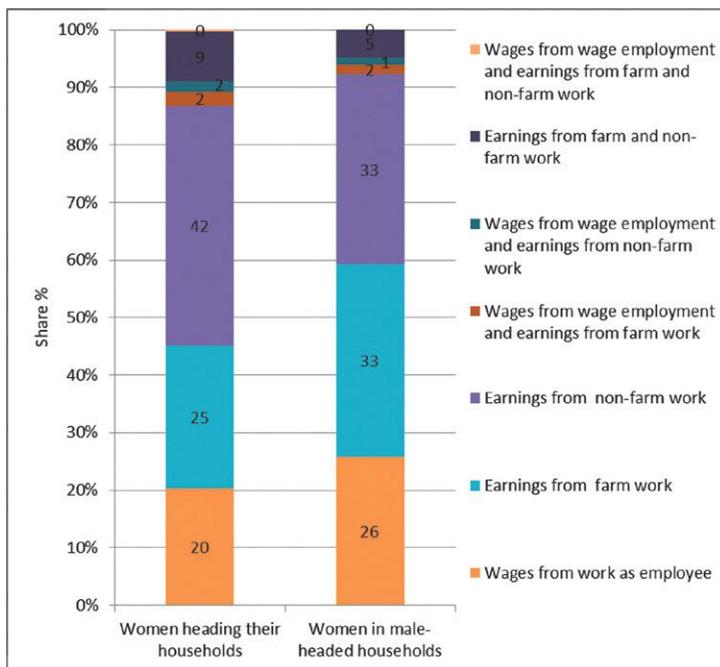


Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

While Figure 2.3 shows the distribution of the sample across economic activities based on respondents' main occupation, Figure 2.4 shows households' livelihood strategies based on the different sources of labour earnings. It should be noted, though, that for contributing family workers we have attributed a proportion of total income from the family enterprise, whether in farming or in manufacturing or services, according to the

share of total family hours the respondents have contributed to the activity. The figure shows that by and large, proportionately more women in male-headed households are working as employees, and in farming. The presence of males in the household able to do the heavy physical work that farming entails probably enables more women in such households to also work in agriculture. In contrast, proportionately more women heading their households are earning income from self-employment in non-farm work. The figure does not, however, show the different activities that women may be engaged in within the mutually exclusive categories depicted in the chart. So, for example, self-employment in non-farm work may involve several activities such as making string hoppers, sewing clothes, and making envelopes. However, the chart does show combinations of activities across the broad categories of wage employment, farm work and non-farm work, and accordingly, it can be seen that 13 per cent of women heading their households, and eight per cent of women in male-headed households appear to be earning income through a mix of wage work, farm work, and non-farm work.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of respondents by type of livelihood strategy

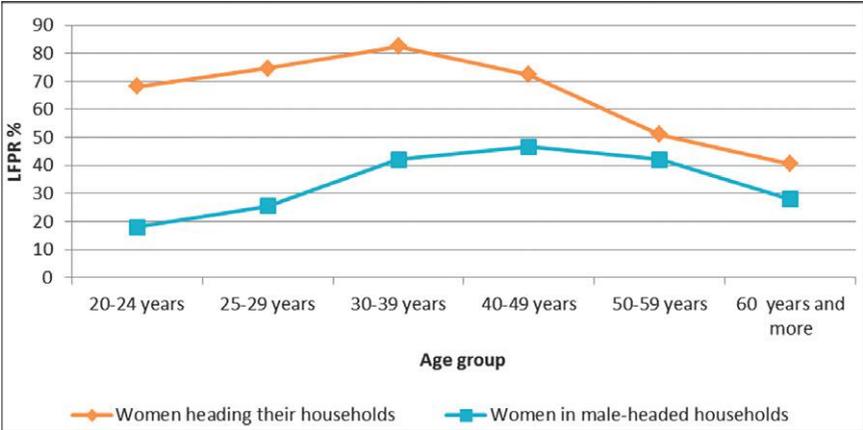


Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

As for engagement in market work, 59 per cent of the sub-sample of women heading their households was participating in the labour market compared to 39 per cent of women in male-headed households. The patterns of participation according to age cohort are distinctly different for the two sub-samples. The data suggests that women heading their households are propelled into the labour market earlier, and that more of them continue to work even into their sixties. Figure 2.5 shows that

labour force participation rates among women heading their households in their early twenties is nearly 70 per cent, peaking to more than 80 per cent in the 30s and declining with further years but to no less than 50 per cent of even the 60 years and more age cohort. In contrast, less than 20 per cent of women in male-headed households in their early twenties are engaged in market work, and the rate peaks at 47 per cent among those of them who are in their forties, and thereafter declines to 28 per cent of the 60 years and older age group.

*Figure 2.5: Labour force participation rates by age cohort*



Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

### *Households' livelihood strategies, income and expenditure*

The extent to which households in our sample have diversified livelihoods is evident in Figure 2.6, which presents the proportion of women-headed households and male-headed households that draw income from different sources in terms of seven mutually exclusive categories. It can be seen that 76 per cent of households headed by women, and 67 per cent of households headed by men, have only one source of labour income, either wage employment, self-employment in farming, or self-employment in non-farming. In contrast, a fourth of households headed by women, and a third of those headed by men, draw income from different sources of labour market activity. Proportionately more male-headed households draw income from wage employment and farm work, whereas proportionately more women-headed households draw income from self-employment in non-farm activities.

However, while Figure 2.7 shows the different sources of labour income that households access, it should be noted that transfers make up a significant proportion of the total income of women-headed households. On average, in such households, transfer payments account for 38 per cent of total household income, whereas transfer payments in male-headed households account only for 15 per cent of total household income. In fact, 604 women-headed households only receive transfer income and no income from labour earnings whatsoever. In contrast only 44 among male-headed households survive only on transfers.

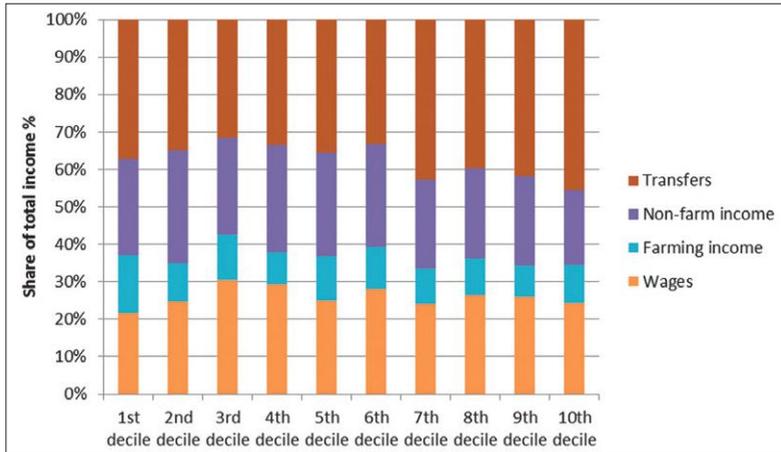
Figure 2.6: Percentage of households by livelihood strategies



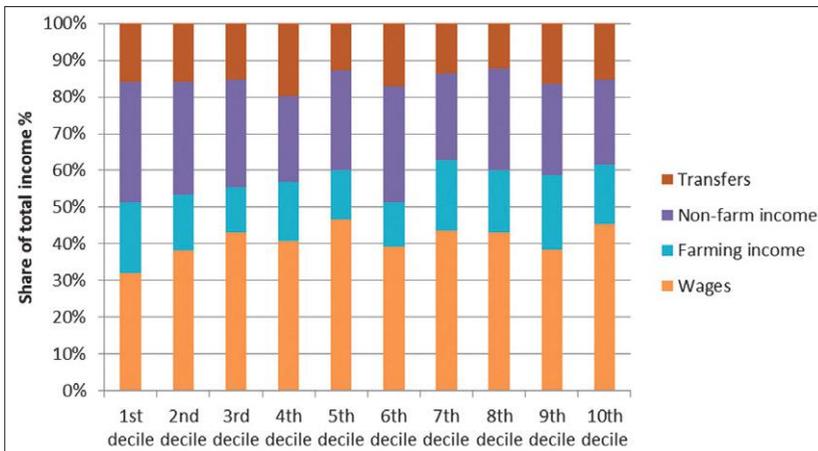
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

Figure 2.7: Composition of household income by source and by decile, women-headed households and male-headed households

*Households headed by women*



*Households headed by men*



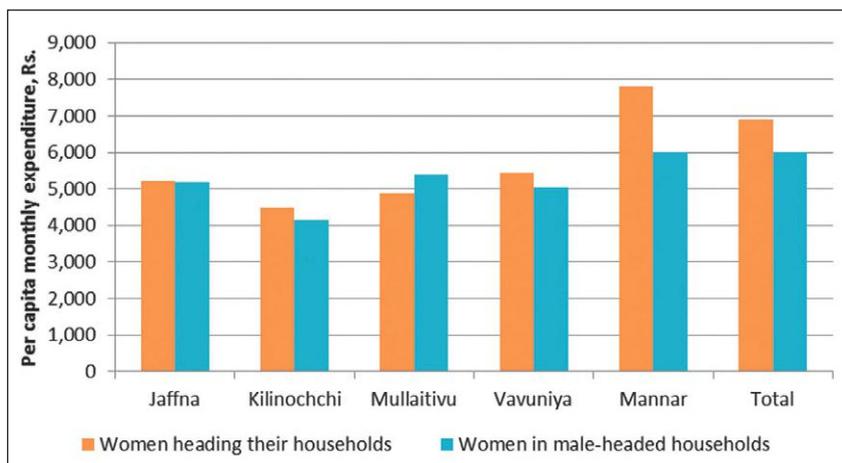
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

Transfer income makes up the highest percentage of total income among women-headed households irrespective of where they rank in terms of per capita household expenditure. Among the poorest of women-headed households, as defined by the lowest ranking in per capita expenditure, transfers make up 37 per cent of total household income, while for the richest of women headed households, this share increases as much as up to 46 per cent. Income from wage employment ranges between 20 and 30 per cent. For women-headed households, farming income never exceeds 15 per cent of total income regardless of household per capita consumption decile, whereas non-farm income accounts for at least 20 per cent of total income.

In male-headed households, the primary contributor to household income is wage income which ranges between 32 per cent and 47 per cent of total income. For female-headed households, the contribution from wages is at most only 30 per cent. On the other hand, although the share of non-farm income towards total income is higher among male-headed households compared to female-headed households, this is the second largest income source for both types of households, but tends to decline as per capita expenditure rises. At the highest decile, the share from non-farm income declines to 20 per cent (from a highest of 30 per cent) in women-headed households. For male-headed households, this contribution drops to 23 per cent from a highest of 33 per cent. For both types of households, however, agricultural income is the smallest contributor, although at lower expenditure levels, the share tends to be greater compared to higher expenditure levels.

The information in Figure 2.9 suggests what may be the underlying factors. Income from wage work appears to have increased for substantial numbers engaged in it, particularly for households headed by males. Nearly half of such households dependent on wage income experienced an increase in income from wage work, whereas the equivalent proportion of households headed by women was 38 per cent. However, for about a third of both types of households, income from wage work declined over the last five years. Almost half of the women-headed households depending on self-employment in farming had experienced a decline in income from this source, whereas 38 per cent of households with male heads also experienced a decline in income from self-employment in farming. Proportionately fewer male-headed households dependent on self-employment in non-farming experienced a decline in income from this activity than equivalent female-headed households. Apart from these notable differences in experience, by and large, a third of households appear to have experienced increases in income from whatever source, for a third, the income has been stable, and for the remaining third, income has declined.

Figure 2.8: Per capita household expenditure by district



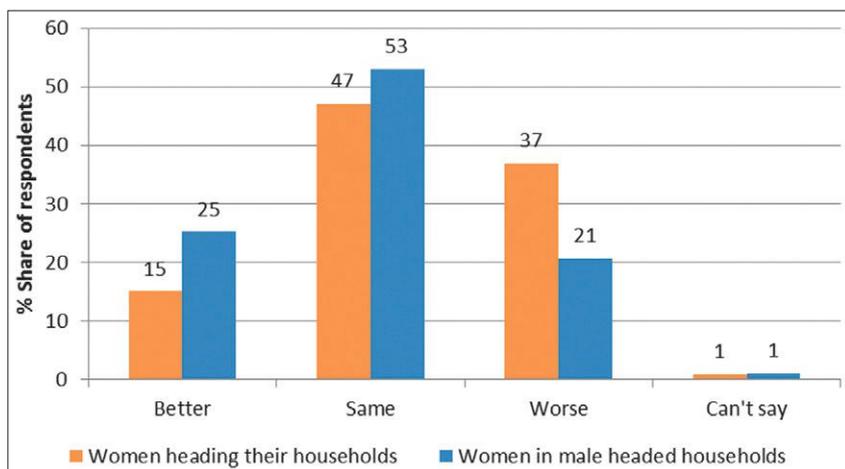
Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

Women-headed households have slightly higher average per capita expenditure than households headed by men across districts other than in Mannar where the differential is much higher (Figure 2.8). Only in Mullaitivu do women-headed households have lower per capita expenditure than households headed by men. Per capita expenditure is lowest for either group in Kilinochchi district.

By and large, the majority of respondents said that they had experienced no change in the household's economic situation since the war ended (Figure 2.9). Proportionately more women in male-headed households (53 per cent) believed that there was no change, compared to women heading their households (47 per cent). However, proportionately more women in male-

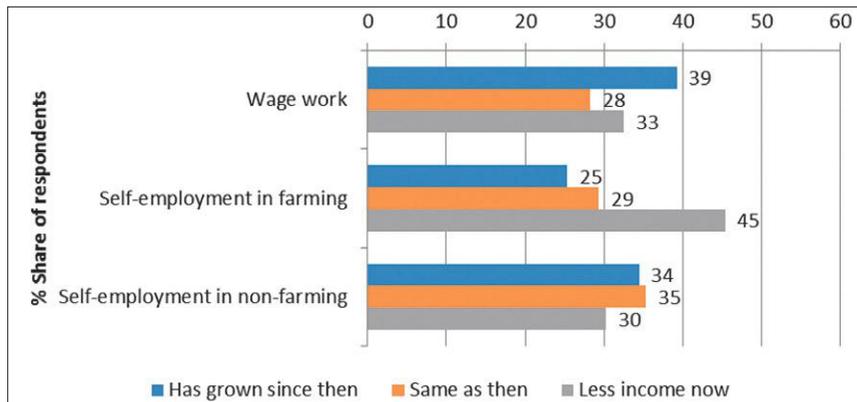
headed households (25 per cent) perceived that the household’s economic situation had improved over the last five years compared to a much lower 15 per cent of women heading their households. Even so, a much larger proportion of women heading their households – that is nearly two fifths – believed that the household’s economic situation had worsened over the reference period compared with only a fifth of women in male-headed households who thought the same.

*Figure 2.9: Perceptions about how total household income has changed compared to the situation five years ago*

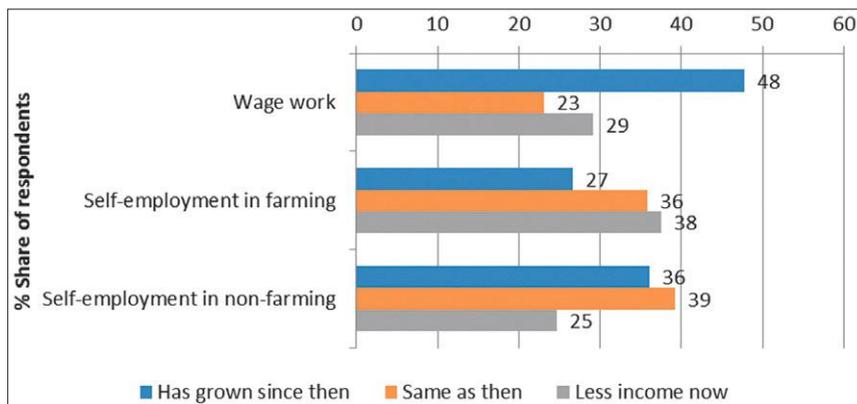


Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

*Figure 2.10 : Perceptions about how income from different sources had changed over the last five years  
Women heads of households*



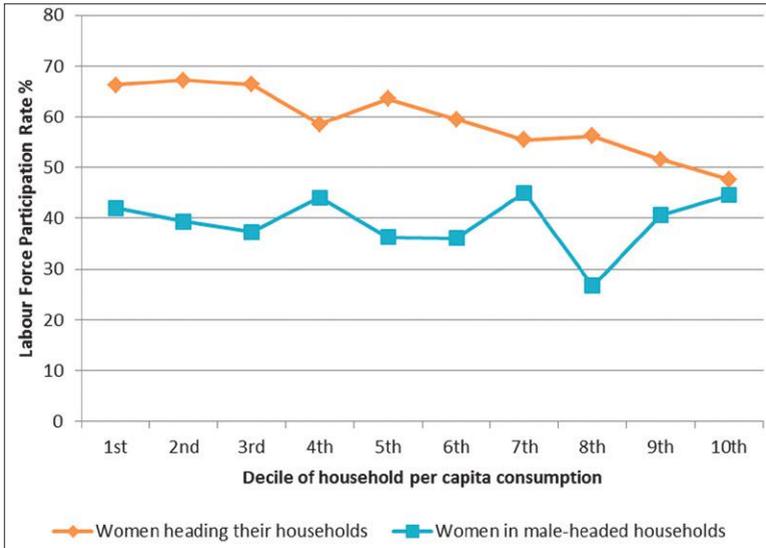
*Women in male-headed households*



Source and notes: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Shares refer to proportions of those for whom the particular source of income is relevant.

Are labour force participation rates of respondents higher in poorer households? Figure 2.11 presents the labour force participation rates of women heading their households and women in male-headed households by decile of per capita household consumption. It is evident that in each consumption decile, a greater proportion of women heading their households are participating in the labour force than of women in male-headed households. Besides, a higher proportion of poorer women heading their households are engaged in paid work than the proportion of poorer women from male-headed households. So even among the poor, women heading their households appear to be compelled to engage in market work in a way that women in male-headed households are not compelled to. In fact, labour force participation rates among women in male-headed households, while being altogether lower, hardly change across the distribution of consumption, from just 42 per cent to 45 per cent. In contrast, among women heading their households, labour force participation rates peak at 66 per cent in the poorest decile, and bottom out to 48 per cent in the richest decile. Clearly, economic distress is a factor driving labour force participation in our sample of women heading their households.

Figure 2.11: Labour force participation rates by decile of per capita household consumption



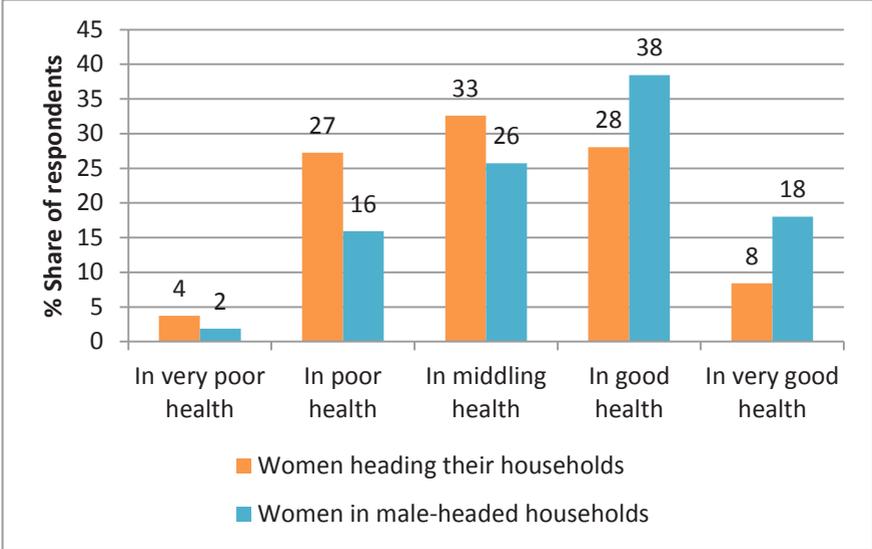
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

### Assets

We begin by assessing the configuration of the asset pentagon of the livelihood framework for the average female respondent by first looking at access to human capital. The first type of human capital we look at is the health of the respondent according to her own assessment. In Figure 2.12 it is immediately apparent that proportionately more women heading their households suffer from ill health. In contrast, proportionately more women from male-headed households are in good health or in very good health (56 per cent compared to only 36 per cent of women

heading their households). One reason for the distinct patterns of health status between the two sub-samples could be that women heading their households tend to be older. On the other hand, they are likely to have experienced more psychological trauma than women in male-headed households. Besides, their unremitting economic struggle to make ends meet without the help of a spouse or partner is likely to give rise to even more stress and associated ill health.

*Figure 2.12: Own perceptions of health status*



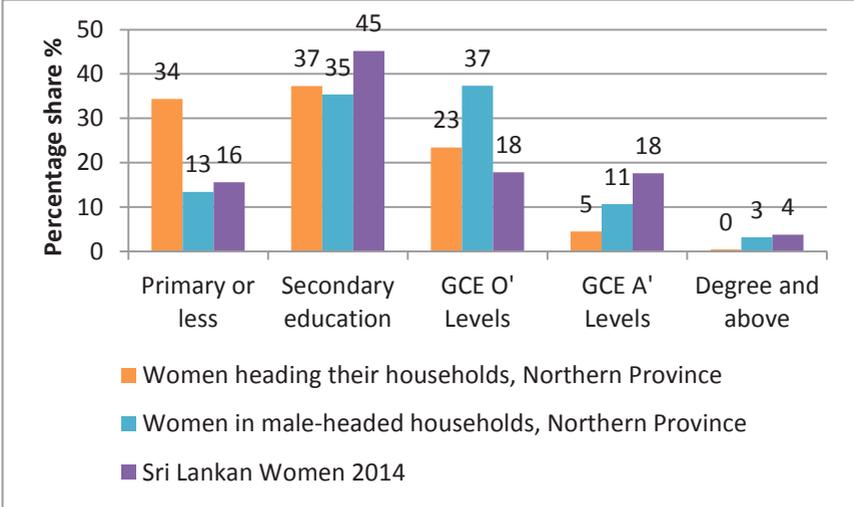
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

The second characteristic indicative of access to human capital that we use is the highest level of education attained by the female respondents. Figure 2.13 presents the distribution of the sub-samples across five different levels of educational attainment, along with equivalent figures for the population of Sri Lankan women at large from national sample survey data. The graph illustrates the fact that access to human capital is in relatively short supply among female heads of households, as there are higher proportions of them in the lower educational attainment categories such as only primary education or less, or only secondary education or less. Clearly, these women tend to be far less equipped than women in male-headed households in terms of access to human capital, to engage in livelihood activities that can yield a decent wage. Of course, this may also reflect the different distributions across age cohorts of the two sub-samples, with women heading their households tending to be older, and therefore perhaps less educated. The educational attainment of the older women could also have been impacted negatively by the long duration of the war. An interesting point to note from the figure is that while 45 per cent of Sri Lankan women have secondary education according to national sample survey data (Department of Census and Statistics 2015a), this share is considerably lower in the two sub-samples of women surveyed for the purpose of this study.

There are two reasons for this. First, while the proportion of women with the lowest levels of education is higher in our sample data than in the Sri Lankan population as a whole as denoted by national sample survey data, it is highest among women heading their households, at 34 per cent of all such

women between 20 and 64 years of age. On the other hand, at least a fourth of the women in our sample have GCE O' Levels, while the proportion among the population at large is 18 per cent only. However, attainment of GCE A' levels is higher among Sri Lankan women as a whole, than among the sub-samples of Northern women surveyed for the purpose of this study.

*Figure 2.13: Educational attainment of women heading their households and women in male-headed households, in the Northern Province (2015) and Sri Lanka (2014)*

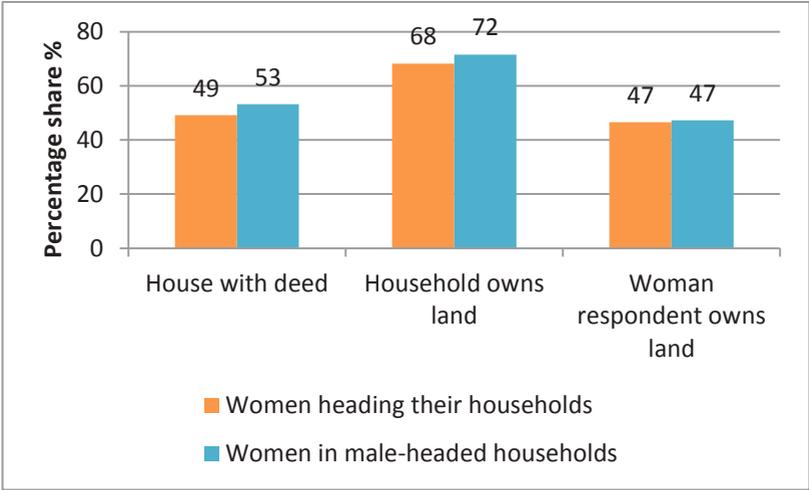


Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015. Data for Sri Lankan women is obtained from the Department of Census and Statistics (2014a), based on Labour Force Survey data 2014.

In this section we use three indicators to proxy access to physical capital. The first is the proportion of households owning a house to which they have the title deed. The second is the proportion of

households owning land. The third is the proportion of female respondents owning land themselves. Access to physical assets as proxied by these three indicators is illustrated graphically in Figure 2.14. There does not appear to be a significant difference in access to physical assets between women heading their households and women in male-headed households. This is in contrast to what Kulatunge (2017) found in Eastern Province. In our sample, at least a half of each subgroup is living in a house owned by the household with a title deed. Slightly more than two thirds are living in households which own land, and nearly half of the women interviewed own land themselves.

*Figure 2.14: Ownership of houses and land in the Northern Province 2015*



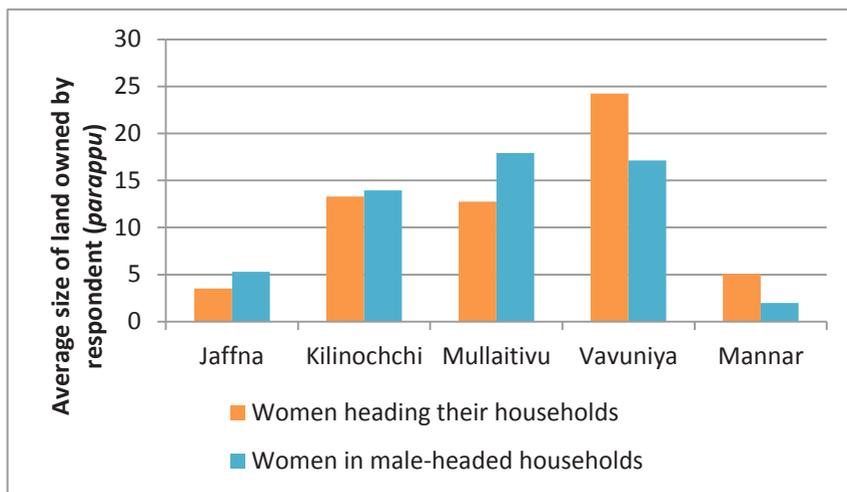
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

Similarly, women heading their households, if they own any land, do not necessarily own smaller holdings than women in male-headed households (Figure 2.15). It can be seen that across districts, the size of landholding is smallest in the highly densely populated district of Jaffna, and largest in the much larger and less densely populated district of Vavuniya. Only in Mullaitivu do women heading their households hold substantially smaller blocks than women in male-headed households in the same district. In Jaffna where the average size of holding is a little less than five *parappu*<sup>2</sup> too, women heading their households and owning land, hold slightly smaller blocks. In contrast, there is hardly any difference in Kilinochchi, while in Vavuniya and Mannar, women heading their households actually hold larger blocks of land. This could even be due to their inheriting the land on the demise of their male relatives or spouses.

---

<sup>2</sup> The unit of measurement for land in the Northern Province is a '*parappu*', which is equivalent to 10 perches.

Figure 2.15: Average size of landholding held by respondent by district, 2015

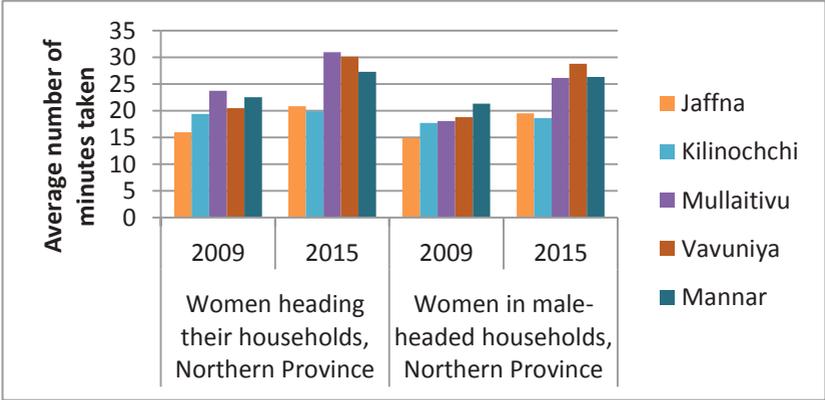


Source and notes: Source Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015. The unit of measurement for land in Northern Province is a ‘*parappu*’, and is equivalent to 10 perches. All references to the extent of land in this paper are in terms of *parappu*.

Connectivity to markets can be regarded as another aspect of access to physical capital as the infrastructure one has access to in the location of residence is a key determinant of connectivity. In terms of connectivity, then, on average it took between 20 minutes and half an hour to get to market in 2015 for both sub-groups of women respondents, and in fact, there is little significant difference in the time taken by either group to go to the market. Connectivity is best in Jaffna district, and worst in Mullaitivu and Mannar districts. However, Figure 2.16 shows that despite the heavy and visible investment in road

development and reconstruction since the end of the war, the time taken to go to market has actually increased by about five minutes for all in the sample, other than for the residents of Kilinochchi. It is possible that with better roads and higher levels of economic activity, traffic congestion also increased after the war, requiring that people spend a little more time getting to markets than they did earlier. On the other hand, transport services may not have stepped up to the improvement in road infrastructure.

*Figure 2.16: Average number of minutes taken to go to the nearest market in northern districts 2009 and 2015*



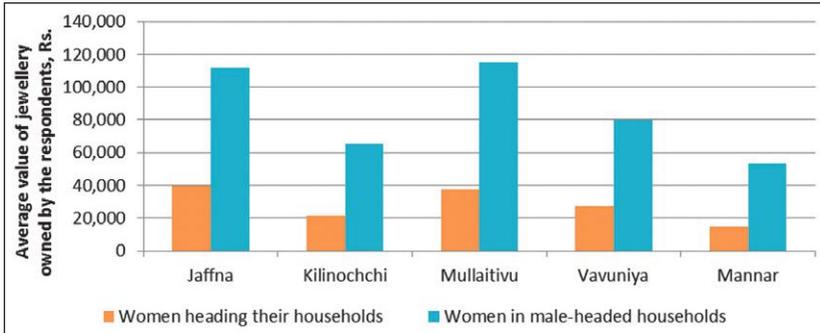
Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

If the ownership of jewellery is regarded as a proxy for financial capital, considering that jewellery can be easily pawned and transformed into financial capital, then women heading their

households have significantly less access to financial capital than women in households headed by men. For example, while 58 per cent of women heading their households owned jewellery that they could pawn in an emergency, the average value of finances that pawning could raise was Rs. 35, 325. In contrast, 73 per cent of women in male-headed households owned jewellery that they could pawn, and on average, their jewellery could raise Rs. 93, 992.

Thus, women from male-headed households owned jewellery that was at least three times as valuable as the average amount of jewellery held by women heading their households. It is possible that some or many women heading their households may have owned more jewellery earlier, but were forced to sell or were not able to redeem their pawned jewellery due to economic distress. Figure 2.17 sets out the average amount in rupees that could be raised if the jewellery that was owned were to be pawned. It can be seen that while proportionately more women heads of households in Jaffna and Vavuniya had jewellery that they could pawn, women in Mannar had the least. In terms of average value that could be raised with the jewellery, while women in male-headed households had the most, those in Mullaitivu could pawn and raise the most.

*Figure 2.17: Average value of jewellery owned by respondents in the districts of the Northern Province (Rs.)*



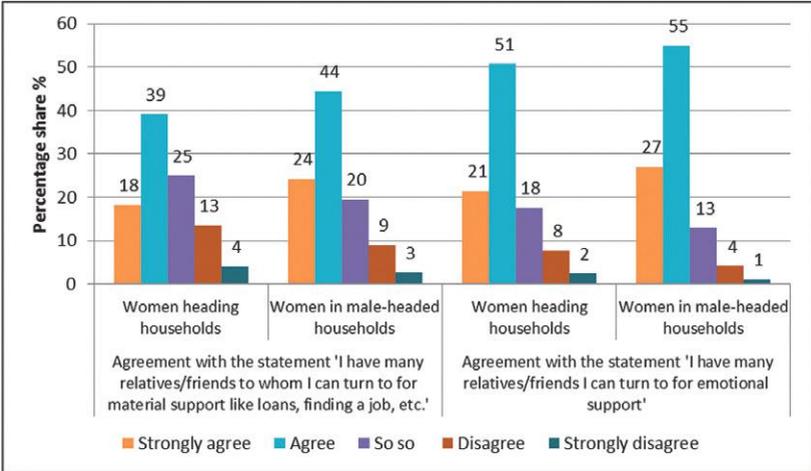
Source and notes: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015. Figures in parentheses denote the percentage of women heading their households in each district who owned any jewellery that could be pawned.

We use access to material and emotional support from friends and relatives as proxy for social capital. Accordingly, Figure 2.18 shows that by and large, emotional support from relatives and friends is easier to come by than material support for women heading their households as well as for women in male-headed households. However, in both cases, proportionately more women in male-headed households appear to have access to both types of support.

The figure also shows that 72 per cent of women heading their households, and 82 per cent of women in male-headed households agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that

they had many relatives or friends they could turn to for emotional support. Relatively few disagreed (ten per cent of women heading their households and five per cent of women in male-headed households). In contrast, 57 per cent of women heading their households, and 68 per cent of women in male-headed households agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they had many relatives or friends they could turn to for material support. Relatively more disagreed with this statement than with the statement about having access to emotional support (17 per cent of women heading their households and 12 per cent of women in male-headed households).

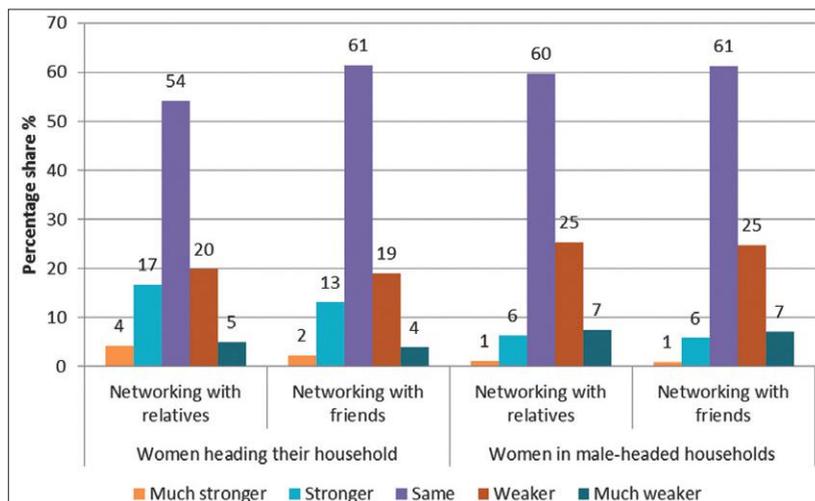
*Figure 2.18: Access to friends and relatives who can provide material as well as emotional support (%)*



Source: Survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

How had the respondents' access to social networks changed since they first began managing their households? Figure 2.19 shows that by and large, the majority of respondents had not experienced much change in their networks, although proportionately more women heading their households felt that their bonds with relatives and friends were stronger than before, compared to women in households headed by men. Similarly, relatively smaller proportions of women heading their households believed that bonds with relatives and friends were weaker now, than the proportions of women in male-headed households. This information suggests that women heading their households may have needed to invest heavily in social networks of friends and relatives because they found themselves in vulnerable circumstances and that as a result, more of them seem to have stronger networks than women in male-headed households. On the other hand, the predicament that these women faced when first forced to act as heads of households may have encouraged their friends and relatives to come to their aid, thereby renewing and strengthening relationships.

*Figure 2.19 : Change in network of friends and relations since the respondent first started managing a household*



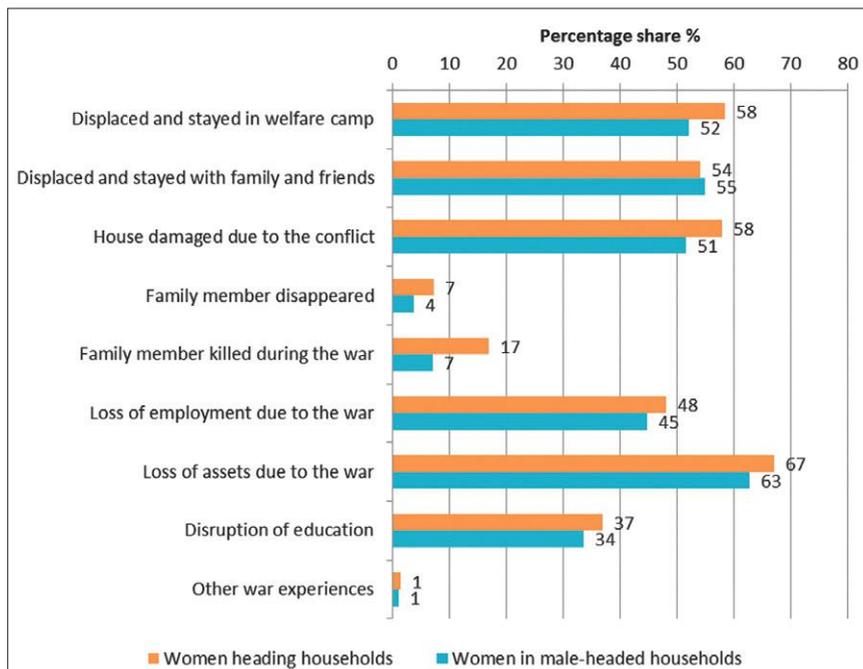
Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

### *Vulnerability context mediated by war-related shocks*

Given the particular post-conflict environment in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, the vulnerability context in which women operationalize their livelihood strategies is likely to be strongly mediated by the different ways in which they experienced the conflict. The survey collected information about nine experiences that respondents said that either they or members of their family underwent as a result of the conflict. Summary statistics are presented in Figure 2.20 below.

The data suggests that proportionately more women heading their households experienced every one of the war-related shocks enumerated than did women in male-headed households. The war-related shock that was most widely experienced was the loss of assets with nearly two thirds of the sample being affected. Family members' education was disrupted in nearly half the sample of households as a result of the war. Taken together, the loss of assets and the inability to enhance human capital is likely to have negatively affected the livelihood strategies of many women in the sample according to the SLA framework. The data also shows that at least half the sample was displaced during the war and had to stay in a welfare camp or with relatives or friends. Again, proportionately more women heading their households experienced this shock, compared to women from male-headed households. Proportionately more women heading their households suffered the loss of a family member due to death or disappearance as the result of the war and this is to be expected, as many of these women who had undergone these experiences are likely to have been compelled to take on the role of household head as a result of these very same experiences. Seventeen per cent of women heading their households, and seven per cent of women from male-headed households experienced the death of at least one family member as a result of the war. The war was also associated with the disappearance of at least one family member of seven per cent of women heading their households, and of four per cent of women in male-headed households.

*Figure 2.20 : Vulnerability context: war-related experiences of household members, Northern Province*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

### *Institutional structures and processes*

The institutional environment is a critical component of the SLA framework and comes under the rubric of transforming structures and processes. In this study we investigate the influence of two aspects, namely institutions and livelihood interventions, on labour market and livelihood outcomes. We

limit our investigation of this aspect of the livelihood framework to just these two dimensions as they are the most tractable to data collection and analysis using quantitative methods. The data itself consists of respondents' perceptions about their helpfulness. Table 2.2 shows how respondents rated how helpful they found the institutions they had dealt with.

*Table 2.2: Perceptions of respondents about the helpfulness of institutions*

	Percentage share of households which responded (row)					
	Not helpful at all, even obstructive	Not helpful	So so	Helpful	Very helpful	Proportion of households which responded
<i>Women heading their households</i>						
Provincial Government	2	6	49	36	8	44
Local Government	2	5	42	43	8	53
Divisional Secretariat's Office	1	2	8	59	29	99
Grama Niladhari's Office	1	2	7	51	39	100
<i>Divineguma Livelihood</i>						
Development Programme (Central Government)	1	3	12	42	43	81
Private Commercial Banks	0	2	25	53	19	76
State-owned Banks	0	2	25	53	19	87
Agricultural Extension Office	1	3	32	43	21	35
<i>Women in male-headed households</i>						
Provincial Government	1	5	49	36	9	45
Local Government	1	5	40	44	10	53
Divisional Secretariat's Office	0	1	9	60	29	99
Grama Niladhari's Office	1	2	7	52	39	100
<i>Divineguma Livelihood</i>						
Development Programme (Central Government)	1	3	16	40	40	74
Private Commercial Banks	0	1	21	55	23	82
State-owned Banks	0	1	17	53	29	91
Agricultural Extension Office	1	3	25	47	25	40

Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

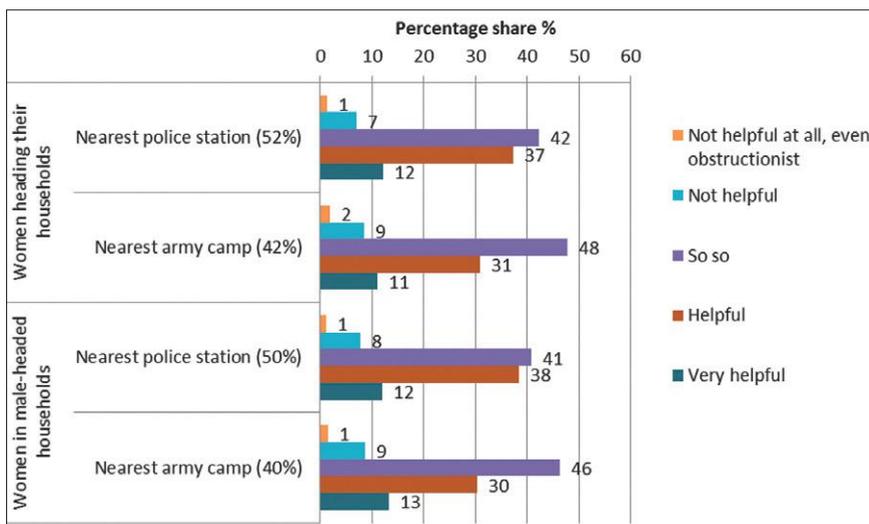
The institutions ranged from political institutions such as the sub-national Provincial Government and the Local Government, to the decentralized administration represented by the Divisional Secretariat's Office, or the more localized *Grama Niladhari's* Office, the *Grama Niladhari* being the representative of the central administration at village level. *Divineguma* (involving the livelihood development component of the older, *Samurdhi* Programme) is the main livelihood development programme implemented by the Central Government. Since some households may not have had interactions with these institutions, or even if they had, may not have wanted to respond, the questionnaire also had the option "can't say or not applicable." The last column in the table shows the proportion of households which chose to respond to each of the questions.

The table shows that by and large, respondents who chose to answer the questions found the institutional environment helpful and service-oriented. The decentralized administrative structures fared particularly well, with proportionately more respondents finding them helpful or very helpful than the share who found the political structures of provincial and local government helpful or very helpful. This is in contrast to Godamunne's (2015) findings about the role of social protection in state legitimacy in former conflict areas of Sri Lanka. Using qualitative data collection and analytical methods, Godamunne (2015) recorded several incidents of bias on the part of local *Samurdhi* officials when selecting beneficiaries due to politicization, favouritism and nepotism. The present study's findings suggest that these experiences have not been widespread.

While the evidence suggests that respondents found the civil administrative organizations and structures by and large helpful in their dealings with them, how did they perceive the military and the police? This is particularly important in a post-conflict situation where many observers have pointed to the ‘militarization’ of the region after the conflict as having a deleterious effect on livelihood activities (Lindberg and Herath 2014; Sumanthiran 2011). In contrast, Sarvananthan (2015) has argued that barriers emanating from the state through the police and military are less important in impeding women’s economic empowerment than socio-cultural factors.

Figure 2.21 sets out how respondents perceived the nearest police station and the nearest army camp. Only half or a little less than half the sample of respondents chose to rate the helpfulness of the two entities. The rest chose the option ‘can’t say or not applicable’. However, from those who chose to respond to the question, a little less than half found them neutral. Most of the rest found them either helpful or very helpful. Ten per cent of the rest found them unhelpful while about one per cent found them so unhelpful as to be obstructionist. Overall, more respondents found the police station to be more helpful than the nearest army camp. There is little significant difference in the perceptions of women heading their households, and women in male-headed households. Thus, this study provides some limited evidence based on quantitative survey data that supports Sarvananthan’s (2015) argument that the security establishment is not a significant barrier to women’s economic empowerment in the Northern Province.

*Figure 2.21: Perceptions about the helpfulness of the security establishment*

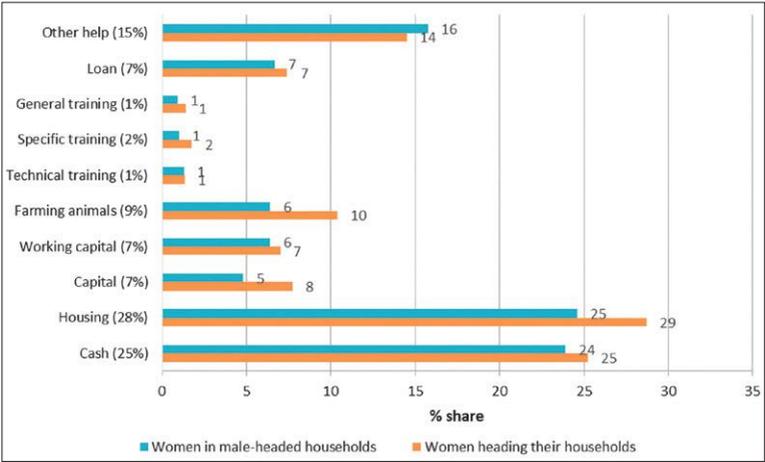


Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Figures in parenthesis show the proportion of all respondents who chose to rate each entity rather than choose the option 'don't know, can't say'.

In assessing the extent of participation in livelihood interventions implemented by government and non-government organizations as well as bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors, this study adopted a somewhat broader approach, looking at assistance for housing as well as cash grants as being important for providing social protection while engaging in livelihood activities in a post-war environment. By far the most popular and no doubt necessary form of intervention in a post-conflict situation has been assistance for housing (24 per cent of all interventions), closely followed by cash grants (21 per cent).

As Figure 2.22 illustrates, the houses of between 50 and 60 per cent of respondents were damaged during the war, and the information about interventions suggested that around half this number received housing assistance as part of the reconstruction effort. Assistance has mainly taken the form of capital, with very few interventions devoted to training. The descriptive data suggests that the roll-out of livelihood assistance programmes favoured women-headed households a little more than they helped male-headed households, particularly in the case of providing housing, working capital and farm animals.

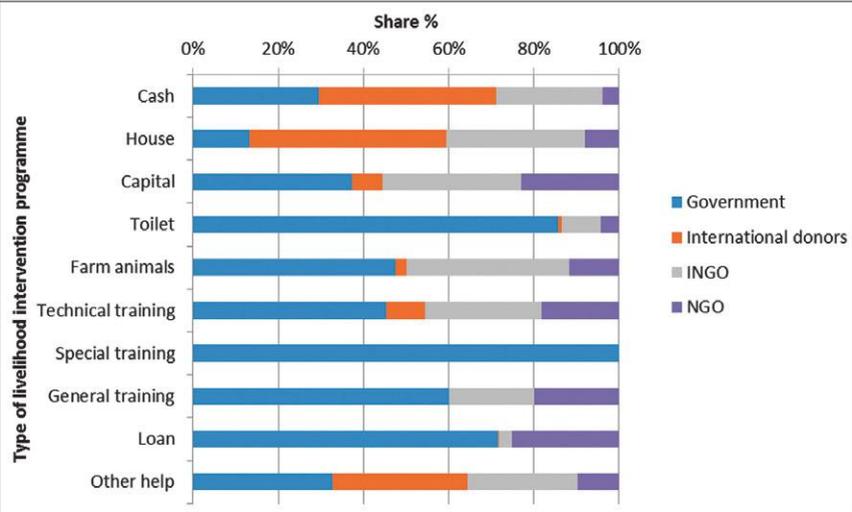
*Figure 2.22: Percentage of households that participated in livelihood interventions, Northern Province*



Source and notes: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015. Figures in parentheses show the share of total number of interventions by type of interventions, in which the entire sample of respondents participated.

The Government of Sri Lanka appears to have been responsible for implementing the bulk of the relief and livelihood programmes which respondents participated in. This is evident in Figure 2.23 with international donors showing a strong presence in the provision of cash and housing, for the most part.

*Figure 2.23: Shares of assistance and livelihood intervention programmes implemented by various agencies*

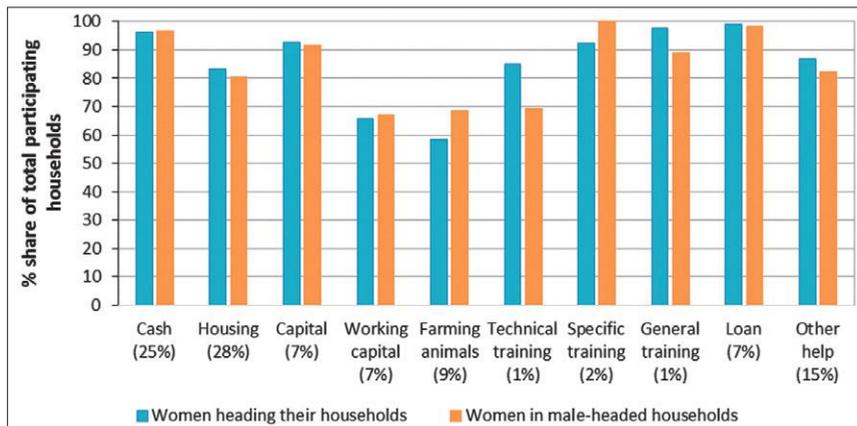


Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

But how effective were these programmes in meeting their objectives? Some indication of the extent to which participating in the interventions helped livelihood strategies can be obtained from the data presented in Figure 2.24, which tells us what percentage of respondents or their spouses who participated in the interventions thought that the assistance was helpful for their business.

The results indicate that by and large, respondents who took part in livelihood interventions have found these programmes to be useful. A large majority of the respondents who participated in the specific interventions found cash assistance and housing assistance helpful for their livelihood strategies. While most of the respondents found capital to be useful, proportionately less respondents find working capital and farm animals to be useful livelihood interventions. General training appears to have been more useful for women heading their households than technical or specific training. But it is important to note here that only a very few participants took part in such training programmes. Loans appear to be by far the most helpful livelihood intervention. Thus, evidence from this survey suggests that while participation levels in livelihood development programmes have been relatively low, the majority of those who participated found that their participation helped them in their livelihood activities.

*Figure 2.24: Percentage of participating households who believed that the assistance was helpful for their livelihood strategy*



Source and notes: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015. Figures in parentheses show the share of total number of interventions by type of interventions in which the entire sample of respondents participated.

### **2.3 Perceptions of respondents about labour market choices**

While it is important to understand if women are engaged in gainful employment, and whether male and female-headed households adopt different livelihood strategies, it is also necessary to understand how women themselves explain why they are employed or why not, and the reasons behind their decisions. While the majority of employed women are in self-employment, the main reason why women heading their households started a business appears to be economic distress (see Table 2.3). For example, 96 per cent of the respondents in

women-headed households agreed with the statement that they started a business because family income was insufficient to meet household expenses.

*Table 2.3: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each of the following reasons for engaging in self-employment*

	Women heading their households	Women in male-headed households
Family income insufficient for expenses	95.54	85.48
Wanted own independent income under my control	70.53	62.7
Wanted regular additional income for the future	73.85	71.94
No other job was available	58.17	41.25
Husband dead/unable to work	79.65	14.19
Had a business idea	42.25	58.74
Acquired a skill	20.23	22.51
Had financial resources to invest	6.65	11.92
Inherited a family-owned business	13.7	15.18
Wanted to hand over a business to kids	37.18	32.67
Was persuaded by community	7.4	4.62
A livelihood programme encouraged me	5.55	3.63
Encouraged by the government	7.55	3.31
Encouraged by a private company	1.85	0.99
Encouraged by a bi/multilateral donor	1.92	0.99
Encouraged by an I/NGO	1.79	0.66
Saw another person do it	17.56	14.52
A relative abroad persuaded me	1.44	0.66
Other reasons	3.29	2.07

Source: Source and notes: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Respondent could select more than one option.

Other key reasons for starting their own business included the death or disability of spouse and the non-availability of other jobs. Even in male-headed households, the main reason why the respondent started her own business was because she needed additional income to meet household expenditure.

However, the need for stronger agency is also a key reason why respondents were encouraged to start their own business. In other words, over 70 per cent of the respondents in women-headed households agreed that, the need for her own independent income that was under her control as well as the need for regular additional income in the future, were also reasons why they started a business activity. This holds true for respondents from male-headed households as well.

Even so, less than 10 per cent of the respondents in both women- and male-headed households were encouraged to start a business as a result of livelihood intervention programmes or because of the support of the government, private companies, or other local or international donor agencies. But where the respondents had a business idea, more women in male-headed households were likely to initiate a business activity (59 per cent) than women heading their households (42 per cent). This could be because women in male-headed households are more likely to have had the required support to start a business from their husbands while women heading their households are likely to have found setting up a business and making contacts required for running a business very difficult in the absence of a male partner.

Knowing what sort of livelihood activities they were engaged in previously provides some insights about why they are engaged in their current livelihoods. It is interesting to note that current livelihood activities of the households tend to be like the activities they engaged in previously, irrespective of whether the women headed their households or were from male-headed households. While about 66 per cent of both women heading their households and women in male-headed households have engaged in farm activities in the past, about 36 per cent of the former and 40 per cent of the latter have engaged in non-farm activities. However, at the time of the survey, agricultural income was the lowest contributor to total household income, suggesting that the conflict may have structurally changed the livelihoods of these households, diluting the importance of farm activities in their overall income composition. About six per cent of both sub-samples of women worked as employees in the past, whereas among women heading their households, this proportion had increased to 11 per cent by the time of the survey, and among women in male-headed households, it had slipped to four per cent.

The respondents' previous livelihood strategies resonate in their livelihood preferences. For example, 71 per cent of respondents in female-headed households and 74 per cent in male-headed households did not want to be employed in someone else's organization. On the other hand, 72 per cent of the respondents in female-headed households preferred to be employed in their own businesses. Although this is slightly less for respondents in male-headed households, at 67 per cent, a significant number of women prefer to be self-employed. This is very likely due to the

flexibility that such a livelihood activity would offer that may not be available in more formal employment.

Only 33 per cent of respondents in female-headed households preferred to be employed in a family-owned business. This is only four per cent more than those who wished to be employed in someone else's organization. This gap is 11 per cent for respondents in male-headed households.

Given that wage work is the least popular type of employment among respondents in both female- and male-headed households, it is important to unpack the reasons why they preferred not to engage in wage work. In female-headed households the two main reasons appear to be physical weakness: they felt that they were not strong enough health-wise to engage in paid work as well as carry out household activities such as cooking and cleaning. Since this sub-sample is made up of older women they are unlikely to have the energy required to keep down a job with regular hours anyway. Gender norms seem to play a larger role in keeping respondents in male-headed households from wage work. Over 83 per cent of the respondents in male-headed households cited household activities as the main reason they did not want to engage in wage employment. Another key reason is having childcare-related responsibilities. Moreover, 42 per cent of the respondents in male-headed households also stated that the family does not like her being employed in wage work. The corresponding percentage for respondents in female-headed households was only 21 per cent. On the other hand, more women from female-headed households than male-headed households agreed that the lack of

necessary education has also deterred them from seeking wage work. Gender norms at the community level or other forms of discrimination due to caste, race or religion appeared not to be critical factors in women's decisions to opt out of wage work.

Where respondents in women-headed households had engaged in wage work in the past, but had given up such wage work, the main reason for doing so was old age and the deterioration in their health. The main reasons why women in male-headed households had to give up wage work was their having to do carry out household chores and care for children.

Next, reasons for not engaging in self-employment activities were investigated. The predominant reasons why women heading their households did not engage in self-employment was being too old to work and having to spend time on household chores. As for wage employment, household chores and childcare activities were the primary reasons that respondents in male-headed households gave for not taking up self-employment. Another reason that respondents in male-headed households did not seek self-employment was that there was no need for them to do so since others in the family earned enough. On the other hand, more women in female-headed households than male-headed households agreed that the lack of capital to invest was a reason for them to not engage in self-employment. However, the lack of networks appeared to hold women in male-headed households from taking up self-employment than they appeared to hold back women heading their households.

Even when women were not engaged in self-employment at the time of the data collection, if they were doing their own business activities in the past, what made them quit? While in male-headed households, this was primarily due to lack of strength, health-wise or childcare responsibilities, women heading their households were compelled to give up their self-employment for a wider variety of reasons which included physical weakness, disruptions due to war and displacement, as well as childcare.

*Table 2.4: Percentage of women who agreed with each of the following reasons for not engaging in self-employment*

	Women heading their households	Women in male-headed households
I don't like	12.19	12.65
Too old, hence retired	48.38	16.29
Not strong enough now, health-wise	68.71	27.42
Woman's place is home	7.98	10.23
Husband/children earn enough	24.63	45.14
Remittances from abroad enough	10.04	7.06
Handouts from I/NGOs enough	1.65	1.15
Cooking and cleaning takes up time	69.88	83.75
Childcare takes up time	23.40	61.42
Caring for the elderly takes up time	11.19	13.67
Family doesn't like	21.33	42.27
Society looks down upon women who work	4.56	4.11
Community is not supportive	6.38	7.07
Don't have education or skills	24.26	13.98
Concerned about personal safety	10.04	10.90
No suitable jobs	19.42	17.95
Poor transport facilities	7.14	6.77
Employers prefer men	8.81	7.43
Employers pay men more	7.47	6.59
Difficult for people of my caste to get jobs	2.82	1.49
Difficult for people of my ethnicity to get jobs	1.66	0.49
Difficult for people of my religion to get jobs	1.41	0.17

Source and notes: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Respondents were required to indicate their agreement with each of the reasons suggested.

## **2.4 Summary conclusions**

Since this section covered a lot of ground, particularly the sections that presented summary statistics on livelihood outcomes and associated conditions that the SLA recognizes, we bring together the highlights of the descriptive analysis in this section.

There do not appear to be significant differences in women's livelihood outcomes in the Northern Province after the conflict, irrespective of whether they head the households or are members of male-headed households. The majority of women heading their households are compelled to engage in market work. Those from male-headed households participate much less. Of those who are in the labour market, most are engaged in self-employment as opposed to paid work either in the private sector or public sector. Self-employment in non-farm work is the most common livelihood activity among women heading their households. Moreover, women heading their households start work at a much younger age than women in male-headed households, and tend to work till their sixties.

Per capita household expenditure across female- and male-headed households do not indicate sharp disparities, except in Mullaitivu where households headed by women tend to have noticeably higher per capita expenditure compared to those of male-headed households. Transfer income makes up a significant portion of household income among women-headed households compared to male-headed households, and the share from transfer income is in fact highest among the richest female-

headed households. Agricultural income contributes the lowest share to total household income irrespective of the type of household headship and tends to drop as households move up the distribution of per capita expenditure.

Although the majority of respondents have not experienced a change in the household's economic situation since the war ended, more women in female-headed households thought their household economic situation has worsened over the reference period, while more women in male-headed households considered their economic situation to have improved. This could be because income from self-employment (in farming and non-farm activities) is perceived to have declined over the reference period compared to wage income which more male-headed households appeared to have access to.

The descriptive analysis evaluated the asset pentagon of the SLA framework using several proxies: respondent's assessment of her own health and her level of education for human capital; ownership of house with deed, ownership of land by the household, ownership of land by the principal female respondent for physical capital; ownership of jewellery for financial capital; and emotional and material support from friends and relatives for social capital.

Proportionately more women heading their households tend to be in poor health compared to women in households headed by men. With a higher proportion of women with lower educational attainment, women in female-headed households have less access to human capital than women in male-headed

households. However, there is no significant difference between women heading their households and women in male-headed households in terms of access to physical capital. On the other hand, access to financial assets is markedly lower for women heading their households compared to women in male-headed households. Emotional support from friends and relatives tends to be stronger than material support for both women heading their households and in male-headed households. Nevertheless, both types of support tend to be higher for women in male-headed households. Yet, although the majority of women have not experienced changes in their social networks since they first began managing their households, women heading their households have seen a greater improvement in their social networks over the reference period compared to women in male-headed households, perhaps through necessity.

We described the vulnerability context by way of nine war-related experiences. The most widely experienced shock was the loss of assets due to war. Over half of the respondents were displaced and stayed in camps or with family and friends. Nearly half experienced the loss of employment of a family member due to the war. A little more than a third experienced the disruption of the education of a family member due to the same circumstances. Importantly, proportionately more women heading households had experienced each of these war-related experiences compared to women in male-headed households.

This study captures the institutional structures and processes of the livelihood approach in terms of the perceived helpfulness of institutions and livelihood interventions. Overall, political and

administrative institutions were found to be helpful. Although many respondents did not respond to the question about how helpful the military and the police were, the majority of those who responded said that they were helpful, the police more than the army. There was no significant difference between the responses from women heading households and women in male-headed households.

While the predominant reason for women to engage in paid work appears to be economic need in both types of households, a large majority of women also cited the need for an independent source of income as a factor that has motivated them to be employed. Where women were not employed, the main reason that women heading their households cited was ill health and physical weakness. In male-headed households, women's decisions to not participate in the labour market or quit the labour market were mainly due to care responsibilities and household chores. Of women who were engaged in self-employment, few had been encouraged to do so because of a livelihood intervention or support from government or other sources. It is also clear that when engaging in the labour market, women prefer self-employment or working in the family business to wage work.

Livelihood interventions covered in this study range from simple cash hand-outs to business loans. Cash hand-outs and housing are also considered as livelihood interventions as they provide critical social protection when engaging in livelihood activities in a post-conflict environment. In terms of more direct and obvious interventions, capital infusions stand out. In general, livelihood interventions seem to have reached proportionately more

women-headed households than male-headed households. Moreover, the majority of the respondents who took part in these interventions found them to be useful for their livelihood activities.

### **3. Factors Associated with Labour Market Outcomes**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section presents the econometric analysis that addresses the first three research questions that this study set out to investigate. The three research questions as set out in Section 1 are:

1. What are the labour market outcomes of women heading their households in the Northern Province?
2. What are the individual, skills-related, and household-related factors, including access to different types of assets associated with these outcomes?
3. Have conflict-induced shocks that the women experienced, been associated with any of these outcomes?

The analysis of women's labour market outcomes consists of three components. First, we looked at the factors associated with women's labour force participation. Second, we looked at the factors associated with four types of paid employment outcomes: (1) as employees in the government or semi-government sector; (2) as employees in the private sector; (3) self-employment as employers or own-account workers in agriculture; and, (4) self-employment as employers or own-account workers in

agriculture. Third, we looked at the wage and earnings outcomes of employed women in our sample.

For the first of these outcomes, participation, we estimated a binary outcome logit model; for the second a multinomial logit model; and for the third, as many wage or earnings functions as there were employment outcomes. The latter were corrected for sample selection bias as choice of employment strategy could influence earnings outcomes. The analysis regarded the individual principal female respondent as the unit of analysis. Since most of the independent variables in each of these models are the same, we define all those relevant for the first of these – labour force participation – in the section devoted to this particular analysis. The additional variables entering other equations are defined in the relevant analytical sections.

### **3.2 Factors associated with the labour force participation of women heading their households**

#### *Model and definition of variables*

We estimated women’s participation in the workforce separately for the sub-samples of women-headed and male-headed households, by implementing the following model where the binary dependent outcome  $p$  takes the value one if respondent  $i$  is a participant, and zero if not.

$$p_i = F(\alpha + \beta X_i) \quad (3.1).$$

In equation (1)  $F(z) = e^z / (1 + e^z)$  is the logit function and the parameters  $\beta$  were estimated by maximum likelihood. The vector  $X$  consists of several groups of explanatory variables: they are; individual characteristics such as expected wage and age; variables related to household composition, consumption and transfer income including remittances; variables related to the assets pentagon such as health status, educational attainment, financial assets, ownership of land, livestock and equipment, connectivity and spatial assets, and social capital and networks; and war experiences and the institutional environment. It should be noted that the model does not address the issue of causality to distinguish whether participation is a cause or a consequence of various individual and other characteristics. In fact, some of the explanatory variables we include in our model, such as the health status of the individual and her education attainment, could have been mediated by the conflict. Therefore to minimize the effect of endogeneity we use community-level variables to capture the influence of the conflict.

Since none of the respondents in the sample was unemployed, the binary dependent outcome of participation was identical to the outcome of employment. The lack of unemployed persons in the sample was probably due to conditions of household economic distress coupled with depressed labour market conditions offering few opportunities for employment which drove women to create their own employment. Such women would not have been able to afford to wait to look for jobs in such

conditions, but were forced to take up any activity that could bring in an income.

Neoclassical theory posits that the expected hourly market wage can influence the individual's decision to participate. But since wages are observed only for employed persons, wages need to be imputed for individuals who are not employed and whose decision to participate may be determined by the wage that they are likely to get. The usual procedure is to estimate a standard wage equation with Heckman selection bias correction (Heckman 1979) as do Klasen and Pieters (2012), Heim (2007) and Blau and Kahn (2007). However, given the difficulties associated with finding a suitable exclusion restriction necessary to implement the Heckman procedure, we have instead constructed the expected market wage as the log of the average monthly wage of women employees in the same Divisional Secretariat's division, of the same level of education. Where such information was not available within the division (for certain categories of educational attainment, for example), we used the equivalent average wage in the neighbouring division as a proxy for the expected wage.

Of variables related to the individual's demographic characteristics, we defined two age-related variables, *age* and its square, *age squared*. Although ethnic characteristics such as belonging to the Islamic Moor ethnic group have been found to be highly correlated with the likelihood of women's labour force participation (Gunatilaka 2013), we were unable to investigate the relationship between ethnic characteristics and labour force

participation in this study due to the small number of observations relating to Sinhalese and Muslims.

Household characteristics such as its demographic composition and economic situation have been found to be important correlates of participation in the empirical literature. Among the variables related to household composition used in the analysis, several demographic variables related to household composition were included. Since a woman's childcare responsibilities can prevent her from taking up market work, we included three variables in the model to denote these commitments: *the proportion of household members who are children less than five years of age*, *the share of children between 5 and 15 years of age*, and the reference category was the *share of children 16 years and above*. Since looking after elderly members of the household can also constrain engagement in paid work, we included the *share of elderly (more than 70 years of age) members in the household* as an explanatory variable as well as the *share of members who are ill*. To look at the association between the class background of the respondent and the likelihood of her participating in the labour market, we included a dummy variable that takes the value one if *her father is or was in a white-collar job*, that is, in an occupation category that included managers, professionals and associated professionals, technicians and clerks. If the household has male members who are employed, that is likely to obviate the necessity for the principal female respondent to engage in paid work as well due to the income effect of neo-classical wage theory. Therefore we included *the share of employed male household members* as a proportion of all household members of working age as another

explanatory variable. Whether the household has one or more *male household members in white-collar jobs* may encourage women's participation as the men may have access to social networks through their colleagues that can be leveraged to find suitable jobs (Malhotra and De Graff 1997; Amarasuriya 2010). Males in white-collar jobs may also be better educated and may be more open to their womenfolk also undertaking paid work, although this was found not to be the case in areas close to the metropolitan hub of Colombo (Gunatilaka 2016). On the other hand, male household members in white-collar jobs may restrict women's market work because they may believe that while women in poor households had to work, if their women were to work, it would signal that the household was poor and of lower social status. The presence of other adult females to share some of the unpaid work has been found to free up a woman to engage in market work (Gunatilaka 2013). Therefore we included *the share of other adult females in the household*.

There are theoretical reasons and supporting empirical evidence that economic need may drive women from poorer families to work (see Klasen and Pieters 2012 for a review of the literature). Hence the model included an *index of housing quality* with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 11 to denote the wealth status of the household. We used this rather than household consumption in the model as an index based on assets that are easily observable is more likely to be accurate than self-reported consumption expenditure. The index is made up of three component scores denoting the quality of building materials used in house construction (for example, six if brick through to one if clay); the type of toilet the household has access

to (four if private through to one if the household practises open defecation; and whether the household has access to electricity. If the household receives income transfers, including remittances from relatives in Sri Lanka and abroad, the income substitution effect may obviate the necessity for the respondent to work. Hence we included a dummy variable that took the value one if *the household receives transfer income* to denote the influence of this factor.

The model included many groups of independent variables related to the assets pentagon of the SLA framework. Health status is an important dimension of human capital and since many women had cited poor health as a reason why they did not engage in any livelihood activity, we defined one health-related dummy *In poor health* which took the value one if the respondent said that she was under the weather or very sick. The next group of variables denoted the highest level of education that the individual had attained. The reference category for the group of education variables was *Primary*, which included all persons with less than six years of education. The three dummy variables *Secondary*, *GCE Ordinary Levels*, *GCE Advanced Levels and above* denoted different levels of educational attainment. Two variables denote ownership of land and since land can be used as collateral, these variables represent an important source of capital for livelihood activities. The two variables are *extent of land owned by the household* and whether *the household owns a house with a deed*. Another two variables denote access to financial assets. The first denotes the *log of the value of financial assets owned by the respondent* herself, and the second is the *log of net financial assets jointly owned* with

other members of the household, which is the log of the total value of assets from which the total value of household debt has been deducted. The dummy *livestock* took the value one if the household owns at least one of the following: cows, buffaloes, goats or chickens. The dummy variable *crop trees* took the value one if the household owns at least one of the following: mango, palmyrah, and coconut.

Three variables denote strength and extent of social capital and networks. Two variables attempted to look at the association between the respondent's perception of *how strong her networks of friends* and her *network of relatives* were compared to when she first started managing her household. The variables were based on her responses to the question of whether she thought that her network of relatives or friends was much stronger now, stronger now, just the same, weaker now or much weaker now, and again the responses were cardinalized from a scale of one to five. The third variable denoting access to social capital was based on a dummy variable which took the value one if the respondent was *a member* of any one of the following organizations: a microfinance organization, a death benevolence society, a women's rural development society or mothers' group, a national political party, or any other such community based organization.

Spatial characteristics and connectivity are an important part of the asset pentagon of the SLA framework. In the models three variables denoted the density of establishments in three sectors in the Divisional Secretariat's Division where the respondent is resident and the data was sourced from the Department of

Census and Statistics' (2015c) listing of *Non-agricultural Economic Activities in Sri Lanka Economic Census of 2013/2014*. These variables were used as proxies for local labour demand conditions. They are: *the number of establishments in industry and construction; the number of trading establishments; and the number of service sector establishments*. Another three variables denote connectivity. The dummy variable *vehicle* took the value one if the household owned any of the following mechanized modes of transport: car, van, three-wheeler, or motor cycle. *Time taken to the nearest market* and *time taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat* denoted the extent of connectivity to markets and institutions. Other spatial characteristics were included in four dummy variables denoting district of residence: *Vavuniya, Mannar, Kilinochchi* and *Mullaitivu*. *Jaffna district* was the reference category for the participation equation.

The influence of war-related experiences on the probability of labour force participation was captured by seven community-level variables rather than individual-level experiences in order to avoid the problem of endogeneity. They were the proportions of households in the division: 1) *displaced and stayed in a camp*; 2) *displaced and stayed with relatives or friends*; 3) *had incurred damage to property*; 4) *had suffered loss of employment*; 5) *had lost assets*; 6) *whose members' education had been disrupted*; and, 7) *who sustained other damages due to the war*. We did not include family members killed or disappeared due to the war in the model because the sample used for analysis was made up of women who headed their

households, and who may have headed their households because they had lost key family members due to these same reasons.

The influence of the institutional environment on women's labour force participation was captured by two cardinalized variables, which were based on the extent to which respondents found two institutions helpful, with very helpful given the value five, and very unhelpful, even obstructionist, given the value one. The two institutions were the *Divisional Secretariat* and the *Grama Niladhari's Office* for which the response rate was 99-100 per cent (see Table 2.2). Only the individuals who responded to these two questions were included in the regression sample. We were unable to include any other institutions-related variables in the model because many individuals selected the option that denoted that they either did not know (which could have been due to the fact that the households did not interact with the institutions) or they did not want to say.

### *Results of the econometric analysis*

Since the economic empowerment of women heading their households is a key focus of this study, we first present the results of the estimation of factors associated with women's labour force participation for this subgroup in Table 3.1. We included only women heading their households who did not have a spouse resident in the same household in our sample. The table presents the marginal effects of five logistic regressions, each model run with an additional group of characteristics or conditions encompassed within the SLA framework. The last column presents the results of the complete or extended model.

The marginal effect of the expected wage is positive, large and significant only in the parsimonious model. However, the moment that the assets variables are included in the model, the log of the expected wage ceases to be significant, and with the spatial variables added to the model, its magnitude shrinks and the sign changes. Since the expected wage is an outcome of local labour demand and supply conditions, this result suggests that the expected wage by itself does not play an important role in the participation decision. This finding is congruent with the findings of Gunatilaka (2013) for Sri Lanka using national sample survey data, and Klasen and Pieters (2012) for India.

Several of the demographic and household-related variables work well. The directions of the relationships between the variables and the variable of outcome, probability of labour force participation, are in line with the theory. Among the age-related variables, while age is positively correlated with labour force participation, suggesting that the probability of participation increases with an additional year, the marginal effects are statistically insignificant in the fuller specifications. In contrast, all the marginal effects of the age squared variable are negative and statistically significant at the one per cent critical level. This suggests an inverted U-shaped relationship between age and labour force participation, with the probability of participation rising with age but that probability declining with additional years. Women's care responsibilities associated with children less than five years of age appear to be the second most formidable constraint to their engagement in market work, reducing the probability of participation by nearly 36 percentage points in the complete model. None of the other three care-

related variables appeared significant. Nor was the presence of other adult female members in the household (to share the care burden) a significant factor associated with the probability of participation.

On the other hand, as the share of male household members who were employed increased, the respondent was significantly less likely to participate. The magnitude of this restraining effect was around 49 percentage points across all specifications. Having at least one male household member in a white-collar job is positively but not significantly associated with the probability of participation. The respondent's class or status as denoted by whether her father was a white-collar worker appears negatively associated with her decision to work, but this variable was not statistically significant in any of the models, either. The wealthier the household as denoted by its housing conditions, the less likely it appeared to be that the respondent would engage in market work and the marginal effects were negative and statistically significant in all the models. However, the effects were small compared to other significant household-related variables. The income substitution effect of receiving transfer income appears to significantly obviate the necessity of the respondent going out to work, by reducing the likelihood by about 13 percentage points, with the marginal effects being statistically significant at the most stringent one per cent critical level across all specifications.

We turn next to assess how ownership of assets mediates the probability of labour force participation. In terms of human capital, poor health has a large and significantly negative effect

on participation in all the specifications, its magnitude hovering around 16 percentage points. The direction of the relationship between educational attainment and the probability of labour force participation is negative but not significant in the more extended models for educational attainment less than GCE A' Levels. So while the least educated, who are also probably the poorest, are more likely to participate, secondary-educated individuals and those with just the GCE O' Levels are less likely to participate than primary-educated individuals, all other characteristics being equal. In contrast, educational attainment of A' Levels and beyond increases the probability of participation by 11 percentage points. This result is in line with previous research for the Sri Lankan population at large, which suggest a 'U' type relationship between education and participation, with education beyond the A' Levels being positively associated with the probability of participation (Gunatilaka 2013).

The extent of land held by the household and its ownership of a house with a deed is positively associated with labour force participation but only the marginal effect of the land ownership variable is significant across all specifications, even though its magnitude is less than one percentage point. Ownership of land and house can enable self-employment activity by providing the collateral to obtain a loan, and by providing the premises on which livelihood activities can take place. None of the financial assets variables is significant although the relationship appears to be positive. Ownership of livestock is associated positively and significantly with labour force participation across all specifications, suggesting that women's employment in such cases is likely to be involved with animal husbandry. But

ownership of crop trees is negatively and significantly associated with women's participation, suggesting that women may not be involved in market-oriented production activities associated with tree crops, which are more likely to require male labour to manage and harvest.

*Table 3.1 : Factors associated with the probability of labour force participation of women heading their households: Marginal effects of logistic regression*

	Means or proportions	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Log of expected wage	9.5320	0.1582*	0.1150	-0.0662	-0.0588	-0.0631
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>						
Age	50.3092	0.0157*	0.0067	0.0079	0.0081	0.0082
Age squared	2634.6130	-0.0003***	-0.0002**	-0.0002***	-0.0002***	-0.0002***
Share of children less than 5 years	0.0131	-0.3411**	-0.3303**	-0.3604**	-0.3686**	-0.3677**
Share of children between 5 and 15 years	0.1147	0.1276	0.0996	0.0773	0.0659	0.0637
Share of other adult females	0.6702	-0.0302	-0.0103	-0.0078	-0.0025	-0.0034
Share of elderly household members (>70 years)	0.0282	-0.0563	-0.0667	-0.0778	-0.0890	-0.0907
Share of members who are ill	0.0196	-0.1016	-0.0514	-0.0379	-0.0346	-0.0344
Share of employed males in the household	0.1255	-0.4915***	-0.5058***	-0.5035***	-0.4975***	-0.4970***
At least one male member in a white-collar job	0.0475	-0.0046	-0.0035	0.0115	0.0177	0.0177
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	0.1101	-0.0377	-0.0176	-0.0079	-0.0109	-0.0102
Housing infrastructure score	9.1300	-0.0173***	-0.0173***	-0.0146***	-0.0144***	-0.0143***
Household receives transfer income	0.8757	-0.1265***	-0.1322***	-0.1271***	-0.1268***	-0.1281***
<i>Assets</i>						
In poor health	0.3560	-0.1525***	-0.1525***	-0.1590***	-0.1654***	-0.1669***
Secondary education	0.3745	-0.0656**	-0.0656**	-0.0364	-0.0381	-0.0395
GCE O' Levels	0.2331	-0.1053***	-0.1053***	-0.0599*	-0.0616	-0.0616
GCE A' Levels or beyond	0.0505	0.0027	0.0027	0.1076**	0.1101*	0.1133**
Extent of land owned by household	4.1980	0.0040***	0.0040***	0.0025**	0.0024**	0.0023**
Household owns house with deed	0.4867	0.0265*	0.0265*	0.0111	0.0076	0.0083
Log of net financial assets held jointly	1.2607	0.0006	0.0006	-0.0011	-0.0013	-0.0013
Log of respondent's net financial assets	4.0948	0.0010	0.0010	0.0004	0.0006	0.0004

	Means or proportions	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Household has livestock	0.4810		0.0967***	0.0867***	0.0890***	0.0883***
Household has crop trees	0.7504		-0.0432***	-0.0585***	-0.0485***	-0.0479***
Strength of relationships with relatives	3.0488		-0.0580***	-0.0574***	-0.0585***	-0.0584***
Strength of relationships with friends	3.0903		0.0454***	0.0428**	0.0415***	0.0433***
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	0.2769		0.1198***	0.0870***	0.0851***	0.0867***
<i>Spatial variables and connectivity</i>						
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	671.7831			-0.0012***	-0.0015***	-0.0015***
Number of trading establishments in the DS division	1296.0259			0.0002***	0.0003***	0.0003***
Number service establishments in the DS division	1260.4830			0.0003***	0.0004***	0.0004***
Household owns mechanized transport	0.1421			-0.0319**	-0.0330**	-0.0334**
Minutes taken to go to the nearest market	23.6891			0.0010	0.0014	0.0014
Minutes taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat	44.5429			-0.0007	-0.0007	-0.0007
Kilinochchi	0.1007			-0.1040***	-0.1113**	-0.1086***
Mullaitivu	0.1000			0.0317	0.0597	0.0674
Mannar	0.1000			-0.1614***	-0.2080***	-0.2010***
Vavuniya	0.1219			0.3198***	0.3798***	0.3847***
<i>Proportion of households in community who experienced the following in relation to the war</i>						
Displaced and stayed in camp	0.5667				-0.0821	-0.0820
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	0.5392				-0.0522	-0.0469
Damage to property	0.5628				-0.0642	-0.0497
Loss of employment	0.4762				0.0074	0.0065
Loss of assets	0.6593				-0.0050	-0.0174

	Means or proportions	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Education disrupted	0.3589				0.0043	0.0053
Other damages due to war	0.0130				0.2661*	0.2892**
<i>Institutions</i>						
Extent to which the Divisional Secretariat is seen as being helpful	4.1405					-0.0400*
Extent to which the <i>Grama Niladhari</i> is seen as being helpful	4.2371					0.0311**
Number of observations	2969	2969	2969	2969	2969	2969

Notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of firms are from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c). Mean of dependent variable is 59 per cent. Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Single; Number of children 16 years and older living in household; In good or middling health; Primary or no schooling; Jaffna. \*\*\*, \*\*, \* and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively. All the models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat's Division level for robust standard errors.

All three variables denoting access to social capital are statistically significant across all specifications. The stronger the relationship with relatives now compared to when she first began to manage a household, the less likely that the respondent is engaging in market work and this result too is robust across all specifications at the one per cent critical level. The magnitude of the marginal effect is considerable, reducing the probability of participation by about six percentage points across specifications. The nature of the social capital denoted by this variable could influence workforce participation both directly and indirectly. Material help from relatives flowing from the stronger relationship could obviate the need for the respondent to work. However, strong kinship ties could also subject women to more binding social norms which discourage labour force participation. In contrast, the strength of the respondent's relationship with friends has a slightly smaller (four percentage points) but positive and significant effect. Compared to both these forms of social capital, membership in organizations is positively and significantly associated with an increase in the probability of participation by about nine per cent in all the specifications.

All three variables denoting the density of economic activity in the DS division are significant at the one per cent critical level even though the magnitudes of their marginal effects are less than one percentage point. The results suggest that as the numbers of industrial and construction-related establishments rise, the probability of labour market participation declines marginally. In contrast, increases in the number of trading and

service-sector establishments is associated with an increase in the probability of participation, suggesting that women are likely to have more job opportunities in these sectors rather than in manufacturing and construction. The marginal effects of the distance variables are disappointing. Greater connectivity as denoted by the ownership of some form of mechanized transportation is not significant, and the sign is negative. The ownership of vehicles can also signal higher social status, and women in households with higher social status may be willing to work only if they are likely to get status-enhancing jobs, rather than be seen as being so economically needy as to need to work. Women who are otherwise identical in terms of their productive characteristics but who live in Mannar and Kilinochchi appear to be significantly less likely to participate in market work than women in Jaffna district, whereas women from Vavuniya district are much more likely to participate. The magnitudes of the effects are considerable, ranging from negative nine percentage points to negative 19 percentage points for Kilinochchi and Mannar to positive 38 percentage points in Vavuniya.

Of the community-level variables denoting war-related experiences, only the marginal effect of other war-related experiences is statistically significant in the complete model. Its magnitude is large, but the proportion of households reporting such experiences is very small, at a little more than one per cent of the sample. With respect to the institutional environment, the extent to which the Divisional Secretariat appears helpful to the respondent is significantly and negatively correlated with the probability of labour force participation. The underlying reason is not immediately apparent. But the extent to which the *Grama*

*Niladhari's* office is perceived as being helpful is positive and significant. Self-employment generation programmes are typically implemented through this level of the administration, which may be an underlying reason for the positive effect on participation.

Do the same factors that enable and constrain the labour force participation of women heading their households also enable and constrain the participation of women in male-headed households? In Table 3.2 we compare the results of the extended model for women heading their households who are not living with a spouse, with the results of estimating the probability of labour force participation of married women living with their husbands in male-headed households. However, for the estimation of the probability of women in male-headed households, we include additional variables to minimize problems of omitted variable bias. These variables denote husband's characteristics such his years of education, whether he is in a white-collar job, and which economic sector he is employed in, manufacturing or services. The sample means and proportions are also set out alongside.

Some interesting similarities and contrasts can be discerned between the two sets of estimations. In contrast to the results for women heading their households, the expected wage has a large, significant and positive effect on the probability of labour force participation of women in male-headed households. Thus, the supply of labour by women in male-headed households appears more responsive in relation to changes in the expected wage, suggesting high reservation wages among this group of women.

This is likely because they are not compelled to work, and would probably be secondary income earners for their families even when they do.

As in the case of women heading their households, the probability of participation of women in male-headed households, increases with age, but the results for women in male-headed households are statistically significant. However, the rate at which the probability of participation increases with age declines faster among women in male-headed households than among women heading their households. The magnitudes of both effects are also larger for women in male-headed households, suggesting that the labour force participation rates of women in male-headed households are more sensitive to age, whereas women heading their households are probably forced through circumstances to participate in the labour force regardless of how old or how young they are. This also explains why the participation rates of women heading their households are higher than the participation rates of women in male-headed households at every age cohort, as shown in the previous section.

*Table 3.2: Factors associated with the probability of women heading their households and women in male-headed households, participating in the labour force: Marginal effects of logistic regression*

	Means or proportions		Marginal effects	
	Women heading households	Women in male-headed households	Women heading households	Women in male-headed households
Log of expected wage	9.5320	9.5998	-0.0631	0.1916**
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>				
Age	50.3092	41.4793	0.0082	0.0508***
Age squared	2634.6130	1849.8707	-0.0002***	-0.0006***
Share of children less than 5 years	0.0131	0.0769	-0.3677**	-0.1281
Share of children between 5 and 15 years	0.1147	0.1721	0.0637	0.0382
Share of other adult females	0.6702	0.4641	-0.0034	-0.0604
Share of elderly household members (>70 years)	0.0282	0.0186	-0.0907	-0.3963*
Share of members who are ill	0.0196	0.0177	-0.0344	0.2062
Share of employed males in the household	0.1255	0.4070	-0.4970***	-0.4339***
At least one male member in a white-collar job	0.0475	0.1728	0.0177	
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	0.1101	0.1043	-0.0102	-0.0461
Housing infrastructure score	9.1300	9.3880	-0.0143***	-0.0131
Household receives transfer income	0.8757	0.6728	-0.1281***	-0.0124
<i>Husband's characteristics</i>				
Husband's years of education		9.3293		-0.0012
Employed in a white-collar job		0.1793		0.0910*
Employed in the manufacturing sector		0.2522		0.0132
Employed in the services sector		0.2837		0.0254
<i>Assets</i>				
In poor health	0.3560	0.1739	-0.1669***	-0.0513*
Secondary education	0.3745	0.3630	-0.0395	0.0339
GCE O' Levels	0.2331	0.3696	-0.0616	-0.0155
GCE A' Levels and more	0.0505	0.1424	0.1133**	0.0547
Respondent owns land	4.1980	6.3566	0.0023**	0.0020***
Household owns house with deed	0.4867	0.5207	0.0083	0.0504
Log of net financial assets held jointly	1.2607	1.5228	-0.0013	0.0015
Log of respondent's net financial assets	4.0948	3.8845	0.0004	0.0028
Household has livestock	0.4810	0.5207	0.0883***	0.1393***
Household has crop trees	0.7504	0.7967	-0.0479***	0.0425
Strength of relationships with relatives	3.0488	3.3261	-0.0584***	-0.0308

	Means or proportions		Marginal effects	
	Women heading households	Women in male-headed households	Women heading households	Women in male-headed households
Strength of relationships with friends	3.0903	3.3163	0.0433***	0.0458*
Respondent is a member of at least one community organization	0.2769	0.2707	0.0867***	0.0884*
<i>Spatial variables and connectivity</i>				
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	671.7831	673.8196	-0.0015***	-0.0003
Number of trading establishments in the DS division	1296.0259	1300.8174	0.0003***	0.0001
Number service establishments in the DS division	1260.4830	1261.2185	0.0004***	0.0000
Household owns mechanized transport	0.1421	0.4500	-0.0334**	0.0125
Minutes taken to go to the nearest market	23.6891	22.2489	0.0014	0.0012**
Minutes taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat	44.5429	44.2185	-0.0007	0.0002
Kilinochchi	0.1007	0.1065	-0.1086***	-0.1149
Mullaitivu	0.1000	0.1076	0.0674	-0.1254*
Mannar	0.1000	0.0957	-0.2010***	0.0295
Vavuniya	0.1219	0.1228	0.3847***	-0.0335
<i>Proportion of households in the community who experienced the following in relation to the war</i>				
Displaced and stayed in camp	0.5667	0.5701	-0.0820	0.0041
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	0.5392	0.5285	-0.0469	-0.0245
Damage to property	0.5628	0.5578	-0.0497	0.2935***
Loss of employment	0.4762	0.4857	0.0065	-0.2069
Loss of assets	0.6593	0.6676	-0.0174	-0.1965
Education disrupted	0.3589	0.3695	0.0053	0.1061
Other damages due to war	0.0130	0.0135	0.2892**	0.1977
<i>Institutions</i>				
Perception of helpfulness of Divisional Secretariat	4.1405	4.1804	-0.0400*	-0.0502*
Perception of helpfulness of Grama Niladhari	4.2371	4.2717	0.0311**	0.0650*
Number of observations			2968	920

Source and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of establishments from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c). Mean of dependent variable is 59 per cent for females heading their households and living without their spouses and 39 per cent for married women living with their husbands in male-headed households. Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Single; Number of children 16 years and older living in household; Primary, secondary and O' Levels (husband's education); Primary or no schooling (principal female respondent's education); Agricultural sector; Jaffna District. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively. Both models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat's level for robust standard errors.

Possibly due to the same reasons, having children less than five years of age is associated with a much smaller decline in the participation of women in male-headed households and the effect is not statistically significant, whereas for women heading their households this factor was found to be a significant constraint. However, an increase in the share of ill members in the household has a significant and negative effect on the participation of women in male-headed households whereas the effect is negative, but smaller and not significant for women heading their households.

The likelihood that a woman in a male-headed household participates in the labour market decreases by 43 percentage points as the share of employed males in the household increases, whereas the equivalent effect for women heading their households is 50 percentage points. More wealth and receiving transfers are also associated with a decline in the probability of the participation of women in male-headed households, but the results are not statistically significant and the magnitude is just a

fraction of the effect of this variable for women heading their households.

Poor health significantly reduces the participation of women in male-headed households, but only by five percentage points, compared to 17 percentage points among women heading their households. None of the marginal effects of educational attainment for women in male-headed households is significant, whereas the highest level of educational attainment was associated with a significant increase in the probability of participation of women heading their households by 11 per cent. The household's ownership of land has a slightly larger and positive effect on the participation of women heading their households than on the participation of women in male-headed households though the magnitudes are still less than one per cent. While the marginal effects of having farm animals are positive and statistically significant for both groups, the magnitude of the effect is much larger for women in male-headed households. And having tree crops is significantly associated with a decline in the probability that women heading their households are participating in the labour market, but the same characteristic is associated with a positive effect on the participation of women in male-headed households though not significant. Thus, the marginal effects on various forms of productive capital suggest that women in male-headed households may be better able to leverage them for the purposes of their employment.

The marginal effects of the variables denoting social capital are of remarkably similar magnitude in both models. Other than for

the time taken to go to market, none of the local labour market variables is a significant predictor of the participation of women in male-headed households unlike in the case of women heading households. The positive sign on the marginal effect of the time taken to go to the market is puzzling, although the magnitude of the relationship is slight. Nevertheless, the direction of the relationship appears to be counter-intuitive. However, spending more time getting to markets could be due to either greater physical distance from the destination, and relative isolation associated with poverty and low social status, compelling even married women to undertake any work that is available, regardless of the impact on social status. On the other hand, more time taken to go to market could also suggest congestion and could be correlated with more densely populated localities with greater opportunities for wage work and markets for one's products. In this way, too, more time taken to reach the nearest market could be correlated with greater probability of labour force participation. In stark contrast to the results for women heading their households, only the marginal effect for residing in Mullaitivu district is a significant and negative predictor of the workforce participation of women in male-headed households.

From among the war-related experiences, the experience of having suffered damage to housing is positively and significantly associated with women in male-headed households engaging in market work. In terms of magnitude it is the second largest marginal effect (30 percentage points) that is statistically significant. Since repairing damaged homes requires substantial capital outlay, the associated economic need may be sufficiently compelling to drive women who would not have been working in

ordinary circumstances, to work for pay. And if there are substantial numbers of others in the community who have suffered likewise, then the neighbourhood effect may also exert some pressure on individual households to repair their homes so that they do not look the worst along the street. The extent to which the DS Office is perceived as being helpful is significantly associated with a lower probability of participation for women in male-headed households, too, but the magnitude of the effect is somewhat larger and the reason why, still not clear. Also among women in male-headed households, the extent to which the *Grama Niladhari* is seen as helpful is associated with a much larger increase in the probability of participation (six percentage points) whereas the effect, though statistically significant, was comparatively smaller (three percentage points) for women heading their households. This result suggests that women in male-headed households may be more likely to be able to access institutional help from community-level administrative officers for purposes of employment. The latter effect may arise through the mediation of their husbands, even after controlling for the educational attainment and employment characteristics of these men. In fact, if the husband has a white-collar job as opposed to being a manual worker, then the wife is significantly more likely to participate in the workforce. The economic sector in which the husband works appears not to be significantly associated with the probability of the wife's workforce participation.

To sum up the findings of the econometric analysis thus far, the comparison of the probability functions related to the labour force participation of women heading their households and of women in male-headed households suggests that economic

distress drives women heading their households to the labour market, even though they may be having to shoulder a considerable care burden at home. The compelling necessity to make a living in the absence of other sources of support may be overcoming the constraining effect of social norms on engagement with the market. The receipt of transfers though, eases off this pressure. Poor health is associated with a decline in the probability of engaging in the workforce.

In contrast, for women in male-headed households, the need to engage in market work is far less compelling. Their labour supply is therefore much more elastic in relation to the expected wage, and given that they are most likely the secondary income earner in the family, if at all, their reservation wage rates – that is the lowest wages at which they would be willing to take up employment - are probably high. Since they do not face the same compulsion to work, as do women heading their households, they may be more willing to submit to social norms and what behoves their status. Even so, women in male-headed households appear to be better able to leverage access to assets such as farm animals for purposes of their own employment than are women heading their households. Such women also appear to be better able to take advantage of local level institutions for purposes of market work. This may be through the influence and networks of their husbands. However, for both groups of women, access to social capital appears to be fundamentally important to the probability of engaging in market work.

Among the war-related experiences, only the proportion of households in the community who suffered other losses due to

the war appears to have had a significant negative effect on the participation of women heads of households. In contrast, community-level experiences of damage to housing appear to have a significant and positive effect on the participation of women in male-headed households.

### **3.3 Factors associated with labour market outcomes of women heading their households and of women in male-headed households**

#### *The model*

The second component of the analysis in this section looked at the factors associated with four types of paid employment outcomes by estimating a labour market outcome model using maximum-likelihood multinomial logistic regression. The model that we estimated over the two sub-samples of women is based on the following linear functional form:

$$s_{ij} = \beta X_i + \varepsilon_{ij}. \quad (3.2)$$

In equation (3.2), the dependent variable  $s_{ij}$  denotes the employment outcome  $j$  of individual  $i$ . Subscript  $j$  takes different values with no natural ordering for different outcomes. The four outcomes explicitly looked at are as follows: employment as a salaried employee in the government or semi-government sector which is the most desirable job outcome in terms of conditions of work; employment as a private employee, which could be in the formal or informal sector; employment as an employer, own-

account worker, or as a contributing family worker in the agricultural sector; and lastly, employment as an employer, an own-account worker, or as a contributing family worker in the non-agricultural sector. These four outcomes are the main job status outcomes of the respondents. The employed were those who were engaged in any income generating economic activity during the previous month, a somewhat broader definition than the standard ILO definition of employment which uses the previous week as the reference period. The base category included those respondents who are not engaged in market-oriented work, such as full-time housewives, students, respondents who have retired, or those who are unable to work due to old age, disability or illness.

Equation (3.2) includes almost all the explanatory variables of equation (3.1) and, as in that equation, the vector  $X_i$  consists of several categories of explanatory variables including the individual's demographic characteristics, household characteristics, human capital characteristics, spatial characteristics and war experiences at the community level that may be associated with these outcomes. The term  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is the error term. This model does not attempt to address the issue of causality either; it only looks at relationships between the outcome variables and the independent variables in terms of partial correlations.

## *Results*

The results of the estimation for women heading their households, and for women in male-headed households are presented in Table 3.3. We confine our discussion of the results to the explanatory variables which appear statistically significant in predicting relevant employment outcomes, and we structure our discussion according to the SLA framework. Since the base category is the sub-sample of women in each sub-sample who are not participating in the labour market, the marginal effects of the explanatory variables under each employment outcome need to be interpreted as being relative to the base category.

Turning first to demographic characteristics of the respondent and features of her household, age is a significant predictor only of whether women in male-headed households get public sector jobs, or are likely to be self-employed or work as contributing family workers in agriculture. In both cases, the likelihood increases with age, but at a declining rate. As the share of children less than five years of age increases, it is less likely that a woman heading her household would be employed in the private sector and the marginal effect is quite large. However, the presence of older children is more likely to find her self-employed in the non-farm sector, and less likely to find her employed in farming. The presence of other females is associated with women in male-headed households working in the non-farm sector, but there is no significant statistical evidence that this household feature frees up women heading their households to engage in livelihood activities. As the share of elderly members rise in a male-headed household, the wife is less likely

to be found working in the public sector. However, this characteristic is not significantly associated with any other job outcome.

As the share of employed males in a household increases, then the woman heading it is less likely to be employed in the private sector, and to be self-employed in the non-farm sector, and more likely to be self-employed or in the family business in the agricultural sector. The same characteristic predicts that women in male-headed households are also unlikely to be self-employed or in the family business in the non-farm sector. These results suggests that for women, whether heading their households or living in male-headed households, taking up farming as a livelihood is possible only if there are working males in the household, who can possibly undertake heavy labour on the farm, or at the very least, command hired male workers who can carry out the necessary tasks. If the respondent's father was in a white-collar job, she is more likely to be a public sector employee, regardless of whether she is heading her household or is living in a household where her husband is the head, and if the latter is the case, the woman is unlikely to be engaged in non-farm self-employment activity. Women in wealthier households are unlikely to be in private sector jobs, all other characteristics being equal. But such women if heading their households are also less likely to be self-employed in non-farming while women in male-headed households are less likely to be in farming. Thus, it appears that only the poor are forced to find work as employees in the private sector; and in non-farming if heading their households, and in farming if living in male-headed households. Receiving transfers make it less likely that the

respondent will be a public sector employee or self-employed in farming if she is heading her household. While the same holds true for women in male-headed households, such women are more likely to be working in the private sector. This last observation, together with the result that greater household poverty finds women in male-headed households more likely to be self-employed in farming, suggest that for such women, the receipt of transfers obviates the need to work in either the private sector or in farming. Thus, both these outcomes appear the less preferred options for women in male-headed households and are likely to come about only as a result of economic distress.

The husband's employment characteristics appear to be significant predictors of the wife's labour market outcomes in households headed by men. The husband holding a white-collar job, or being employed in the manufacturing or services sector other things being equal, makes it more likely that the wife is a public sector employee. However, the husband's white-collar job is associated with an even greater likelihood of the wife being in private sector employment and less likely that she is self-employed in the non-farm sector. This is compared to women in male-headed households who are not participating in the labour market but who share the same characteristics. However, husband's employment in the manufacturing or services sector rather than in the agricultural sector makes it significantly more likely that the wife is self-employed in the agricultural sector herself and less likely that she is self-employed in the non-farm sector.

We turn next to the relationship between the ownership of assets and different labour market outcomes for the two groups of women. It is immediately noticeable that relatively few of these assets are significant in the labour market outcomes of women in male-headed households. In contrast, many of these characteristics are associated with labour market outcomes for women heading their households. The education variables work well and are in line with the empirical literature. The relationship between educational attainment and the probability of public sector employment is positive and monotonic for both samples of women, but the marginal effects are statistically significant only for women heading their households, suggesting that as educational attainment increases, the chances of being employed in the public sector also increases. In contrast, probability of employment as a private sector employee declines with better educational attainment until the GCE A' levels, relative to primary education or no schooling, but thereafter rises. This suggests that private sector employment for women heading their households is a realistic option only if they have little or no education at all and are also likely to be desperately poor, and for women who are educated beyond the A' Levels, the latter because they would be then more likely to be employed in better jobs. It is possible that the statistically significant results are obtained for this group of women rather than for women in male-headed households because of the larger size of sample and hence higher number of observations for each educational category.

The marginal effects of the educational variables are negatively correlated and monotonically so, for women heading their

households in the case of self-employment in agriculture, even though only one of the marginal effects is statistically significant. This suggests that self-employment in agriculture is probably the least desired employment outcome for such women and that it is only those who cannot find any other employment opportunity who remain in it. And this may be the case for most women who live in less densely populated parts of the Northern Province who are forced to eke out a living in mostly subsistence agriculture because they cannot access markets for the non-agricultural wares that they are able to produce.

*Table 3.3 : Factors associated with the probability of labour market outcomes: Marginal effects of multinomial logistic estimation*

	Women heading their households			Women in male-headed households		
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>						
Age	0.0030	-0.0047	0.0058	0.0135***	0.0067	0.0118*
Age squared	-0.0000	-0.0000	-0.0001	-0.0002***	-0.0001	-0.0001*
Share of children less than 5 years	-0.0299	-0.1220*	-0.0553	0.0317	-0.0078	-0.1537
Share of children between 5 and 15 years	0.0135	0.0049	-0.0096***	-0.0024	-0.0038	-0.0258
Share of other adult females	0.0041	-0.0097	0.0038	-0.0056	-0.0530	-0.0678
Share of elderly household members (>70 years)	0.0004	0.0611	-0.0778	-0.2312**	-0.0089	0.0906
Share of members who are ill	0.0545*	-0.0900	-0.0431	-1.0624	0.1107	0.1785
Share of employed males in the household	-0.0426	-0.1161***	0.1278***	-0.0285	-0.0442	-0.0396
At least one male member in a white-collar job	0.0308**	-0.0503	0.0752***	-0.1109*		
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	0.0173***	-0.0208	-0.0158	0.0250*	-0.0105	-0.0445
Housing infrastructure score	0.0085	-0.0057**	0.0043	0.0116	-0.0095**	-0.0130**
Household receives transfer income	-0.0404***	-0.0117	-0.0269**	-0.0222**	0.0270*	-0.0329*
<i>Husband's characteristics</i>						
Husband's years of education				0.0031	-0.0037	-0.0023
						0.0140
						-0.0001
						-0.1202
						0.0374
						0.1249*
						-0.1231
						0.1991
						-0.1781**
						-0.0738*
						0.0032
						0.0186
						0.0024

	Women heading their households			Women in male-headed households		
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture
			Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services			Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
Employed in a white-collar job						
Employed in the manufacturing sector						
Employed in the services sector						
<i>Assets</i>						
Secondary education	0.0024	-0.0231*	-0.0066	-0.0201	-0.0227	-0.0212
GCE O' Levels	0.0256***	-0.0371**	-0.0049	-0.0540**	-0.0376	-0.0146
GCE A' Levels and more	0.0706***	0.0520**	-0.0683*	-0.0303	0.0085	-0.0924
Extent of land held by household	0.0001	-0.0027**	0.0003	0.0041***	-0.0025	0.0014
Household owns house with deed	0.0074	-0.0010	-0.0031	0.0074	0.0088	0.0152
Log of respondent's net financial assets	-0.0003	-0.0020*	0.0010	0.0016	0.0004	0.0004
Household has livestock	-0.0183***	-0.0180	0.0350***	-0.0186	-0.0111	0.0831***
Household has crop trees	0.0072	-0.0255**	0.0146	-0.0420**	0.0189	0.0029
Strength of relationships with relatives	-0.0074**	-0.0085	-0.0136*	-0.0231*	-0.0058	-0.0149
Strength of relationships with friends	0.0153***	0.0084	0.0143*	0.0153	-0.0030	0.0166
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	-0.0104	-0.0032	0.0554***	0.0509***	-0.0034	0.0714***
<i>Spatial variables and connectivity</i>						
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	-0.0001	0.0055**	0.0008***	-0.0039***	0.0045	-0.0013**
Number of trading establishments in the	0.0000	-0.0012***	0.0002***	0.0008***	-0.0010	0.0003**

	Women heading their households				Women in male-headed households			
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
DS division								
Number service establishments in the DS division	0.0000	-0.0009***	0.0001***	0.0008***	0.0001**	-0.0007	0.0002**	-0.0000
Household owns mechanized transport	0.0016	-0.0079	-0.0076	-0.0227	0.0089	-0.0080	-0.0435**	0.0430**
Minutes taken to go to the nearest market	-0.0002	0.0015***	0.0007**	-0.0005	-0.0008	0.0006	0.0010**	-0.0001
Minutes taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat	0.0001	-0.0007**	-0.0004*	0.0004	0.0001	0.0001	-0.0003	0.0002
Kilinochchi	0.0405	0.8669***	-0.1050***	-0.6208***	-0.0335	0.7187	-0.1874*	-0.0332
Mullativu	0.0429	0.7725***	-0.0515*	-0.4365***	-0.0047	0.6935	-0.1327	-0.1826**
Mannar	0.0208	1.2944***	-0.1637***	-0.8202***	-0.0594	1.1452	-0.2480*	0.0311
Vavuniya	0.0405	-1.6212***	0.1635**	1.1074***	0.1143	-1.3242	0.2796*	0.0188
<i>Proportion of households in the community who experienced the following in relation to the war</i>								
Displaced and stayed in camp	0.0052	0.0110	-0.0126	-0.0355	-0.0615*	0.0002	-0.0207	0.0900
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	0.0165	-0.1529***	0.0247	0.0877**	-0.0379	-0.0190	-0.0415	0.0876*
Damage to property	-0.0035	0.0217	-0.0877***	0.0255	0.0534	0.0227	0.0759	0.1645*
Loss of employment	-0.0289	-0.0195	-0.0639*	0.1440**	-0.0307	-0.0240	-0.0780	-0.1027**
Loss of assets	-0.0423*	0.0622	0.0141	-0.0885	0.0543	-0.0744	-0.0785	-0.0983

	Women heading their households			Women in male-headed households		
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture
Education disrupted	0.0650***	-0.0168	0.0931***	-0.1475**	0.0601	0.0325
Other damages due to war	-0.1737***	0.0529	-0.0850	0.4370**	0.0527	0.0924
<i>Institutions</i>						
Perception of helpfulness of the Divisional Secretariat	-0.0067	0.0215	-0.0099	-0.0350*	0.0213	-0.0215
Perception of helpfulness of <i>Grama Niladhari</i>	0.0074	0.0009	0.0180*	0.0074	-0.0093	0.0372**
Number of observations	2969	2969	2969	2969	920	920

Source and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GroW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of establishments from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c). Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Single; Number of children 16 years and older living in household; Primary, secondary and O' Levels (husband's education); Primary or no schooling (principal female respondent's education); Agricultural sector; Jaffna District. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively. Both models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat's Division level for robust standard errors.

*Table 3.4 : Means and proportions of factors associated with labour market outcomes*

	Women heading their households				Women in male-headed households			
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>								
Age	43.8652	44.1242	50.4530	48.5659	39.1091	36.8974	42.5663	44.1696
Age squared	2006.8090	2058.2980	2613.7780	2461.3850	1586.3820	1433.7690	1919.3130	2057.1400
Share of children less than 5 years	0.0144	0.0248	0.0066	0.0155	0.1176	0.0857	0.0535	0.0451
Share of children between 5 and 15 years	0.2220	0.1095	0.0661	0.1547	0.1882	0.1847	0.1675	0.1845
Share of other adult females	0.8390	0.8064	0.5922	0.7462	0.4820	0.4573	0.4498	0.4844
Share of elderly household members (>70 years)	0.0453	0.0311	0.0197	0.0294	0.0049	0.0214	0.0172	0.0166
Share of members who are ill	0.0223	0.0124	0.0114	0.0199	0.0000	0.0188	0.0222	0.0339
Share of employed males in the household	0.0496	0.0514	0.2497	0.0580	0.4082	0.3846	0.4193	0.3445
At least one male member in a white-collar job	0.0674	0.0093	0.1538	0.0135				
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	0.2921	0.0870	0.0769	0.1020	0.3091	0.1026	0.0482	0.0643
Housing infrastructure score	9.6854	8.6957	9.4744	8.9621	9.9091	8.8205	9.0843	9.5322
Household receives transfer income	0.5730	0.8789	0.7991	0.8026	0.2182	0.8205	0.6867	0.7427
<i>Husband's characteristics</i>								
Husband's years of education					12.9273	8.8718	8.8913	8.7544
Employed in a white-collar job					0.7636	0.3846	0.1807	0.0292

	Women heading their households				Women in male-headed households			
	Public sector employees		Private sector employees		Public sector employees		Private sector employees	
	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
Employed in the manufacturing sector	0.1798	0.3571	0.3889	0.3682	0.0545	0.3846	0.4699	0.3860
Employed in the services sector	0.3034	0.2019	0.2436	0.2473	0.1455	0.2051	0.3614	0.4035
<i>Assets</i>	0.4270	0.0807	0.0171	0.0424	0.8000	0.2564	0.0361	0.0643
Secondary education	4.0174	2.1560	6.0472	5.4350	13.3218	1.8333	6.5991	9.4313
GCE O' Levels	0.4494	0.3975	0.5513	0.5162	0.6909	0.5641	0.6265	0.5906
GCE A' Levels and more	3.6913	3.1600	4.5085	4.3768	5.2842	2.8326	4.1694	3.7961
Extent of land held by household	0.3596	0.3882	0.5983	0.5650	0.4727	0.3846	0.7108	0.6842
Household owns house with deed	0.8202	0.6615	0.8077	0.7527	0.8364	0.8205	0.8554	0.8655
Household has livestock	2.9775	3.0124	3.0214	3.0208	3.4545	3.2564	3.4940	3.2982
Household has crop trees	3.2921	3.0932	3.1453	3.0767	3.4909	3.3977	3.4699	3.3041
Strength of relationships with relatives	0.1910	0.2236	0.4786	0.3430	0.1818	0.3846	0.4096	0.3977
Strength of relationships with friends	677.7416	687.5248	638.5684	635.5785	704.3273	587.9487	596.3012	609.1404
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	1438.2250	1360.0590	1247.0850	1199.4860	1307.4730	1168.4100	1117.3250	1172.7310
<i>Spatial variables and connectivity</i>								
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division								
Number of trading establishments in the DS division								

	Women heading their households				Women in male-headed households			
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
Number service establishments in the DS division	1261.6180	1243.8850	1224.6500	1261.7840	1441.1640	1187.6670	1161.1080	1208.2870
Household owns mechanized transport	0.2472	0.0776	0.2094	0.0957	0.9091	0.3077	0.2892	0.4444
Minutes taken to go to the nearest market	19.9888	25.8789	26.9060	24.4513	17.3636	27.4359	28.4337	24.6257
Minutes taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat	37.9326	43.4565	47.6282	47.0605	30.9091	49.4872	48.3735	56.9415
Kilinochchi	0.2472	0.1304	0.1026	0.1020	0.9364	0.0513	0.0723	0.1637
Mullaitivu	0.0899	0.1025	0.1154	0.1146	0.0727	0.1026	0.1325	0.1111
Mannar	0.1798	0.1025	0.0769	0.1047	0.1273	0.3077	0.1084	0.1053
Vavuniya	0.1461	0.1242	0.1410	0.0984	0.9909	0.0769	0.0843	0.1170
<i>Proportion of households in the community who experienced the following in relation to the war</i>								
Displaced and stayed in camp	0.6310	0.6154	0.6060	0.5695	0.4230	0.6044	0.5859	0.6004
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	0.5666	0.4230	0.5802	0.5525	0.6467	0.4413	0.4760	0.5974
Damage to property	0.6680	0.5577	0.5766	0.5620	0.5397	0.4749	0.5177	0.6396
Loss of employment	0.5631	0.5027	0.4523	0.4829	0.4248	0.4513	0.4245	0.4996
Loss of assets	0.7338	0.6738	0.6701	0.6475	0.6478	0.5701	0.6004	0.6873
Education disrupted	0.4679	0.3735	0.3956	0.3604	0.2681	0.3201	0.3569	0.4440

	Women heading their households			Women in male-headed households				
	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers and own account workers in agriculture	Employers and own account workers in manufacturing or services
Other damages due to war <i>Institutions</i>	0.0143	0.0155	0.0135	0.0153	0.0092	0.0145	0.0120	0.0215
Perception of helpfulness of the Divisional Secretariat	4.1236	4.1863	4.1923	4.1372	4.1818	4.1282	4.1807	4.2632
Perception of helpfulness of the <i>Grama Niladhari</i>	4.2247	4.2795	4.3248	4.2437	4.2909	4.1026	4.3735	4.3626

Sources and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of establishments from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c).

As the extent of households' land ownership increases, the less likely it is that women heading their households are working as private sector employees, and the more likely it is that they are self-employed in the non-agricultural sector. This may appear counterintuitive as greater landholding may make agriculture more viable. But actually, since holding and managing land is easier for men than for women, if women heading their households own larger extents of land, they may be more likely to use that as a resource (by renting it perhaps) to move out of agriculture into self-employment in the non-farm sector. The associated marginal effect is positive and significant and larger in magnitude than the marginal effect for self-employment in agriculture which is not even significant. Again, as the net financial assets of women heading their households increase, they are less likely to be working in the private sector. If the household owns livestock, then the less likely it is that the woman heading her household is in the public sector and the more likely it is that she is self-employed in the agricultural or non-agricultural sector (the marginal effects are significant for both outcomes, with the marginal effect for the non-farm sector being twice the size of the farm sector). Perhaps counter-intuitively, the positive and significant effect of this variable on non-agricultural employment is twice as large as the marginal effect on agricultural employment. An explanation of this does not come immediately to mind. It may also depend on the kind of livestock that is owned, which the model has been unable to control for because more differentiated variables would have resulted in a small number of observations in each category. Owning livestock is also positively and significantly associated

with women in male-headed households engaging in self-employment in the farm and non-farm sectors, and the magnitudes of the marginal effects in this case are remarkably similar.

The relationships between the social capital variables and job outcomes are interesting. Stronger bonds with relatives are associated with a lower probability of being employed at all for women heading their households, with the results being significant for public sector employment and self-employment, but only negative but not significant for private sector employment. It is possible that this relationship is endogenous as far as public sector work is concerned. Public sector employees may be having relatively weaker bonds with relatives simply because they do not need the security of a strong and supportive kin group. As public sector employees they are able to access the institutional networks and security afforded by the public sector, in a way that those in the private sector, or in self-employment, are unable to do. In contrast, stronger relationships with friends are positively associated with all categories of employment for both groups of women although the results are statistically significant only for public sector employment and agricultural self-employment. In contrast, membership in organizations is significantly and positively associated only with self-employment whether in agriculture or non-agriculture. While the marginal effects are positive for women in male-headed households as well, it is significant only in the case of self-employment in non-farming activities for this group of women. This suggests that this enabling condition is

important for self-employment and not for formal employment in the public sector.

Community and spatial characteristics appear to be catalytic for the labour market outcomes of women heading their households. If she is living in a community with a higher number of industrial and construction-related establishments, and which is less dense in the number of trade and service-related establishments, then it is more likely that she is a private sector employee. Conversely, if she is living in a community with a high density of trade and service sector establishments, then it is less likely that she is a private sector employee and more likely that she is self-employed in either the agricultural or non-farm sectors. The same holds true for women in male-headed households but only for the agricultural sector. Here again, employment in the private sector appears less desirable than self-employment when opportunities for the latter appear more available. Access to own mechanized transport makes it significantly less likely that women in male-headed households are self-employed in agriculture and more likely that they are self-employed in non-agriculture. Private sector employment and self-employment in agriculture is more likely for women heading their households the longer the time it takes to go to market. Women heading their households are more likely to be employed as private sector employees if they are living in Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu than in Jaffna district, but less likely to be living in Vavuniya district. Living in Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu rather than Jaffna also makes it less likely that they are self-employed. This is also true for women in male-headed households who are self-employed in agriculture.

Opportunities for self-employment appear to be higher in Vavuniya rather than even Jaffna, and this holds true for women in male-headed households as well.

Community-level war experiences such as being displaced and living with family and friends, losing employment and other war experiences are associated with a greater likelihood that women heading their households will engage in self-employment or family business in the non-farming sector, but if the proportion of household members whose education has been disrupted due to the war in the community is high, then such women are less likely to be engaged in the non-farm sector. In contrast, if a high proportion of individuals in the community experienced disruption to education, then women heading their households are more likely to engage in self-employment in the farming sector. However, high rates of education disrupted in the community make it more probable that women in male-headed households will take up self-employment in the non-farm sector compared to similar women who are not participating in the labour market whereas high rates of loss of employment due to the war make it less likely that such women would find their own employment in the non-agricultural sector.

In terms of institutional variables, the more helpful the *Grama Niladhari* office is seen as being the more likely it is that women will be self-employed in agriculture. It could also be that with more assistance targeting the agricultural sector being routed through the *Grama Niladhari's* office, such women perceive the *Grama Niladhari* as being helpful. In contrast, the more helpful the DS office is perceived as being, the less likely it would be that

a woman heading her household would be self-employed in the non-farm sector.

To sum up, different characteristics appear to be associated with different types of job outcomes – employment in the more formal public and private sectors and self-employment in farming and non-farm activities, not just across the job categories, but also across the types of households. Irrespective of who heads the household, women’s public sector employment is associated with greater social status and superior educational attainments. In female-headed households where at least one male member of the household has a white-collar job, women are more likely to be employed in the public sector than to stay away from the labour market. In male-headed households, if the husband is in a white-collar job or is employed in the manufacturing or service sector, wives are more likely to be employed in the public sector.

Employment in the private sector appears to be the least desirable job outcome. Where women are better educated, live in richer households, own land and own financial assets, or come from households where there is a greater share of men in the household who are employed, they are less likely to be employed in the private sector. Where industrial and construction activities are more densely concentrated compared to trade and service activities, women are more likely to be employed in the private sector. Moreover, women in Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar are more likely, and those in Vavuniya are less likely, to be employed in the private sector compared to women in Jaffna.

Understandably, self-employment in agriculture among females heading their households appears to be strongly associated with whether the household has working age males or not. On the other hand, educational attainments are negatively associated with self-employment in agriculture, indicating that self-employment in agriculture is an employment of last resort for women who cannot find employment elsewhere. The fact that receipt of transfers is negatively associated with self-employment in agriculture (as well as the private sector) also indicates that it is probably economic distress that drives women to these jobs. The perception that the *Grama Niladhari* is helpful is also positively associated with self-employment in agriculture.

Self-employment in non-agriculture appears to be largely an option for women heading their households. For example, among female-headed households, having children aged 5 to 15 is positively associated with non-agricultural self-employment, but negatively associated with agricultural self-employment. Furthermore, in male-headed households, where the husband is employed in the manufacturing or service sector, the wife is less likely to be employed in the non-agricultural sector and more likely to be engaged in agricultural self-employment activities.

Women heading their households who are members of organizations, in communities with a greater concentration of trade and service sector industries, as well as a greater concentration of war-related experiences such as displacement and loss of employment, are more likely to be self-employed.

### 3.4 Factors associated with the earnings of women heading their households

To identify the characteristics associated with the wages and earnings of employed women heading their households, we deployed wage functions for those working as employees, and earnings functions for those employed either as employers, as own-account workers or as contributing family workers. However, since wages or earnings data are only limited to those who choose to work, and since women who work are selected non-randomly in the population, estimating wages for only the subpopulation who work can introduce a bias into the estimates of the factors associated with wages or earnings. The econometric analysis of wages reported here addresses such selection issues by using Heckman's (1979) sample selection model for the estimation of wages or earnings. The sample selection model, consisting of a two-stage procedure involving two equations, is estimated by Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE).

As set out in Greene (2012), the procedure involved estimating the parameters of the first equation of the model by maximizing

$$\ln L_1(\theta_1) = \sum_{i=1}^n \ln f_1(y_{i1} | X_{i1}, \theta_1). \quad (3.3)$$

In equation (3.3),  $y_{i1}$  is a binary outcome variable and denotes employment. The vector  $X_{i1}$  contains the variables hypothesized as being associated with employment. The parameter  $\theta_1$  is the

consistent estimator derived from maximizing equation (3.3). The consistent parameter is then embedded in the second equation whose outcome  $y_{i2}$  is a continuous variable and denotes the wage or earnings. However,  $y_{i2}$  is observed for only that part of the sample consisting of women working as employees or in self-employment. The second equation's parameters are estimated by maximizing

$$\ln L_2(\hat{\theta}_1, \theta_2) = \sum_{i=1}^n \ln f_2(y_{i2} | X_{i1}, X_{i2}, \hat{\theta}_1, \theta_2). \quad (3.4)$$

In this equation, the vector  $X_{i2}$  contains the variables hypothesized as being associated with wages. The elements of the vector  $X_{i2}$  derive from human capital theory, and from the relationships between labour earnings and endowment characteristics that have emerged from the theoretical and empirical literature and incorporated in the SLA framework.

We estimated three models of equation (3.4) separately for three categories of wages or earnings outcomes using Stata command Heckman MLE<sup>3</sup> for each. In the analysis related to employees,  $y_{i2}$  denotes the log of monthly wages. In the second model analysing the earnings of the self-employed,  $y_{i2}$  denotes the log of seasonal earnings of those employed in farm work, and in the

---

<sup>3</sup> The models were estimated separately because Stata does not have a command to correct for sample selection bias if the selection equation is a multinomial regression models of the kind used for the analysis of employment outcomes.

third model,  $y_{i2}$  denotes the log of monthly earnings of those self-employed in non-farm work. We describe the derivation of the earnings variable in self-employment in what follows.

Where production, whether farm or non-farm, is undertaken by the household as a group, and where individual members are not always paid a wage or a share of the profit, it becomes a challenge to measure the returns to labour provided by individuals. To address this issue, in this study we have assumed identical productivity in all production tasks across individuals. Their individual contributions to output are made dependent only on the time devoted by each member to the production activity. Accordingly, to estimate the individual's 'earnings' from such activities, we divided total revenue from the production activity by the total number of person-hours provided by household members, and then multiplied the result by the total number of hours that the respondent had devoted to the task. In the case of agricultural earnings, which are seasonal, we have information about total revenue for that activity during the last season, and the number of hours per week that each household member devoted to the activity. Thus we were able to apportion revenue from the activity during the season, to participating household members according to how many hours each of them spent on it, during a typical week. We followed the same procedure to estimate the earnings from non-farm production activities, only in this case, the duration was a month rather than a season.

## *Results*

We first present and discuss the results of the estimation of the factors associated with the wages of all the women employees in our sample, and separately, with the wages of women employees heading their households, and of women employees from male-headed households. Average monthly wages by sample group are presented alongside. Although women employees heading their households were found to be earning monthly wages that were significantly lower than the monthly wages of women from male-headed households, tests confirmed that the coefficients and the intercepts of the functions for the two sub-samples were significantly different from each other, and so the model was estimated separately for each subgroup. The results of the estimation are presented in Table 3.5.

Given the relatively small number of women in male-headed households who are in wage employment, relatively few of the results for this sub-sample turned out to be significant. The results appear more robust for the subsample of women heading their households.

Only the coefficients of the variable age squared are significant and that only for women heading their households, suggesting that for this group, wages rise at a declining rate as the individual ages. In line with human capital theory, better education is associated with higher returns in terms of wages, but the results are significant only at the highest level of education. Thus, schooling up to GCE A' Levels or more increases the wages of women heading their households by 26

per cent, than if she were educated only up to primary level. Although occupation is usually a significant correlate of employees' wages, this was not the case for our sample of employees. Nevertheless, almost all the job-related variables are significant and the direction of the relationships as denoted by the signs is in line with the theory and the empirical literature. Women heading their households and working in the private sector earn 48 per cent less than equivalent women in the public sector, while women in male-headed households earn 95 per cent less. Women heading their households and working as temporary employees earn 46 per cent less, and those working as casual employees earn 63 per cent less, than women with permanent jobs, all else being equal. Among women in male-headed households, those in casual employment earn 64 per cent less than those in permanent jobs.

None of the social class or social capital variables is a significant predictor of wages among women heading their households. However, a woman in a male-headed household whose father is in a white-collar job earns 22 per cent more than an equivalent woman whose father was in a blue-collar job. This finding provides a fascinating insight into factors other than productive characteristics (denoted by education) that appear to play a role in the determination of wages. Of the social capital and network variables, only that relating to the strength of bonds that women in male-headed households have with friends is statistically significant. The result suggests that strong bonds with friends are associated with an increase in wages of 22 per cent as well. It is possible that such women have access to more influential networks of friends through their husbands.

*Table 3.5: Estimation of factors associated with the monthly wages of employees, women heading their households and women in male-headed households: Results of Heckman MLE*

	Coefficients			Mean monthly wage (Rs.)	
	All women employees	Women heading their households	Women in male-headed households	Women heading their households	Women in male-headed households
<i>Demographic variables</i>					
Female head of household	-0.1176*			9,664	17,765
Age	0.0276	0.0291	0.0149		
Age squared	-0.0004*	-0.0004*	-0.0002		
<i>Education variables</i>					
Secondary education	0.0235	0.0325	0.0627	9,557	11,278
GCE O' Levels	-0.0530	-0.0407	-0.0458	9,206	14,316
GCE A' Levels or beyond	0.2355***	0.2602**	0.1012	17,618	26,979
<i>Job-related variables</i>					
Low skilled occupation	0.0660	0.0644		8,600	12,745
Private sector employee	-0.5476***	-0.4764***	-0.9500***	7,910	8,659
Temporary	-0.4004***	-0.4553***	-0.1294	9,281	13,980
Casual	-0.6107***	-0.6308***	-0.6364***	6,562	9,485
<i>Social class and social capital</i>					
Father is/was a white-collar worker	0.0625	0.0159	0.2191*	13,454	26,610

Strength of relationships with relatives <sup>4</sup>	0.0025	0.0195	-0.1026		
Strength of relationships with friends	0.0224	-0.0116	0.2179**		
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	-0.0965*	-0.1346**	-0.1882	8,726	14,477
<i>Spatial variables</i>					
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	-0.0011***	-0.0013***	-0.0011		
Number of trading establishments in the DS division	0.0002**	0.0002*	0.0002		
Number service establishments in the DS division	0.0003***	0.0004***	0.0003		
Respondent lives in either Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu or Mannar	-0.4626***	-0.6076***	-0.0902	9,470	18,061
Constant	10.0916***	10.1541***	9.7947***		
<hr/>					
<i>Selection equation</i>					
Share of children less than 5 years of age	-1.2958**	-1.1490**	-3.7221**		
Share of children less between 5 - 16 years of age	0.7401*	0.8353*	-3.1770***		
Fisher's z transformed correlation	-1.7327***	-1.8805***	1.4902		
Natural logarithm of the standard deviation of the residual of the wage equation	-0.5967***	-0.5830***	-0.8201***		
N	513	412	101		

Source and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of establishments from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c). Estimated by applying the Heckman MLE procedure to correct for sample selection bias to the data. Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Primary or no schooling; Public employee; Permanent tenure; Vavuniya. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively.

However, membership of organizations is significantly associated with lower wages as employees, for women heading their households. In this case, membership of organizations may be correlated with less wealth and lower occupation status as poorer women would tend to seek membership of such associations. This may be the reason why membership of organizations is associated with lower wages for such women. In fact, the most interesting finding to come out of this analysis, made possible by the rich data set, is that non-productive characteristics such as social class and networks appear to wield as much influence over the determination of employees' wages as productive characteristics such as education and skills.

The spatial variables are significant predictors of wages only for the sample of women heading their households. When working as employees, the wages earned by these women are likely to rise marginally (by less than one per cent) with the number of trading and service establishments in the local community (the Division). Wages are likely to decline with each additional establishment in the division belonging to industrial and construction establishments. Clearly, the higher demand for women's labour in a local market with a higher density of trading and service establishments where women can get jobs more easily than in the industrial and construction sectors, ensure that the wages that they earn are also higher. Being resident in Vavuniya is associated with wage premium; women heading their households living in any of the other districts are on average likely to be earning three-fifths less even if they share the same productive and other characteristics in the model. The signs of these coefficients are exactly the same for women in

male-headed households, but they are not statistically significant.

The analysis related to the factors associated with the earnings of employers, self-employed persons or contributing family workers in agricultural and non-agricultural employment is confined to the sample of women heading their households. This is because the small number of observations for each category among the sample of women in male-headed households gave rise to concave log likelihood functions that would not converge. In contrast, the larger number of observations for each employment outcome available in the much larger sample of women heading their households, particularly those working in the non-agricultural sector, enabled the model's estimation. However, only the results of the estimation of earnings from non-agriculture with its large number of observations turned out to be significant. The results are presented in Table 3.6 below.

*Table 3.6: Estimation of factors associated with the earnings of employers, own account workers, and contributing family workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors: Results of Heckman MLE for women heading their households*

	Earnings from agriculture	Earnings from non-agriculture	Mean agricultural seasonal earnings (Rs.)	Mean non-agricultural monthly earnings (Rs.)
<i>Demographic variables</i>				
Age	0.0801	0.0470**		
Age squared	-0.0007	-0.0006**		
<i>Education variables</i>				
Secondary education	0.0404	0.2162***	4,837	9,700
GCE O' Levels	0.2378	0.3046***	7,125	10,464
GCE A' Levels or beyond	-1.0945	0.3633**	6,893	8,244
<i>Assets</i>				
Extent of land owned by household	0.0127	-0.0110***		
Household owns house with deed	-0.0369	-0.0488	6,673	8,884
Total net financial assets of the household	-0.0184	0.0006		
<i>Social class and social capital</i>				
Father is/was a white-collar worker	0.5049	0.1774**	5,717	11,347
Strength of relationships with relatives	-0.0609	0.0271		
Strength of relationships with friends	-0.1171	0.1154**		
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	-0.1461	0.0072	7,213	9,359
<i>Spatial variables</i>				
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	0.0009	-0.0029***		
Number of trading establishments in the DS division	-0.0003	0.0008***		
Number service establishments in the DS division	-0.0003	0.0005***		
Respondent lives in either Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu or Mannar	-1.0650**	-1.1262***	5,014	8,706
Constant	8.6046**	9.3225***		

Selection equation		
Share of employed males in the household	0.8513**	0.3381
Time taken to go to the nearest market	0.0042	-0.0087***
Fisher's z transformed correlation	-0.5894	-0.9538***
Natural logarithm of the standard deviation of the residual of the earnings equation	0.2807**	-0.1154**
N	237	1115

Source and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of firms from the Department of Census and Statistics (2015c). Heckman MLE procedure applied to correct for sample selection bias. Note that individual earnings are estimated as the share of total household income from the activity accruing to the individual according to the person-hours she spent on this activity during a typical week. Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Primary or no schooling; Vavuniya. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively.

Earnings in non-agricultural activities rise with age but at a declining rate and the results are significant at least at the five per cent critical level. The relationship between earnings and education is positive, monotonic and statistically significant. It suggests that better education is strongly associated with higher returns in non-farm self-employment and family work. In fact, the respondent having GCE A' Levels or more increases returns by nearly 36 per cent, compared to having primary education or less. Thus the impact of better education on non-farm earnings is twice as high as that of the same level of education on wages when working as an employee.

The household owning a larger extent of land is associated with a highly significant but very small (less than one per cent) decline in earnings from non-agriculture. It is possible that maintaining larger extents of land involves costs which erode the capacity to earn from non-agricultural livelihood activities. The returns to class as signalled by the respondent's father being in a white-collar job are statistically significant, involving an earnings premium of a substantial 18 per cent. Perceptions of stronger bonds with friends also increase non-farm earnings by 12 per cent, suggesting that strong networks among friends are ingredients for success in non-farm self-employment activities. Membership of associations has a considerably smaller, but positive association, but the results are not significant.

As in the case of returns to wage employment, a higher density of trading and service establishments in the local market, denote greater opportunities for earnings from non-farm self-employment activities. The coefficients are small but statistically significant at the one per cent critical level. Residence in any district other than Vavuniya is associated with a 113 per cent decline in non-agricultural earnings compared to the earnings from non-agriculture when resident in Vavuniya. Self-employed producers in the non-agricultural sector are probably better able to sell their products at a higher price to the more prosperous residents of Vavuniya as well as to transport it more cheaply to the more expensive markets in Colombo, than they would if they were living in any other Northern district. Likewise, inputs for non-agricultural production other than labour would also be cheaper in Vavuniya as it is closer to key distribution centres such as Anuradhapura (two hours by train), Kurunegala, and

Colombo, than Jaffna which is eight hours by train from Colombo.

### **3.5 Summary conclusions**

This section looked at factors associated with several labour market outcomes of women in the Northern Province, and the livelihood strategies of their households. The labour market outcomes were as follows: women's participation in the labour force; their job status outcomes; and, their earnings from wage work or from own employment in agriculture and non-agriculture.

Economic distress seems to underlie the decision to participate in the labour market for women heading their households, and receiving transfer income eases off some of this pressure. The presence of young children and poor health constrains these women from market work, but education attainment up to GCE A' Levels and beyond encourages participation. In contrast women in male-headed households are less compelled to engage in paid work, and therefore more likely to play traditional gender roles. The strengths of social relationships appear to be important correlates of the participation decisions of women heading their households as well as women in male-headed households. Strong bonds with relatives made it less likely that women participated, while strong relationships with friends and membership of organizations, made it more likely that they did.

Of the different types of job outcomes, public sector employment is the most desirable, and is associated with higher social status

and higher educational attainments. Private sector employment appears to be the least popular job outcome. While household wealth, education, ownership of financial and physical assets appear to encourage women to stay out of the private sector, the lack of trade and service sector industrial activities in comparison to construction and industrial activities tend to push women into private sector employment. Self-employment in non-agriculture appears to be sought mostly by women heading their households. In fact, the analysis suggests that women heading their households may choose to engage in agricultural activities when no other employment options are available to them. On the other hand, the presence of a husband may enable women from male-headed households to be self-employed in agriculture. Broadly, where communities have undergone different war-related experiences, they are more likely to be self-employed, and seem to draw strength from social capital such as membership in organizations.

Public sector jobs are the most desirable. They pay twice as much as private sector jobs and are invariably permanent. In addition to factors such as education and skills that influence returns to labour, higher social status and access to networks are also associated with higher wages as employees. Higher earnings from self-employment in non-agriculture are significantly associated with better education among women heading their households, but higher social class and strong bonds with friends significantly make for higher earnings from non-agriculture for women in male-headed households. Being resident in Vavuniya with its greater connectivity to input and output markets also

makes for higher earnings from self-employment than living in any other district.

In the next section we look at whether participation in livelihood development programmes provided by the government, non-governmental actors, and donors mediate women's labour market outcomes in the Northern Province.

## **4. Livelihood Interventions And Self-Employment Outcomes**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous section investigated the factors associated with women's labour market outcomes and households' livelihood strategies in Sri Lanka's Northern Province after the war. The analysis in this section continues the story by exploring whether participating in the myriad livelihood development programmes implemented by government, non-government, or international donor agencies after the war, is associated with self-employment outcomes. We state at the outset that our analysis is subject to many limitations, not least the challenge of exploring causality with data from just one household survey producing cross-section data. This data, too, was collected six years after the end of the war, and likely many years after the interventions were first implemented. In fact, none of these programmes built in measures to evaluate outcomes in a rigorous way from the very beginning. As Blattman and Ralston (2015) point out in reference to similar programmes carried out in other parts of the world, many such programmes have been motivated largely by

faith, only secondly by theory and almost never by empirical evidence. Similarly, evaluating programme outcomes in an empirically robust way has not been a priority in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, in this section we apply several recently developed econometric techniques to our observational data to assess the causal impact of participating in livelihood development programmes on women's self-employment outcomes.

There does appear to be a growing international empirical literature related to the effectiveness of livelihood interventions in non-conflict, conflict and post-conflict environments. Some have used experimental methods to assess the impact of interventions on outcomes. Experimental methods have the advantage of randomizing "treatment", in this case participation in livelihood development interventions that allows the establishment of a causal relationship between treatment and outcome. This literature has been the subject of a recent, upbeat review by Blattman and Ralston (2015). The authors argue that while traditional job creation is important, the immediate need is to improve portfolios of work, increasing productivity in current occupations, and enabling access to new ones. They cite empirical evidence that confirms that it is possible to improve poor people's work portfolios cost-effectively on a large scale, and that it requires a mix of interventions that addresses both the demand side and the supply side. So safety net programmes such as workfare that shore up consumption together with infusions of capital with or without skills training, help raise productivity and incomes. Such interventions have eased the credit constraint faced by the poor and resulted in an expansion of businesses and start-ups. Blattman and Ralston (2015) argue

most emphatically that if the diagnosis that such poor are credit-constrained is correct, then interventions that are capital-centric will be successful. However, capital needs to be provided in grant form rather than as microfinance, as microfinance is too expensive for the borrower and has short repayment periods. Skills training programmes on their own are not cost-effective, and designing them to provide exactly what is needed is difficult. Many such programmes have high dropout rates and have either modest or ambiguous effects on participants' labour market outcomes whereas skills training combined with capital may work better. In contrast, Elsayed and Roushdy's (2017) evaluation of randomised control trial (RCT) found that vocational, business and life skills training provided to women in 30 villages in Egypt increased the likelihood of treated women becoming self-employed compared to the control group.

Nevertheless, in support of their argument that capital-centric programmes generate livelihoods more cheaply and more effectively, Blattman and Ralston (2015) cite several studies which have evaluated such programmes using RCT methods. For example, randomized trials of seven programmes providing livestock along with a package of other services such as basic training on livestock health, care and related training, short-term income support and other services, found that the programme shifted casual labour to self-employment and raised earnings or household consumption by 10-40 per cent (Banerjee et al. 2015; Bandiera et al. 2013). Most interestingly, Blattman and Ralston (2015) cite two studies of livelihood interventions in post-war Uganda which targeted women and were successful in raising earnings and consumption. The first in Northern Uganda

offered five days business skills training, \$150 cash grant, encouragement to be petty traders and follow up visits for the next few months, to women who had returned to their villages from forced displacement (Blattman et al. 2015). A randomized evaluation showed that they started trading enterprises, doubled their earnings and increased consumption by a third. Another programme in war-affected districts in Northern Uganda invited young men and women to form groups of about 20 and submit proposals to get vocational training and start individual enterprises. Each group received grants of nearly US\$ 8000. Four years later, a randomized evaluation showed that earnings were 40 per cent higher among the group which participated in the programme (Blattman et al. 2014).

A further important point that Blattman and Ralston (2015) make is that while policy makers and researchers look on regular (blue-collar) work as being more desirable than self-employment, many of the poor prefer self-employment. This was found to be the case for a group of 1000 unemployed and underemployed applicants to low-skill jobs in five different industrial firms in Ethiopia (Blattman and Dercon 2015). The experiment randomly offered cash and business training to half of the unsuccessful job applicants who started businesses and saw their incomes grow by a third. And soon, many of the successful job applicants quit their jobs while those who remained were no better off economically than those who started their own businesses. However, the health of those who remained in jobs ended up being much worse.

Almost all of the interventions reviewed by Blattman and Ralston (2015) in their survey are in Africa, most of them targeted men, and the binding constraints that the interventions eased were correctly identified as capital and skill constraints. The available Sri Lankan evidence that was surveyed in the introductory section is not encouraging as far as women beneficiaries are concerned (see de Mel et al. 2007; 2014). The interventions that de Mel et al. (2007, 2014) analyzed using RCT methods focused on providing capital grants and skills training, to both men and women in field locations related to the 2004 Tsunami in the southern areas of the country, and to women in urban environments near the cities of Colombo and Kandy. The first of these studies found that women's businesses were barely profitable unlike men's, while the second concluded that although the interventions appeared successful in encouraging business startups among women, capital and skills appeared not to be the binding constraints on business growth and sustainability. As far as we are aware, no RCT-based evaluations of livelihood interventions have been carried out in the former conflict zones of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Nevertheless, some other evaluations of livelihood intervention programmes targeted at women in Northern Province after the war using qualitative methods found more positive results. ILO's Local Empowerment through Economic Development (LEED) and Local Economic Development through Tourism (LED) projects, for example, provide some interesting insights and useful lessons in the design and management of such interventions in the Sri Lankan context of a myriad of

government and other agencies in the field engaged in the same endeavour.

The ILO implemented the projects during 2011-2016 and 2015-2016 in two divisions of Vavuniya and Kilinochchi districts. The projects aimed to economically empower the most vulnerable population, including women, female heads of households, persons with different abilities, and marginal farmers, help reduce conflict-related economic inequalities and thereby contribute towards sustainable peace. Marginalized farmers were especially targeted, the majority of them women, some of whom were the sole income earners in the family (women-headed households) or were caring for a disabled family member. A total of 67 per cent of beneficiaries in Vavuniya North and 70 per cent in Mulankavil were women. The primary focus of the projects was the commercial production of papaya and other field crops such as passion fruit, cassava and bell pepper, as well as a sustainable fisheries harvest. The projects adopted a project implementation framework based on value chain development, particularly by linking Northern producer group/co-operatives with domestic and overseas buyers.

An independent evaluation of the two projects based on qualitative data collection and analytical methods by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) (2016), found that farmers in the area have been able to improve their economic status significantly due to the ILO-LEED project. Some farmers had also been able to invest heavily in agricultural equipment with the proceeds of their farming. Returns from farming were also invested in housing, the education of children, the purchase of

gold jewellery, and paying off debt. Assistance provided by the LEED and other agencies had increased the number of fishing boats (by even setting up a boat building facility) and equipment among fishing households (a large majority of them female-headed), so that the number of people working on a boat declined from 7-8 just after the conflict to 2-3, which raised earnings to Rs. 2,000 per day. Women became members of fisheries societies and participated in decision-making.

It appears that much of the projects' success was due to their distinctive organizational framework inspired by ILO's distinctive tripartite approach which was adapted to suit local conditions. The framework involved stakeholders comprising intended beneficiary groups; government agencies, including the Ministry of Labour and Trade Union Relations and the Departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Cooperatives; and employers represented by private sector actors and the Employment Federation of Ceylon. This enabled the projects to mobilize government departments and private business groups for technical services and markets to strengthen the capacity of concerned producer groups and the conflict-affected population. Social dialogue enabled co-operatives to enter into trade agreements with a number of buyers ensuring a ready market and fair pricing for their members. Officers belonging to the decentralized district and divisional level administrations interviewed by CEPA attributed the LEED projects' relative success compared to other donor implemented projects to the time taken to ascertain needs and conditions before coming up with sustainable solutions. The demonstrated success of the project has encouraged the original funders of LEEDS, the

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia and the Royal Government of Norway, to commit to a follow-on Employment Generation and Livelihoods through Reconciliation (EGLR) project for the period 2017-2021.

This brief review of the international and Sri Lankan literature on the effectiveness of livelihood interventions in generating employment and income suggests that this research question is best addressed through evaluations of individual projects using experimental methods. Evaluations using qualitative data and methods can also provide useful insights about the factors that made for success or failure. Such evaluations as have been carried out thus far suggest that capital-centric interventions, increasing individuals' bargaining strength through collectives, and institutional buy-in by different stakeholders, are important for success. Nevertheless, in what follows we use analytical techniques that have been developed recently to assess treatment effects of interventions in observational rather than experimental data, to glean insights about the effectiveness of livelihood interventions in Sri Lanka's north after the war. However, before discussing these new techniques and the results of applying them to our data, we present an overview of the descriptive information related to livelihood interventions in the next section.

## **4.2 Overview of livelihood interventions**

This study gathered information about ten different types of livelihood interventions that respondents participated in, after the conflict. Of these, cash grants and housing are interventions

that can be expected to catalyse livelihood rehabilitation in general, whereas the other types of assistance we looked at – capital grants, working capital grants, livestock, training and loans – are likely to have a more direct impact on livelihood rebuilding. In this section we present a descriptive overview of the data related to livelihood interventions.

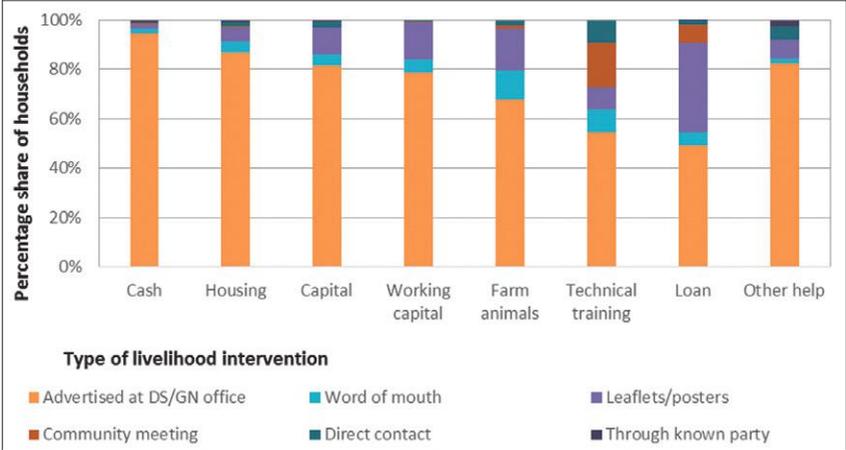
While the vast majority of respondents (85 per cent) were aware that such programmes existed, participation levels tended to be much lower (49 per cent.) However, more female-headed households (50 per cent) than male-headed households (43 per cent) participated in the interventions, although awareness levels were broadly similar across both types of households.

At least 50 per cent of the respondents learned about the livelihood intervention programmes available to them through advertisements at the Divisional Secretariat or the *Grama Niladhari* office as evident in Figure 4.1. For most types of grants, these advertisements appear to be the primary source of information for the respondents, while leaflets or posters have been an important source of information for capital, working capital, farm animals and loans. In fact about 36 per cent of the respondents have learned of loan facilities through leaflets. Word of mouth was a more important source of information for programmes about animal husbandry than for any other programme.

Of these interventions, the government has provided the largest number of direct interventions. A total of 85 per cent of the respondents who have received working capital and nearly half

of the respondents who have received farm animals as livelihood interventions, have received such interventions from the government. The same is true for loans; while 74 per cent of the respondents obtained loans from the government or its agencies, another 18 per cent have borrowed from local NGOs.

*Figure 4.1: Sources of information of livelihood interventions*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

However, interventions in the form of housing and cash grants have been mainly received through international agencies. For example, 42 per cent of the respondents have received cash grants and 46 per cent of the respondents have received housing from international agencies. Furthermore, another 32 per cent have received housing from international NGOs. The number of organizations providing assistance in the form of capital equipment is spread out more evenly among the government,

INGOs and NGOs. On the other hand, while most respondents have received farm animals from the government (47 per cent), a significant number of participants (38 per cent) have been given farm animals by INGOs. Overall, the participation of international agencies in livelihood interventions is broadly limited to cash handouts and housing, while the government has been the main driver of livelihood assistance across all categories.

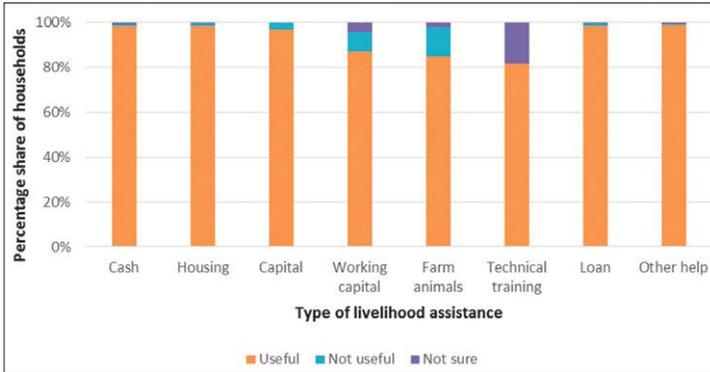
The interpretation of summary statistics on technical training requires caution because of the small number of observations. Of the entire sample, only 23 respondents received technical, general or special training. Of these 23, 11 received technical training. Therefore, although the government has been responsible for the greatest share of training, it has to be understood in the context of the actual numbers. Very low provision and participation in training programmes as part of livelihood interventions indicates either one of the following: first, that recipients had some know-how in relation to their livelihood activities and that they did not think that additional training was necessary; or second, that donors presumed that recipients could engage in livelihoods without further human capital development.

The large majority of respondents found the livelihood assistance programmes they took part in appropriate, and the proportion who found such interventions appropriate was many times greater than the percentage who did not find them appropriate (Figure 4.2). However, the responses tend to be more nuanced in the case of working capital and farm animals.

Even though over 80 per cent agreed that the interventions were appropriate, about 9 and 13 per cent of the respondents did not find the provision of working capital and farm animals as livelihood interventions appropriate. This may perhaps link with our previous point that some level of training would have been required for these respondents to apply these interventions effectively to start and/or improve an income-generating activity.

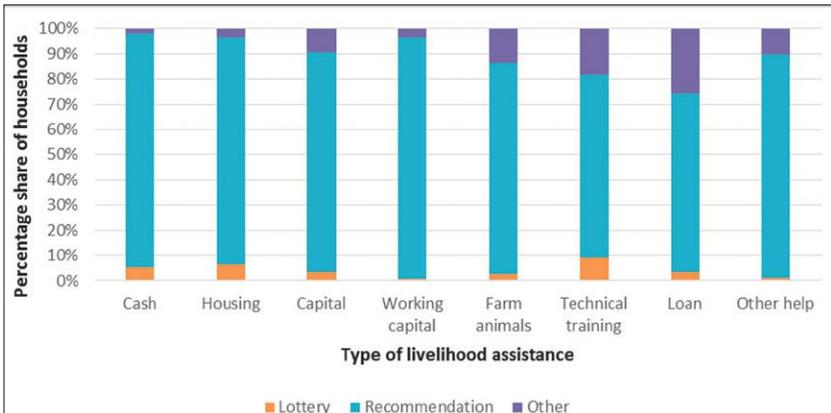
For most types of livelihood interventions, candidates were selected through a process of recommendation (presumably by the *Grama Niladhari* of the area) (*Figure 4.3*) This suggests that good relations with the *Grama Niladhari* would have been critical for selection into the programme and partly explains why perceptions of the *Grama Niladhari*'s helpfulness was found to be catalytic in self-employment in agriculture in the previous section . Recommendation as a source for selection is highest for working capital (96 per cent) and understandably lowest for loans (71 per cent). The relatively narrow outreach in terms of creating awareness in the community, which is mostly limited to advertisements in government organizations and the selection process which is dominated by recommendation, could partly explain the relatively low rate of participation in livelihood development programmes.

*Figure 4.2: Appropriateness of livelihood assistance programmes*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

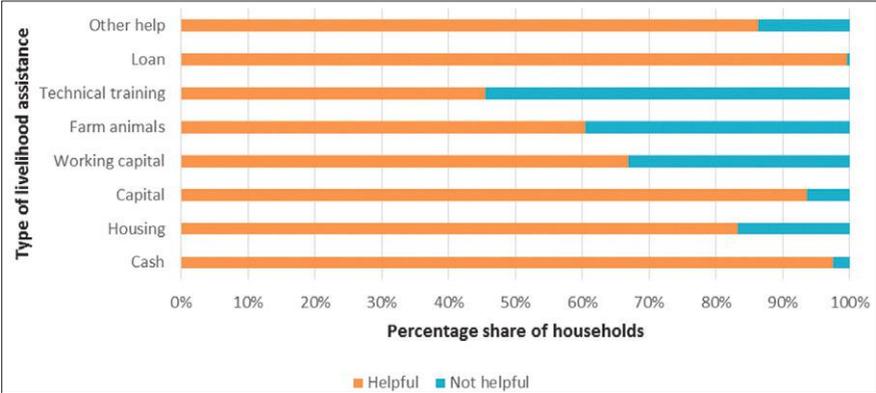
*Figure 4.3: Selection method for participation in livelihood interventions*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

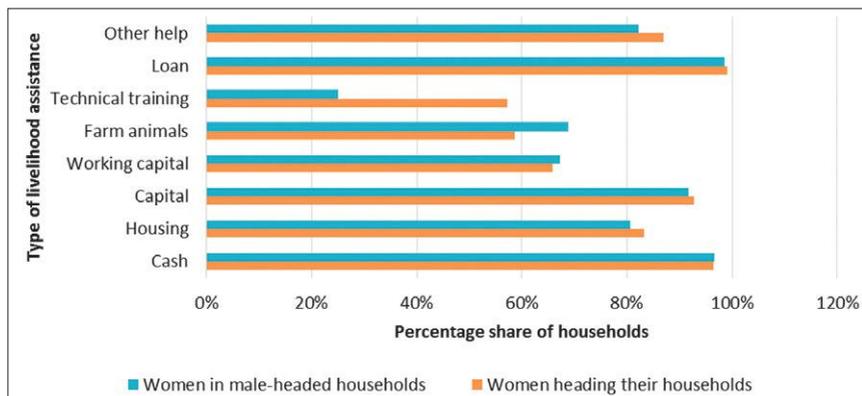
Having looked at who had received livelihood assistance, it is also important to see if those recipients found the interventions useful or not in generating or enhancing their household income, and if so, why.

*Figure 4.4: Helpfulness of livelihood interventions*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

*Figure 4.5: Perception of helpfulness of livelihood intervention by type of household headship*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, 2015.

Loans were found to be the most useful by far, and this stands to reason because they enhance liquidity and increase the range of livelihoods that the borrower may choose to engage in. Cash was the next most useful intervention, probably for similar reasons. Although technical training has been the least helpful, as mentioned earlier, the number of observations is too small to be compared with other types of interventions. A total of 39 and 33 per cent of the recipients of farm animals and working capital found these interventions to be unhelpful. In fact, these numbers also appear to be correlated with the lower level of acceptability of these two interventions discussed earlier.

While the level of helpfulness of these interventions among female- and male-headed households is largely the same, notable differences exist in participants' assessment of the helpfulness of farm animals for livelihood activities. While 69 per cent of respondents in male-headed households found farm animals to be useful, only 59 per cent of the women heading their households found this intervention to be helpful. Animal husbandry involves managing land, and this may be easier for women in male-headed households than for women heading their households. This particular finding however, resonates with the analysis of women's labour market outcomes in the previous section where it was found that women in male-headed households were more likely to be self-employed or working as family workers in agriculture than women heading their households.

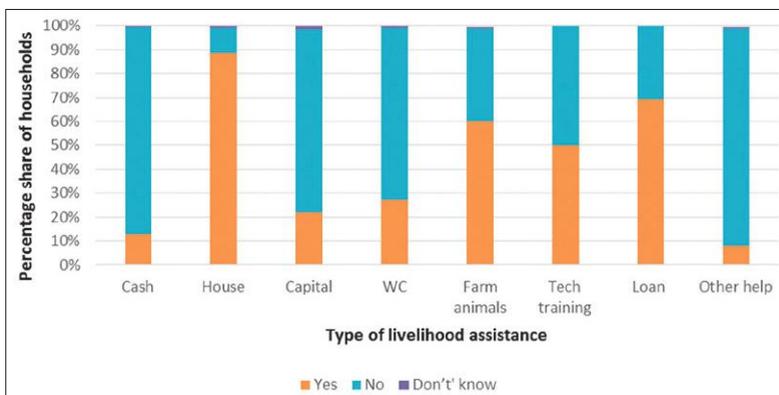
Most respondents who found livelihood interventions useful did so because it helped reduce production costs. This is the primary reason why recipients found cash and housing helpful. Although they are not direct interventions, the liquidity provided through cash handouts and stability gained through housing are likely to have created a positive impact on rebuilding livelihoods in general. Those who found farm animals to be useful experienced an increase in their income and expanded their business/or started a new line of income-generating activity due to this intervention.

However, those who did not find the interventions to be useful did so for a variety of reasons. At least a third or 30 per cent of the recipients of farm animals found that the intervention did

not suit them while 26 per cent claimed that they could not to earn income through this intervention. A little less than a fourth, that is 23 per cent, also said that livestock were most suited for men, confirming the findings of the econometric analysis in the previous section . In fact, most of the respondents who found direct interventions to be not useful said that the support was either not suitable or that they could not find gainful employment as a result of the intervention. Among those who found housing to be unhelpful, 74 per cent claimed that they needed additional funds.

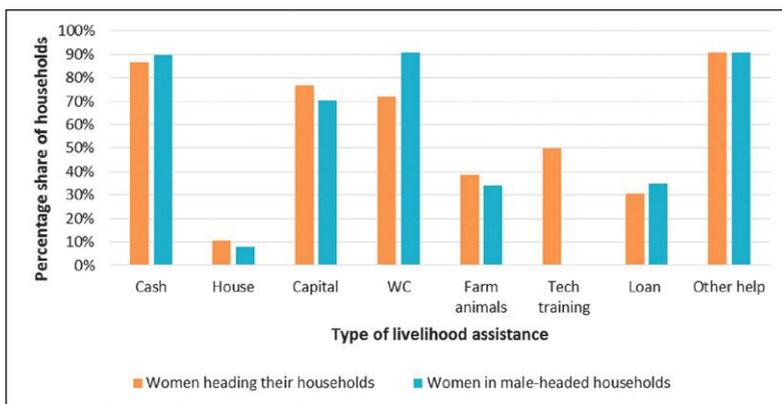
Since follow up to livelihood interventions is important to develop sustainable income generating activities among participating households, we also looked at the extent to which livelihood interventions were reinforced by follow up activities. The data suggests that follow up has been highest for housing, possibly because much of these activities were funded by international agencies or INGOs. The follow up for loan facilities is also higher than for other interventions, but in this case, it is very likely that follow ups are built into the programmes to support the recovery of dues by lenders. Interestingly, follow up is lowest for capital handouts (22 per cent) and for working capital (27 per cent). Although there has been greater follow up for farm animals, it does not seem to have been effective in making these interventions useful to some recipients.

*Figure 4.6: Follow up of livelihood interventions*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

*Figure 4.7: Follow up to livelihood interventions: women heading their households and women in male-headed households*



Source: Data obtained from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

In general, follow up appears to be higher among male-headed households for cash grants, working capital and loans. In fact, there is a large difference in the level of follow up for working capital handouts between female and male-headed households.

Nevertheless, in most cases, these follow up activities have been mostly limited to a site visit and an additional meeting. In addition, some level of advice and guidance was provided for housing, capital, farm animals and loans. More sustainable follow ups such as setting up mentoring relationships with the recipients, additional training and funds, enabling access to more programmes have been conspicuously lacking.

To summarize the key points of the analysis of descriptive statistics on livelihood interventions, while the majority of the households were aware of livelihood intervention programmes being initiated in their areas, proportionately fewer respondents from male-headed households took part in these interventions compared to those from female-headed households. The government has financed the major share of direct livelihood interventions while international agencies supported interventions such as cash and housing. By and large, most of the respondents who took part in the interventions found them to be acceptable and useful. In fact, many of the participating households found livelihood assistance helpful to them irrespective of whether the households were headed by males or by females. The greatest positive impact of the interventions was helping to reduce production costs. Those who did not find such interventions helpful advanced a variety of reasons including the

non-suitability of the interventions for them and the inability to find employment as a result of the intervention.

Cash grants, capital and working capital handouts involved less follow up, in comparison to housing, farm animals and loans. However, much of these follow up activities have been limited to a second visit by the donors or the setting up of a meeting.

### **4.3 Econometric strategy**

#### *Analytical methods*

While it is useful for evaluation and purposes of replication to find out whether an intervention was successful in achieving its objectives, this can be a challenge when one is dealing with observational or non-experimental data. In such data, who participates in the intervention is not controlled by those who collect the data, unlike in experimental data where the intervention or “treatment” is randomized. Randomization of the intervention ensures that the difference between the average treated outcomes (those who participated) and the average non-treated outcomes (those who did not participate in the intervention) estimates the average treatment effect (ATE).

In this section we aim to find out whether participation in livelihood intervention programmes, which we refer to as the “treatment”, had an impact on the labour market outcomes of the respondents in our sample of roughly 4000 women when such “treatment” was not randomized. In such cases, common

characteristics can affect both treatment assignment and treatment-specific outcomes as the outcome and treatment are not necessarily independent. For example, it could be that the same entrepreneurial spirit that encourages some women to take up self-employment, would also motivate them to self-select to participate in livelihood development interventions. However, if we have no measure of individuals' entrepreneurial spirit in our model, then the omission of this variable will cause bias in estimation, making the difference between the average treated outcomes and the average non-treated outcomes an unreliable estimate of the impact of livelihood development interventions. Possible correlation between the outcome and treatment, and endogeneity of the treatment, can also erode the consistent and unbiased estimation of the average treatment effect.

This can be seen in the following example. For the sake of simplicity let us assume that we are only interested in one labour market outcome, workforce participation. We also assume that the treatment dummy variable  $D_i$  takes only two values either 1 or 0 depending on whether or not the individual participated in a livelihood intervention programme. Then  $Y_i = f_i(1)$  is the probability of workforce participation if the individual had participated in a livelihood intervention programme and  $Y_{0i} = f_i(0)$  would be the probability of workforce participation if the individual had not participated in a livelihood intervention programme. Thus, for each individual, the data allows us to observe  $Y_i = Y_{0i} + D_i(Y_i - Y_{0i})$ .

So what would be the average effect that participating in a livelihood programme has on the rate of workforce participation? A popular average causal effect among researchers is the average treatment effect (ATE) that is the average difference in the potential outcome means,  $E[Y_i - Y_{0i}]$ . This is the average difference in the workforce participation rate of those who participated in a livelihood intervention programme and the workforce participation rate of those who did not. However, ATE suffers from selection bias, as demonstrated in equation (4.1):

$$E[Y_i | D_i = 1] - E[Y_{0i} | D_i = 1] = E[Y_i - Y_{0i} | D_i = 1] + \{E[Y_i | D_i = 1] - E[Y_{0i} | D_i = 0]\}. \quad (4.1)$$

Equation (4.1) shows that selection bias results when individuals who have participated in a livelihood intervention programme differ from individuals who have not participated in a livelihood intervention programmes because of characteristics other than those that are correlated with participating in an intervention programme.

In contrast, the average effect of the treatment on the treated or ATET is  $E[Y_i - Y_{0i} | D_i = 1]$ . This is equivalent to the difference between average rates of workforce participation of the sample  $E[Y_i | D_i = 1]$  which is observed, and the counterfactual average rates of workforce participation *if they had not participated in a livelihood intervention programme*,  $E[Y_{0i} | D_i = 1]$ , which

cannot be observed. Thus, ATET is the effect that participating in a livelihood programme has on the workforce participation of those who underwent that livelihood intervention programme. We combine these terms as follows in equation (4.2)

$$E[Y_i - Y_{0i} | D_i = 1] = E[Y_i | D_i = 1] - E[Y_{0i} | D_i = 1]. \quad (4.2)$$

Therefore, to estimate the average effect of the treated on the treated, that is ATET, we need to construct a control group or devise a modelling strategy that provides a consistent estimate of the labour force participation rate of those who participated in the intervention programme, *if they had not done so*. Such a modelling strategy is known as a potential outcome model, the Rubin causal model (Rubin 1974) or the counterfactual model. These models use covariates to make treatment and outcome independent once the estimation is conditioned on these covariates.

Potential outcome models are based on three key assumptions. The first assumption is that conditioning on observable covariates makes the outcome conditionally independent of the treatment. This means that once controlled for all observable variables, the potential outcomes are independent of treatment assignment and conditional independence allows us to use differences in model-adjusted averages to estimate the ATE. The second assumption is that each individual could receive any treatment. This is called the overlap assumption. And third, it is assumed that the potential outcomes and the treatment status of each individual are unrelated to the potential outcomes and

treatment statuses of all other individuals in the population (Cattaneo et al 2013, Drukker 2014).

### *The potential outcome model*

We assume that,<sup>4</sup>  $y_i$  is the observed outcome variable, employment as own account worker, employer or contributing family worker and  $t_i$  is the treatment variable which denotes whether or not the individual or her spouse (if from a household headed by a male) participated in a livelihood interventions programme. The term  $X_i$  is a vector of explanatory variables or covariates that affect the outcome of self-employment, while  $W_i$  is a vector of explanatory variables that affect the assignment of treatment that is participation in a livelihoods intervention programme. The two vectors  $X_i$  and  $W_i$  may have elements in common.

In this model, the potential outcome  $y$  is  $y_0$  when  $t=0$  and  $y$  is  $y_1$  when  $t=1$ . That is,

$$y = (1 - t)y_0 + ty_1. \quad (4.3)$$

---

<sup>4</sup> We use the notation used under the topic ‘Advanced introduction to treatment effects for observational data’ in the relevant manual for Stata 14 where the model is very clearly set out.

The functional forms for  $y_0$  and  $y_1$  are

$$y_0 = X' \beta_0 + \varepsilon_0 \quad \text{and} \quad (4.3.1)$$

$$y_1 = X' \beta_1 + \varepsilon_1. \quad (4.3.2)$$

In the two equations above,  $y_0$  and  $y_1$  are expressed as linear functions for simplicity of notation but in practice they can assume other functional forms. The coefficients  $\beta_0$  and  $\beta_1$  in the two equations have to be estimated. The terms  $\varepsilon_0$  and  $\varepsilon_1$  are error terms that are unrelated to the two covariate vectors  $X_i$  and  $W_i$ . The potential outcome model separates each potential outcome into a predictable component,  $X\beta_t$  and an unobservable error term  $\varepsilon_t$ . The treatment assignment process is,

$$t = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } W'\gamma + \eta > 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}. \quad (4.4)$$

In equation (4.4),  $\gamma$  is a coefficient vector and  $\eta$  is an unobservable error term which is not related to either  $X$  or  $W$ . The treatment process is also made up of two components, one of which is predictable, that is  $W'\gamma$ , and an unobservable error term  $\eta$ .

In this model,  $y_i$ ,  $t_i$ ,  $X_i$  and  $W_i$  can be observed from the data. However, the data cannot reveal both  $y_0$  and  $y_1$  for a given individual,  $i$ . The model for  $t$  determines how the data on  $y_0$  and  $y_1$  are missing. The model separates the potential outcomes and treatment assignments into both observable and unobservable components. The unobservable error term of the treatment model needs to be independent of the vector  $(\varepsilon_0, \varepsilon_1)$  in order that the set of available estimators can be specified. The coefficient vectors  $\beta_0$ ,  $\beta_1$  and  $\gamma$  are the auxiliary parameters. Estimates of these coefficients are required to estimate the average treatment effect ATE and the average treatment effect on the treated ATET.

There are several techniques that can control for all observable variables in order to ensure that potential outcomes are independent of treatment assignment. Four such methods are used for this analysis. The four methods are: regression adjustment (RA); inverse-probability-weighting (IPW); and the “doubly robust” methods of the augmented inverse-probability weights (AIPW) and inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA). The first, Regression Adjustment (RA) uses a regression model to predict potential outcomes adjusted for covariates. But while RA builds regression models to predict outcomes it does not attempt to model treatment. In contrast, inverse-probability-weighting (IPW) uses regression models to predict treatment but does not build a formal model for outcome. Additionally, the (IPW) estimator uses weighted means

rather than simple unweighted means to fit a model of treatment status on whatever characteristics there is information about for each respondent in order to obtain inverse probability weights. In this way, the estimator disentangles the effects of variables which affect treatment.

In contrast to RA and IPW which uses a single regression model (RA modelling outcome and IPW modelling treatment) the doubly robust methods combine the outcome modelling approach of RA with the treatment model approach of IPW. Combined in this way, the resulting doubly robust estimators require that only one of the models be specified correctly. Consequently, if the treatment model is misspecified but the outcome model is correctly specified, correct estimates of the treatment effects are still obtained. The same goes if the outcome model is mis-specified but the treatment model is correctly specified (Drukker 2014).

Of the “doubly robust” methods, the first we use is the AIPW which was proposed by Robins and Rotnitzky (1995). It deploys two models for treatment and outcome, estimating the treatment model first, and then using inverse-probability weights (IPW) from the treatment model and augmenting the IPW estimator with a correction term, when performing regression adjustment to predict outcomes. The correction term removes the bias if the treatment model is wrong and the outcome model is correct. However, the correction term becomes zero if the treatment model is correct and the outcome model is wrong. The second of the “doubly robust” methods we use is IPWRA proposed by Wooldridge (2010) which also deploys two models for treatment

and outcome. In contrast to the AIPW method, IPWRA uses probability weights to produce corrected regression coefficients for the non-random treatment assignment when modelling outcomes. The weights do not affect the accuracy of the regression adjustment estimator if the treatment model is wrong and the outcome model is correct because the weights would correct the regression adjustment estimator if this were the case.

In an assessment of the performance of the four models using Monte Carlo simulation, Linden et al. (2016) show that

“(i) when models estimating both the treatment and outcome are correctly specified, all adjustment methods provide similar unbiased estimates; (ii) when the outcome model is misspecified, regression adjustment performs poorly, while all the weighting methods provide unbiased estimates; (iii) when the treatment model is misspecified, methods based solely on modelling the treatment perform poorly, while regression adjustment and the doubly robust models provide unbiased estimates; and (iv) when both the treatment and outcome models are misspecified, all methods perform poorly.”  
(p. 550)

In what follows we cut to the chase and investigate whether participation in livelihood intervention programmes encourage women heading their households and women in male-headed households to take up self-employment in the farm and

separately, in the non-farm, sectors. We define self-employment here rather broadly to include employment as own-account workers, employers, and contributing family workers. We directly look at the impact of interventions on self-employment because of two reasons. First, in our sample, there does not appear to be an in-between stage of job-search since none is unemployed. Secondly, the interventions themselves are aimed at encouraging self-employment activities rather than work as employees in the public or private sectors. So the two outcome models we estimate using logistic regression are self-employment in farming and separately, self-employment in non-farming.

The covariates for the outcome model were selected from the results of the multinomial regression estimation of employment outcomes reported in Table 3.3 of Section Three. The treatment model we estimate is multivalued with three kinds of treatment: *cash only*, *no cash but direct interventions only*, and *cash and direct interventions*, with the reference base category being *neither cash nor direct interventions*. This categorization follows the insights about the efficacy of capital-centric interventions drawn from the recent empirical literature and reviewed by Blattman and Ralston (2015).

*Table 4.1: Distribution of sample by interventions and labour market outcome*

	Non- participants	Public employees	Private employees	Self- employment in agriculture	Self- employment in non- agriculture	Total Number	Total %
<i>Women heading their households</i>							
Neither cash nor direct interventions	539	43	133	57	362	1,134	37.5
Cash only	90	7	24	17	71	209	6.9
Direct interventions only	435	18	107	111	454	1,125	37.2
Cash plus direct interventions only	173	22	58	53	247	553	18.3
Total	1,237	90	322	238	1,134	3,021	100.0
<i>Women in male-headed households</i>							
Neither cash nor direct interventions	254	29	20	22	49	374	37.3
Cash only	35	2	4	3	9	53	5.3
Direct interventions only	222	21	17	43	87	390	38.8
Cash plus direct interventions only	101	6	3	23	54	187	18.6
Total	612	58	44	91	199	1,004	100.0

Source: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

Table 4.1 sets out the distribution of the sample by type of intervention and labour market outcome. While nearly seven per cent of women heading their households received only cash and no other livelihood assistance, a marginally lower five per cent of women in male-headed households also did so. Thirty seven per cent of women heading their households did not receive cash assistance but participated in at least one livelihood intervention programme and the equivalent figure for women in male-headed

households was 39 per cent. Roughly 18 per cent of both groups of women received cash assistance and participated in at least one livelihood development programme.

Since the treatment is multivalued we use multinomial logistic regression to estimate the treatment model. However, to select the covariates for the treatment model, we first estimate the covariates of participating in the three kinds of livelihood interventions in what follows.

#### **4.4 Factors associated with participation in livelihood interventions**

##### *The model*

In order to identify the covariates of treatment, we used maximum likelihood to estimate a multinomial logistic regression model with three mutually exclusive treatment outcomes. The model that we estimated over the two sub-samples of women is based on the following linear functional form:

$$t_{ij} = \beta X_i + \varepsilon_{ij}. \quad (4.5)$$

In equation (4.5), the dependent variable  $t_{ij}$  denotes the treatment outcome  $j$  of individual  $i$ . Subscript  $j$  takes different values with no natural ordering for different treatment outcomes. The three outcomes explicitly looked at are as follows: cash only, no cash but direct interventions only, and cash and

direct interventions, with the reference base category being neither cash nor direct interventions. These three outcomes are the main treatment outcomes of the respondents. The base category consisted of those respondents who did not participate in any livelihood intervention. The vector  $X_i$  in equation (4.5) consists of several categories of explanatory variables including demographic and household characteristics, assets, spatial characteristics and war experiences at the household level that may be associated with these outcomes. The term  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is the error term. This model does not attempt to address the issue of causality either; it only looks at relationships between the outcome variables and the independent variables in terms of partial correlations.

The results in Table 4.2 show that, by and large, the characteristics included in our models of participating in livelihood assistance programmes appear to predict the probability of households headed by women being the beneficiaries of such programmes better than the probability that households headed by men participated in such programmes. Of the groups of variables, household demographic variables appear not to be significantly related to outcome, but variables related to the employment profile of the household appear to be more reliable predictors of participation. Spatial variables and war experiences are also significant predictors.

Women-headed households with small children are significantly less likely to have benefited from cash only programmes and more likely to have participated in cash plus programmes. A

higher proportion of adult women in male-headed households is associated with participation in cash plus direct intervention programmes. As the proportion of household members working as public employees rises, the probability of male-headed households receiving cash assistance declines significantly. While the marginal effect is negative for women-headed households, too, the result is not statistically significant.

But higher shares of own account workers are correlated with a greater probability of women-headed households participating in cash plus direct intervention programmes, but negatively and significantly associated with benefiting from cash only, interventions. Higher social class as denoted by whether the woman's father was or is a white-collar worker makes it more likely that such households participate in a cash only programme and less likely that they participate in a cash and direct interventions programme. Wealthier households headed by women and women-headed households which get transfer income are less likely to have participated in cash only programmes and more likely to have participated in cash plus programmes. In contrast, male-headed households receiving transfers are more likely to have participated in both cash only, and direct intervention programmes, but less likely to have participated in cash and direct intervention programmes.

Owning a greater extent of land is associated with women-headed households receiving direct interventions only. Owning a house with deed, makes it likely that women-headed households participated in both cash assistance and direct intervention programmes. From the social capital variables, only membership

of organizations is significantly associated with direct interventions and cash plus direct interventions for women-headed households. This characteristic is associated with male-headed households participating in cash plus programmes, and for these households, strong bonds with relatives and more assets held in joint accounts make it more likely that they participated in direct interventions programmes.

As the density of industrial and construction enterprises increases, both types of households are more likely to have participated in direct interventions programmes. But as the density of trade enterprises increases, this likelihood declines. Distance from markets makes it less likely that women-headed households participated in cash assistance programmes but more likely that male-headed households participated in direct interventions programmes.

All the marginal effects of the district variables are large and statistically significant at the more stringent one per cent level for women-headed households. Accordingly, all such non-Jaffna households were more likely to have got cash assistance and less likely to have received direct interventions assistance. Households in Mannar and Vavuniya were less likely to have got cash as well as direct interventions, and households from Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi more likely to have got the cash plus programmes than Jaffna households. Male-headed households in Vavuniya were more likely than similar households in Jaffna to have received cash assistance only and less likely to have participated in any of the two other categories of interventions.

Of the war-related experiences, having lived in welfare camps as a result of displacement is correlated with a greater likelihood of both types of households receiving cash assistance and of women-headed households receiving only direct interventions. This suggests that the intervention was well-targeted as wealthier households are more likely to have had friends and relatives living outside their affected community with whom they could have stayed. Loss of employment during the war is associated with a greater likelihood that women-headed households participated in direct interventions, as well as cash and direct interventions and less likely they participated in cash only programmes. Disruption of education of household members also made it less likely that such households would get only cash, and more likely that they would get cash plus direct livelihood development assistance. Thus, the interventions seem to have been targeted at resuscitating employment in households whose capacity to earn had been affected by the war. In contrast, loss of assets appeared to make it less likely that both types of households received assistance. This could be because such households may have been better off than others, since they had assets to lose as a result of the war.

The more helpful the respondent perceives the *Grama Niladhari's* office as being, the more likely it is that she or her spouse has participated in a livelihood development programme. But here, causation could work both ways. A helpful village official can make it more likely that a household accesses a programme; the fact that a household has been able to access the programme may encourage the respondent to regard the official who would have made the recommendation, as helpful.

*Table 4.2 : Factors associated with the probability of participation in livelihood interventions:  
Marginal effects of multinomial logistic estimation*

	Women heading their households			Women in male-headed households		
	Cash only	Only direct interventions	Cash plus direct interventions	Cash only	Only direct interventions	Cash plus direct interventions
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>						
Share of children less than 5 years	-0.2082**	0.0078	0.1244	-0.0842	0.1155	-0.0201
Share of children between 5 and 15 years	0.0073	-0.0097	0.0639***	0.0375	0.0282	-0.0363
Share of other adult females	0.0132	-0.0279	0.0278	-0.0619	0.0286	0.1088**
Share of elderly household members (>70 years)	-0.0156	-0.0306	0.0218	-0.2946*	0.0700	0.2716*
Share of members who are ill	-0.0158	-0.1142	0.0603	0.0475	-0.1089	0.0319
Share of employed males in the household	0.0350	0.0161	0.0364	0.0081	-0.0501	0.0742
At least one male member in a white-collar job	0.0076	-0.0364	0.0196	0.0036	0.0034	-0.0084
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	-0.0305	0.0034	0.0025	-0.0991*	0.0211	0.0463
Share employed in the public sector	-0.0219	0.0329	0.0240	-0.0199	-0.0148	0.0052
Share employed in the private sector	-0.0285**	0.1086***	0.0309**	-0.0356	0.0816	0.0286
Share employed as employers, own account workers, contributing family workers	0.0247**	-0.0095	-0.0256	0.0059	-0.0638	-0.0115
Housing infrastructure score	-0.0059***	0.0120**	0.0089***	0.0024	0.0037	-0.0034
Household receives transfer income	-0.0086	0.0019	0.0318*	0.0461**	0.0416	-0.0407**
<i>Assets</i>						
Extent of land held by household	0.0002	0.0035*	0.0004	0.0004	0.0028	0.0002
Household owns house with deed	-0.0037	0.0133	0.0328***	-0.0011	0.0303	0.0120



	Women heading their households		Women in male-headed households	
Other damages due to war	-0.0224	-0.1625	0.0273	-0.6141
<i>Institutions</i>				0.4868
Perception of helpfulness of Divisional Secretariat	0.0077	-0.0008	-0.0155	-0.0284*
Perception of helpfulness of <i>Grama Niladhari</i>	-0.0119	0.0268	0.0238**	0.0343**
Number of observations	2969	2969	2969	920
				920
				920
				920

Source and notes: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015. Data related to the number of establishments from the Department of and Statistics (2015c). The base category for each sub-sample of women is that group of relevant households which did not participate in any livelihood intervention programme at all, accounting for 539 women-headed households and 254 households headed by men. Reference categories for groups of dummy variables are as follows: Number of children 16 years and older living in household; Jaffna District. \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent and ten per cent levels respectively.

#### **4.5 Does participation in livelihood intervention programmes impact on women’s self-employment outcomes?**

Having estimated the covariates of outcome (self-employment in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors) in Section Three as well as the covariates of treatment (participation in three types of treatment) in the section above, the next step in the analysis involved estimating the treatment effect of participating in livelihood intervention programmes. This required specifying the two models, the outcome equation and the treatment equation for the two sub-samples of women. We began with the covariates of both equations found to be statistically significant in the previous estimation, but then refined the specification according to whether the models converged in the estimation of the treatment effects with Stata’s “teffects” command. The covariates that were selected for each of the models through this elimination process are listed in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 set out the results of the estimation of the average treatment effects on the treated (ATET) by RA, IPW and the double robust technique of IPWRA, and the average treatment effect (ATE) estimated by the second double robust technique of AIPW. In his own description of Stata’s capabilities in executing these approaches, Drukker (2014) implies that the ATE of AIPW can be compared with the ATETs of the other methods.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Table 4.4 sets out the ATETs and ATE of

---

<sup>5</sup> In a post to Stata Forum on 18 October 2017, Joerg Luedicke of Stata Corp wrote that the AIPW implements an estimating function that is derived particularly for ATE. Estimation of ATET would require the derivation of a

the four levels of livelihood interventions related to employment as employer, own account worker or as contributing family worker in agriculture. Table 4.5 does the same for the outcome of employment as employer, own account worker and contributing family worker in the non-agricultural sector.

---

different function and he speculates that an AIPW estimator for ATET is yet to be derived. See <https://www.statalist.org/forums/forum/general-stata-discussion/general/1414344-teffects-aipw-and-the-aequation-option-what-equations-are-being-shown> accessed 11 November 2017.

*Table 4.3: Independent variables included in the outcome and treatment models, women heading their households and women in male-headed households*

	Women heading their households		Women in male-headed households	
	Outcome model	Treatment model	Outcome model	Treatment model
<i>Demographic and household variables</i>				
Age	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Age squared	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Share of employed males in the household	Yes	No	No	No
At least one male member in a white-collar job	Yes	No	No	No
Respondent's father a white-collar worker	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Housing infrastructure score	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household receives transfer income	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Husband's characteristics</i>				
Husband's years of education	No	No	Yes	No
Employed in a white-collar job	No	No	Yes	No
Employed in the manufacturing sector	No	No	Yes	No
Employed in the services sector	No	No	Yes	No
<i>Assets</i>				
Secondary education	Yes	No	Yes	No
GCE O' Levels	Yes	No	Yes	No
GCE A' Levels and more	Yes	No	Yes	No
Extent of land held by household	Yes	No	Yes	No
Household owns house with deed	Yes	No	Yes	No
Log of household's net financial assets	Yes	No	Yes	No
Strength of relationships with relatives	Yes	No	Yes	No
Strength of relationships with friends'	Yes	No	Yes	No
Respondent is a member of at least one community-based organization	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Spatial variables and connectivity</i>				
Number of industrial and construction establishments in the DS division	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of trading establishments in the DS division	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number service establishments in the DS division	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Household owns mechanized transport	Yes	No	Yes	No
Minutes taken to go to the nearest market	Yes	No	Yes	No
Minutes taken to go to the Divisional Secretariat	Yes	No	Yes	No
Kilinochchi	Yes	No	No	No
Mullaitivu	Yes	No	No	No
Mannar	Yes	No	No	No
Vavuniya	Yes	No	No	No
Non-Jaffna districts	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Proportion of households in communities who experienced the following in relation to the war</i>				
Displaced and stayed in camp	Yes	No	Yes	No
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	Yes	No	Yes	No
Damage to property	Yes	No	Yes	No
Loss of employment	Yes	No	Yes	No
Loss of assets	Yes	No	Yes	No
Education disrupted	Yes	No	Yes	No
Other damages due to war	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Household experienced the following in relation to the war</i>				
Displaced and stayed in camp	No	Yes	No	Yes
Displaced and stayed with relatives or friends	No	No	No	No
Damage to property	No	No	No	No
Loss of employment	No	Yes	No	Yes
Loss of assets	No	Yes	No	Yes
Education disrupted	No	Yes	No	Yes
Other damages due to war	No	No	No	No
<i>Institutions</i>				
Perception of helpfulness of the Grama Niladhari	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

---

Of the results related to self-employment in agriculture set out in Table 4.4, RA failed to produce any as the initial estimates of the output logit model did not converge. Nevertheless, the other three techniques produced results. Among the treatment effects of the three types of interventions, only the coefficients of direct interventions turned out to be statistically significant for both women heading their households, and women in male-headed households. Regardless of whether the average treatment effects were estimated using IPW, AIPW or IPWRA, the impacts appear positive. The impact of interventions also appears to be of greater magnitude for women in male-headed households. However, note that the coefficients estimated using AIPW are much smaller than those estimated using IPWRA, although both are statistically significant. So, for example, going by the AIPW, while participation in direct interventions increases the probability of self-employment in agriculture of women heading their households by nearly five percentage points compared to women heads who did not participate in any intervention, the magnitude of impact for women in male-headed households is almost twice that, at ten percentage points. In contrast, the equivalent impact of participation in direct interventions only on the probability of self-employment in agriculture according to the IPWRA is much larger, at 26 percentage points for women heading their households, and 42 percentage points for women in male-headed households. Meanwhile, the magnitude of the causal impact according to the IPW estimator is more in line with that obtained from AIPW rather than IPWRA though not statistically significant.

So which of these results should we go by?<sup>6</sup> Drukker (2014) suggests that when both outcome and treatment models are correctly specified the AIPW estimator is more efficient than either the RA or the IPW estimator. Our results in Table 4.4 encourage us to agree with Drukker (2014): the AIPW estimator appears to produce more credible results as the IPWRA estimator appears to produce treatment effects that are far too big.

However, AIPW fails to produce a statistically significant result in the estimation of the effect of treatment on the probability of self-employment in non-agriculture for women heading their households. Here we have to rely on the results of the other estimators, which are negative and significant in the case of cash, as well as direct interventions only. The ATETs of all the estimators, whether RA, IPW or IPWRA, are all negative and significant for both these types of interventions, but only RA produces a negative and statistically significant treatment effect for cash plus direct interventions. Again, the results are of different magnitudes with IPW producing more conservative estimates, a negative of nine per cent compared to no treatment at all, whether the treatment is cash only or direct interventions only. In contrast, the results produced by RA are twice to three times as large and by IPWRA three to five times as large.

---

<sup>6</sup> We have confined ourselves to these methods and not used propensity score matching or nearest neighbour matching methods as the relevant Stata commands ‘teffects psmatch’ and ‘teffects nnmatch’ can handle only two levels or values of treatment whereas we have three levels of treatment, the fourth being the base category.

Only AIPW produces a result that is statistically significant, large (45 per cent) (and negative) for the analysis of the effect of cash only on the outcome of non-agriculture for women in male-headed households. IPWRA suggests that participation in direct interventions only by households headed by men results in such women engaging in non-agriculture. The treatment effect is large (30 per cent compared to households that did not participate in any treatment) and significant at the 10 per cent critical level. Since both the AIPW result and the IPWRA result appear to be improbably large, while RA and IPW do not deliver results that are at all statistically significant, it may be best to ignore them.

So erring on the side of caution about the causal effects of participating in livelihood interventions, we can say that participating in direct livelihood interventions appears to see more women in male-headed households taking up self-employment in agriculture than women heading their households. At least five per cent of women heading their households who are currently self-employed in agriculture would not have been so in the absence of such programmes. In contrast, at least 10 per cent of women in male-headed households are currently self-employed in agriculture because of participation in direct interventions. However, livelihood interventions appear not to have been successful in catalyzing self-employment in non-agriculture for women heading their households. In fact, participation in cash only programmes or direct interventions only programmes have reduced the self-employment of women heading their households in non-agriculture by at least nine per cent, compared to a situation where they had not participated at all.

*Table 4.4 : The impact of participating in livelihood interventions on self-employment in agriculture: women heading their households and women in male-headed households*

	Average treatment effects					
	Cash only vs no treatment		Direct interventions only vs. no treatment		Cash plus direct interventions vs. no treatment	
	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error
<i>Women heading their households</i>						
Inverse-probability weights (IPW) (ATE)	-0.0145	0.0319	0.0538	0.0457	0.0019	0.0301
Augmented inverse-probability-weighted estimator (AIPW) (ATE)	-0.0001	0.0794	0.0466***	0.0153	0.0090	0.0469
Inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA) (ATE)	0.1266	0.0908	0.2579**	0.1097	0.1425	0.0918
<i>Women in male-headed households</i>						
Inverse-probability weights (IPW) (ATE)	-0.0562	0.0590	0.0638	0.0883	0.1561	0.1338
Augmented inverse-probability-weighted estimator (AIPW) (ATE)	0.0400	0.0927	0.0974***	0.0363	0.3456	0.2764
Inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA) (ATE)	0.1258	0.1269	0.4155**	0.1789	0.2320	0.1465

Source: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GrOW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

*Table 4.5: The impact of participating in livelihood interventions on self-employment in non-agriculture: women heading their households and women in male-headed households*

	Average treatment effects					
	Cash only vs no treatment		Direct interventions only vs. no treatment		Cash plus direct interventions vs. no treatment	
	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error	Coefficient	Standard error
<i>Women heading their households</i>						
Regression adjustment (RA) (ATE)	-0.2307**	0.0988	-0.3829***	0.1354	-0.1671*	0.096
Inverse-probability weights (IPW) (ATE)	-0.0944*	0.0484	-0.0994*	0.0598	-0.0015	0.0521
Augmented inverse-probability-weighted estimator (AIPW) (ATE)	-0.1701	0.1035	-0.0487	0.0496	0.0142	0.0939
Inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA) (ATE)	-0.3277**	0.1599	-0.5088**	0.1889	-0.2395	0.1610
<i>Women in male-headed households</i>						
Inverse-probability weights (IPW) (ATE)	-0.1017	0.1004	-0.0865	0.1208	-0.1406	0.1058
Augmented inverse-probability-weighted estimator (AIPW) (ATE)	-0.4466**	0.1996	0.0671	0.0429	0.2434	0.2737
Inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA) (ATE)	-0.0524	0.1116	0.3046*	0.1756	0.0091	0.1149

Source: Estimated with data from the survey conducted for the GroW Study on Identifying Post-War Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, 2015.

## 4.6 Conclusions

This section looked at the livelihood interventions initiated in Sri Lanka's Northern Province post-war, and investigated whether they had any impact on self-employment outcomes of respondents. It is clear that there has been some level of apathy towards participation in livelihood interventions, as reflected in the lower participation rates in such programmes compared to the high awareness rates. However, those who have participated in livelihood interventions have found them to be useful, mainly because of the reductions in costs recipients have achieved through these interventions. Follow up activities to livelihood interventions appear to be weak, and have been limited to a second visit by the donors in most cases.

The econometric analysis in this section suggests that participation in livelihood interventions in the form of direct interventions have helped generate self-employment opportunities in agriculture among women heading their households as well as among women in male-headed households. The interventions have been twice as effective in generating self-employment in agriculture among the latter rather than the former. However, livelihood intervention programmes have not been successful in encouraging women to take up self-employment in non-farming although non-farming provides far more employment opportunities for women than farming does. Women also seem to prefer off-farm self-employment, for, as the analysis in Section 3 suggested, agriculture was the least preferred livelihood for women heading

their households if other options were available. In fact, participating in livelihood intervention programmes, particularly cash only, and direct interventions only, significantly reduces the self-employment of women heading their households in non-farming economic activities. This result is perverse and suggests that policy makers need to re-examine their policies and programmes and recalibrate accordingly.

## **5. Conclusions And Implications For Policy**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study looked at the factors enabling and constraining women's labour market outcomes in Sri Lanka's Northern Province after the long war which ended in 2009. The analysis adopted DfiD's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework as a conceptual framework as it comfortably accommodates factors such as the structure of personal and household assets, spatial variables, access to markets, and the institutional environment. Most importantly, it permits the inclusion of war-related experiences as elements of the vulnerability context. While the government, non-governmental organizations and international donors implemented programmes to assist the generation of livelihoods in the aftermath of the war, this study looked at whether participation in any of these programmes was associated positively with women's self-employment outcomes. The data used for the analysis was collected in 2015 through the administering of questionnaires to a sample of roughly 4,000 women from as many households, of which 75 per cent were headed by women, from among the poorer divisions in the five

districts of the Northern Province. In this section we present a summary of key findings of the analysis and then draw out their main implications for policy formulation.

## **5.2 Overview of findings**

### *Labour market outcomes and livelihood strategies*

Although 59 per cent of women heading their households, and 39 per cent of women in male-headed households participate in the labour market in the poorer divisions of the Northern Province, women heading their households start younger, and continue to work into their sixties. The livelihood outcomes of the two sub-samples of women are broadly similar, with most participating women being self-employed in non-agricultural activities. Transfer income accounts for the biggest share of income in female-headed households, while wage income contributes the most to household income among male-headed households. Agricultural income contributes least to total household income irrespective of whether households are headed by males or by females, and its share in total income is lower among richer households compared to poorer households. A little less than half of respondents heading their households who were engaged in agriculture also reported that self-employment in farming yielded less income in 2015 than it did in 2010.

Overall, women in male-headed households appear to have better access to human and financial capital, and tend to be better off, while women heading their households have more

access to social capital. By and large, both types of households seem to have equal access to physical capital. As expected, more women heading their households had painful experiences related to the war compared to women in male-headed households. Among all households, the most widely experienced shock was the loss of assets. By and large, the political and administrative institutions were found to be helpful. Although many respondents did not answer the question about how helpful the military and the police were, at least half did. And of them, the majority said that they were helpful, the police more than the army. Only about 10 per cent said that they were unhelpful.

The findings from the econometric analysis of survey data related to the factors associated with women's participation in the labour force, their job outcomes, and their earnings from wage work or own employment in agriculture and non-agriculture.

In general, women heading their households tended to participate in the labour market out of need, with transfers, the presence of employed males in the household, and strong bonds with relatives, easing off the pressure. The least educated among them (primary and less), the more educated among them (A' Levels and more), and those with male family members in white-collar jobs, were more likely to participate. If women heading their households had children less than five years of age, they were less likely to participate. Poor health also kept women at home. Ownership of assets such as land and livestock encouraged participation, as did strong bonds with friends and membership of associations. Higher densities of trade and

service-related businesses in the local community were correlated with an increased probability of participation by women heading their households. In contrast, women in male-headed households appeared not to be driven by economic distress to engage in paid work and may therefore have been more likely to accept traditional gender roles. Women in households headed by men also seem to be better able to leverage assets such as owning a house with a deed, owning livestock, and a helpful *Grama Niladhari* for purposes of employment. Social capital played an important role in the probability of women's employment irrespective of whether women- or men-headed households. Many of these findings resonated with the findings of the descriptive analysis. For example, while the descriptive statistics suggested that economic distress is likely to have catalyzed the employment of women heading their households, many women also understood how important it was to have an independent source of income. In male-headed households, traditional gender roles appear to constrain women from entering the labour market and were cited as a key reason for giving up paid work.

Of the different job outcomes, public sector employment ranked as best and appears to be positively enabled by higher social class and better educational attainment. Greater household wealth and higher educational achievements made private sector employment a less desirable option. Higher education levels made it unlikely that women were engaged in self-employment in the agricultural sector, while self-employment in non-agriculture seemed to be a more attractive option than self-employment in farm work for women heading their households.

In fact, such women were likely to engage in agricultural activities when no other employment options were available to them. Higher densities of trade and service-related businesses in the local community made it more likely that women heading their households were engaged in self-employment in the farm and non-farm sectors.

For women engaged in wage-work, public sector jobs were the most agreeable. While educational achievements were positively and powerfully linked to better wages in the public sector as well as to greater earnings in non-farm activities, factors unrelated to productivity such as social class and networks also appeared important. Higher earnings from self-employment in non-agriculture were associated with better education, higher social class, strong bonds with friends, higher densities of trade and service-related businesses in the local community, and being resident in the better-connected Vavuniya district. Women living outside Vavuniya had significantly lower earnings both in agriculture and non-agriculture.

### *Livelihood interventions*

Livelihood interventions that respondents or their families participated in have ranged from simple cash handouts to business loans. Cash handouts and housing provide critical social protection when engaging in livelihood activities in a post-conflict environment and relatively more households had benefited from them. Take up of other livelihood intervention programmes appeared to be rather low. In general, livelihood interventions seem to have reached proportionately more

women-headed households than male-headed households. The majority of the respondents who took part in these interventions said that they were useful for their livelihood activities.

The econometric analysis looked at the causal impact of participation in livelihood interventions with employment as employers, own-account workers or contributing family workers in the farm and non-farm sectors. The findings of the analysis suggest that that participation in livelihood interventions in the form of direct interventions has helped generate self-employment opportunities in agriculture among women heading their households as well as among women in male-headed households. The interventions have been twice as effective in generating self-employment in agriculture among the latter rather than the former. However, livelihood intervention programmes have not been successful in encouraging women to take up self-employment in non-farming although non-farming provides far more employment opportunities for women than farming does. In fact, participating in livelihood intervention programmes, particularly cash only, and direct interventions only, significantly reduces the self-employment of women heading their households in non-farming economic activities.

### **5.3 Implications for policy**

The findings of the present study suggest that the pattern of labour market outcomes, particularly participation in the workforce, of women in male-headed households, is largely similar to that of women elsewhere in the country. While such women are actually better placed in terms of their ability to

leverage assets and the institutional environment for purposes of employment, most likely because of the networking of their husbands, and because production structures are still very much brawn-oriented, the majority of them do not. Gender norms appear to influence their participation decisions, and the presence of husbands who play the role of the primary income earner, enable them to be more selective in the kind of work they do.

It is very different for women heading their households, compelled to find employment through economic necessity. These women appear to be less well equipped in terms of access to human, physical, and social capital to be able to do so. They also tend to be older and in poorer health. Unless they get support from friends and relatives, they are compelled to take up any work regardless of gender norms. Participation in direct livelihood intervention programmes appear to have encouraged at least six per cent of women currently self-employed in farm work to take up farm work which they would have been unlikely to have done in the absence of such interventions. In contrast, participating in livelihood intervention programmes, particularly cash only, and direct interventions only, appear to have discouraged the self-employment of women heading their households in non-farming economic activities.

The impact of livelihood interventions on the self-employment of women in the farm and non-farm sectors is cause for concern. While interventions have been encouraged the former, they have discouraged the latter. This is unfortunate because most women prefer self-employment in the non-farm sector rather than in the

farm sector. This stands to reason as agriculture in Sri Lanka remains largely a brawn-oriented rather than a brain-oriented production system where men have a comparative advantage. Earnings are also higher and have grown more in recent times in the non-farm sector than in the farm sector whereas climatic changes increased the risks associated with agriculture.

**As far as policy directions arising from these findings are concerned, formulating appropriate policies and designing a strategy to address the physical and psychological health issues that women heading their households grapple with, is critically important.** Since such women are also most likely to neglect their own health while providing care for others, policies to protect and improve their health are urgently needed. Therefore, instead of waiting until they themselves seek medical assistance at government-run hospitals and dispensaries, the authorities should devote more resources to conducting field clinics to diagnose their health problems and then deploy auxiliary cadres to monitor and provide care thereafter. Psychological health issues can be addressed through community-based initiatives which can provide opportunities to find tranquillity and happiness through creative activities. The therapeutic effects that community gardens, art and craft circles, yoga, qi gong and tai chi have on individuals suffering from psychological stress are well-documented in the psychology literature, and appropriate interventions that use these elements need to be designed and implemented.

**Although many of the livelihood interventions implemented by government and donors have focused on agriculture, a more diversified approach is needed.**

In the first place, instead of focusing on individuals, it may be necessary to focus on households as members' decisions about work are inter-dependent. Thus, instead of promoting the livelihoods of individuals, the focus should shift to promoting households' portfolios of work, increasing productivity in current occupations, and enabling access to new ones (Blattman and Ralston 2015). And while much of agriculture requires more brawn than brain and dexterity, crops which require the former may be encouraged in agricultural households with males of working age. Other crops that are less dependent on upper-body strength, and can be grown more intensively using 'no-dig' methods in a smaller acreage, may be more suited for women heading their households who have fewer male family members of working age to help them. Given the implications of climate change, efforts need to be made to promote drought-resistant crops and appropriate and sustainable land use practices. However, many women heading their households prefer to work in the non-agricultural sector, and non-farm self-employment activities may be viable where there is better access to markets. Appropriate interventions will need to be designed accordingly.

**The setting up of a supportive institutional structure, and the setting up of rigorous methods to follow up, monitor, evaluate and recalibrate are also essential.** The direct interventions that have thus far been implemented appear not to have been successful in generating non-farm self-employment, even though most employed women are currently

engaged in this and clearly show a preference for it. These components are essential whether livelihoods are developed in farm or non-farm activities, For example, the empirical evidence from livelihood development activities in other countries, as well as from ILO's LEED project in Sri Lanka highlight the need for small scale producers to use collectives to deal with bigger players in the market. The LEED project successfully worked through co-operatives to link up with government departments and private business groups to access technical services and markets which was a critical ingredient for the project's success. The findings of the present study also showed that women who are members of associations are more likely to be participating in the labour market and to be engaging in self-employment activities. Hence, such organizations can be a focal point to create economic opportunities for women, to raise awareness, disseminate information pertaining to livelihood opportunities and to even act as producer groups to increase market power. Importantly, policy makers and donors need to be realistic about the timeline of such projects, which need to provide support for a minimum of three years. After all, it takes as much as three years since the first investment for almost any commercial enterprise to begin to break even and then make profits. Therefore, interventions aiming to promote livelihoods need to have a lifespan of at least three years.

**The findings of this study also suggest that gender sensitization of institutions will make them more accessible to women heading their households.** Enhancing the capacity, dynamism and leadership qualities of women development officers in government and other

institutions through training and mentoring is essential for the gender sensitization of an institution in order to improve its outreach to women.

**In the long-term, enhancing the employment prospects and outcomes of girls and women affected by conflict requires investing in their human capital.** Policies to improve general education facilities and services in the Northern Province so that girls leave school with skills that enhance their employability and productivity need to be implemented as a matter of urgency. Educational attainment in the Northern Province, particularly in the districts outside Jaffna, appears to be on average lower than the national average. Better use of IT-based educational facilities which can even be live-streamed via a smart phone, can help make good critical shortfalls in teaching quality and materials. The government may need to consider subsidizing universal access to the internet for such purposes in order that Sri Lankans, wherever they live, are able to break free of the chronic weaknesses of the country's education system, jump on the information superhighway, and catch up on the skills required by the market.

**Finally, a macroeconomic and investment climate in line with the comparative and competitive advantages of the region will help increase the stock of decent job opportunities for women in the Northern Province.** For example, that the Northern Province is located rather far away from the economically dynamic and diverse south-west will not matter for industries such as IT which use digital communication technologies. A private education and skills development sector

with strong links with foreign universities can revitalize Jaffna's historic reputation for providing good education services and attract students from other parts of the country as well as from the South Asian region. In this way, service providers can benefit from scale economies in education provision and expand their regional presence through campuses in Vavuniya, where land prices will be lower than in Jaffna. More open and proactive policy approaches looking to enhance employment opportunities through the linking up of investors, institutions, and markets across regions as well as across the national border are needed in the Centre as well as in the region.

## References

- Abeyaratne, S. 2004. "Economic roots of political conflict: the case of Sri Lanka". *The World Economy*. 27(8). pp. 1295-1354.
- Alailima, P. J. 2000. "Chapter 3: The Human Development Perspective". In W. D. Lakshman and C. A. Tisdell (Eds.), *Sri Lanka's Development Since Independence: Socio-economic Perspectives and Analyses*. Nova Publishers.
- Alesina, A., P. Giuliano, and N. Nunn. 2011. "Fertility and the Plough". National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16718>
- Amirthalingam, K. and R.W.D. Lakshman. 2009a. "Displaced livelihoods in Sri Lanka: An economic analysis". *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 22(4). pp. 502-524.
- Amirthalingam, K. and R.W.D. Lakshman. 2009b. "Women's assets and their role in surviving displacement and impoverishment in the contexts of the war and the tsunami in eastern Sri Lanka". In N. de Mel, K.N. Ruwanpura and G. Samarasinghe (eds) *After the Waves: The Impact of the Tsunami on Women in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association (SSA). pp. 42-61.
- Andersen, L. E., and B. Muriel. 2007. *Informality and Productivity in Bolivia: A Gender Differentiated Empirical Analysis*. Institute for Advanced Development Studies. Retrieved from <https://ideas.repec.org/p/adv/wpaper/200707.html>
- Arunatilake, N., S. Jayasuriya, and S. Kelegama. 2001. "The Economic Cost of the War in Sri Lanka." *World Development*, 29 (9): pp. 1483-1500.
- Asian Development Bank. 2015a. *Women in the Workforce*. Manila: ADB.
- Asian Development Bank. 2015b. *Balancing the Burden? Desk Review of Women's Time Poverty and Infrastructure in Asia and the Pacific*. Manila: ADB.
- Attanasio, O., E. Battistin, E. Fitzsimons, and M. Vera-Hernandez. 2005. "How effective are conditional cash transfers? Evidence from Colombia" (Briefing Note No. 54). The Institute for Fiscal Studies, UCL: London.
- Badgett, M.V.L. and N. Folbre. 1999. "Assigning care: Gender norms and economic outcomes." *International Labour Review*, 138: pp. 311-326.
- Bandarage, A. 2010. "Women, Armed Conflict, and Peacemaking in Sri Lanka: Toward a Political Economy Perspective." *Asian Politics & Policy*, 2 (4): pp. 653-67.
- Bandiera, O., Burgess, R., Das, N., Gulesci, S., Rasul, I., and M. Sulaiman. 2013. "Can basic entrepreneurship transform the economic lives of the poor?" STICERD - Economic Organization and Public Policy Discussion Papers Series 43, Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, LSE.

- Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., Goldberg, N., Karlan, D., Osei, R., Parienté, W., Shapiro, J., Thuysbaert, B. and C. Udry. 2015. "A multifaceted program causes lasting progress for the very poor: Evidence from six countries." *Science*, vol. 348, (1260799), pp. 772.
- Baranov, V., Bhalotra, S., Biroli, P. and J. Maselko. 2017. "Maternal Depression, Women's Empowerment and Parental Investment: Evidence from a Large Randomized Control Trial". IZA Discussion Paper No. 11187. IZA Institute of Labor Economics.
- Barrett, C., Reardon, T. and P. Webb. 2001. "Nonfarm Income Diversification and Household Livelihood Strategies in Rural Africa: Concepts, Dynamics, and Policy Implications." *Food Policy*, 26 (4): pp. 315-331.
- Baumann, P. 2000. *Sustainable Livelihoods and Political Capital: Arguments and Evidence from Decentralisation and Natural Resource Management in India*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Bbaale, E. and P. Mpuga. 2011. "Female education, contraceptive use, and fertility: evidence from Uganda". *Consilience-The Journal of Sustainable Development*, 6(1): pp. 20-47.
- Becker, G. S. 1965. "A Theory of the Allocation of Time". *The Economic Journal*, 75 (299): pp. 493-517.
- Bhaumik, S. K., Dimova, R. and J. Nugent. 2006. "Pulls, Pushes and Entitlement Failures in Labor Markets: Does the State of Development Matter?" IZA Discussion Paper No. 2258. Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA): Bonn, Germany.
- Bhaumik, S.K., Dimova, R. and I.N. Gang. 2016. "Is Women's Ownership of Land a Panacea in Developing Countries? Evidence from Land-Owning Farm Households in Malawi". *The Journal of Development Studies*, 52(2): pp. 242-253
- Birkeland, N. M. 2009. "Internal Displacement: Global Trends in Conflict-Induced Displacement." *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91 (875): pp. 491-508.
- Blattman, C. 2010. "Post-conflict Recovery in Africa". In Aryeetey, E., S. Devarajan, R. Kanbur, and L. Kasekende (eds.) *Oxford Companion to the Economics of Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blattman, C. and S. Dercon. 2016. "Occupational Choice in Early Industrializing Societies: Experimental Evidence on the Income and Health Effects of Industrial and Entrepreneurial Work" (September 26, 2016). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2843595> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2843595>.
- Blattman, C. and L. Ralston. 2015. "Generating Employment in Poor and Fragile States: Evidence from Labor Market and Entrepreneurship Programs." Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2622220> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2622220>.

- Blattman, C., Green, E.P., Jamison, J., Lehmann, M.C. and J. Annan. 2016. "The Returns to Microenterprise Support among the Ultrapoor: A Field Experiment in Postwar Uganda". *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 8(2): pp. 35–64.
- Blau, F. D. and L.M. Kahn. 2007. "The Gender Pay Gap: Have Women Gone as Far as They Can?" *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21(1): 7–23.
- Boserup, E. 1970. *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, George Allen & Unwin: London.
- Bouta, T. and G. Frerks. 2002. *Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael: Netherlands.
- Braun, M., Lewin-Epstein, N., Stier, H. and M.K. Baumgartner. 2008. "Perceived equity in the gendered division of household labor". *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 70: pp. 1145-1156.
- Brudevold-Newman, A., Honorati, M., Jakiela, P. and O. Ozier. 2017. "A Firm of One's Own: Experimental Evidence on Credit Constraints and Occupational Choice". IZA Discussion Paper No. 10583. Bonn: IZA.
- Calderón, V., Gáfaró, M. and A. M. Ibáñez. 2011. "Forced Migration, Female Labor Force Participation, and Intra-Household Bargaining: Does Conflict Empower Women?" Documento CEDE, pp. 2011–28.
- Caputo, R. K., and A. Dolinsky. 1998. "Women's choice to pursue self-employment: The role of financial and human capital of household members". *Journal of Small Business Management*, 36(3): 8-17.
- Cattaneo, M.D., Drukker, D.M. and A.D. Holland. 2013. "Estimation of multivalued treatment effects under conditional independence". *The Stata Journal*, 13 (3): 407-450
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2007. Annual Report, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL, Sri Lanka)
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2008. Annual Report, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL, Sri Lanka)
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2010. Annual Report, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL, Sri Lanka)
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), 2016. Annual Report, Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL, Sri Lanka)
- Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA). 2016. "Local Empowerment through Economic Development (LEEDS) Project". Impact Study Series, No. 4, Summary Report. Colombo: CEPA.
- Chevalier, A. and T.K Viitanen. 2002. The causality between female labour force participation and the availability of childcare. *Applied Economics Letters*, 9(14): 915–918.

- Chiappori, P. 1992. "Collective Labor Supply and Welfare". *Journal of Political Economy*, 100(3), pp. 437–67.
- Chiappori, P., Fortin, A.B. and G. Lacroix. 1998. "Household Labor Supply, Sharing Rule and the Marriage Market" (Cahiers de recherche No. 9810). Université Laval - Département d'économique.
- Collier, P., Elliott, V.L., Hegre, H., Hoeffler, A., Reynal-Querol, M. and N. Sambanis. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington DC: World Bank ; Oxford University Press.
- Collinson, S. 2003. *Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action*. HPG Report 13. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Dasgupta, I. 1999. "Women's employment, intra-household bargaining, and distribution: a two-sector analysis". *Oxford Economic Papers*, 52(4): 723–744.
- de Haan, L. and A. Zoomers. 2005. "Exploring the frontier of livelihoods research". *Development and Change*. 36(1): pp. 27-47.
- De Mel, S., D. McKenzie, and C. Woodruff. 2009. "Are women more credit constrained? Experimental evidence on gender and microenterprise returns". *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 1 (3): pp. 1–32.
- De Mel, S., D. McKenzie, and C. Woodruff. 2014. "Business training and female enterprise start-up, growth and dynamics: Experimental evidence from Sri Lanka". *Journal of Development Economics*, 106 (2014):199-210.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 1987. *Labour Force and Socio Economic Survey - 1985/86*. Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2012. *Census of Population and Housing - 2012*. Colombo: Government of Sri Lanka.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2015a. *Non-Agricultural Economic Activities in Sri Lanka – Economic Census 2013/14*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2015b. *Annual Report of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2014*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2015b. *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012/13 Final Report*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2015d. *Non-agricultural Economic Activities in Sri Lanka Economic Census of 2013/2014. Listing Phase*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Department of Census and Statistics. 2017. *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey: Annual Report, 2016*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.
- Dercon, S., and P. Krishnan. 1996. "Income Portfolios in Rural Ethiopia and Tanzania: Choices and Constraints." *Journal of Development Studies*, 32(6): pp. 850-875.

- Drukker, D. 2014. “In the spotlight: Double-robust treatment effects (two wrongs don't make a right, but one does)”. *Stata News*, 29 (1). <https://www.stata.com/stata-news/news29-1/double-robust-treatment-effects/>.
- Elsayed, A. and R. Roushdy .2017. *Empowering Women under Social Constraints: Evidence from a Field Intervention in Rural Egypt*. IZA Discussion Paper 11240, Berlin: IZA.
- ESCWA. 2007. *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Women*. Beirut-Lebanon: United Nations.
- Fallon, P. and R. Lucas. 2002. “The impact of financial crises on labor markets, household incomes, and poverty: A review of evidence”. *The World Bank Research Observer*, Vol. 17, pp. 21-45.
- Fernández, R. 2007. Alfred Marshall Lecture: “Women, Work, and Culture”. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 5(2–3), pp. 305–332.
- Fernández, R., Fogli, A. and C. Olivetti. 2004. “Mothers and Sons: Preference Formation and Female Labor Force Dynamics”. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119(4), pp. 1249–1299.
- Fortin, N. M. 2005. “Gender Role Attitudes and the Labour-market Outcomes of Women across OECD Countries”. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 21(3), pp. 416–438.
- Friedberg, L. and S. Stern. 2005. “Economics of marriage and divorce” (Virginia Economics Online Paper No. 399). University of Virginia, Department of Economics.
- Ganeshanathan, V. 2013. *The Yaal Players*. Colombo: Kumaran Book House.
- Godamunne, N. 2015. *The role of social protection and state legitimacy in the former conflict areas of Sri Lanka*. Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium. London: ODI.
- Goldin C. 1995. “The U-Shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History”. In: Schultz TP *Investment in Women's Human Capital and Economic Development*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 61-90.
- Greene, W.H. 2012. *Econometric Analysis*, 7<sup>th</sup> International Edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Gunatilaka, R. 2008. “Informal Employment in Sri Lanka: Nature, Probability of Employment and Determinants of Wages”, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series. ILO Sub regional Office for South Asia: New Delhi.
- Gunatilaka, R. 2013. *Women's Participation in Sri Lanka's Labour Force: Trends, Drivers and Constraints*. Colombo: ILO.
- Gunatilaka, R. 2016. *Women's Activity Outcomes, Preferences and Time Use in Western Sri Lanka*. Colombo: ILO.

- Gunewardena, D. 2015. *Why aren't Sri Lankan women translating their educational gains into workforce advantages?* The 2015 ECHIDNA Global Scholars Working Paper. Washington D.C.: Centre for Universal Education at Brookings.
- Gunewardena, D. 2010. "An Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Wage Differentials among Youth in Sri Lanka". In: R. Gunatilaka, M. Meyer M and M. Vodopivec M (eds.) *The Challenge of Youth Employment in Sri Lanka*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank, pp. 217-241.
- Gunewardena, D., Abeyrathna, D., Ellagala, A., Rajakaruna, K. and S. Rajendran. 2008. "Glass Ceilings, Sticky Floors or Sticky Doors? A Quantile Regression Approach to Exploring Gender Wage Gaps in Sri Lanka". *PMMA Working Paper 2008-04*, Poverty and Economic Policy Research Network.
- Haas, B., Steiber, N., Hartel, M. and C. Wallace. 2006. "Household employment patterns in an enlarged European Union". *Work, Employment and Society*, 20(4): 751-771.
- Handrahan, L. 2004. "Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction". *Security Dialogue*, 35 (4): pp. 429-445.
- Heath, R. 2014. "Women's Access to Labor Market Opportunities, Control of Household Resources, and Domestic Violence: Evidence from Bangladesh". *World Development*, 57(Supplement C), 32-46.
- Heckman, J. 1979. "Sample selection bias as a specification error", *Econometrica*, Vol. 47: pp. 153- 61.
- Heim, B.T. 2007. "The Incredible Shrinking Elasticities: Married Female Labour Supply", 1978-2002, *The Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 42: pp. 881-918.
- Hudock, A., Sherman, K. and S. Williamson. 2016. "Women's Economic Participation in Conflict Affected and Fragile Settings". *Occasional Paper Series*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.
- ILO. 2007. *ABC of women workers' rights and gender equality*. Second edition. International Labour Office: Geneva.
- Ingirris, M. H. and M.V. Hoehne. 2013. "The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women: A Blessing in Disguise". *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7 (2): pp. 314-33.
- Iyer, L. and I. Santos. 2012. "Creating jobs in South Asia's conflict zones". Policy Research Working Paper; no. WPS 6104. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/862681468294333637/Creating-jobs-in-South-Asias-conflict-zones>.
- Kabeer, N. 2012. "Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development". CDPR Discussion Paper 29/12. London: SOAS University of London.

- Klasen, S. and J. Pieters. 2012. "Push or Pull? Drivers of Female Labor Force Participation During India's Economic Boom". SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2019447. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.
- Korf, B. 2004. "War, Livelihoods and vulnerability in Sri Lanka". *Development and Change*. 35(2). Pp. 275-295.
- Kulatunga, S. T.K. 2017. "Unpacking Household Asset Inequality between Male and Female Headed Households in the Post War Economy of Eastern Sri Lanka: A Decomposition Analysis". In, *International Conference of Sri Lanka Forum of University Economists Proceedings full paper series: Volume I*. University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka Forum of University Economists. pp. 1-10.
- Kulatunga, S. T.K. 2014. Income Generation in Conflict-affected Communities: With Special Reference to Female-headed Households in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Paper presented at the International Conference on Revisiting Social Responsibility in Contexts of Crisis: Challenges and Possibilities in Sri Lanka, Proceedings. Colombo: Faculty of Arts.
- Kulatunga, S. T.K. and R. W.D. Laskhman. 2013. "Responding to security threats: livelihoods under protracted conflict in Sri Lanka". *Disasters* 37 (4): 604-26.
- Kumar, K. 2001. "Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action". Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lim, L.L. 2002. "Female Labour-force Participation". Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization, Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM). Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/completingfertility/RevisedLIMpaper.PDF>
- Lindberg, J. and D. Herath. 2014. "Land and Grievances in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka: Exploring the Role of Corruption Complaints". *Third World Quarterly*. 35 (5): pp. 888–904.
- Linden, A., Derya Uysal, S., Ryan, A. and J. L. Adams. 2016. "Estimating causal effects for multivalued treatments: a comparison of approaches". *Statistics in Medicine*, 35: pp. 534–552.
- Lindsey, C. 2001. "Women Facing War." ICRC Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women. ICRC: Geneva.
- Longwe, A., Smits, J. and E. de Jong. 2013. "Number and spacing of children and women's employment in Africa". *Nijmegen Center for Economics (NiCE) Working Paper*, 13–103
- Lundberg, S. 1988. "Labor Supply of Husbands and Wives: A Simultaneous Equations Approach". *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 70(2): pp. 224–35.
- Malhotra, A. and D.S. DeGraff. 2000. "Daughters and wives: Marital status, poverty and young women's employment in Sri Lanka". In: Garcia, B. (ed.): *Women, Poverty and Demographic Change*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

- Malhotra, A. and D.S. DeGraff. 1997. "Entry versus success in the labor force: Young women's employment in Sri Lanka". *World Development*, 25(3), pp. 379–394.
- Mammen, K. and C. Paxson. 2000. "Women's Work and Economic Development". *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(4): pp. 141–164.
- Manser, M. and M. Brown. 1980. "Marriage and Household Decision-Making: A Bargaining Analysis". *International Economic Review*, 21(1): pp. 31–44.
- Mazibuko, S. 2013. "Understanding underdevelopment through the sustainable livelihoods approach". *Community Dev*, 44: pp. 173–187.
- McElroy, M. B. and M. J. Horney. 1981. "Nash-Bargained Household Decisions: Toward a Generalization of the Theory of Demand". *International Economic Review*, 22(2): pp. 333–49.
- Menon, N. and Y. Van der Meulen Rodgers. 2015. "War and Women's Work Evidence from the Conflict in Nepal". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59 (1): pp. 51–73.
- Ofstad, A. 2002. "Countries in Violent Conflict and Aid Strategies: The Case of Sri Lanka". *World Development* 30 (2): pp. 165–80.
- Ormhaug, C. 2009. "Armed conflict deaths disaggregated by gender". PRIO Paper, 23 November. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute.
- Petesche, P. 2011. "Women's Empowerment Arising from Violent Conflict and Recovery: Life Stories from Four Middle-Income Countries". USAID.
- Pfaffenberger, B. 1991. "Ethnic conflict and youth insurgency in Sri Lanka: the social origins of Tamil separatism". In Montville (ed.) 1991, *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multi-ethnic Societies*. Lexington, MA: Lexington, pp. 241–58.
- Plümer, T. and E. Neumayer. 2006. "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy". *International Organization*, 60 (3), pp. 723–754.
- Rahman, S. 2000. "Women's employment in Bangladesh agriculture: composition, determinants and scope". *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16(4): pp. 497–507.
- Rehn, E. and E.J. Sirleaf. 2002. *Progress of the World's Women 2002*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women.
- Robins, J. M., and A. Rotnitzky. 1995. "Semiparametric efficiency in multivariate regression models with missing data". *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 90: pp. 122–129.
- Rubin, D. B. 1974. "Estimating causal effects of treatments in randomized and nonrandomized studies". *Journal of Educational Psychology* 66: pp. 688–701.
- Ruppanner, L. 2010. "Conflict and Housework: Does Country Context Matter". *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 26: pp. 557–570.

- Ruwanpura, K. N. and J. Humphries. 2004. "Mundane heroines: conflict, ethnicity, gender and female headship in eastern Sri Lanka". *Feminist Economics*. 10(2). pp. 173-205.
- Sarvananthan, M. 2015. "Impediments to Women in Post-Civil War Economic Growth in Sri Lanka." *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management* 2 (1). pp. 12–36.
- Sarvananthan, M., Suresh, J. and A. Alagarajah. 2017. "Feminism, nationalism, and labour in post-civil war Northern Province of Sri Lanka." *Development in Practice*, 27:1. pp. 122-128.
- Schultz, T. P. 1990. "Testing the Neoclassical Model of Family Labor Supply and Fertility". *The Journal of Human Resources*, 25(4): pp. 599–634.
- Shastri, A. 1990. "The material basis of separatism: The Tamil Eelam movement in Sri Lanka". *Journal of Asian Studies*. 49(1). pp. 58-77.
- Silva, K.T. 2003. "Armed conflict, displacement and poverty trends in Sri Lanka: evidence from selected displaced populations". In M. Mayer, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake and Y. Thangarajah (eds) *Building Local Capacities for Peace: Rethinking Conflict and Development in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: MacMillan India Ltd. pp. 245-270.
- Stifel, D. 2008. "Madagascar: Labor Markets, the Non-Farm Economy and Household Livelihood Strategies in Rural Madagascar". Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 112. World Bank.
- Solotaroff, J. L., Joseph, G. and A. Kuriakose. 2018. *Getting to Work: Unlocking Women's Potential in Sri Lanka's Labor Force*. Directions in Development—Countries and Regions; Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Stoloff, J. A., Glanville, J. L. and E.J. Bienenstock. 1999. "Women's participation in the labor force: the role of social networks". *Social Networks*, 21(1): pp. 91–108.
- Sumanthiran, M. A. (24 Oct 2011). "Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka: A Series of Serious Concerns". Sri Lanka Brief.
- Thomas, D. 1990. "Intra-Household Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach". *The Journal of Human Resources*, 25(4): pp. 635–664.
- UNDP. 2001. *Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*. New York: UNDP.
- UNDP. 2015. Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- West, C. and D. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing gender". *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1: pp. 125-151.
- Wooldridge, J. M. 2010. *Econometric Analysis of Cross Section and Panel Data*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Zuckerman, E., Dennis, S. and M. E. Greenberg. 2007. *The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The World Bank Track Record*. Washington D.C.: Gender Action.

# Chapter 4: Post-War Realities: Barriers to Female Economic Empowerment

*Kethaki Kandanearachchi and Rapti Ratnayake*

## 1. Introduction

A stark reality in Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war has undoubtedly been the increase in female-headed households. The Department of Census and Statistics states that women head about 1.2 million households in Sri Lanka, with more than 50% of this figure being widows and women separated from their husbands.<sup>1</sup> Yet, eight years following the end of the war, many female-headed households remain economically disadvantaged and exposed to conditions of poverty, exploitation, violence, and social exclusion.

This paper aims to examine the main barriers to economic empowerment experienced by female-headed households in the north of Sri Lanka. The theoretical approach adopted broadly examines these barriers on both an individual and structural level. By doing so, this paper questions the extent to which the economic choices of women are restricted by the structural constraints imposed by society and its institutions.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part we briefly examine Sri Lanka's history and conceptualize female economic empowerment. Section 2 presents the methodology and theoretical

---

1 Ministry of Policy Planning, Economic Affairs, Child, Youth, and Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka, "Household Income and Expenditure Survey Final Report," Department of Census and Statistics, 2012/2013, 7. Found at: [http://www.statistics.gov.lk/HIES/HIES2012\\_13FinalReport.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/HIES/HIES2012_13FinalReport.pdf).

framework used to gather data for the study. Section 3 presents the findings and analysis gathered from the interviews. Our findings are divided into four main sections: We begin by questioning whether the war triggered or exacerbated the economic pressure facing women in the north. Then we examine the barriers to female economic empowerment on a structural level and an individual level, and finally we look at the opportunities found within the interviews.

This paper argues that the economic gender gap present in female-headed households is more often a result of deep-rooted socio-economic constraints, rather than restrictions found inherent to the choices of the woman. To be relevant to the realities of female-headed households, post-conflict development programmes must question gender and how it intersects with other aspects of social stratification such as class, religion, ethnicity, caste, and disability.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 The war in Sri Lanka**

For nearly 30 years, the brutal war between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had resulted in waves of conflict, militarization and displacement.<sup>2</sup> The conflict had led to thousands of deaths and casualties amongst civilians, the armed forces and the LTTE combatants, as well as multiple displacements, cases of physical and mental disabilities, and the destruction of homes and public property.<sup>3</sup> An immediate

---

2 International Crisis Group, "Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East," Crisis Group Asia Report No. 217, 2011,1.

3 R. Jayasundere and C. Weerackody, "Gendered Implications of Economic Development in the Post Conflict Northern and Eastern Regions of Sri Lanka," Care International Sri Lanka, 2013, 3.

and crippling consequence of the war was the deterioration of livelihoods and the local economy.<sup>4</sup>

The war impacted men and women in different ways. By specifically looking at a Sri Lankan context, many women accrued the effects of war in the long term. Even though a small proportion of young female combatants experienced war at first-hand, most women were impacted through indirect means, by not necessarily being involved in combat or fighting, but instead being exposed to the harsh realities of a post-conflict environment.<sup>5</sup>

Women are especially subject to poor living standards, malnutrition, sickness, and sexual disease and abuse<sup>6</sup>. More specifically, women in post-war Sri Lanka face profound and multi-faceted vulnerabilities, especially due to their new roles as primary breadwinners of their families. Women in post-conflict Sri Lanka do not have equal access to resources, political rights, and autonomy over their environment as their male counterparts do. In most cases, they are still subject to the control and authority of men in their families and communities. Furthermore, their roles as caretakers often limit their mobility, and the freedom to grasp opportunities in pursuing work outside of their homes.

The data received allowed us to examine several individual and personal accounts of women in the north of Sri Lanka. Although many female heads of households show signs of resilience by

---

4 D. Jayatilake and K. Amarathalingam, "The Impact of Displacement on Dowries in Sri Lanka," Brookings Institute, 2015, 8.

5 S.I. Krishnan, "The Transition to Civilian Life of Teenage Girls and Young Women Ex-Combatants: A case study from Batticaloa," International Centre for Ethnic Studies Research Paper No. 1, 2012.

6 C. Ormhaug, "Armed Conflict Deaths Disaggregated by Gender." A report for the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, November 23, 2009. 13.

trying to become active agents in their own lives and standing up to the effects of unequal power relations, many remain hugely disadvantaged by oppressive socio-political conditions of post-war Sri Lanka.

## **2.2 Conceptualizing female-headed households**

An underlying obstacle in trying to identify female-headed households is the absence of a suitable definition. So far, several attempts have been made at defining the term but unfortunately fail to capture the diversity of the women and the complexity of the households they manage<sup>7</sup>. For instance, limiting the definition of female-headed households to just those with an absence of men present would ignore households with dependent adults, such as men who are disabled or unemployed.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to this, if we were to base the definition of a female-headed households on whether a woman is the primary “breadwinner” or income earner of the family, we would be overlooking the contributions women make to the household, such as caregiving and subsistence farming.<sup>9</sup>

A broad definition was used in the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey, which stated that a female-headed household was a “household in which a female adult member is the one who is responsible for the care and organization of the household, or is selected as the head of the household by the other members of the household.”<sup>10</sup>

---

7 R. Fonseka, ‘Women-headed Households: Searching for a Common Definition,’ *CEPA Blog*, 2015, <http://www.cepa.lk/blog/details/women-headed-households-searching-for-a-common-definition-314ca10cd108ab6e8fba55ce0b5e86bd.html>

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Ministry of Policy Planning, Economic Affairs, Child Youth and Cultural Affairs Sri

In comparison to this, a recent report released by the UNFPA stated that the government adopts the breadwinner-type definition of female-headed households, where government programmes and aid are provided to female heads of house if the woman is the main income earner because of economic inactivity of her husband caused by disability or sickness; or absence by divorce, separation, or having gone missing; or if the woman is single.<sup>11</sup> Women also fall within this definition if their husbands are sick due to alcoholism—a category which is not considered by NGOs when implementing NGO programmes.<sup>12</sup>

The UNFPA report also noted that in many cases, the vulnerability criteria used to determine who is eligible for assistance or aid from programmes was not applied consistently. In many cases, elderly women and those who had lost their husbands due to natural causes, were not included in the criteria used to define female-headed households. It was stated that elderly women were a specifically vulnerable group as many were taking care of young grandchildren in the absence of their parents.<sup>13</sup>

Another point to highlight is that the women who fall within the ambit of female-headed households do not represent a homogenous group. Instead, the experiences and exposure that many women faced during the war represent a diverse, and altogether divergent, reality. Many women who lived through the war were civilian women who fell victim to conflict, displacement,

---

Lanka, “Household Income and Expenditure Survey Final Report,” Department of Census and Statistics, 2012/2013, 9, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/HIES/HIES2012PreliminaryReport.pdf>.

11 UNFPA, “Mapping of Socio-Economic Support Services to Female-Headed Households in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka,” 2015, 15.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

and deprivation. However, the LTTE also prominently featured a female wing of cadres who were seen as masculinized and violent fighters.<sup>14</sup> This point is particularly important to bear in mind as many state and non-state programmes often assume the former, implementing programmes that are typically designed for the gendered ideals of powerlessness and passivity.

This paper adopts The International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of a female-headed household. Under this definition, a female-headed household is one where “either no adult males are present, owing to divorce, separation, migration, non-marriage or widowhood, or where men, although present, do not contribute to the household income.”<sup>15</sup>

### **3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Understanding female economic empowerment**

There is no universally accepted definition of the term “empowerment.” However, feminist discussions establish that empowerment is targeted at individuals suffering from powerlessness, as disempowerment is deeply rooted in the inability to exercise agency or make choices.<sup>16</sup> Under this logic, economic empowerment would be the ability to make choices in an economic context.

---

14 R.Vasudevan, “Everyday Resistance: Female-Headed Households in Northern Sri Lanka,” Graduate Institute Publications, 2013, <http://books.openedition.org/iheid/688>.

15 Definition found in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Thesaurus, <http://www.ilo.org/thesaurus/default.asp>

16 R. Vithanagama, “Women’s Economic Empowerment: A Literature Review,” International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), 2016, 4.

Therefore, a clear theme in defining female economic empowerment is the link between agency, choice and decision-making and how it relates to the market.<sup>17</sup> Female economic empowerment would lead to greater access for women to resources, and opportunities such as jobs, financial services, property, productive assets, skills development, and market information.<sup>18</sup>

Naila Kabeer's general definition seems to be the most suitable for this paper. She writes, "*The conceptualizing of empowerment touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their inter-relationships with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities.*"<sup>19</sup>

Our paper shows that although economic vulnerabilities are the most pressing concern for most of the women interviewed, economic survival is not purely based on employment and financial stability. Rather, we found that many of the interviews discussed broader issues such as physical and emotional health, a sense of

---

17 N. Kabeer, "Women's Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Developments," School of Oriental and African Studies 2012, 8. <https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/NK-WEE-Concept-Paper.pdf>.

18 GENDERNET and OECD, "Women's Economic Empowerment," DAC Network on Gender Equality (*GENDERNET*) Issues Paper, 2011, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/47561694.pdf>.

19 *Ibid.*

security, family commitments, and social stigma as having more of an impact on economic empowerment than the actual economic market forces and opportunities.

By highlighting this, our insights into the number of qualitative interviews show a spillover of aspects in the non-economic domains of a woman's life that affect the economic opportunities surrounding her. This paper argues that advancing the economic empowerment of female-headed households requires a holistic approach that not only looks at providing opportunities and skills to women, but also reconfigures the structural barriers that stem from cultural practices and traditions that limit a woman's decision-making powers.

### **3. 2 A note on methodology**

For the purposes of this study, a total of 20 in-depth interviews were used from an overall 116 conducted between 2015-2016. The interviews represent six women from the Jaffna, seven from Mullaitivu, four from Vavuniya and three from Mannar districts in the north of Sri Lanka. The sampling framework used for the in-depth interviews considered the distribution of female-headed households and the ethnic proportions in the region, together with a female-headed and male-headed breakup. The women interviewed as female-heads of house were retrieved from lists that were collected by the Women's Development Officers (WDO) in the District Secretariats and various local organizations.

We will acknowledge that the bias of the researchers and writers of this paper are in favour of the women's perspective. From the onset, interviews were carried out in the language of preference for

each individual woman with the hopes of empowering participants to openly discuss the understanding they had of their own lives. Interviews were carried out through open dialogue with the use of guided conversation rather than set questions. Furthermore, the researchers paid special attention to the autonomous responses of women and made a strong attempt at having no men present during interviews. The interviewers were sensitive to the post-war context where many women had undergone trauma and loss.

The qualitative team started the preliminary analysis after receiving the first 10 cases. The team colour-coded the cases and identified the predominant themes emerging from this data. After colour-coding almost 30 cases which are rich in information, we selected 20 cases where we could identify common themes and patterns. This paper took a bottom-up approach where it analyzed the data first before developing a framework.

### **3.3 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical approach adopted in this paper broadly categorizes the data into barriers imposed at a structural level and barriers at an individual level. Structural barriers include both restrictions that are imposed by laws and policies, and gender-specific customary norms, values, and beliefs that characterise the relationships and roles of women in society. These barriers are shaped through inherited discriminatory practices that have created the gender roles that are structured into the labour and market forces. Structural barriers to female economic empowerment take on different forms and manifest in different contexts, but for the sake of the paper, they arise from institutions, rather than from the individual character of the woman.

Individual barriers examine the skills and abilities of each woman, and include the decision-making power or agency of each individual woman. It should be noted that this separation does not imply that structural barriers are mutually exclusive and distinct to individual barriers. There are many issues gathered from the interviews that overlap these distinctions. However, this separation does allow us to categorize the data more efficiently, and by doing so, allows us to examine what plays the more detrimental role in preventing women from pursuing further economic opportunities.

Our findings support Naila Kabeer's (2010) argument that individual choice is made within the confines of the structural norms that are imposed on the woman, and that gender discrimination in the market is a product of structured constraints that operate throughout the life courses of men and women from different social groups. In turn, this paper argues that it is the gender constraints at a structural level that underpin the challenges facing female-headed households in advancing economically.

## **4. Findings and Analysis**

### **4.1 War as a “Trigger”**

This study aims to examine how war and its direct effects—the loss of human, physical and capital assets—affected the economic prospects of women in the Northern Province. It questions whether the outbreak of war acted as a “trigger” to the economic pressure and adversity faced by women, or whether the barriers to female economic empowerment were already entrenched in traditional societal structures and further exacerbated through the onset of war.

Much of the qualitative data show that the direct effects of war, such as displacement, disappearances, death, and disabilities overthrew the social order and forced women to take on new roles of leadership within the family. Issues of displacement were a common theme in many interviews. A 52-year-old woman from Jaffna discusses fleeing her home and returning to nothing: *“Our native place is Jaffna. We went to Vavuniya due to the war. We suffered for two years in the Vanni without a place to live or anything to eat. Our children starved. We were happy in the Vanni. It was peaceful. War is the reason for everything. We lost everything and came back to our native place due to the war. We lost our property, earnings, cattle and lives. All this suffering is because of the war.”*

A 46-year-old woman from Mannar stated that, *“I think if there was no war I would have improved a lot. I was healthy and strong. I used to make hoppers and sell and I had a net to fish. I had a garden and sold vegetables . . . Whatever I earned I lost after we were displaced. All our efforts were useless.”*

A 45-year-old woman from Mullaitivu stated, *“I worked in Kilinochchi for five years as the administrative coordinator. Initially, they gave me Rs. 3000. After my appointment was confirmed they gave me Rs. 16,000 salary including overtime, but I stopped the work after being displaced.”* Many of the interviews displayed strong feelings of disappointment and highlighted the frustration of having livelihoods interrupted by the outbreak of war.

The loss of family members was another prominent and significant reality to the war. Many women failed to receive the death

certificates or notifications on the whereabouts of their loved ones. This “ambiguous loss”<sup>20</sup> has resulted in long-term suffering. A 59-year-old woman in Vavuniya shared, *“I got married so early. I don’t know if he was shot, he was disappeared. It was a time of conflict. I didn’t even see his body.”*

In a report released by the International Committee of the Red Cross, it was argued that “ambiguous loss” coupled with economic difficulties lead to debilitating mental health issues to families. Out of 56% of families experiencing economic difficulties with the loss of missing family members, 86% showed symptoms of anxiety or depression.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that the women were already living within the economic and social confines of their societies. Although we cannot overlook the role that the war played in creating new post-war roles that women have been forced to adopt,<sup>22</sup> our findings show that this exacerbated the hardships that the respondents faced. In the direct aftermath of Sri Lanka’s war, many women were in a fragile balance between bearing the economic burden of being the primary earners while also being main caregivers within families. A combination of the loss of male family members, displacement, and the destruction of existing livelihoods, left women already in vulnerable positions, placed in more precarious positions within society.

---

20 International Committee of the Red Cross, “Living with Uncertainty: Needs of the Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka,” International Committee of the Red Cross Report 2009, 4.

21 *Ibid.*

22 A. Hudock, K. Sherman, and S. Williamson, “Women’s economic participation in conflict-affected and fragile settings,” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Occasional Paper Series, January 2016. [https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/occasional\\_paper\\_series\\_volume\\_i\\_-\\_womens\\_economic\\_participation.pdf](https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/occasional_paper_series_volume_i_-_womens_economic_participation.pdf)

Considering this, the interviews demonstrated that the most debilitating factor to the economic progress of female-headed households are the influences and attitudes of the communities they live in. This paper argues that societal and cultural factors at a structural level play a bigger role in limiting the advancement of women and ultimately the ability for a woman to escape poverty.

## **5. Structural barriers**

In this section, the paper explores the prominent structural barriers that female-headed households face in generating economic growth and income-earning opportunities. Structural barriers are defined as the constraints imposed by institutionalized rules and regulations, as well as the gender-specific customary norms, values, and beliefs that characterize the relationships and roles of women in society.

In many of the interviews, it was noticed that the activities and work done by women fell within conventionally “feminine” roles. Kabeer argues that women’s work is typically observed as “inferior” and that most often, a woman’s aptitude, abilities, and activities are valued lower than that of men.<sup>23</sup> In light of this, Sri Lankan women continue to occupy a subordinate status to men, despite continuous economic, social and political developments.<sup>24</sup> This leads us to infer that structural impediments, such as the deeply entrenched patriarchal system and traditional values and attitudes, remain an overarching barrier to the economic empowerment of women. By using this as a platform to base our

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> H.M.A Herath, “Place of Women in Sri Lankan Society: Measures for their empowerment for developments and good governance,” *University of Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka*, Vol. 01(1) 01-14 (2015), 5.

analysis, we aim to show that structural systems need to evolve in unison with governmental, non-governmental, and private sector efforts that aim to uplift female economic empowerment.

### ***Detrimental social values***

Socially constructed institutions such as marriage, religion, and patriarchy came at the core of the barriers women face in progressing economically. Sri Lanka's "deeply entrenched patriarchal structure"<sup>25</sup> has notably been an underlying force of the suppression facing all the women, irrespective of their societal structures, traditions, and religion.

In a post-conflict environment, the assumption is that an increase in female-headed households, and the supposed autonomy associated with becoming the primary earners, would dilute the rigid patriarchal structure. However, our interviews proved otherwise. In most cases, this deeply entrenched system reinforced the stereotypical views of women, despite interventions that aimed to empower them.

Therefore, the status of a woman within society, and within the household, has played a bigger role in how women have adapted to a post-conflict environment. In the majority of the cases, the prevalence of ingrained and internalized societal values takes precedence over the need to overcome economic pressures. For most women, rigid patriarchal attitudes are affirmed through marriage and accepted unquestioningly by the wives themselves. Herath (2015) argues that in many households, men maintain the

---

25 *Ibid.*

decision-making power within families. The role of a woman in the house is often confined to household chores and childcare.<sup>26</sup>

When asked, “Why didn’t you work when your husband was there?” a 48-year-old woman from Jaffna answered, “*He was there for us. There should be woman at home. If we work, we have to leave the house at 8.30 a.m. and come back after 5 p.m. Then the children are neglected. The mother should be home and take care of the children. When they come from school only I can tell them to wash, eat, get ready and go for tuition on time. If I am not there children will not go . . . We must cook and give food to our husband on time and feed the workers in the field on time . . . if we women get out of the house for work everything in the house will be upside down. When they come exhausted from the field if we are at home only can we make some tea and help them to relax. That is our responsibility. So I don't like to go out to work.*”

As men uphold control and power within relationships and women are expected to uphold cultural values and not bring shame to their families, the economic pursuits of woman are normally under the control of their husbands. A 25-year-old woman from Vavuniya stated, “*It was okay, when my husband was working, he helped us with what he earned. It all changed when he got sick. Still he doesn't like me to go to work; he still wants to take care of us.*”

Another recurrent example of cultural and patriarchal restrictions being imposed on women is their mobility to work and go into public spaces. These restrictions do not always stem from issues of safety, but have more to do with the perception of women being confined to the home and household work. Added to this is the preoccupation

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

with status, or “prestige,” where the pressures of societal stigma are imposed on the image and reputation of the women.

A 51-year-old woman from Vavuniya discussed the role “prestige” played in preventing her from going out to work, breaking into tears at the end of her statement; *“I don’t go out for work. I help people to get army/police pass or help them to get a loan. They will give me a little commission for that. I do not have plans to go out, work and earn money. It affects respect and my status. My relatives will tell me that I got married without the consent of my family so now I am on my own and struggling to eat.”*

Moreover, these detrimental social values have a negative impact on Sri Lanka’s education system. A 35-year-old woman from Mannar stated that, *“I studied up to the 10th grade. Then I didn’t continue. There was a problem between the girls and boys. It had nothing to do with me. Yet I was stopped. When my father passed away I was eight. It was the brothers who stopped me from schooling. I liked learning but I had no choice.”*

High economic growth, particularly amongst women, is far more successful if accompanied with the expansion of opportunities in education for women.<sup>27</sup> However, gender inequality in education often begins at a young age where education is not seen as a primary concern for girls. In Sri Lanka, education is free and compulsory for both girls and boys and the rate of enrolment is 97.1% for boys and 95.6% for girls in the primary education cycle.<sup>28</sup> While the overall education levels of girls are high, and more

---

27 N. Kabeer, “Women’s Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development,” SIG Working paper 2010, 4.

28 S. Jayaweera and C. Gunawardena, “Social Inclusion: Gender and Equity in Education Swaps in South Asia,” Sri Lanka Case Study, 2007, 10.

girls complete senior secondary school than boys in Sri Lanka, in poorer households with resource constraints, less is invested in the education of girls.<sup>29</sup>

The consequences of these social values are not new to a post-conflict environment. They remain established and ultimately limit the choices that women have in undertaking certain types of work. Sentiments such as these also ensure that women remain within the confines of their ascribed domestic roles.

### ***Marriage***

The institution of marriage is an integral part of the lives of the women interviewed and in many ways imposes roles which define the responsibilities of women within the family. A 48-year-old woman from Jaffna refers to the constraints of marriage: *"If we marry we should listen to our husbands. The wife should be in the place where the husband asks her to be. If she goes against it then there is no meaning in the marriage itself. The husband ties three knots on the woman. Why do we give our neck to tie? It is to abide by him . . . There is a proverb. 'If we marry, we cannot be what we want to be.'"* Wedding customs such as tying three knots on the thali, a gold chain tied around the neck of the bride during Tamil marriage ceremonies, hold the symbolic meaning of binding in the practice of a marriage ceremony and define a woman's married life.

Yet, many interviews showed married women internalizing attitudes of inferiority and dependency. A 51-year-old woman

---

29 N. Kabeer, "Women's Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development," SIG Working paper, 2010, 14.

from Vavuniya stated, *"We were not legally married., We were married and had two children, and then only I found out that he was already married, so I left him."* This interviewee is now looking after her two children without the assistance or help of her husband. She further stated that, *"The only problem with my marriage was I got married to him without knowing his history so there is nothing much to blame on him. I should have known. Otherwise, he is from a good family, he is also from Jaffna."* This quote further explains the importance placed upon the "family background" rather than the person's qualities in finding a partner. It is also alarming to see how this woman directly blames herself for the failure of her marriage.

The pressure surrounding marriage and maintaining married relationships play such an integral part in the lives of women that many women end up being trapped in unsuccessful, unhappy marriages. In most the interviews, many women got remarried to uphold societal expectations and as a means of escaping poverty. Dowry compounds the problem further. Sri Lanka's dowry system plays an important role in the livelihoods, family life and social traditions of a woman's life.<sup>30</sup> Dowries are typically defined as property that is transferred from parents to daughters, and finally to their grooms during marriage. This system is particularly disadvantageous in cases of displacement or in a post-war context where families are left in deeper levels of poverty. The stress and anxiety in trying to give a daughter in marriage is complex and deeply intertwined into the social fabric of Sri Lanka's traditions.

---

30 D. Jayatilke and K. Amirthalangam, "The Impact of Displacements on Dowries in Sri Lanka," Brookings Institute –LSE, 2015, 21.

This pressure was revealed by a 48-year-old woman, *“Now if we are to give a child away we need at least three to four hundred thousand [LKR]. That is the rate that they are demanding now. We have a daughter to be given in marriage. We need money for that too.”*

A 35-year-old woman from Jaffna who could not provide a dowry points out the difficulties she faced after marriage: *“Two months after the birth of my daughter [my husband] left again to go to Vanni for work. He got married to a woman in Vanni and now has two children with her. He left me because of dowry issues. I didn’t give him any dowry because I couldn’t afford to give any and I have no parents. He abused me a lot, he has beaten me a lot and then he went to his parent’s house. His parents knew. They support him as well. In fact they are the reason why he beats me. He started selling my jewellery and then sold my bicycle. He tortured me a lot.”*

Former member of the UN National Women’s Committee and the Child Rights Committee, Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne, substantiated these sentiments at the 2016 inauguration of the Women’s Forum Sri Lanka, where she stated that cases of domestic violence are particularly difficult to deal with primarily because of family pressure and Sri Lanka’s social values and cultural beliefs.<sup>31</sup> For instance, many of the interviews from our study show women in submissive positions within marital relations. In these cases, women discuss living with alcoholic, abusive and unfaithful husbands.

---

31 S. Daniel, “Women’s Forum Sri Lanka Inaugurated,” Daily FT, 2016, <http://www.ft.lk/article/530855/Women-s-Forum-Sri-Lanka-inaugurated>.

As many women look to marriage as a form of security, we noticed that not many women shared feelings of security and comfort within a marital relationship. The pressure placed on women to be married more often leads to a loss of autonomy. In many cases, we noticed dissatisfaction and abuse within marriages. A 40-year-old woman from Mullaitivu not only realized the problems within her marriage but also made the decision to walk away from an abusive husband: *“I must earn and lead a good life. I must educate my children like others. I have a dream how my children should be. I was innocent. After the marriage my husband didn’t allow me to go here and there. It was only after I was separated that I knew what life is. Now I know how important it is to earn. Then my husband was suspicious and beat me up. I was tolerating it for ten years. But it never stopped. Then I left him. He married another woman. What is left for me through that marriage is only the four children.”*

Patriarchal attitudes, along with the unequal balance between men and women in relationships, are an underlying cause for cases of domestic and intimate partner violence.<sup>32</sup> A 26-year-old woman from Jaffna shares her experiences of domestic violence as a daughter. She explained how her mother was a victim of the abusive father; *“my father used to work and since 2005, he started drinking. He is a mason. With his drinking habit, we had a lot of troubles. He is really abusive towards my mother, verbally and physically. She had to receive psychiatric treatment. I think it started because she started to think too much after my father became abusive. She also hurt the back of her head. She fell down. We started to notice that she became angry about everything and*

---

32 L. Wanasundra, “Country Report on Violence against Women in Sri Lanka,” Centre for Women’s Research (CENWOR), 2000, 5.

*talks to herself a lot. So we had to take her for the treatment...*" These comments alone shed light on how women and men internalize gender roles. The subordinate status of women and the powerful positions men hold in controlling the choices of women provide grounds for violence to persist, and are arguably the reason women continue to endure abuse.

The same woman stated that, "*We know where to take my mother and how to treat her, but it's hard without my father's consent. We also tried to take my father to a rehabilitation place for alcoholics, he didn't want to. We talked to DS office as well. We even tried to give him tablets without him knowing in order to make him sober. It's not working; mother often ends up telling him that there is a pill in his tea.*" These statements emphasize how the entrenched patriarchal attitudes in Sri Lankan society subordinate women and make them voiceless.

## **Religion**

Religion plays a large role in shaping the traditions, values and attitudes of society. Post-war Sri Lanka has been witness to ongoing inter-religious tension and violence where religious minority groups have been subject to continuous attacks, through hate campaigns and propaganda, and more violent forms of physical assault and property damage.<sup>33</sup> These inter-religious tensions have affected female-headed households in a number of ways.

In several interviews, inter-religious marriage caused isolation within communities and family dynamics. A 46-year-old Christian

---

33 G. Gunatilleke, "The Chronic and the Acute: Post-war Religious Violence in Sri Lanka," International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2015, 15.

woman from Mannar said: *“I went abroad using a Muslim name but my husband knew that I am a Catholic. After marriage I was in Mannar for some time. I was nothing. I didn’t want to go out much. I was shy to step out. I converted and married. Whether I converted or not I was married to a man who was following another religion. When our people see (me) they scold me. If you convert to another religion and meet people of the previous religion that you followed, you feel bad. You can understand this situation only if you fit in my shoes.”*

A 51-year-old Muslim woman from Mannar stated that *“[my siblings] don't help because I converted. They are Hindu.”* This quote highlights how women facing poverty and vulnerabilities are further marginalized by their families and communities upon religious conversion.

On a more personal level, religion plays a prominent role in hindering the decision-making power of a woman, particularly in their reproductive and economic freedom. A 35-year-old Muslim woman from Mannar, mother to seven kids and currently pregnant with twins, stated that her husband is ill and that there is no means to an income. When asked why she was not employed, she stated: *“Because of my pregnancy.”* The interviewer asked her, *“If you find it difficult to bear the child, why didn't you do anything to stop it?”* She whispered, (in the presence of her husband) *“He doesn't like to undergo any contraceptive methods”*. The same woman further stated, *“We have taken nothing from the banks because interest is ‘haram’ (prohibited by the religion), so we didn't take. We were offered but we didn't take. We were offered by Samurdhi too. That is also with interest. We do not want with interest. If we get a loan without interest, then we can take.”*

Many of the interviews indicate how women internalize and accept much of the prejudice that manifests through religion. Herath substantiates this argument by stating that many women define their subordinate status in society as their destiny, or some natural phenomenon, and not as a factor of a deeply unequal socio-economic background.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, in a similar way to Sri Lanka's patriarchal structure and the institution of marriage, ingrained religious practices and beliefs hold more force in controlling the decisions of the women interviewed than their need to escape economic barriers.

### ***Barriers to female economic empowerment at the workplace***

Much of the work undertaken by the women interviewed remains informal and highly precarious. Informal work carried out by women is a critical barrier to economic advancement as it restricts a woman's ability to move into the labour market, as well as the ability to access decently paid work with more security. This section briefly highlights the key barriers to economic empowerment facing female-headed households at the workplace.

#### **5.1 Sexual harassment and abuse at the workplace**

Sexual and gender based violence against women, particularly within the workplace, is one of the most widespread barriers to women trying to access employment. Although Sri Lanka has measures in place to protect women against sexual and gender-

---

34 H.M.A. Herath, *Place of Women in Sri Lankan Society: Measures for their Empowerment for Development and Good Governance*, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, 2014, 15.

based violence,<sup>35</sup> the study reveals that women in the North still encounter issues due to the lack of enforcement of these laws. As a result, they often suffer due to increasing pressure combined with an unreceptive workplace environment.

A 25-year-old woman from Vavuniya shared her experiences of abuse and sexual harassment in several places she was employed at: *“At the British College, where I worked for four months, the boss was very kind to me at first . . . He told me that my salary is 16,000 and I have to cook for three people, clean and in my free time stay at the reception and run errands and help with the others. They gave me the salary on time and it was good, but then later he started to cross the line with me. I don’t know if he thought that I would be okay with that because my husband is not with me. He started to ask me to come early around 7:30 because I had to clean and open the office. But at the time I arrive there, he will be the only one in the office. At first nothing happened, but then later he started to molest me while I worked in the kitchen. Then one day while I was at the kitchen, he came from behind and tried to hug me. I pushed him hard and he fell on the chairs, which made a big noise. Others from outside heard it and I started to shake and felt dizzy. So, I left the kitchen and went to the reception and told the receptionist as soon as she arrived, I also told two other male teachers who work there. They said that he is not that kind of a person. No one talked to him about that, but they all told me that this will never happen. I went to work there for a couple days more and they refused to give me leave even on Sundays. I keep asking them, but they didn’t give me*

---

35 R. Jayasundera, “Understanding Gendered Violence against Women in Sri Lanka: A Background Paper for Women Defining Peace,” Women Defining Peace, 2009. <http://assets.wusc.ca/Website/Programs/WDP/backgroundPaper.pdf>.

*leave at all. So, one day I took a leave by myself without asking anyone, that made him angry, he called me and yelled at me and that was it. I didn't want to go and work there anymore. When a woman with no husband goes to work, this is how they treat the woman."*

*She went on further to state that, "I also worked as a cashier in a restaurant in the town. It was just the same story, the boss was nice to me at the start and then he started talking inappropriately. I quit after two weeks. At that time, I went home and told my mother. I cried and told her that the world is so cruel for a woman. If it's this hard for married women, it must be harder for younger women. I feel sad. That is why I don't like to go out and work. If it is chicken or cattle, we can just raise them within the household, sell whatever we get, and raise the children."*

A common occurrence found amongst women is the fear of speaking out due to reprisal and backlash. Quite often threats of dismissal, disbelief, or even the fear of further acts of violence, prevent women from coming forward. These occurrences cement much of the reasoning behind why the women interviewed prefer to stay at home and engage in informal and self-employed work. For instance, the same woman stated, "*With all these experiences, I am quite afraid to go to work now.*"

### ***Balancing motherhood and work***

One of the major barriers to economic empowerment is the conflict between balancing economic responsibility with family commitments. Women often discussed their own role as mothers and wives, and the cultural and societal pressures that limit their economic progress. Very few respondents received childcare

support or household help from their husbands. If support were received, it was more often through financial help and networks of kinship found within the community

Following the death of her husband, a 48-year-old woman from Jaffna spoke about balancing work and providing for her family. She stated, *“If I go to work my children will be neglected. That is my only issue.”*

A 25-year-old woman from Mullaitivu shared the same sentiments in her interview where she said, *“I got married again and again there were so many losses and we were in difficulties. People who did the GCE O/L work in hospitals now. I also have the talent and passed six subjects in the O/L. I have the courage that I would be able to work. I didn’t try doing anything because my kid was small.”*

Sri Lanka’s post-conflict environment forced women into the non-traditional role of becoming female heads of households, which clashed with their previously held roles as carers at home and primary childcare providers. In most cases, the women discussed receiving little or no support from the community. A number of cases spoke of the stigma associated with leaving their homes and family commitments to go to work. As a response, many women discussed finding flexible work with manageable hours and workplaces within proximity to their homes in order to manage economic pressure with family commitments. However, opportunities of this nature were seldom present, and if found, didn’t always advance the economic pursuits of the woman.

## ***Unfavourable working conditions***

Female-headed households are exposed to several health and safety risks at the workplace with fewer coping mechanisms in dealing with them. A number of cases discussed illnesses, hostile work environments, and difficulties associated with the nature of their jobs. These affect the abilities and productivity of the women, in turn making them less likely to access the labour market.

A 25-year-old woman from Vavuniya shared her experiences of working in a garment factory; *“I was tailoring; we do it piece by piece there. I started to feel dizzy and have headaches, because we had to work all day standing. They let me sew after a while . . . We had to stand for a long time even if we are checking threads or cutting the thread, so I told the manager, I cannot stand for too long. So he told me to quit if I can’t stand for too long. So I quit.”* This quote highlights why women are reluctant to leave their homes to work if the result is potentially further harm to their health or the loss of their jobs.

## ***Lack of capital, limits to access resources***

Traditionally, women in the rural areas of Sri Lanka are engaged in informal jobs where a lack of infrastructure hosts some of the biggest challenges to women advancing their economic pursuits. The Asian Development Bank report published in 1999 stated that in many rural areas there is insufficient electricity, water, road networks and transport facilities.<sup>36</sup> These infrastructural limitations prevent women from accessing capital resources, tools,

---

<sup>36</sup> Asian Development Bank, “Support for Sri Lanka’s Transport Sector,” Asian Development Bank (ADB) Independent Evaluation, 1999, 1.

technology, and even basic resources to further their economic pursuits.

A 26-year-old woman from Jaffna stated; *“In one day I can make products worth 2000 rupees, I can make about 60 brooms of two different kinds. I only make two doormats in a day. We can make more mats using machines, but I don’t have the tools to do it with a machine. The doormats I manually make take time and I have to knit to make it. It takes a lot of time to do it that way.”*

Similarly, a 52-year-old woman from Jaffna who seems quite ambitious, states that the only barrier is the lack of capital. *“If I have some capital I can stitch a bra. I will make others proud of me, of my success being a single woman. I have girls to support. I would go to the shop and look for buyers.”*

In all the interviews, we noticed that women remain in informal, agricultural and home-based fields of work with very little progress moving towards the manufacturing or the service sectors. Most the cases showed that much of the work undertaken is low-paying, with no advancement in work prospects or conditions. Advancement in accessing capital, technology and tools is crucial in incentivizing and supporting women in take their enterprises further.

## **5.2 Issues related to aid and interventions**

As part of Sri Lanka’s post-war development, institutions and aid organizations provided schemes that aimed to ease the plight of suffering. The UNFPA’s report highlighted that while current programmes broadly provide the type of interventions that beneficiaries require, there seem to be significant faults in the

“design, implementation and coordination of these programmes.”<sup>37</sup> Many of the issues stemmed from the reliance placed on outdated and flawed data, and discrepancies with how these projects targeted their beneficiaries.<sup>38</sup> As a result, these interventions were deeply flawed at the foundations of their designs, and the implementation of these programmes only targeted a few women, leaving many excluded from much needed support.

A 35-year-old woman from Mannar gave insight into these issues by stating, *“An organisation gave us the cage. It helped the widows and the disabled. They gave us the chicks. We had no experience in managing poultry. We didn't know what to give and what not to give. So we gave rice. Only if proper food is given, they will lay eggs. We called the organization to come and check. They said they will come, and they need to inject the chickens. But they never came. They helped, they gave us the chickens but after that they didn't care.”*

A 52-year-old woman from Jaffna provided further insight into the failed targeting of projects and the mismanagement of resources by stating that the *“Government gave me a machine through the D.S. Office. That machine is there. Later again the ones who came from Vanni were registered by the government for livelihood support. I also gave my name. I asked them to give cash, so that I can buy the things and start my work. But they gave me another machine.”*

In responding to the war, many aid organizations took on a more “impersonal” approach. Whitehead argues that by doing so, the

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

interventions themselves didn't always work towards empowering women. By assuming that all women in the post-war context of Sri Lanka represent a homogenous group with similar needs and prospects, aid interventions end up offering women opportunities that are typically feminine, thereby imposing constraints that were indirectly, and invisibly, institutionalizing discrimination.<sup>39</sup> In turn, interventions that aimed to make women independent economic actors failed to meet their desired goals. Furthermore, interventions that were motivated by welfare concerns rather than the push for development ended up having less sustainable and long-term benefits.

### **5.3 Individual Constraints**

Individual barriers examine the abilities and skills of each individual woman interviewed. From the data received, we noticed that low levels of transferable skills and education had a massive effect on cementing low-waged, less formal types of work. This further reinforced the women's dependency on both men and relief efforts in pushing them out of poverty. This section aims to show that even if women tried to take control of their empowerment, the structural impediments discussed above play a bigger role in restricting a woman's ability to make choices that would lead to economic empowerment.

#### ***Transferable skills and education***

Aside from restrictions to accessing work, women face barriers in education and skills. Most often, these barriers are experienced at a young age. In poorer households, the opportunity costs of girls' schooling are most significant. In most cases, girls' labour is

---

39 A. Whitehead, "Some preliminary notes on the subordination of women." *IDS Bulletin*, 1979.

used as a substitute for their mothers' labour at a later stage e.g. through caring for siblings and household work. As a result, the loss of the hours spent learning impacts on their ability to raise an income. Particularly within a post-war context, many women who face displacement or loss struggle to make the transition towards accessing formal or waged labour. This lack of education and transferable skills has been recognized as a lasting and detrimental cause of poverty.

According to the findings, the reasons for the lack of education and transferable skills cut across several socio- cultural issues. These include early school dropouts, but also extend to factors such as resettlement, poverty, and family commitments. A 38-year-old woman from Mullaitivu explained how war, displacement, and resettlement crippled her education *"I studied in Thanneerootru. I went to Nuraicholai, Puttalam in 1990 when I was in grade 10. I sat my GCE O/L exam in Puttalam in 1995. I had to study in the 6th grade for three years because we were changing places"*.

A 46-year-old woman from Mannar said that the reason she could not continue her studies was poverty, *"I studied up to grade 8. I wanted to study further, but couldn't. It was so difficult even to find meals. So we ate only once a day or twice a day"*. Furthermore, a woman from Mannar said, *"[I] studied up to the 10th grade. Then stopped schooling because [my] father was sick and [my] mother needed a helping hand."*

The data gathered recognizes that prior to the war, many women worked within one specific industry that was mostly limited to the household. In a post-war context, the interviews highlighted how many of these skills could not successfully make the transition to a new environment, further disempowering women. Our findings

also highlighted how the government and aid interventions that aimed to develop certain skills failed as many women did not have the requisite entrepreneurial and financial knowledge to build on the skills gained.

### ***Dependent mentalities***

Following the end of the war, relief efforts by the government and non-governmental and private sectors admirably implemented relief initiatives in an attempt to meet the basic needs of people affected by the crisis. However, very few projects took on an integrative approach that would combine relief operations with market development frameworks. More often, donor agencies faced the challenge of trying to provide solutions under critical pressure to meet human demands, with the urgency to address the immediate needs of crisis-affected countries. As a result, programmes that aimed to alleviate poverty in the country led to a degree of dependency,<sup>40</sup> which made some women reliant on relief.

A 26-year-old woman from Jaffna criticizes the NGO sector interventions stating that they create issues of dependency and do not reach the destitute. *“If the NGOs are going to help a family, they could help someone once to start something. But, if they keep supporting the same person, that person will start depending on this NGO for the rest of the life. When they were busy helping one person over and over again, they kind of ignored the rest of the people who really needed help. It could have been better if they assess who needs help the most and who doesn’t.”*

---

40 P. Harvey and J. Lind, “Dependence and humanitarian relief: A critical analysis,” Humanitarian Policy Group Research Report 19, 2005, 10, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/277.pdf>.

Dependency is also fostered through patriarchal values. Women often look to male family members for support, relinquishing themselves from any control in their economic domains. In some cases, we noticed that even if the environment and opportunities were available for economic activity, there was a lack of willingness to engage in self-employment work as their husbands, families or children could provide sufficient support. A 39-year-old woman from Vavuniya highlights this. When asked if she ever wanted to work, the respondent stated, *“No, whatever my father brings is enough, so I stayed at home. Well, I have never thought of working, my father is taking care of me so I don’t have to think about it.”* The interviewee responded asking what her plans would be if her father were not present or capable of looking after her. She responded with, *“My sons will be grown-ups, so I hope they will take care of me.”*

Issues of dependency could stem from several factors. However, in a society where women are, and have historically been, so hugely reliant on men, many women do not successfully jolt themselves up to new roles of independence. As a result, feelings of dependency could result from prolonged reliance on male family members, and could transform into a dependency placed on interventions and aid.

#### **5.4 Opportunities for Female Economic Empowerment**

Despite the challenges examined in this paper, a number of opportunities came to light in the interviews. Many women showed high levels of resilience and strong aspirations for the future. Women in post-war Sri Lanka display an immense capacity to recover from the hardships they went through for several decades. These women have shown an interest in making the best out of the limited opportunities available to them. Their resilient nature has helped to rebuild their livelihoods as survivors of the war. Amongst many factors, most of the women found solidarity with their female family members and friends, and showed strong incentives toward becoming financially stable and saving money. However, the most promising sign we noticed was the strong desire to provide better futures for their children.

##### ***Female networks and solidarity***

Female solidarity from family members, friends and networks often led to feelings of empowerment and support. Many women found strength and encouragement in confiding to female family members.

Some cases providing insight into the support networks surrounding family-led businesses that were often made up of mothers, daughters and sisters. A 59-year-old woman from Vavuniya said, *“My daughter had a very hard time. We have no help. So, my daughter told me we should start preparing string hoppers and pittu again, so we started again. We live in small huts next to each other, so we make the food together”*. A 26-year-old woman from Jaffna said, *“My mother helps me with the work. My sister just finished a six-month course in coir work and she*

*will help us as well. I have three more sisters and they help me as well. We need at least three people to make a rope. It's like a family business."*

In one case, a 40-year-old woman from Mullaitivu talked about feeling inspired by successful women in her community. *"At a meeting, I met Ms. Jensila. Then only I was aware of many details. How we should have an income. Then I was inspired. Mother also encouraged me. She said that she will support me when she gets the Samurdhi aid and she asked me to do this along with looking after the children without going abroad."*

### ***Financial skills***

In a few cases, we noticed that a few women were entrepreneurially driven, with strong desires to save money. For instance, a 45-year-old woman from Mullaitivu gave us insight into how she saved money and made investments to accumulate more of an income. She stated, *"I saved money through Chit Fund. I make jewellery. We gave the paddy field on lease. I used that money as the capital for jewellery making and made about 30 pieces of jewellery. We got a Rs.75,000 loan from commercial credit and bought chickens for poultry and we have some money on hand so we are able to pay the interest. We don't spend too much money and we don't put all money into investment so some amount of money would be left on hand. In the meanwhile, the cocks will be sold within six months and we have banana trees so it is fine. The interest rate is high. No problem as we are able to adjust and it doesn't seem complicated but it was difficult for some others. They didn't invest in income generation related work so they are struggling."*

A 52-year-old woman from Mullaitivu engaged in the short-eats business stated that she saves Rs. 500/= per day. She stated, *“If I am giving the short-eats to the shops and also selling at home, I will earn more. Apart from the breakfast expenses, I will earn Rs. 500. That is the profit apart from what I am spending on buying the dry rations I need to make more short-eats. If I count the expenses for flour, chilli, and vegetables it adds up to 1,000 rupees. Then only I will be able to manage the education cost, groceries and every other thing we need at home.”*

### ***Strong aspirations to educate their children***

In almost every interview, women talked about providing better futures for her children and family. All of the women wanted to educate their children and stated that generating enough money to send their children to school was one of the biggest concerns. A 40-year-old woman from Mullaitivu stated; *“I must earn and lead a good life. I must educate my children like others. I have a dream of how my children should be . . . Now I know how important it is to earn and how to live.”* Another 59-year-old woman in Vavuniya spoke of what she went through to educate her children; *“For about 17 years, I was selling food to the hospital to educate my children. Like that, I worked hard and educated my children. My son scored 9As in his O/L examination.”* A woman in Jaffna who is 48 years old stated that her *“only desire”* is to educate her children.

In addition to these opportunities, many of the women were driven towards improving their personal skills levels, education, and knowledge. A few cases highlighted goals in becoming proficient in computer skills and the English language. *“First of all, I can learn*

*English because it is important anyway, so it's better to learn. My brother can do photo editing. My brother studied computer courses at ILO and when he completed the course, they gave him a computer, so he does photo shop, photo editing. I want to learn that as well so that we can do a small business together."* It is clear that amongst all the hardships women face in overcoming the barriers to female economic empowerment, there are still strong desires and levels of resilience to pursue better lives.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Sri Lanka's post-war environment has had harsh social and economic ramifications for female-headed households. Our findings support Kabeer's argument that even if women make choices and exercise agency, it is often within the limits imposed by the structural distribution of norms, rules, and identities within society.

In the case of Sri Lanka, our findings have shown that socially constructed institutions create much of the gender-bias that are deeply ingrained in society, thus placing female-headed households at greater risk of poverty. In other words, the structural systems such as patriarchy, social norms and attitudes are the most detrimental to the economic empowerment of women.

In many ways, the confines imposed by structural systems have filtered down to the very individual level through gender roles and stereotypes which had created insecurities and subsequently hindered the woman's sense of agency, which has further led to a high level of dependency.

A particularly pertinent point to highlight is that the socio-cultural norms and rules are internalized by many of these women. In almost all the cases, these women do not confront the restrictions and social constructs that limit them to the societal roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers. This in no way implies that the burden is on the women to change. Instead, it sheds light on the need for policies and laws to transform the very structural barriers that Sri Lankan society falls into.

It was apparent that the issues these women encounter at their workplace: sexual and gender-based violence, hostile working environments, and the nature of their jobs, prevent women from entering the labour market. The findings of the study brought to light how marriage and religion hinder the decision-making power of women. Many women shared their experiences of being victims of abuse and violence by their partner and how issues related to dowry instigated most of them. Issues concerning inter-religious marriages and conversion were also proven to create tensions in the family and community.

Many cases proved that women in the post-war context need not only conventional vocational training but also other skills essential to reducing their vulnerability such as basic skills in literacy, numeracy, learning skills, problem-solving skills. In order for aid interventions to be sustainable and to create income-generating prospects for women, there needs to be less focus on traditional skills and more of an investigation into the existing skills, jobs and expertise of women. The sense of inadequacy was well expressed in many cases where these women lack the required knowledge and skills to access the labour market. Support from their family members and aid interventions have provided a temporary solution,

but in turn, have also created an unhealthy level of dependency, which is particularly detrimental to the empowerment of women.

Restricted access to basic facilities, infrastructure, and capital restricted the opportunities for women in post-war Sri Lanka. Women managing private and small-scale businesses spoke about a range of barriers encountered in finding the capital to expand their businesses, or finding machinery to increase production and difficulties in transporting products to the market. Even though the government and non-government and private sectors have intervened to fill in these loopholes, many pursuits failed due to the poor framework of the programme, mismanagement of the resources, and a failure to monitoring and follow-up on the progress of the intervention.

Regardless of a range of barriers identified, the findings also display a few opportunities available for women to flourish in the post-war North. These women seem assertive and resilient in uprooting themselves amidst barriers they face almost every day. They find solace in female solidarity and believe that their individual experiences and strengths could help and complement one another. Their financial management skills and determination to educate their children definitely give them hope for the future.

Furthermore, when looking at the effect of the war on the economic hardships facing female-headed households, our findings show that the war did not necessarily act as a trigger. Instead, women have always been confined to certain roles within society; the war acted as more of a catalyst that exacerbated the hardships women face, but was not the root cause of these circumstances.

Finally, this paper argues that while market forces play centre stage in the current projects and strategies aimed at uplifting women, policies need to go a step further in addressing the non-economic domains of a women's life. These could be policies on improving access to education and vocational training, or further well-designed investments in provided basic social services, awareness programmes, childcare, social protection, and basic facilities and utilities.

More importantly, larger efforts need to be made on confronting historically established gender inequalities that reinforce the barriers to female economic empowerment. Eliminating the gender-bias is crucial to eradicating poverty, promoting overall economic development, and is an intrinsic goal in itself. However, this most likely will require long-term commitment and resources. A robust education in all spheres of a woman's life, including marriage, health, and personal autonomy, will be a good starting point in the forward movement of women.

## References

- Asian Development Bank. "Support for Sri Lanka's transport sector." *ADB Learning Curves*, 2012. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/evaluation-document/36042/files/lc-sape-transport-sri.pdf>.
- Collier, Paul, V.L. Elliot, Anke Hoeffler, Håvard Hegre, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis. "Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy." The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/ndle/10986/13938/567930PUBObrea10Box353739B01PUBLIC1.pdf;sequence=1>.
- Edmund, Phelps. "The Statistical Theory of Racism and Sexism." *American Economic Review*. Vol. 61, No. 4. (1972). 659-661.
- Finance and Planning (Sri Lanka), Ministry of. "Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2009/2010." Department of Census and Statistics, 2011. [http://www.statistics.gov.lk/HIES/HIES2009\\_10FinalReportEng.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/HIES/HIES2009_10FinalReportEng.pdf)
- FOKUS Women. 'Report on the status of female heads of households and their access to economic, political and cultural rights: Anuradhupura District' *Fokus Women*. (2015). Found at: [http://www.fokuskvinner.no/Documents/\(ESCR\)%20in%20Anuradhapura.pdf](http://www.fokuskvinner.no/Documents/(ESCR)%20in%20Anuradhapura.pdf)
- Gowrinathan, Nimmi and Kate Cronin-Furman. "The Forever Victims? Women in Post-war Sri Lanka." Colin Powell School, The City College of New York, 2015.
- Herath, H.M.A. "Place of Women in Sri Lankan Society: Measures for Their Empowerment for Development and Good Governance." University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka, 2012.
- Jayasundere, R. and C. Weerackody. "Gendered implications of Economic Development in the Post-Conflict Northern and Eastern Regions of Sri Lanka." Care International Sri Lanka, 2013.
- Jayatilaka, Danesh and Kopalapillai Amirthaligam. "The Impact of Displacement on Dowries in Sri Lanka." The Brookings Institute-LSE. 2015. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Impact-of-Displacement-on-Dowries-in-Sri-Lanka-Feb-2015.pdf>.
- Kabeer, Naila. "Women's Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development." School of Oriental and African Studies (UK) working paper, 2012. <https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/NK-WEE-Concept-Paper.pdf>.
- Kabeer, Naila. "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Discussing Women's Empowerment - Theory and Practice*. Sida Studies No. 3. n.d. [http://www.sida.se/contentassets/51142018c739462db123fcoad6383c4d/discussing-womens-empowerment---theory-and-practice\\_1626.pdf](http://www.sida.se/contentassets/51142018c739462db123fcoad6383c4d/discussing-womens-empowerment---theory-and-practice_1626.pdf).

- Kabeer, Naila. "The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 108. (1999). [http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/document.nsf/eb300385855/31eef181bec398a380256b67005b720a/\\$FILE/dp108.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/document.nsf/eb300385855/31eef181bec398a380256b67005b720a/$FILE/dp108.pdf).
- Lang, Marques. "Income Disparity for Working Mothers: Eliminating Structural Discrimination through Public Policy." *Portland State University McNair Scholars Online Journal*, Vol. 5, 2011: 63-85. <http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1107&context=mcnair>.
- Lindsey, Charlotte. "Women Facing War." ICRC report, 2001. [https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0798\\_women\\_facing\\_war.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0798_women_facing_war.pdf).
- Mehra, Rekha. "Women, Empowerment and Economic Development." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 554, 1997. 136-149. <https://comm4002careproject.wikispaces.com/file/view/WomenEmpowermentAndEconomicDevelopment.pdf>.
- Ormhaug, Christian, Patrick Meier, Helga Hernes, "Armed Conflict Deaths Disaggregated by Gender.' International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2009. [http://file.prio.no/Publication\\_files/Prio/Armed%20Conflict%20Deaths%20Disaggregated%20by%20Gender.pdf](http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/Armed%20Conflict%20Deaths%20Disaggregated%20by%20Gender.pdf).
- Petes, Patti. "Women's Empowerment Arising from Violent Conflict and Recovery: Life stories from four middle-income countries." US Agency for International Development (USAID), 2011. [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/Petes\\_Women\\_and\\_Conflict.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/Petes_Women_and_Conflict.pdf).
- Philips, Mira. "Gender and Post-Conflict Development: Experiences and female-headed households." *The Island*. 2014. [http://www.island.lk/index.php?page\\_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code\\_title=109106](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=109106).
- UNDP, "Livelihoods and Economic Recovery in Crisis Situations." UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. Found 2013. [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/20130215\\_UNDP%20LER\\_guide.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/20130215_UNDP%20LER_guide.pdf).
- Wanasundera, Leelangi. "Country Report on Violence against Women in Sri Lanka." Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR). 2000. <http://mhps.net/?get=123/71-Country-Report-on-Violence-Against-Women-in-Sri-Lanka.pdf>.
- Whitehead, Ann. "Some Preliminary Notes on the Subordination of Women." *IDS Bulletin*. Vol. 37, Issue 4. 2006.

# Chapter 5: Doing This and That: Self-employment and economic survival of women heads of households in Mullaitivu

*Chulani Kodikara*

## 1. Introduction

[Suganthy Matheeseelan] . . . used to run her small tailoring business from home but with help from the ILO she learned business skills such as budgeting, bookkeeping and business expansion, and was able to build a shop in Mullaitivu District and provide jobs for six other people. Her monthly net profit is now around 25,000 rupees (US\$188).<sup>1</sup>

Indrani is 50 years old, was born in Jaffna, and lives at Uppukulam-South in Mannar. Her husband was disabled in the war and is not able to work. Due to their financial constraints, they were unable to send their three children to school. In 2009, she received loans from the VDO<sup>2</sup> and cooperative bank to build and expand a “buy back systems” business with five other poultry farmers in the area. She has since doubled her business and is now planning to employ three other women to expand further.<sup>3</sup>

Success stories of beneficiaries or recipients of economic empowerment programmes such as those cited above abound

---

1 Our impact, their stories. “Post-war resilience: New skills bring better incomes for Sri Lankan women.”

*ILO website*, 1 September 2016. [http://www.ilo.org/global/about-theilo/newsroom/features/WCMS\\_513769/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-theilo/newsroom/features/WCMS_513769/lang--en/index.htm)

2 Village Development Organisation.

3 Sri Lanka: Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, 15 October 2013. Feature story on World Bank website. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/15/sri-lanka-economic-empowerment-of-rural-women>

in publications and progress reports of international donor organisations, and international and local NGOs, which are in turn reproduced in local and international media reports. They form an intrinsic part of descriptions and discourses of livelihood support programmes, which seek to develop small, medium and micro enterprises in war-affected areas of Sri Lanka, particularly for women-heads of households (WHHs). Following Philip Mader, “(w)ritten in colourful, evocative prose, and reporting or promising impacts from the relatively mundane to the spectacular . . . and often accompanied by uplifting images,” (Mader 2015: 5) these stories are invariably hinged to and framed in terms of what he refers to as “mobilising narratives” of empowerment and development (ibid 2015).

This paper is not seeking to challenge the success stories cited above as fabrications or fictions. A certain percentage of those who receive livelihood development assistance may succeed<sup>4</sup> – in some cases, exceeding the expectations of organisations implementing these programmes. Yet they do not tell the whole story. Based on in-depth interviews with seven women living in Mullaitivu, this paper questions and challenges the common sense of the development industry, which promotes self employment in the war-affected North and East as a magic bullet to alleviate poverty and empower women. Not every woman who is a recipient of these enterprise development programmes becomes an “entrepreneur” running an “enterprise” or even a micro enterprise. Rather, most end up engaging in “survival activities or strategies” (de la Rocha 2001a; Haan 1989; Kabeer 2012), or “petty commodity production and petty trade” (de la Rocha 2001a; 2001b; 2007: 50).

---

4 See for instance Gunatilaka, Ramani and Ranmini Vithanagama, *Women’s Labour Market Outcomes and Livelihood Interventions in Sri Lanka’s North after the War*, Colombo: ICES. Forthcoming.

Moreover, such activities which I refer to as self-employment activities<sup>5</sup> in this paper are merely one or more of a diverse repertoire of precarious livelihood activities and meagre, subsistence level income sources engaged by women as a matter of economic survival in which their own labour is the most important ingredient. Yet women's own productive labour was materially, temporally, spatially and affectively entangled with and circumscribed by the extraordinary labour of remaking their lives after war. Although many of these women continued to receive Samurdhi or PAMA, such payments were woefully inadequate. Women coped and survived because of the additional financial and material support they received from charitable institutions, individuals and other family members, even though these were ad hoc, episodic and unreliable.

The literature on livelihoods tells us that livelihoods have both a social and economic (Ellis 2000), as well as a political dimension linked to macro-economic policies of nation states (de la Rocha 2001a; 2001b; 2007; 2009). I thus locate and analyse women's livelihoods in post-war Sri Lanka within the broader politics of post-war development and reconstruction, arguing for the need to recognize women's (and men's) right to livelihoods in war-affected areas as a question of economic justice beyond a market-based approach to economic empowerment.

---

5 A recent IDS report acknowledges that entrepreneurship is now considered synonymous with self-employment, i.e. any activity that is undertaken to generate an income (Ayele et al. 2016: 4.), even though this risks draining both terms of all meaning. I draw on an older distinction made between entrepreneurship and self-employment, which recognizes the small scale and informal character of self-employment (Langevang et al 2015).

This paper attempts to provide a thick and rich description of the livelihood and income generation strategies of seven women heads of households – six Tamil and one Muslim – in post-war Mullaitivu who have been renamed **Bahirathi, Faizunnisa, Manohari, Nirmala, Kalainidhi, Rathirani** and **Vasanthamala** to protect their identities. Through this thick and rich description, the paper seeks to understand vulnerabilities, strengths, constraints, and barriers as well as opportunities to make a life and make living in the midst of loss and trauma, while recognizing that they are not merely victims but also agents making choices, albeit constrained by broader socio-political structures (Kabeer 1999). While this is not a household-level analysis of livelihoods, following from the work of Frank Ellis and Mercedes Gonzales de la Rocha, I attempt to study their livelihoods in the context of the households in which they are embedded on the premise that the characteristics of the household (and their trajectory over time) influence livelihood options. Although this task has been constrained by the fact that the interviews for this study did not consistently ‘open up’ the household for inquiry, nevertheless based on the information available, I have attempted to piece together how household structures shaped the choices made by these women. The analysis also draws on three interviews with managerial-level staff working for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Sewalanka, a local Non-Governmental Organisation implementing SME programmes.

The seven interviews analysed in this paper were conducted in Mullaitivu by Tamil speaking researchers who were part of the ICES GROW research study. The study conducted a total of 116 interviews in Tamil in the five districts of the North of which 95 were translated into English. The number of translated interviews

from each district is as follows: Jaffna -32, Kilinochchi - 20, Mannar - 20, Mullaitivu – 8, and Vavuniya – 15. I chose seven interviews from the 8 interviews conducted in Mullaitivu on the basis of the richness of the interviews and the age, ethnicity and geographical location of the respondents. The decision to focus on Mullaitivu was based on the fact that it was the district worst affected by the war, has the highest poverty rate and the lowest mean household income in Sri Lanka compared to other districts (World Bank 2015). Of the 41,367 families and a population of 130,873 living in Mullaitivu, 6,515 households are headed by women, including “war widows, natural widows and those living separately from their husbands” (District Secretariat 2015: 44). As a percentage, Mullaitivu has the second largest percentage of women-headed households in the North after Kilinochchi (Centre for Women’s Development 2013). Even though, it was my intention to conduct a follow up interview with each of the seven women, I was unable to do so. I acknowledge that this is a significant limitation of this paper.

The paper is divided into four parts: I begin this paper by briefly detailing the dominant approach to livelihood development in war-affected areas in Sri Lanka, going on to examine key characteristics of the seven women that were part of this study in part two; their age at the time the interviews were conducted, their education; their age of marriage and circumstances of marriage, the number of children they had and their livelihood activities. In part three, I examine the kinds of self-employment engaged in by these women, their limits and possibilities, as well as the other kinds of support that are helping to sustain their families despite the failure of self-employment ventures. Part four explores women’s labour as the most critical element in their livelihood strategy, and the ways in

which it is constrained and stretched to its limit. I conclude with some observations. The paper does not explore in detail the policy implications of the findings. That I will leave to those better versed in matters of the economy.

## **2. Reconstruction, Development and the Dominant Approach to Livelihood Development in Post-War Sri Lanka**

Livelihoods are core to rebuilding community and lifting people out of poverty in post-war contexts. Local economies in post-war environments face many economic and social challenges, including the reintegration of several particularly vulnerable groups such as ex-combatants, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, and youth. However, whether women heads of households are more vulnerable and prone to poverty than other households is a matter of considerable dispute in the scholarship on livelihoods (Gonzalez de la Rocha and Grinspun 2001: 61)

Before proceeding any further, it is perhaps necessary to first clarify my understanding of livelihoods. I draw primarily from the work of Frank Ellis (1998; 2000) and Mercedes Gonzales de la Rocha (2001; 2007). Ellis defines a livelihood or a means to a living as comprising of assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), activities, and access to these, mediated by institutions and social relations that together determine the living gained by the individual or the household (Ellis 2000: 10). Citing Scoones (1998) he elaborates on each of these assets: natural assets are natural resources such as water, land, and trees; physical assets are those brought into being by economic production processes such as tools, machines, irrigation canals and terraces; human assets comprise education and good health;

financial assets refers to access to cash, savings and credit; social capital refers to the networks and associations in which people participate, and from which they can derive support that contributes to their livelihoods. Ellis stresses the impact of social and kinship relations for facilitating and sustaining diverse income portfolios, i.e. gender, family, kin, class, caste, ethnicity and belief systems and institutions that mediate an individual's or family's capacity to achieve its consumption requirements. Ellis's work relates to rural agricultural communities, and declining incomes from farming, which is increasingly forcing such communities to find supplementary forms of in-farm and off-farm income sources (Ellis 2000).

The resources of poverty / poverty of resources model developed by Gonzalez de la Rocha emphasises the household and its social organization as the appropriate unit of analysis of what she refers to as "survival strategies" of the poor. Such strategies she states are characterized by diverse income sources and multiple income earners and are based on four structural conditions for household capability: i.e. the possibility to earn wages; labour invested in the production in petty commodity and petty trade, labour invested in production of goods and services for consumption, and income from social exchange. Although her work is on the urban poor in one Mexican city and Latin America more generally, I believe it has sufficient analytical purchase to be applied to the context of post-war Sri Lanka.

## **The Political Economy of Development in the Post-War North and East**

At the time the interviews for these studies were done, the local economies in the war-affected districts of the North, reliant mainly on agriculture and fisheries, and to lesser extent on livestock and forestry were still in crisis with stable and secure employment opportunities available only to a few (Gunasekera et al. 2016; Kadirgamar 2017). The post-war reconstruction and development policy of the government has been analysed elsewhere (Bastian 2013; Goger and Ruwanpura 2014; Gunasekera et al, 2016; Kadirgamar 2013a, 2013b, nd; Keerawella 2013), and will not be rehearsed here. However, based on this scholarship, it is possible to identify six main components of GoSL policy in this regard: prioritization of massive infrastructure development efforts such as rebuilding roads, railway lines, and electricity grids; encouragement and facilitation of private sector investment particularly in the garment and tourism industries, through release of land for industries, favourable land leasing terms, communications and electricity infrastructure, and fast track development approvals (Goger and Ruwanpura 2016: 13); promotion and facilitation of business enterprises by the army including in the agriculture, livestock, dairy, tourism and hospitality sectors (Skanthakumar 2013); implementation of a housing reconstruction programme to renovate or rebuild approximately 150,000 houses which were partly or fully destroyed due to the war (Gunasekera et al 2016: 1); expansion of credit facilities (Kadirgamar 2013a, nd); and the promotion of small and medium enterprise development. While both agriculture and fisheries sectors have received government and donor financial allocations for their revival, it has not been sufficient to meet all of the demands and challenges of rebuilding

these sectors. Revival of these sectors has also been hampered by factors extraneous to the war: floods and droughts in the case of agriculture and intrusion of Indian and Southern fishermen into northern waters in the case of fisheries (Gunasekera et al 2016).

The infrastructure projects and housing schemes created some jobs, although mainly for able-bodied Sinhala men from the South. Even these were however petering out as the projects were completed or nearing completion at the time of writing. The army which is one of the largest civilian employers in Mullaitivu has created jobs in tourism, farms<sup>6</sup> and pre-schools, even though the rationale underlying its entry into economic activity is an altogether different one – to ensure the participation of “war heroes” in a militarized model of development (Jegatheeswaran 2017; Jegatheeswaran & Arulthas 2017). Other than these, the jobs for women were mainly in the few garment factories set up in the districts. This is where self-employment schemes and small and micro income generation projects (SMEs) enter reconstruction and development policy as the magic bullet to relieve poverty and economically empower the war-affected population, in particular vulnerable groups such as ex-combatants, youth, and women heads of households (Godamunne 2015, See also Senaratna 2017).

While SME promotion has a long history in Sri Lanka going back to the 1970s, they were repackaged as a post-war development intervention following the end of the war in 2009. Similarly it has a long history in international development orthodoxy and has been referred to as “nothing less than the most promising instrument available for reducing the extent and severity of global poverty”

---

6 A recent study reports that the Army Directorate for Agriculture and Livestock operates farms in Udayakattukulam, Nachchikadu, and Wellakulam in the Mullaitivu district (Jegatheeswaran and Arulthas 2017).

(Snodgrass, 1997: 1). Micro credit tends to occupy an important place in these programmes. Mader citing Harper (2011: 59) contends that microfinance offers a way of exploiting the labour of the poor, and indeed of extracting higher returns by financing petty businesses under the guise of assisting the poor to become entrepreneurs, without setting up factories and machines, without directly employing them, and without having to manage this labour. Marder elaborates that these new financial relationships are more advantageous than direct employment because 1) There is no need for any actual entrepreneurial activity by owners of capital; 2) A number of fixed costs are avoided; 3) The risks of entrepreneurship are outsourced to others and 4) There is no risk of employees appealing to or combining against their employers/owners. He goes on to state:

Microfinance makes employee-type capital labour relationships possible even with the denizens of slums and villages in the Global South – a truly astonishing innovation. This form of surplus extraction is plainly more congruent with financialised capitalism than traditional employment, and may be understood as part of a fundamental ongoing transformation in how labour power is made amenable for capital accumulation in many different spaces. (Mader 2015: 23)

Women's self-employment is especially encouraged because of an assumption that it generates higher incomes and empowers women to gain autonomy and improve the health of their families, helping to alleviate poverty in society at large (Premchander 2003). Indeed, as Roy argues, the icon at the heart of these programmes are third world women, such as Indrani and Suganthy, whose stories open

this paper, produced as figures of resilience and charged with converting poverty into enterprise (2012: 136). Women tend to be also constructed as virtuous and reliable recipients of microcredit tied to these programmes; the ones “who always pay” as opposed to unreliable male defaulters. In this sense, these programmes are “technologies of gender” that entail the feminization of risk, responsibility and obligation in the global fight against poverty (Roy 2012: 143).

Countries and communities emerging from war and natural disasters from Mozambique (Baden 1997) and Bosnia (Bateman 2001; Pupavac 2005), to New Orleans, USA (in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina) (Adams 2012) have been equally subject to the logic of these interventions. Pupavac refers to a 1997 ILO report on Bosnia to the effect that “international strategies after the war re-oriented their programming for women away from therapy toward income generation, micro-enterprise and skills training” (Pupavac 2005: 397). Both Bateman (2001) and Pupavac (2005) are critical of the outcomes of these programmes in Bosnia, seeing them as part of international structural adjustment policies and neo-liberalization of the economy, which eroded state employment and welfare provision. Bateman’s (2001) critique is particularly trenchant in relation to SME’s tied to microcredit. Taking this critique a step further scholars such as Roy and Adams link these programmes to “disaster capitalism” – whereby catastrophes and their disproportionate impact on poor communities are turned into market opportunities for profit (Roy 2012:107; Adams 2012).

In Sri Lanka, by 2011, two years after the end of the war, promotion and support for SMEs had become a taken for granted aspect of post-war development. In a 2011 IRIN article, the Government Agent for Vavuniya noted: “Cottage industries now play a vital

role in generating income in the former war zone”. The same article quotes the Bank of Ceylon Area Manager from Vavuniya as saying “when jobs become harder to find, people find it easier to start something on their own, especially when they see there are opportunities to succeed.”<sup>7</sup>

### **SME Programmes in Post-War Sri Lanka**

In post-war Sri Lanka, SME programmes, ranging from home gardening, bee keeping, tailoring, poultry farming, dairy farming and support for small retail shops have proliferated. International institutions involved in implementing them include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. Local Non-Governmental organisations include Sarvodaya, Sewalanka, and World Vision. State institutions involved include the National Enterprise Development Authority (NEDA), the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, and the Samurdhi project.<sup>8</sup> The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and USAID are among those involved in funding such initiatives. Such programmes are also part of bilateral aid provision from foreign governments such as Australia, Germany and Norway through their local Embassies. It is a

---

7 Cottage industries offer hope in former war zone by Amantha Perera, 10 November 2011. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/94176/sri-lanka-cottage-industries-offer-hope-former-war-zone>

8 This is the state’s implemented poverty alleviation programme. It was renamed as Divineguma during the Rajapakse regime, but reverted to its original name following the election of a new government in January 2015 (see Divi Neguma Project now ‘Samurdhi’ Project, Daily News, 19 October 2016, <http://dailynews.lk/2016/10/19/local/96452>).

crowded arena and there is no one model that is followed. Different agencies have adopted very different approaches comprising all or some of the following: vocational and management training, distribution of tools, and provision of credit facilities. Some target individuals, others only collectives whether farmer organisations, women's development organisations, cooperatives or self-help groups. Some assistance comes in the form of a comprehensive package providing monitoring and follow up assistance over a considerable period of time. Other SME programmes consist of one time grants or distribution of material assistance in the form of seeds, farming implements, livestock, poultry, sewing machines and the like. Some assistance is more popular than others. The number of organisations that have distributed chicks ranging from the age of 5 days to 40 days for instance are legion. Microcredit is a component of some of these programmes with interest rates ranging from around 20 per cent to 70 per cent.

The International Labour organisation's (ILO) Local Empowerment through Economic Development (LEED) programme is an example of a comprehensive package of assistance from training and capacity building, business planning and infrastructure development to marketing and follow up assistance.<sup>9</sup> Its support is however only available to collectives. One of the Programme Officers responsible for the implementation of the LEED programme explained that they don't support individuals or the very poor. In the ILO's view, the latter in particular have no capacity to sustain entrepreneurial activity. Sewalanka's Link with Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LLRD) follows a similar approach with support only extended to groups within communities that they work

---

9 [http://www.ilo.org/colombo/whatwedo/projects/WCMS\\_397563/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/colombo/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_397563/lang--en/index.htm)

in, although individuals remain eligible for microcredit from Sewalanka Credit (an arm of Sewalanka) provided the collective recommends the individual as credit worthy and provides a guarantee against default. This was described as an integrated approach, which involves community-level needs assessments, organising, and mobilisation of communities.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) takes a Competency Based Economic Formation of Enterprise (CEFE) approach to livelihoods in the war-affected areas, which was first introduced by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in the early 1990s. In promotional material, CEFE is described as follows:

CEFE is a comprehensive set of training instruments using an action-oriented approach and experiential learning methods to develop and enhance the business management and personal competencies of a wide range of target groups, mostly in the context of income and employment generation and economic development.

It represents an accumulation of instruments for entrepreneurship training combined with an active and dynamic approach and methods of empirical learning in order to develop and improve managerial and individual skills.

Rather than solely transmitting information, CEFE trainings aim at creating competences including knowledge, attitudes, skills and habits. The trainings enhance the participants' ability for self-organised decisions and action taking in complex and continuously changing systems.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://cefe.net/about/>

It is also said to be adaptable to diverse constituencies: academics, people with low educational backgrounds, managers, entrepreneurs, university graduates, demobilised soldiers, refugees or street children, just to name a few.<sup>11</sup> In implementing via this approach, the UNDP personnel that I interviewed broke down the CEFE process into the following steps:

- Identification and measurement of competencies such as skills, previous experience, and available resources;
- Facilitating the participants or beneficiaries to generate ideas based on their available competencies as well as marketing, technical assistance, and packaging information available to the trainers;
- Screening of ideas at a macro- and micro-level followed by the selection of one idea;

Formulation of a business plan including organization management and finance, production and marketing. Yet the UNDP does not fully fund an entire livelihood activity even while acknowledging that this posed a challenge for many participants. Rather, participants are expected to find their own finances to implement the business plans developed with UNDP assistance. Furthermore, UNDP advocated for an approach which targeted the household rather than individual women as they felt that not all WHHs could become primary income earners whether due to advanced age, the stage in the domestic cycle, health problems, low energy levels, or lack of literacy, etc. They were of the view that “WHHs need support from their families. If their sons have gone

---

11 <http://kaset.psru.ac.th/nec/admin/files/CEFEshort.pdf>

off somewhere, then she can't do anything". They felt that it was more feasible to target a young male in the family to take up an entrepreneurial activity, which would also prevent their migration in search of work away from home. Their proposed strategy was directed at keeping the young men at home, although of course not all WHHs had young sons who would stay at home and who could be put to work. Daughters, it is to be surmised, were expected to move in with their husbands and therefore not seen as worthy beneficiaries.

The NGO and UN staff who I interviewed acknowledged that interventions which were implemented in the immediate aftermath of the resettlement process was more in the nature of humanitarian assistance designed to ensure food security and that these programmes were not expected to succeed as livelihoods. The programme officer at Sewalanka expressed similar views. She stated: "You cannot give 30 chicks and think you have provided a livelihood. Often you don't even know whether the chicks are hens or cocks. It takes about six months before the chicks will start laying eggs and from 30 chicks you can probably get an average of 15 eggs per day. If you sell 10 of the eggs, you can get 170 rupees a day. This is not an income. It allows households to manage some daily expenses including for food." She acknowledged that most support given under the name of livelihoods is in fact a misnomer. Sustainable livelihoods intervention schemes I was told only commenced in 2012 or 2013 and the success rates of these are yet to be monitored. UNDP staff speculated that the success rate was around 40 per cent.

## **National Policies and Birth and Deaths of SMEs**

There is in fact evidence to suggest that the success rates of small and medium enterprise development even in “ordinary” circumstances are not in fact guaranteed due to the lack of an adequate policy framework and requisite institutional support (Buddhadasa 2011; Gamage 2014). Asserting that “entrepreneurs cannot create economic development by themselves alone” Buddhadasa (2011:119) argues that only a small segment of the SME sector is capable of making full use of new business openings, and cope effectively with threats without assistance, and that smallness confers certain inherent competitive disadvantages. As a consequence, although SME’s account for about 92.4 per cent of total business establishments in Sri Lanka, its contribution to the GDP is around 18.5 per cent, while the “small” manufacturing sector contributes only a little over one per cent of the GDP (Buddhadasa 2011: 119). Gamage also finds that SMEs in Sri Lanka exhibit high birth rates and high death rates and many small firms fail to grow due to several impediments peculiar to SMEs (Gamage 2014: 359). He identifies a number of external factors such as inadequate infrastructure facilities which affect market linkages and development of investment opportunities; lack of roads limiting market access to products, trade and labour mobility; poor telecommunications; and inadequate market demand. He also identifies a number of factors internal to SMEs such as lack of information on domestic and international markets which make it difficult to exploit and expand markets; lack of skills in relation to product development, packaging, distribution and sales promotion; lack of access to finance; lack of knowledge about bank facilities and procedures; and lack of collateral (ibid: 362). According to both, some sort of external support is warranted in

order for these enterprises to reach their full potential (ibid). This analysis begs the question: If SMEs are prone to failure in normal conditions, by what logic are women-headed households affected by war expected to succeed as entrepreneurs? Indeed, Gamage concludes that the “(p)ost-war environment is not conducive for the development of SMEs . . .” (Gamage 2014: 363).

While a National Policy Framework for SME Development in Sri Lanka, has now been approved by Cabinet (January 2017), it still does not appear to include and address the very small enterprise development programmes of the kind being rolled out in war affected areas.<sup>12</sup> The new policy document identifies the SME sector as an important and strategic sector in the overall policy objectives of the GoSL and as a driver of change for inclusive economic growth, regional development, employment generation and poverty reduction. It is envisaged to contribute to transform lagging regions into emerging regions of prosperity. The policy seeks to create an enabling environment to encourage SMEs, and provide support in relations to technology transfer, skills development, access to finance, market facilitation and research and development. It also seeks to give special attention to “nature’s capital, green growth, entrepreneurship development, women entrepreneurship, craft sector and promising industrial clusters by strengthening enterprise villages, handicraft villages, industrial production villages and SME industrial estates / zones.”

SME’s in this framework include small, medium and micro enterprises, which are defined on the basis of the total number of employees and annual turnover (see Table 1).

---

12 National Policy Framework for Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, [http://www.industry.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/framew\\_eng.pdf](http://www.industry.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/framew_eng.pdf)

*Table 5.1: Defining SMEs in Sri Lanka*

Size Sector	Criteria	Medium	Small	Micro
Manufacturing Sector	Annual Turnover	Rs. Mn. 251 - 750	Rs. Mn. 16 - 250	Less than Rs. Mn. 15
	No. of Employees	51 - 300	11 - 50	Less than 10
Service Sector	Annual Turnover	Rs. Mn. 251 - 750	Rs. Mn. 16 - 250	Less than Rs. Mn. 15
	No. of Employees	51 - 200	11 - 50	Less than 10

According to this definition, a micro enterprise is one which has an annual turnover of less than 15 million and less than 10 employees.<sup>13</sup> This threshold clearly excludes much of the livelihood assistance for WHHs implemented under the banner of small and medium enterprise development in the war-affected North. Moreover, SME policies may not be the most important in determining the success or failure of SMEs. In fact, macro-economic tax policy (VAT, NBT, etc.) has a significant bearing on SMEs deserving further analysis.

The formulation of a National Action Plan on Women-Headed Households which was approved by Cabinet in September 2016 does now seem to address at least, some of the limitations and gaps in the SME policy as it affects WHHs. The Plan prioritizes six programme areas including livelihood development, support services, protection, social security, national level policy formulation, and awareness building, while allowing the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MoWCA) to implement “tailored interventions” for WHHs (Ministry of Women and Child Affairs 2017). While this is a positive development, it is however, set up

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.industry.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/framew\\_eng.pdf](http://www.industry.gov.lk/web/images/pdf/framew_eng.pdf)

for failure as there is no clear understanding or vision for micro-enterprises in the broader economic policy and MoWCA has little capacity to implement and sustain this programme. Hence this specialized policy may do little to improve prospects of self-employment for women.

### **3. Seven Women Living in Post-War Mullaitivu**

When the government of Sri Lanka, launched Eelam War IV<sup>14</sup> against the LTTE in 2006, the LTTE was in control of a fairly substantial area of land covering the whole of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, parts of Mannar and Vavuniya,<sup>15</sup> as well as part of the East, where they ran a de facto state administration which included revenue collection, police, judicial and public services, and economic development initiatives (Stokke 2006). Following the defeat of the LTTE in the East, the government focused on regaining the North. As the war intensified from 2007, and the army advanced into LTTE controlled areas from the west, the LTTE progressively abandoned land held by them taking the population in those areas with them. The Tamil women – **Bhahirathi, Faizunissa, Kalainidhi, Manohari, Nirmala, Rathirani and Vasanthamala** – were part of this exodus and experienced the final phase of the war in all its intensity. **Faizunissa** was one of the thousands of Muslims who were expelled by the LTTE from the five districts of the North in 1990, and who decided to return to Mullaitivu after the end of the war.<sup>16</sup>

---

14 Sri Lanka's civil war which commenced in July 1983 and ended in May 2009 is divided into four phases as Eelam War 1 to IV, each phase interrupted by a ceasefire or peace talks. Phase IV - the last phase was from 2006 to 2009.

15 This was the result of a number of military successes of the LTTE from 1995 to 2002.

16 In October 1990, the LTTE systematically expelled close to 75,000 Muslims living in the five districts of the North. Many of those expelled sought refuge in Puttalam and continued to live there until the end of the war in 2009. For an account of the

The Tamil women who were part of this study lived under LTTE control all their lives or for much of their lives. Indeed in the case of three of them, their husbands were either in combat or worked for the LTTE. As the LTTE retreated east towards Mullivaikal, they together with their families abandoned their homes and villages and moved east as part of the LTTE's human shield. They stopped wherever the LTTE ordered them to stop. **Kalainidhi** went across Mullaitivu from Nedunkerni to Puthukudirippu to Vallipunam and Devipuram to Kompavil and then to Mullivaikkal. Some were lucky to have a relative in a village where they stopped with whom they could seek refuge. **Vasanthimala** went first to Akaraayan in Kilinochchi, and then to Maankulam, Unionkulam and Puliyankulam. But eventually, they all ended up in the small strip of land between the lagoon and the sea in Mullivaikal. In the case of four women, their husbands died or disappeared during the last months of the war. In the case of one – her husband died in her arms. They also lost other close family members during this final phase.

Following the end of the war, the women were displaced to different camps in Vavuniya and returned to Mullaitivu only in 2010, 2011 or 2012. On their return, their houses and household goods were destroyed. Their livestock, poultry and home gardens were dead. While the Muslim woman who was part of this study was spared this fate, her life is equally marked by loss and hardship. Her father was shot dead in 1987 (during the time of the Indian army). Having grown up and having lived in Puttalam for most of her life, she returned to her mother's property in Mullaitivu when

---

expulsion through the narratives of those affected, see the "Quest for Redemption: The Story of the Northern Muslims, Final Report of the Citizens' Commission on the Expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province by the LTTE in October 1990", 2011, Colombo: Law and Society Trust.

Muslims were able to return to their old lands in 2010. For all of them, return and resettlement meant starting life all over again rebuilding homes, lost assets and livelihoods.

### **Age, Education, Marriage and Children**

The seven women were born between 1963 and 1991. The youngest, **Manohari** was 24 at the time of the interview and the oldest **Vasanthimala** was 52. War, displacement, poverty or a combination of these factors had disrupted the education of many of them. Some of them were also forced into marriage at an early age because of LTTE's policy of forced recruitment.<sup>17</sup> The age of marriage of the women ranged from 14 to 33.

**Faizunissa** and **Vasanthamala** were amongst the youngest to drop out from school. Faizunissa stated that she was in grade four when the family was displaced from Mullaitivu to Puttalam in 1990, and that she never went back to school. **Vasanthamala** was in grade six, when she gave up school to take care of her mother who fell ill. **Rathirani** studied up to Grade 10 but did not do her O' Levels.<sup>18</sup> She said the family could not afford to continue her education. She married when she was 28.

---

17 The LTTE enforced a "one family, one child" policy in areas under its control for much of the war. Tamil households were obliged to provide a son or a daughter for "the cause," including children as young as eleven, although they didn't always stop with one (Human Right Watch 2014). It appears that women could avoid recruitment through marriage, but not men.

18 The Ordinary Level (O' Level) is a General Certificate of Education (GCE) qualification in Sri Lanka, conducted by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education. It is based on the United Kingdom (British Cambridge) Ordinary Level qualification. An O' Level is a qualification in its own right, but more often acts as a prerequisite for the next level of education – the Advanced Level exams. On successful completion of A' Levels, students are eligible to apply for tertiary education, including university education.

**Manohari** and **Nirmala**'s education was disrupted by marriage. **Manohari** was 14 when her boyfriend of 22 proposed marriage to her in order to avoid being conscripted by the LTTE. She stated that she agreed because he convinced her that he would be taken away by the LTTE and she was in love with him. However, the LTTE forcibly conscripted him nevertheless, a day after their 'marriage', as there was no one else in his family who could join them. Following his recruitment, she only saw him sporadically when he was allowed to come home on leave, until he abandoned the LTTE two years later at the height of the war. **Nirmala**, on other hand got married in July 2008 at the age of 18 to avoid being conscripted by the LTTE. She had by that time completed her O' Levels with six subjects, but it meant she could not do her A' Levels. Following the disappearance of her husband during the last stages of the war, she lived with another man after the war for a brief period, but is now living separately from him. She stated that they could not get formally married, because she hadn't got the death certificate for her first husband. **Kalainidhi** was the only one to complete her A' Levels<sup>19</sup> despite a number of challenges. Her O' Levels in 1990 got postponed due to the war, and she eventually did it only in 1993. She learnt to sew during those years while attending tuition classes. Her parents arranged her marriage due to the family's economic situation soon after she completed her A' Levels in 1997. **Bhahirathi** learnt sewing for a time after completing her O' Levels before taking a job in a private clinic. She was the oldest to get married at the age of 33 in 2003 but it only lasted three months and she remarried in 2005.

---

19 A number of entry-level jobs both in the public and private sector are open to those who successfully complete A' Levels.

Except for **Bhahirathi** who had no children, the other women who are part of this paper had between one and four children, many of whom were still going to school and still dependent on their mothers. **Rathirani** and **Nirmala** had one daughter, both six years old at the time of the interview. **Kalainidhi** and **Manohari** both had two children. The former, a son of 17 and a daughter aged 15, and in the case of the latter, a daughter of eight and a son of two. **Vasanthamala** had three daughters. **Faizunissa** had four daughters, who were 17, 16, 14 and 7.

### **Women's Work**

As opposed to the dominant narrative that women heads of households do not have any experience of engaging in income generation activities before their husband died, disappeared or separated from them, many of the women had supplemented the incomes of their natal and or marital families, through their own livelihood activities on a daily basis or during times of family crisis. In fact, in a context of disrupted education and early marriage, many of the women started working early in their lives. **Kalainidhi** had worked as a child in the family's peanut farm helping her parents to sow peanuts. When her O' Levels got postponed due to the war, she also learnt to sew and started taking sewing orders. She later paid her O' Level tuition fees with the money she earned. She recalls that tuition fees were low compared to now, only Rs. 20 or Rs. 30, but it was still "big money" at the time. Later, following marriage, she took sewing orders, raised poultry and also helped her husband to grow chillies and brinjals on the small piece of land that they owned. When her husband started making coconut oil, she also helped him to do that.

**Faizunissa** and her older sister started weaving coconut leaf mats once they were displaced to help her widowed mother bring up their family, even though a mat only brought about 5, 10 or 15 rupees at that time. When Faizunissa married she stated that she didn't have to work, because her husband looked after the family, but she took on the mantle of breadwinner during a brief seven-month period when her husband fell ill and was bedridden. She made string hoppers and 'mothakam' for sale. **Rathithevi** remembers her mother taking her to the family farm as a child, but stated that she was not allowed to come after she attained puberty. To the question since when she has been doing agriculture – she stated, “For a long time, even before marriage, since I was a little girl”. **Bhahirathi** started working in a small clinic soon after her A' Levels and later worked with the Tamil Rehabilitation and Relief Organisation (TRRO), an NGO affiliated to the LTTE. She was still working with them when the war broke out and was earning Rs.16.000 per month. **Kalainidhi** mentioned that she had worked with an organization for some time under the LTTE and used to get a monthly salary of Rs.8000. **Manohari** had started working after marriage at the age of 17 as her husband was away for a long period of time after being conscripted by the LTTE. She first volunteered as a Gramasevaka and later worked for NGOs whenever there was an opportunity to work, even though her husband was not very supportive of her working. Even Vasanthamala who stated that she never had to work when her husband was alive, and who spoke with nostalgia of many years of married life with her husband who drove his lorry for the LTTE, had raised poultry for household consumption. Only Nirmala had no history of working before or after marriage. Having just finished her O' Levels before war broke out, she made the decision to get married.

## **Pathways to headship**

Women's pathways into headship analysed here differed considerably. **Manohari, Bhabirathi and Nirmala** separated from their husband /partner on their own accord after the war. Faizunissa also left her husband after he married another woman, and started living with her in a separate house. She says she continued to live with her husband's family for a year, waiting for him to come back, "today, if not tomorrow or the day after, but he never came". So she decided to move to Mullaitivu. **Manohari** left her husband after the war ended because he was an alcoholic. **Vasanthamala**, and **Rathirani** lost their husbands during the last phase of the war. At the time the interviews were conducted, some women were contemplating remarriage. Others were however categorical that they had no desire to marry again.

**Kalanidhi** recalls the exact day that her husband died – 18 March 2009. She remembers shells falling around them and the family getting scattered and running in different directions. She found shelter in a house but others who were still outside were hit by a falling shell. Her husband's cousin and his elder brother died on the spot. Her mother and her husband, were both injured and taken to a medical camp that had been set up in the school nearby. She was told that her husband had a piece of shell lodged in his head and was given saline, but he didn't receive any care for a long time. By the time the doctor came around at three or four in the afternoon he had died.

**Vasanthamala's** husband (who was driving his vehicle for the LTTE) disappeared during the final days of the war, following his surrender to the army. She says that "the army took him with them" and subsequently brought back his documents and told

her that he was shot by the LTTE. She had “cried and cried and asked them to show his body to her, but they didn’t”. **Rathirani’s** husband disappeared in May 2009 in Vattuvaakal, along with her father and her younger brother. Two of her elder brothers also died in the war. **Nirmala’s** first husband (who was an LTTE cadre) also went missing around the same time. She was seven months pregnant at the time. She doesn’t believe he is alive because shells were falling continuously at the time. “Its not possible to escape from it.” On March 11 her mother, father, and younger brother also died in Vattuvaakal. She lived with another man after the end of the war for about three months, but had been living separately from him for more than a year at the time the interview for this study was done.

I dwell on these different histories and trajectories of women’s lives, to provide a glimpse into their gendered experiences of the war and life under the LTTE. Families coped and survived amidst displacement, violence and loss, in no small measure due to the sacrifices and struggles of women. Women’s own aspirations and dreams, including of education, were often amongst the first casualties of the war. Yet these narratives also complicate and disrupt the trope of the victim, revealing women’s agency and will to survive in desperate circumstances.

#### **4. Making a Living in Post-War Mullaitivu**

Following the end of the war, women such as those studied in this paper entered development discourse under the category of WHHs. Yet their households defy easy definition or categorisation. Women’s narratives reveal that they have been unable to establish and maintain consistent family forms in accordance with any

ideal due to the war, and their household arrangements are characterized by diversity, fluidity and their unresolvedness (Reynolds 2000: 155).

**Faizunissa** was living alone with her three daughters. The rest of her family – three sisters and three brothers as well as her mother – still lived in Puttalam, although she stated that they visited her from time to time. **Nirmala** who lost most of her family in the war was living alone with her six-year-old daughter, although her grandmother and elder sister were not too far from her. **Manohari** one of six children, was originally living with her parents but she and her two children later moved to live with “some women.”<sup>20</sup> She had left her parent’s house because they were forcing her to get back with her husband and she had no wish to do so. Her own house was occupied by one of her sisters, but she was hoping to move there, once her sister moved out.

A few of the women were living with their extended families. **Rathirani** was living with her mother, daughter and younger sister. **Bhahirathi**, the youngest of seven was living in her elder sister’s house with her parents while also looking after her parents. **Kalainidhi** was living with her two children and her parents. **Vasanthamala** had refused to join her family in Jaffna and was living with two younger daughters (One brother was living with her for her safety at the time of the interview, but she stated that he was hoping to get married and would go away. Her elder brothers who are living abroad wanted her to join her mother in Jaffna, yet she preferred to be in Mullaitivu. (Her eldest daughter was also married and living in Jaffna.) She said:

---

20 It is unclear from the transcript who these women are.

I like to live here and not in Jaffna. If I live here I can live according to what I earn. I cannot live up to their standards. They are doing well and they don't want me to sell short eats. I want to have my own money and live with it. If I am with them, I will have to ask them for everything. I don't want to live like that. Even if I earn a little, I want to earn on my own and spend my own money.

Households are commonly defined as sharing a roof and a pot. De la Rocha and Grinspun assert that innovative strategies and resourcefulness that poor people use to survive economic change derive largely from initiatives at the household level. Household size, composition and stage in the domestic cycle therefore have significant implications for livelihoods strategies of the poor (2001: 56). The sex of the head of household may be another determinant of household vulnerability, although whether women-headed households are more vulnerable and prone to poverty remains disputed in the extensive scholarship that has examined this question (ibid. 61).

### **Post-War Livelihoods**

In deploying their labour after the war, many of the women studied in this paper fell back on their history of supplementing family incomes. **Kalainidhi** went back to agriculture and sewing; **Faizunissa** went back to making stringhoppers; **Rathirani** returned to cultivation. Self-employment was the predominant source of income. Five out of the seven women studied in this paper were involved in self-employment activities. Self-employment initiatives mentioned fell into the broad categories: agriculture, poultry farming and animal husbandry, and petty

commodity production and petty trading. Women also went looking for informal waged labour to supplement incomes from self-employment. Women's livelihoods were characterized by diversity, precarity and meagreness of incomes, which I consider in more detail below.

**Faizunissa** was making string hoppers for sale, buying and selling Indian garments, and also working as a labourer cutting grass, planting and digging onions, and plucking long beans. **Rathirani** was growing rice, chilli, seasonal vegetables and bananas on the one-acre of land owned by her. Sometimes she also went looking for daily waged labour. For about three years after resettlement, she also sold milk from two cows, but at the time the interviews were conducted they had died. **Kalainidhi** was engaged in poultry farming, while being part of a tailoring business with four other women where she worked part time. Additionally, she weaved palmyrah thatch for roofing although it is now not in much demand because houses are made of concrete. **Bhahirathi** was perhaps the most enterprising of the women who were part of this study, (explained maybe by her youth, the fact that she had no children to look after, and was living with her elder sister and parents). She was part of the same tailoring business as **Kalainidhi** and also raised poultry. The house she built with the housing grant that she obtained when she returned to Mullaitivu had been given on rent. Moreover, half an acre of coconut land that she owned had 17 coconut trees, which yielded some income from the sale of coconuts. At the time of the interview she (together with her family) had also started cultivating four acres of paddy land. She also did other odd jobs. Drying chillies on request – even for a meagre 20 to 50 rupees. **Vasanthamala** was involved in making short eats and vadai, on order for sale. But the business was affected after

she fell ill and was in hospital for over three months. At the time the interview with her was conducted, she was mostly depending on daily wages from digging wells. **Nirmala** and **Manohari**'s attempts at poultry farming had failed. **Nirmala** was depending on money (around Rs. 8000) from the grandmother of her first husband on a monthly basis. **Manohari** was being supported by her brothers.

The self-employment activities that women were engaged in were all gender-stereotypical activities which were mainly household based with no substantial barriers to entry in terms of skills and capital.<sup>21</sup> Women were managing them without any additional labour input, with the exception of some help from within their families. Women's decisions and choices to engage in specific livelihood activities were mediated by a number of different factors including their own skills and inclination, assets and resources available to them, the nature of livelihood support they had received, the stage of the domestic cycle, as well as the highly militarized environment in which they were living. A preference for flexible home based-work was most strongly expressed by those with young children.

**Manohari** for instance found it difficult to sustain a formal job because of her two young children. She had worked for a garment

---

21 Sarvanathan has argued while there have been few successes with the promotion of non-traditional occupations among women in the North and East, such as carpentry, masonry and auto repairing, particularly through the efforts of the World University Service Canada (WUSC), the struggle of women to break out of traditional occupations is being undermined by the (covert or overt) opposition to such occupations for women by men and women, as well as constituents and politicians (Sarvanathan 2016: 123). He cites two examples: the failure of an initiative which trained women to drive and which provided trishaws to them to run for hire after the end of the war and a women-only fishing boat-building venture in Point Pedro set up by an INGO during the ceasefire (2002-03) (ibid 2016: 125).

factory in Kilinochchi in Ariviyal Nagar<sup>22</sup> but she left after a month because she found it difficult to travel back and forth from the factory everyday. She had also worked in a cooperative store as a cashier, followed by a job with CARE as a field worker, which she had also left after some time.

For both **Kalainidhi** and **Bhahirathi** the good thing about the tailoring shop was that they could go to work at 2 p.m. and come back at 5 p.m. **Vasanthimala** stated that she would not go to work, if she had to leave her children at home alone.

I don't like to go out for my work, because of my two daughters. If I go out to work, I will not be able to spend time with my daughters or get home in the evenings. Then my daughters will be all alone in the house. I don't want that. You know what happens in the country these days. You cannot leave your children alone at home. . . . I don't take anyone into my house and I don't go to anybody's house. There are young girls in this house, so I am strict. I don't even let my girls go to see a movie in other houses. . . . I ask the neighbour lady to look out for them.

She went on to say that when she is sometimes asked to work outside the village as a cook, she would refuse, because she didn't want to leave her two young girls at home. **Fainsunissa** mentioned that she would have considered migration as an option, if not for her daughters.

---

<sup>22</sup> She is most probably referring to the MAS factory, which was set up in Ariviyal Nagar in 2012.

Two of the women, **Manohari** and **Nirmala** were keen to continue their education, which was disrupted during the war, and to find a salaried job in the future. After the end of the war, **Manohari** had in fact sat for her O' Levels and passed five subjects, even without proper preparation. She was determined to repeat the exam, and was borrowing her sister's old notes and studies, even though she found it difficult to care for her children and study at the same time. She also wanted to follow a computer course. **Nirmala** also wants to learn computer because she believes it could improve her chances of getting a job. "I would study with the hope of getting a job. Everyone can't get a job, but I can give a try to get it. . . Whether I get the job or not, I will try to study whatever I can".

### **Precarious Work, Meagre Incomes and Diversification as a Survival Strategy**

As I read and reread the interview transcripts of **Bhahirathi**, **Faizunissa**, **Nirmala**, **Manohari**, **Kalainidhi**, **Rathirani** and **Vasanthamala**, I was struck by the many different things they were doing all at the same time to generate an income. They were not involved in just one self-employment activity; they were involved in multiple and overlapping such activities to augment insufficient incomes. On tabulating their livelihood activities (see Table 2), this diversity becomes even clearer.

*Table 5.2: Summary of livelihood activities and support*

	B	F	K	M	N	R	V
Agriculture	X		Y			X	
Livestock			Y 2 cows		Y	X2 cows	X
Poultry	X		X	Y	X / Y	Y	
Salaried job	Y		Y	Y			
Wage Labour / daily paid	X	X				X	X
Self Employment 1	X	X	X Sewing				X
Self Employment 2	X	X	X Pal- myrah thatch				
Paddy land given on lease	X						
Home garden	Y			Y		X but water issues	
Selling / pawning Jewellery	X				X		
House rent	X						
Land given on lease	X						

X- currently engaged in                      Y- engaged in the past

In both Ellis and de la Rocha's framework of livelihoods (i.e. the exploitation of multiple assets and sources of revenue), diversity is recognised and emphasized as an intrinsic attribute of many rural and even urban livelihood strategies. While there is recognition that diversification has been deployed as an accumulation strategy, or a response to opportunity (Ellis 1998, 1999), in the

case of the women analysed here, it was mainly a survival strategy, a response to crisis, and a part of coping strategies often for very low returns (Reardon and Taylor 1996b).<sup>23</sup> The exception was perhaps **Bhahirathi**. As it will become clearer, with the exception of stinting and depleting, other livelihood strategies recognised in the literature such as – intensification and extensification of agriculture, migration, hoarding and protecting were simply not available to the women studied here (Rakodi 2002: 6, Scoones 1998: 3).

Moreover, what is common to the narratives analysed here is the precariousness of the livelihood activities engaged in by these women and the meagreness of their incomes. Poultry and livestock died. Hens went missing, petty trading ventures collapsed. The earnings from self-employment activities engaged by the seven women, fluctuated somewhere between Rs. 300 and Rs. 600 a day. **Rathirani**, among the more entrepreneurial of the women, said that on average she only earned around Rs. 9,000 per month. Several narratives of women in fact vividly illustrate the meagreness and inconsistency of incomes.

There is not much income. Even if I sew a dress, it is not enough for sugar and tea. (**Kalainidhi**)

With salaried work, the salary comes even during leave. Now only if we sell eggs we would get money. If a hen dies, the number of eggs would reduce. Coconut prices would sometimes increase, sometimes decrease. There is no

---

23 Diversification as a strategy is shaped by resources, assets and capacities whether categorised in terms of financial and human (Ellis 2000; Scoones 1998) tangible and intangible (Rakodi 2002) or actual and future claims and expectations (Kabeer 1999).

consistency in monthly income, so whatever is picked from the trees we would sell them. (**Bhahirathi**)

Indeed, the self-employment activities documented here could be characterized as “survival” activities, which occupy the survival end of the self-employment continuum (Kabeer 2012; see also Haan 1989).

Kabeer analyses SME programmes in terms of a continuum. At one end of the continuum is survival-oriented income-generation, which is ‘distress-driven, precarious and characterised by high levels of self-exploitation’. At the other end she finds accumulation-oriented enterprises. At which point of this continuum women find themselves is dependent on gender-specific constraints and opportunities embodied in rules, norms, roles and responsibilities of the intrinsically gendered relations of family and kinship as well as the ‘imposed’ constraints and opportunities embodied in the rules and norms of the purportedly gender neutral institutions of states, markets and civil society as well as the attitudes and behavior of different institutional actors. According to her a large majority of self-employed women are closer to the survival end (Kabeer 2012: 24).

This was certainly the case with reference to livelihoods studied here. Yet women were in receipt of livelihood assistance. I discuss below the kinds of assistance women received for agriculture, poultry farming and animal husbandry and petty trade and petty commodity production. While it is not my intention to critically evaluate these different sectors in any depth here, I explore their limits and possibilities as they emerge through the narratives of the women.

## **Limits and Possibilities of Livelihood Support**

The proliferation of livelihood support programmes in Mullaitivu, when seen through the individual stories and experiences of the women studied here, creates an interesting map. All of the women, with the exception of **Vasanthimala** had received some form of financial or material assistance from the government, an NGO, INGO, faith-based institution, private charity or donor as livelihood support. This assistance took a number of different forms, from outright grants, which allowed the recipients to make the decision about what to do with the money, to interest free or interest payable loans. Assistance also came in in the forms material goods such as livestock, poultry, tools or implements. Some of this assistance was catalytic in commencing or recommencing a self-employment activity, although in other cases, it was not useful or women were unable to sustain the activity beyond an initial period.

### **Agriculture and home gardening**

Consistent with Tamil and Muslim culture, where land and houses are inherited by female children as dowry (Sarvananthan 2017) or on the death of parents, all of the women had a piece of land of their own, although the extent of land varied considerably and not everybody had land enough to cultivate for an income. **Bahirathi** and **Rathirani**, had the two largest plots of land. **Bahirathi** had four acres of paddy land, 1/2 acre of coconut land and some panampilavu land. **Rathirani** had an acre of land, as well as an additional 60 acres of land owned by the family. **Manohari** and **Kalainidhi** had smaller plots sufficient for home gardening.

On return, women who had sufficient land for cultivation had begun working on the land. Most returnees received agricultural

tools worth Rs.9000 as part of the resettlement grant. Additionally **Bhahirathi** and **Rathirani** mentioned that they got water pumps. **Bhahirathi** had received the pump from the Women's Development Centre in Mulliyavalai on a loan, and was paying Rs. 3000 per month. **Rathirani** had received her pump from a charity, which had also given her a few banana trees. She said she planted the trees and was subsequently able to sell the bananas, the income from which she used for her daughter's educational expenses. She also expressed appreciation of the fertilizer subsidy that she received from the Agricultural Productivity Committee, which allowed her to buy fertilizer at a cheaper price.

Women engaged in agriculture faced a number of constraints in realising the full potential of the land available to them. The inability to mobilize additional labour was a major constraint. In the case of **Rathirani** for instance, most of the land owned by her and her family had become jungle and remained uncleared. Even though she had aspirations to expand cultivation of the land, she said she could not afford additional labour:

I want to be involved in agriculture, which is what I am good at. Even if am growing chilli, I need to hire someone to work in the fields. Because of that I don't grow more than what I can work with. I can't afford to pay someone every time. So I mostly do all the things on my own.

Even **Kalainidhi** who had a very small plot – 1/4 acre of land – said she couldn't cultivate on her own without male support. She used to help her husband to cultivate chillies and brinjals which was relatively easy to grow and which yielded a harvest within six months, but she was not doing any cultivation at the time the interviews were conducted. **Bhahirathi**, who was living with her

parents, appears to have solved the labour problem by giving their paddy land on lease.

Access to water was the other frequently mentioned constraint. **Kalainidhi**, **Vasanthamala** and **Manohari** referred to the inability to do any cultivation including home gardening because of lack of water. **Manohari** who had half an acre of land had planted vegetables on her return. However she stated that all the plants died as the rains didn't come as expected. Water was generally drawn from wells, but not everyone had a well on their own land. Those who didn't have water on their lands, obtained water from neighbouring homes or relatives living close by expending time and energy in doing so. **Kalainidhi** was fetching water from her younger sister's house around 150m away while **Manohari** was going to her mother's house. **Vasanthamala** was looking for assistance from an NGO to dig a well on her compound.

It should be noted that none of the women here referred to problems with deeds or problems with army occupation of land which has been identified in a number of other studies (see for instance Sumathy 2016, Jegatheeswara and Arulthas 2017), and which is at the centre of a number of on-going struggles in which women are playing a central role at the time this paper was being written (de Silva et al 2017; Srinivasan 2017; Wickrematunge 2017a; Wickrematunge 2017b).

### **Poultry farming and animal husbandry:**

Poultry farming and animal husbandry are home-based livelihood activities which women in the North and East (as in other parts of the country) have always engaged in, for home consumption as well as to supplement family incomes. Livelihood assistance in the

form of cows or hens or cash grants to buy cows or hens was the most common form of assistance that women received, assisting women to revive these activities. **Bahirathi, Kalainidhi, Manohari, Nirmala** and **Rathirani** had received assistance for poultry farming and/or livestock. **Rathirani** had got Rs. 15,000 from the kachcheri to buy chickens and also received two cows. **Manohari** had got chickens from UNHCR immediately after she resettled. **Nirmala** received cows, hens and nests worth Rs. 40,000 from her Divisional Secretariat (DS) office. **Kalainidhi** got the same amount from the Karathurapatru DS office in 2012 to buy cattle from the Department of Social Services.

Poultry farming can provide a fair and steady income without imposing a massive workload on women due to the ready-made markets available locally and the relative ease of transport of eggs. It can also contribute to household nutrition. Yet beyond the initial random distribution of chicks or hens there appears to be no support or advisory services for poultry farmers in Mullaitivu.

At the time these interviews were conducted, poultry farming provided a steady income only for **Kalainidhi**. She had 30 hens divided in three nests and followed a system of rotation in order to get a continuous income. She said that she could manage her daily expenses with income from the eggs. She wanted to expand her poultry yard, but she needed capital and labour to do so. She needed at least 100,000 to buy more hens and also replace the temporary nests she had with permanent nests. But she lamented that “Money is the barrier . . . (and) It was not the case before.” If she expanded, she said she would need to make the roofing for the poultry sheds, feed the hens, manage the medicine as well as transportation in the absence of her husband. She was carrying 2-3 kg of birdfeed on her bicycle every few days to avoid having

to buy it on a daily basis. But if she got more poultry, she would need a vehicle to transport the bird food. She stated that if her husband was alive she wouldn't have to bear the full burden of responsibility to do these tasks and "he would do it completely." Now if she hired someone, she would have to pay that person.

The more recurrent theme in these narratives was of the lack of success with poultry and of dying chicks and hens. **Rathirani's** hens had died due to sickness. In **Manohari's** case some died and others had stopped laying any eggs. Some of **Nirmala's** hens went missing, others fell ill and yet others were sold. There were similar stories relating to cows. **Kalainidhi** for instance recounted how the two cows she owned did well for about three years, – she was able to sell the milk and also give her children – but then they "strayed towards the military boundary," ate some polythene bags, and later died.

### **Petty commodity production and petty trade:**

**Bhahirathi** and **Kalainidhi's** involvement in the sewing shop was due to livelihood support they received from an International NGO. As **Bhahirathi** explained, the sewing shop was a collective of five women who were supported to set up the shop by CARE International. The initial capital investment was by CARE, which constructed the building and also gave machines, scissors, thread and cloth. Later, World Vision donated materials worth three lakhs to continue the work. **Kalainidhi** also got a bicycle so she can travel to work. **Faizunnisa** had benefited from Rs. 30,000 she received from the Mannar Women's Development Federation to buy a new set of pots, basins and other implements needed for her string hopper business.

Unlike in the case of milk or eggs, petty commodities such as food and clothes did not have such ready markets in the area. **Faizunissa**, **Vasanthamala**, and **Kalainidhi** spoke of the difficulties they faced selling their products in their own areas, and the difficulties of relying on individual consumers. **Faizunissa** mentioned that she preferred to sell to shops and schools rather than individuals because they paid her on time, but that individuals tended to ask for credit and then never paid her back. **Bhahirathi** also stated that people in the area didn't often have enough money to pay at once. "They will ask to pay Rs. 50 or Rs. 20 and say that they would give the rest later. This she said was a hurdle because they had to then run around to get the money back. However, according to **Vasanthamala**, even shop owners to whom she used to sell short eats to, did not pay at once. **Vasanthamala** also referred to the seasonal nature of work and the fact that profits waxed and waned depending on the time of year:

There was a time when Muslims came here for business during Ramazan and Christmas. Then my food business did really well. They would order breakfast and lunch from me and I could even earn Rs. 5000 – 6000 per day.

**Bhahirathi** and **Kalainidhi** who were part of the tailoring collective, stated that sales through the shop were hardly sufficient, and therefore they also sold at the Keppapulavu junction and Vatrappalai market. Remarks by **Vasanthamala**, **Bhahirathi** and **Kalainidhi** relating to selling string hoppers as well as clothes in Mullaitivu raises the question whether there is an over-saturation of the market of the gender-typed goods and services that they are producing, making it challenging to earn a reasonable income from these activities. **Nirmala's** statement relating to the lack of demand for woven thatch roofing material also indicates that

traditional crafts, which women were involved in during the war, may no longer have a market in the post-war context and that such skills may in fact have to be put into different purposes. These findings resonate with Pupavac's observations about Bosnian women trying to sell home-made products along the main Sarajevo Moster road in the baking heat of summer despite having few buyers and limited markets for handicrafts (Pupavac 2005: 402). As Milford Bateman would put it – "supply does not create its own demand" (Bateman 2014).

### **Savings, Credit and Debt**

Even while some women had aspirations to expand the self-employment ventures and to increase income levels, they did not have the ability to save or mobilize capital to invest in more material and bear the increased transportation and labour costs expansion would entail. This also meant that reviving an activity that had collapsed became a huge challenge. **Vasanthamala's** food business collapsed following an illness for which she was hospitalized for three months. Even though she wants resume it, she has no savings to buy a new set of pots and pans. Despite the myriad self-employment assistance programmes, it seems she has no one to turn to for assistance for a new set of pans.

**Rathirani** stated that she put 10 rupees in her daughters till every now and then. **Bhahirathi** was the only woman who appeared to be saving on a regular basis. She was part of a seettu (chit) fund. Before the end of the war, she had about 30 pieces of gold jewellery which she had bought from money saved through seettu, and was continuing to save in this manner. Saving was however impossible for most women. Many spoke of the financial pressures after the war, including the costs relating to rebuilding homes and assets

destroyed during the war, and therefore stretching incomes and rations to their limits. Even though women did receive housing assistance, it was often inadequate. **Faizunnissa** who received housing assistance under the Indian Housing Scheme managed the shortfall by stretching the rations which were given for two or three months after she returned to Mullaitivu beyond that period. Furthermore, out of the Rs. 25,000 which was given as a resettlement allowance, she reserved Rs. 15,000 to build the house. She stated that she built the house “without eating and drinking.” **Rathirani** received a housing grant of Rs. 550,000, yet she stated that they found it inadequate and the family had to spend their own money to finish the house. **Nirmala**, who was the only person whose house was not damaged, stated that although she didn’t have to rebuild her house, surviving on return to Mullaitivu was still difficult. She had survived after resettlement with a young child and minimal support by pawning and selling jewellery given to her by her parents.

Microcredit was readily available in Mullaitivu whether to start, revive or expand a self-employment activity, as government policy following the end of the war had facilitated an influx of financial institutions to the North and East. Namini Wijedasa, in 2014 documented 28 financial institutions providing credit facilities to the poor in the North.<sup>24</sup> Of the women interviewed for this study, **Bhahirathi** and **Manohari** had taken a loan for livelihood purposes. **Bhahirathi** had taken Rs.100,000 from Commercial Credit at 22 per cent interest. She was paying Rs. 4,200 as interest every two weeks. **Manohari** had taken a loan to buy poultry, which she was still paying back, even though all of the poultry had died.

---

24 “North in Debt Trap” by Namini Wijedasa, *Sunday Times*, 10 December 2014.

**Vasanthamala** was offered a loan of Rs. 100,000 by World Vision to improve her short eats business, but it came with a caveat. She was required to form a group with five other women or provide employment for five other women. She stated that she refused the offer as she felt it was not profitable, particularly, if she had to pay the wages of five others and repay the loan.

This whole 100,000 plan is not easy and attractive as it sounds. It is more complicated. It is not useful for me to take that opportunity. I asked them if they could give me anything for free, because that would help me to make some money.

Following her refusal of the offer made by World Vision, **Vasanthimala** stated that she contemplated taking a loan from Ceylinco, but the interest alone was more than she could pay. She had checked some other banks, but couldn't also get loan from a bank as she didn't possess a bank account.

A few of the women analysed here had taken loans for other purposes, and felt they could not afford to take another for livelihood purposes.<sup>25</sup> **Kalainidhi** had taken two loans: Rs. 50,000 from the women's organisations that she is part of and 3 1/4 lakhs at 1 per cent interest from the rehabilitation project that she worked for to finish the doors of the house and fix windows. She was concerned about security for her girl child: "We have a female child, so we need security. We needed two doors for security reasons. And I have paid little by little from the money earned from selling eggs and sewing." She went on to say that she was

---

25 Increasing indebtedness in these areas, among those rebuilding their homes is well documented (see Gunasekara et al 2016, Kadirgamar 2017).

aware of the higher interest rates charged by some of the financial institutions and that she would be cautious about taking a loan from such institutions:

I don't take those loans (from companies like Commercial Credit). I am afraid. Our income depends on hens, and if something happens like sickness or something like what happened to the cows, we would not be able to pay the debt. We don't have any other help like foreign help.

**Faizunissa** had borrowed Rs. 25,000 from World Vision to buy “this and that” which included a fan so her children could study more comfortably and to make some jewellery for one of her daughters reaching the age of marriage. Repayment was on a weekly basis. In her situation, **Faizunissa** also stated that she would think twice before taking another loan. “If I can settle only I will take. If I cannot I wouldn't take. In some places they couldn't pay back, and got scolded. I am scared of that situation. So I do not take. If I settle it then I can take another one anywhere.” Manohari recounted how she tried to borrow from a male acquaintance from the area (for a much lower interest rate) when she was rebuilding the house, and he asked her what favour she could do for him in exchange for the money.

Thus despite the availability of credit, not all women were seduced by the promises being made by microcredit companies.<sup>26</sup>

---

26 These narratives confirm Gunasekara et al's (2016) findings that women headed households have lower levels of debt than other households (2016: 7).

## **Welfare Benefits, Charity and Family**

In the face of growing vulnerability and economic stress women appear to be surviving only due to various forms of support and assistance from charitable and religious institutions, individuals and family, even while these were ad hoc and unreliable. **Faizunissa**, **Kalainidhi** and **Nirmala** were in receipt of Samurdhi. Two others – **Bhahirathi** and **Rathirani** – had applied for Samurdhi but had not yet received it. There were also family members living with some of them, who were in receipt of the Public Assistance Monthly Allowance (PAMA). These welfare payments from the state, were however woefully inadequate. At the time the interviews were conducted Samurdhi payment ranged from Rs. 210 to Rs. 1500 depending on the number of family members and PAMA was a mere Rs. 250.

A number of those who had school-going children had received or were receiving assistance for children's schooling from a church or charity. **Rathirani** had received assistance from a children's charity for her daughter's education needs such as schoolbooks and stationary, as well as free tuition. **Vasanthamala** was also receiving assistance for her daughters' education from some sisters and a priest in the school. The sisters were providing stationary, clothes, shoes, and other things that her daughter needed while she was also in receipt of Rs. 1,500 from a priest towards her daughter's education. Her daughter had in fact been living for a while with the sisters, until she fell ill. She had started fainting and losing weight, and **Vasanthamala** had brought her back to live with her. She mentioned that because she didn't have a daily income, she depended on the 1,500 rupees that her daughter got at the end of every month. She would often pay debts accumulated buying groceries with this money. **Kalainidhi** was

receiving Rs. 1,300 towards tuition fees for her daughter from an organisation called Amaithi Thenral. She had also received some short-term assistance. One benefactor had sent her Rs. 5,000 for just two months and then disappeared. This person had got **Kalainidhi**'s details from another villager. When the support stopped **Kalainidhi** had tried to contact her by phone, but she could not get through because the line was continuously busy. She said "If they don't want to give anymore, we can't do anything, right." Similarly she had received Rs. 2,000 from Haridas Institute for two or three months with instruction to save Rs. 500, but that support was also not continued.

**Nirmala** was depending on money (around Rs. 8,000) from the grandmother of her first husband on a monthly basis. **Manohari** was being supported by her brothers. Yet family and kin networks were always not in a position to offer financial help. **Faizunissa** observed of her siblings: "All six will look after me if they have to, but they are also in difficulties. Therefore I do not expect much from them. If I have I give them." **Vasanthamala** stated that her brothers who are living abroad are not helping her as they wanted her to live with their mother in Jaffna and she refused. Thus, while the diaspora has provided a lifeline for many poor people in the Vanni, yet as the narratives reveal not everyone in the Vanni has family in the diaspora or those who are willing to support.

## **5. Women's Labour in the Aftermath of Violence**

In the absence of capital and additional labour, women's own labour emerge as the most important element in these livelihood strategies. Yet the labour that women could deploy for income generation was severely circumscribed by the extraordinary labour

that was needed to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the war. The social world that these women knew and understood was all but shattered, yet they had to “pick up the pieces and to live in this very place of devastation” (Das 2007: 6). Women’s productive labour was entangled and constrained by the labour needed to take care of homes and families, to rebuild and restore material lives, and the labour of traumatic memory. In making this argument, I am drawing on two strands of literature. Firstly, I draw on the work of a long line of feminist thinkers on women’s double and triple burden of work and the need to make the connections between productive and reproductive labour (Beneria 1979, Pearson 2004; Kabeer 2000). I also draw on the scholarship of Veena Das (2007) and Elizabeth Jelin (2003) on the work involved in re-inhabiting the social world in the aftermath of extraordinary violence. Following from Das, the reinhabiting of a shattered world requires a descent into the ordinary and the everyday; in the aftermath of violence, life is recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through paying repeated attention to the most mundane, drab and commonplace of things. It also entails a descent into the unknown, the unfamiliar and unintelligible, working through memories of loss and pain and becoming claimants of truth and justice.

The women analysed here cooked, cleaned, washed clothes, drew water. They took children to school or tuition. In some cases livestock and poultry was kept purely for domestic consumption. Some domestic chores were particularly time and energy consuming. For instance collecting water, which was not available on their own properties. Women who cooked for a livelihood mentioned that they kept some of the food for family consumption to avoid more cooking. **Bhahirathi**, the only woman without children, was looking after her parents.

Self-employment in fact provided the only way of reconciling women's household burdens and the need to secure an income. Indeed in the model of self-employment that is promoted, care work continues to be domesticated and women are expected to juggle the entrepreneurial activities with their familial obligations without question (Altan Olcay 2014: 251; Roy 2012:144). Roy argues that these programmes not merely reproduces but in fact deepens the domestication of care relations.

Additionally they were rebuilding homes and restoring assets destroyed during the war. All of the women, except **Nirmala**, had to rebuild their houses, which had been fully or partly destroyed, in some cases contributing their own labour to this task. Even though the government and I/NGOs provided various forms of housing and resettlement assistance, such assistance was not uniform and varied depending on whether the houses were fully or partly destroyed, the number of family members, and the type of donor involved. **Faizunissa** recalled that when she returned in 2010, the plot of land given to her by her mother had become like a jungle. She cleared the land herself and built a small hut. With the initial resettlement assistance, **Kalainidhi** "put up a tent with sticks and built a mud house" before they could build a cement and brick structure. At the time of the interview, **Vasanthimala** was still living in a temporary house she got from ZOA and was still trying to get her name included in a housing beneficiary list which involved innumerable visits to the Gramasevaka and Government Agent (GA).

Women's lives were further compounded by the loss of loved ones and the work of memory and mourning. The researchers who conducted the interviews for the GROW study did not ask

direct questions about trauma, yet the trauma of these women as well as the ways in which they are trying to cope, spill into these interviews without any warning or signal, disrupting their flow. The transcripts I studied were marked by tears, sighs, silences and the sudden loss of words. The women whose husbands had disappeared during the war spoke of the added trauma of not knowing what happened to them, the lack of closure and their search for truth and justice.

I cried and cried and asked them to show his body, they didn't. I asked the GS and other offices to provide me with his death certificate, but they didn't. They are telling me that someone must confirm his death. What can I do to prove them he is dead. I haven't even seen his body. (Crying) . . . I am dying inside thinking about all that's happening.

Family members of the disappeared had borne or continue to bear economic and opportunity costs of pursuing truth or justice. None of them had registered the disappearance as a death despite the legal provision to do so in terms of the Registration of Deaths Ordinance, or taken compensation offered by the state. Instead, they had spent considerable time, energy and money looking for the disappeared. As **Rathirani** said:

I am doing everything I can to find him. I sent letters to ICRC, UNHCR and UN along with his picture. They sent a reply that he is being searched for, but they did not find him yet.

For Jelin (2003), labours of memory refers to an active process through which people attempt to change their relationship to

the past and rework their memories in order to re-inhabit the unfamiliar world in which they find themselves. This labour is made particularly difficult and a process without end in the case of disappearances. Of all human rights violations, disappearances thrust an inordinate amount of unanswered questions upon the survivor. Daya Somasunderam, a psychiatrist who has worked and written on the psychological effects of the ethnic conflict on individuals in the North and East of Sri Lanka, describes the homes of the disappeared as quiet, moody and akin to a funeral house where the mildest of conversations linked to the disappeared can set off tears and crying (2007). In these homes, survivors live year after year in the hope of imminent or eventual return of the disappeared because to think that the person is dead is considered disloyal or equal to killing the person (Hamber and Wilson 2002).

Women such as **Rathirani** occupy this liminal space with no escape and continue to attend to the everyday tasks of their lives. It is in fact difficult to determine where their productive labour begins and ends, because it is affectively, spatially and temporally entangled in these multiple other labours. Time was perhaps the most scarce commodity in their lives. Yet there was no additional household labour, which could be mobilized, or cash to pay for labour to support them in carrying out these multiple burdens.

If my husband was here to earn . . . I don't have to work too much. Now I need to do all the work. If rice or something else has to be bought, I need to go to the shops. I need to buy food for the hens. Workload is high and it is hard to balance . . . I need to take care of my kids, and do housework and everything. (**Kalainidhi**)

Here, we need to thirst for everything. At TRRO I had some free time in between. But here there is so much work like poultry, and the coconut grove. I need to move like this or that. There is no rest. I need to take care of my parents, full time. I need to take a bath, wash clothes, cook and go to the market and do household work. (**Bhahirathi**)

### **Adding Children to the Labour Market**

De la Rocha finds that in times of economic hardship the poor will mobilize additional household labour as a coping strategy. In two-parent households, where the man is employed or self-employed, additional financial stresses may be addressed by adding the women to the labour market. Indeed in Sri Lanka too, it would seem that prior to the end of the war, under LTTE control, these women and their families managed to survive, even with difficulty by supplementing one primary income earning activity, whether agriculture, fishing, livestock, or forestry, with other work.

However, following the death, disappearance or separation from their husbands there were few or no additional family members who could be mobilized whether to help with cultivation, other self-employment activities or childcare, with a few exceptions. **Manohari** referred to her mother's help and **Nirmala** and **Vasanthamala** referred to support from neighbours with childcare. While family and community support networks were not completely absent, they were nevertheless weak. Often, family members who might have contributed by household chores or other activities were not in good health, disabled or infirm.

In similar circumstances in other contexts, children are often expected to give up their education and join in income generating

activities or if not, assist parents in these activities while also helping with household chores. Yet in the cases studied in this paper only **Vasanthkumari** and **Faizunissa** mentioned that they might get the assistance of one of their children for their livelihood activities; that too because they had given up schooling. The others who had children were making every effort to ensure that education of the children was not interrupted either because of income generating activities or household chores. Even if sometimes children helped, women were not happy to impose on their children. **Kalainidhi** for instance mentioned that her son helps her with some chores, yet she was very conscious that such activity should not disrupt his studies. Similarly, **Rathithevi** stated:

I go to my sister's house for water and it is around 150 metres away from here. . . .I need to do it, because (my children) have tuition in the evening and school in the morning. They have the responsibility to study. I didn't study hard and so it was a barrier to get a job, as my parents sowed peanuts. It must not be the case for my children.

Women lived for the sake of their children and the meaning of their lives resided in ensuring their children's educations and safety; in arranging good marriages for their daughters and collecting sufficient dowry to do so.

I now live as a mother to my daughter. (**Nirmala**)

What is left for me through that marriage is only four children . . . I must earn, educate my children, and give them in marriage. I have to take efforts up to that . . . I have a dream about how my children should be. (**Faizunnisa**)

## Remarry or not?

The question whether they should remarry or not was also a matter that emerges in these narratives with implications for economic security. Some wanted to remarry; others rejected it. **Faizunissa** had this to say on the topic of remarriage:

He married another woman. That is upsetting. However, I don't want to remarry because my husband left me. I am very strong about it. If I marry again, the new one wouldn't feed my children or care for them. . . . He would curse them before feeding them. I have witnesses such things. So I am living alone. . . . I want to live a better life with my four children than him and prove to the world that I can.  
...

**Mahohari** was being pressured by her parents to go back to her estranged husband, but she was refusing to do so and had in fact left her parents' home to avoid this pressure. **Kalainidhi** however was of the view that "women must get remarried" and that parents had a duty to arrange marriages for young widows. Indeed, families had arranged second marriages after the war, as in the case of **Nirmala**, but this second marriage also did not work.

Cultural and gender norms also made it difficult for women to seek male assistance from within the community, outside of marriage. **Manohari** related an incident, which has a bearing on this matter. She had hired a man to cut down the mango tree in her compound, which was damaged. According to her the neighbours started spreading rumours, although she dismissed them saying " . . . they just talk like that".

The ways in which the household is transformed in time, as the children of these women grow up and marry, as well as women's own decisions to remarry or not, will have implications for the question of labour analysed here. Again in this post-war context, women emerge not merely as victims but as agential subjects, navigating economic, cultural and even political pressures. As time passes, these pressures may ease bringing about more conducive conditions to generate an income through self-employment or to deploy their labour in other ways. By the time their children are older, perhaps Manohari may have completed her O' Levels and a computer course and is able to find a stable salaried job; **Faizunissa** may decide to migrate to the Middle East.

### **Towards a Conclusion: The Impossible Promise of Self-Employment**

Post-war Mullaitivu, as other war-affected districts in the North and East of Sri Lanka, is a site where humanitarian assistance, neo-liberal development and good old, and new charity converge and intersect to promote livelihoods for various sections of the population. SME promotion is at the centre of this assemblage of post-war discourses, practices and structures touted to deliver economic empowerment to the most vulnerable.

The discourse around SMEs is however a gendered one, for while it constructs women as independent, virtuous, reliable and rational economic actors, more creditworthy than men, it has nothing to say about the gender division of labour and the way in which care work continues to be domesticated. Moreover, in the post-war context, these programmes are rolled out almost without any change, altogether ignoring the material and psychological losses during the war and their implications for engaging in

entrepreneurial activities. Indeed, women are expected to be so resilient and resourceful that a few chickens, a few plants, and a few thousand rupees is considered sufficient to enable them to recover from the shock of the war, and its economic, social, cultural and psychological ramifications still reverberating in their lives.

This paper documents women's experiences of these programmes in an attempt to disrupt this dominant discourse. Even as women reveal considerable resourcefulness and agency in negotiating with, struggling against, and manipulating the conditions of their lives so as to overcome the hardships that they face, six years after the war when the interviews for this study were conducted, they were still trying to cope with and recover from the last phase of the war. They tell a story of the impossible promise of self-employment where women are attempting to juggle a diverse repertoire of extremely precarious, and subsistence level incomes sources, in a context where they had few resources beyond their own labour. Even as women expressed a preference for self-employment over wage labour or salaried jobs, it is a choice made out of desperation, where it was impossible for them to neatly disentangle their productive labour and their livelihoods from the multiple other labours that they were having to perform – the reproductive labour required to take care of family and home, the labour needed to rebuild material lives from scratch, and the labours of traumatic memory. Even though women and families were recipients of Samurdhi and PAMA, these payments were hardly sufficient. Thus charitable and religious institutions that flooded these areas after the end of the war and next of kin filled the gaps in post-war development policy. The narratives of the seven women reveal that in the face of growing vulnerability and economic stress, their lives are sustained by a multiplicity of sources, including income

derived from self-employment, claims and entitlements (such as samurdhi), support from relatives, charitable institutions, and cash infusions obtained through pawning and borrowing.

What then is the responsibility of the Sri Lankan state to women such as those studied in this paper? Nagaraj has argued that post-war development in the North and East has been a continuation of the war by other means, while critiquing the unfolding transitional justice process for its failure to take account of the economic precariousness of war-affected communities.<sup>27</sup> Indeed the transitional justice process unfolding in Sri Lanka has emphasized truth, justice, and reparations for civil and political rights while completely sidelining questions of economic harm, economic justice, and redistribution. Within this broader context, policies such as the National Action Plan on Women Headed Households which I referred to at the outset is mere window dressing with no real meaning to structurally address the economic plight of poor women in war-affected areas.

What is now necessary is to locate, analyse and address the question of post-war livelihoods within the broader politics of post-war development and reconstruction and as a question of economic justice, beyond a market-based approach to economic empowerment. As Ni Aolain points out, the academic and policy spotlight after wars tends to be on violence, human rights, male perpetrators and victims while questions of equality, economic redistribution and social justice are off the table for the purpose

---

<sup>27</sup> “Beyond reconciliation and accountability: Distributive justice and Sri Lanka’s transitional agenda” by Vijay Nagaraj, 18 May 2016, Open Democracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/openglobalrights/vijay-k-nagaraj/putting-distributive-justice-on-sri-lanka-s-transitional-agenda>.

of transitional justice. Commitments to economic and social transformation are generally articulated as vague principles, not as binding roles. This is an enforcement gap that cuts across both genders but is acutely felt by women (2012: 79-80).

The magnitude of economic losses suffered during the last phase of the war, that is conveyed so starkly in the narratives documented here, and the structural impediments to post-war income generation requires that redistribution and social welfare become part of the transitional justice debate. Otherwise peace is likely to mean little to poor women in the North and East. The Sri Lankan state could start by taking serious note of the voices of war survivors highlighted in the recently released report of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms and their call for economic justice (Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms 2016). The report observes that at a focus group discussion with women-headed households in Mullaitivu who had faced numerous violations, they “chose to prioritise requests for the provision of basic needs for their children and themselves in order to lead a decent life” (Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms 2016: 36). In a section exploring the economic challenges of women-headed households the report states:

Women in Mullaitivu for instance pleaded for support in the form of immediate monetary compensation or support for their children’s upkeep and education, as they were finding it difficult to survive and provide for these needs. However, a number of the women asked for support not only in terms of payments or handouts, but also support to come to terms with their new lives and role (sic) as

breadwinner, and support to build their skills. As such there were frequent calls for vocational training, self-employment support and job placements. These economic challenges, the women felt, needed to be factored in when designing reparation packages. (ibid 2016: 357)

Can the Sri Lankan state as well as the multitude of development actors crowding the field of livelihood support heed this call?

## References

- Adams, Vincanne. (2012). "The Other Road to Serfdom: Recovery by the Market and the Affect Economy in New Orleans." *Public Culture* 24(1), 185 – 216.
- Ayele, Seife et al. (2017). "New Perspective on Africa's Youth Employment Challenge." *IDS Bulletin*, 48(3), 1-12.
- Baden, Sally. (1997). *Post-conflict Mozambique: Women's Special Situation, Population Issues and Gender Perspectives*. Bridge Report No. 44, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. Available at: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/sites/bridge.ids.ac.uk/files/reports/re44c.pdf>
- Bastian, Sunil. (2013). *The Political Economy of Post-War Sri Lanka*, ICES Research Paper No. 7, Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.
- Bateman, Milford. (2001). "Small enterprise development policy and the reconstruction of the Yugoslav successor state: A 'local developmental state' policy model." Paper presented at 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Enterprise in Transition, Hvar, Croatia, May 24-26, 2001. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGLDEVLEARN/Resources/MBateman.pdf>
- Bateman, Milford. (2014). "A new Balkan tragedy? The case of microcredit in Bosnia." 14 April 2014. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2014/04/08/a-new-balkan-tragedy-the-case-of-microcredit-in-bosnia/>
- Boss, Pauline. (2010). "The Trauma and Complicated Grief of Ambiguous Loss." *Pastoral Psychology*, 59(2), 137-145.
- Beneria, Lourdes. (1979). "Reproduction, production and the sexual division of labour." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 3 (3), 203-225.
- Buddhadasa, Sarath. (2011). "Small and medium enterprise (SMEs) promotion and entrepreneurship development: A neglected but must strategy for post-conflict Sri Lanka's economic achievement." *Parliamentary Research Journal, Sri Lanka: Policy Issues in the post-conflict era*. 1(1), 114-124.
- Centre for Women's Development. (2013). "The Female-Headed Households in the Northern Province in Sri Lanka." Jaffna: Centre for Women's Development.
- Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms. (2016). *Final Report of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms*. 17 November 2016. Colombo.
- Das, Veena. (2007). *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- de Alwis, Malathi. (2009). "'Disappearance' and 'Displacement' in Sri Lanka." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22(3), 378-391.

- De Silva, Marisa, Nilshan Fonseka and Ruki Fernando. (2017). "Mullikulam: Renewed Struggle to Regain Navy Occupied Village." *Groundviews*, 6 April 2017, <http://groundviews.org/2017/04/06/mullikulam-renewed-struggle-to-regain-navy-occupied-village/>
- DiFruscia, Kim Turcot. (2010). An Interview with Veena Das. *Alterities*, 7(1), 136-145.
- District Secretariat, Mullaitivu. (2015). *Annual Performance and Accounts Report 2015. Mullaitivu District*. <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/paperspresented/performance-report-district-secretariat-mullaitivu-2015.pdf>
- Ellis, Frank. (2000). *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, Frank. (1998). "Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification." *The Journal of Development Studies*, 35(1), 1-38.
- Gamage, Buddhika Niranjana. (2014). "Promoting Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Post- conflict Sri Lanka: Challenges and Opportunities." *International Journal of Business and Management Studies* 3(1), 357-364.
- Godamunne, Nayana. (2015). *Mapping of Socio-Economic Support Services to Female-Headed Households in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka*. Final Report, December 2015, Colombo: UNDP.
- Goger, Annlies and Kanchana Ruwanpura. (2014). *Ethical Reconstruction? Primitive Accumulation in the Apparel Sector of Eastern Sri Lanka*. ICES Research Paper No. 14. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.
- Gonzalez de La Rocha, Mercedes. (2007). "The Construction of the Myth of Survival." *Development and Change*, 38 (1), 45-66.
- Gonzalez de La Rocha, Mercedes. (2001). "From the Resources of Poverty to the Poverty of Resources: The Erosion of a Survival Model." *Latin American Perspectives*. 119(28), 72-100.
- Gonzalez de la Rocha, Mercedes and Alejandro Grinspun. (2001). "Private Adjustments: Household, Crisis and Work." In *Choices for the Poor: Lessons from National Poverty Strategies*, ed. Alejandro Grinspun, New York: United Nations. 55-87.
- Gunasekara, Vagisha, Mira Philips, Kulsabanathan Romeshun and Mohammed Munas. (2016). "Life and Debt: Assessing the Impacts of Participatory Housing Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*. 5(1), 1-17, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.434>.
- Gunasekara, Vagisha, Mira Philips and Vijay Nagaraj. (2016). *Hospitality and Exclusion: A study about post-war tourism in Passikudah*. Report 13, Colombo: Centre for Poverty Analysis. <https://securelivelihoods.org/wp-content/uploads/RR13-Hospitality-and-exclusion-A-study-about-post-war-tourism-in-Passikudah.pdf>.

- Haan, H. (1989). *Small-scale/micro-enterprises and rural non-farm employment in Africa: options for IFAD involvement*. Strategy Paper (revised draft), Rome: IFAD, Africa Division.
- Hamber, Brandon and Richard Wilson. (2002). "Symbolic closure through memory, reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies." *Journal of Human Rights* 1(1), 35-53.
- Human Rights Watch. (2004). "LIVING IN FEAR: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka." 16(13) (C), New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Jelin, Elizabeth. (2003). *State Repression and Labors of Memory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jegatheeswaran, Dharsha and Mario Arulthas. (2017). *Normalising the Abnormal: The Militarization of Mullaitivu*. Jaffna: Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research and Washington: People for Equality and Relief in Sri Lanka (PEARL).
- Jegatheeswaran, Dharsha. (2017). *Civil Security Department: The Deep Militarization of the Vanni*. Jaffna: Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research.
- Justino, Patricia. (2006). *On the Links between Violent Conflict and Chronic Poverty: How Much Do We Really Know?* CPRC Working Paper 61, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Kabeer, Naila. (2012). *Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development*. SIG Working Paper 2012/1, IDRC, DFID.
- Kabeer, Naila. (1999). "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflection on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment." *Development and Change*, 30, 435 – 464.
- Kadirgamar, Ahilan. (2017). "Housing Robbery." *Daily Mirror*, 17 April 2017. <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Housing-Robbery-127268.html>
- Kadirgamar, Ahilan. (nd). *Rural Incomes, Rural Debt and the Dynamics of Accumulation in Post-war Jaffna*. [http://www.mcrg.ac.in/5thCSC/5thCSC\\_Paper/Ahilan.pdf](http://www.mcrg.ac.in/5thCSC/5thCSC_Paper/Ahilan.pdf)
- Kadirgamar, Ahilan. (2013a). "Rebuilding the Post-War North." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(43).
- Kadirgamar, Ahilan. (2013b). "Second Wave of Neoliberalism: Financialisation and Crisis in Post-War Sri Lanka." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(35).
- Keerawella, Gamini. (2013). *Post-War Sri Lanka: Is Peace a Hostage of the Military Victory? Dilemmas of Reconciliation, Ethnic Cohesion and Peace Building*. ICES Research Paper No. 8. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.
- Langevang, Thilde, Katherine V. Gough, Paul W. K. Yankson, George Owusu and Robert Osei. (2015). "Bounded Entrepreneurial Vitality: The Mixed Embeddedness of Female Entrepreneurship." *Economic Geography*, 19 (4), 449-473.

- Mader, P. (2015). "The financialisation of poverty." In *The Political Economy of Microfinance: Financializing poverty*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 78-120.
- McEvoy, Kieren and Heather Conway. (2004). "The Dead, the Law, and the Politics of the Past." *Journal of Law and Society*, 31(4), 539-562.
- Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2017). "National Action Plan on Women Headed Households 2017-2019." (Draft –Version 2,) 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017.
- Ni Aolain, Fionnuala. (2012). "Gendered under enforcement in the TJ context." In *Gender in Transitional Justice*, ed. Susanne Buckley-Zistel and Ruth Stanley, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 59-87.
- Pearson, Ruth. (2004). "Women, Work and Empowerment in a Global Era." *IDS Bulletin*, 35 (4), 117-120.
- Premchander, S. (2003). "NGOs and local MFIs – how to increase poverty reduction through women's small and micro-enterprise." *Futures*, 35 (4), 361-78.
- Pupovac, Vanessa. (2005). "Empowering Women? An assessment of international gender policies in Bosnia." *International Peacekeeping*, 12 (3), 391-405.
- Rakodi, Carole. (2002). "A Livelihoods Approach: Conceptual Issues and Definitions." In) *Urban Livelihoods: A People Centred Approach to Reducing Poverty*, ed. Carole Rakodi with Tony Lloyds Jones, Abington and New York: Earthscan. 3-22.
- Reynolds, Pamela. (2000). "The Ground of All Making: State, the family and political activists." In *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das et al., Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. 141-170.
- Roy, Ananya. (2012). "Subjects of Risk: Technologies of Gender in the Making of Millennial Modernity." *Public Culture* 24(1), 131-155.
- Sarvananthan, Muttukrishna Jeyapraba Suresh and Anushani Alagarajah. (2017). "Feminism, nationalism, and labour in post-civil war Northern Province of Sri Lanka." *Development in Practice*, 27(1), 122-128. DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2017.1257566.
- Scoones, Ian. (1998). *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: A Framework for Analysis*. IDS Working Paper No. 72. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Senaratna, Chandrani. (2017). Presentation made by Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Country Review at International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 22 February 2017. [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT\\_CEDAW\\_STA\\_LKA\\_26677\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT_CEDAW_STA_LKA_26677_E.pdf)
- Skanthakumar, B. (2013). "Growth with Inequality: Neo Liberal Authoritarianism in Sri Lanka," *LST Review*, 24(3), 1-31.

- Snodgrass, D. (1997). *Assessing the Effects of Programme Characteristics and Programme Context on the Impact of Micro-enterprise Services: A Guide for Practitioners*. Washington, DC: Management Systems International.
- Srinivasan, Meera. (2017). "Tamil protests to reclaim land persist in Sri Lanka." *The Hindu*, 2 March 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/tamil-protests-to-reclaim-land-persist-in-sri-lanka/article17390840.ece>.
- Somasundara, Daya. (2007). "Collective trauma in northern Sri Lanka: a qualitative psychosocial-ecological study." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 1(5),
- Sumathy, Sivamohan. (2016). "A Spoonful of Sugar: The Quest for Survival and Justice." In *The Search for Justice: The Sri Lanka Papers*, ed. Kumari Jayawardena and Kishali Pinto Jayawardena, New Delhi: Zubaan. 296-368.
- Whitehead, Ann and Naila Kabeer. (2001). *Living with uncertainty: Gender livelihoods and pro-poor growth in rural sub-Saharan Africa*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Wickrematunge, Raisa. (2017a). "On Keppapulavu." *Groundviews*, 9 February 2017, <http://groundviews.org/2017/02/09/on-keppapulavu/>
- Wickrematunge, Raisa. (2017b). "Imbalance of Power: Examining the Struggle for Land in Mullikulam and Keppapulavu." *Groundviews*, 5 May 2017. <http://groundviews.org/2017/05/05/imbalance-of-power-examining-the-struggle-for-land-in-mullikulam-and-keppapulavu/>
- Women's Action Network. (2016). "Women's Access to Justice in the North and East of Sri Lanka." CEDAW Shadow report submitted by Women's Action Network, August 2016.

# **Chapter 6: Impact of Intimate Relationships on Livelihood Activities of Women Affected by War in Northern Sri Lanka**

*Iresha M. Lakshman*

## **1. Introduction**

Sri Lanka, particularly the Northern and Eastern regions of the country, has been severely affected by internal conflict that lasted for several decades from the early 1980s till 2009. Death, disability, and displacement of people, loss of livelihoods and access to formal education, are few of the adverse effects of conflict that have contributed towards determining the region's socio-economic profile during and after the war. Within this social context, women (and children) are identified as a more vulnerable group on whom the impact of conflict is felt more severely than in the case of men (or adults) (McKay 2004; Onyango et al. 2005; Somasundaram 1998; Tolin and Foa 2006).

A detailed analysis of the qualitative data gathered during the course of the research emphasizes a very important theme: intimate relationships of women affected by war in the North of Sri Lanka shaping livelihood activities and choices. Therefore, the current paper looks at women whose intimate relations have either weakened or strengthened their capacity to engage in livelihood activities. The weakening of these capacities may have occurred by way of imposing social norms and values on the women, abuse, death, separation, and divorce while strengthening of them may have occurred through various kinds of support rendered by such intimate partners.

For the purposes of the study, intimate relationships are defined mainly as relationships a woman has with her husband/partner. Other intimate relationships with parents, siblings, and children also seem important in the context of post-war livelihood activities. The latter seems to play a secondary role (as opposed to the primary role played by spousal relationships) in terms of strengthening or weakening a woman's livelihood opportunities, mostly in the absence of a husband due to death, divorce or separation. The study proposes to analyze this phenomenon by way of attempting to answer three research questions:

- How do gender norms, beliefs, and practices prevalent in the community impact women's capacity to engage in livelihood activities?
- What is the impact of marriage on livelihood activities of women affected by war?
- What impact does the termination of marital relationships due to divorce, separation, or death, have on livelihood activities of women affected by war?

This paper intends to discuss certain key areas relating to the impact of marital relationships on the livelihood choices women make in post-war Sri Lanka: a) background of war-affected women in Sri Lanka; b) the conceptual framework employed; c) research methods; d) analysis and discussion of data followed by e) the conclusion.

## **2. Background: War-affected Women in Sri Lanka**

The 26-year long civil war in Sri Lanka concluded in May 2009. It had intense impacts on Sri Lankan society as a whole, but also

very particularly in the Northern Province. It was the Northern and Eastern provinces, which bore the brunt of the war. More than 70,000 people died due to the armed conflict. Communities' lives were disrupted repeatedly over 26 years. Families were compelled to relocate multiple times to multiple locations as a consequence of the war. Houses, infrastructure, and cultivatable land were ravaged (Arunatilake et al. 2001). It is recorded that there are 138,199 female-headed households (FHHs) in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka (Ministry of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs n.d.). This is principally due to the fact that many men living in the North and East died, disappeared, were injured or detained as a result of the war.

Such widespread destruction will undoubtedly have some impact on gender and gender relations within a community. As men participate in armed combat or lose their lives because of it, women are left to shoulder the burden of providing for their families (Moser 2007; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). Therefore, we see that war opens up space to challenge certain gender stereotypes. However, with the conclusion of armed conflict, there is a possibility of returning to the status quo prior to the conflict as well. Consequently, some women will return to their traditional roles, while others may have to expand on those traditional roles entrusted to them. In many instances, life conditions dictate women to go beyond their traditional caregiver role and to adopt the role of the breadwinner of the household. For example, in Somalia, many women, with the loss of their husbands to war, took on the responsibility of frequenting the market to sell produce and purchase goods (Sorensen 1998). This highlights the space that is made available to women to break certain barriers they were faced with before and during the war, in the post-war context.

In contrast, though, certain institutional factors could curtail the extent to which women may secure empowerment in Sri Lanka. Access to land is recognized as one of the key determinants in empowering women (Pallas 2011; Pena et. al. 2008; SIDA 2009; Swaminathan et. al. 2012). However, women in the North face the challenge of the Thesawalamei Law, which is applicable to Tamils domiciled in the Northern Province. The law does not recognize a woman's right to own land (Sarvananthan 2014). Though women can own their dowry property and half of their *theediaththam*<sup>1</sup> they cannot sell or manage the property without their husband's consent (Sarvananthan 2014). This situation truly undermines women in the North from improving their condition, particularly in situations where they have lost their husbands and fathers in addition to losing a lot of their assets including land. As a result of losing their husbands during the war, FHHs cannot alienate property or effectively manage it because they could not provide the death certificates of their husbands (Sarvananthan 2014). Situations of this nature undermine a woman's ability to stand on equal footing with men within society (Quibria 1995).

Social factors also impede women engaging meaningfully in a livelihood activity in the North and East (Sarvananthan 2014). Morrisson and Jütting (2005) have shown this to be the case generally across the developing countries. As Rajasingham-Senanayake (2004) points out, the lack of an appropriate cultural idiom, which encourages women to actively engage in the social and economic life of the community, can severely undermine the possibility of women continuing to play the new roles thrust on them during the conflict, once the war ended. Even a cursory

---

1 The assets and wealth acquired after marriage by either or both parties involved.

glance through the interviews makes it clear that, in the North, social norms still dictate that women should remain at home. This has seriously undermined the types of livelihood activities women can engage in, and restricted them mainly to activities, which may be successfully accomplished within the household. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that women are likely to be pushed into the informal sector due to the lack of employment opportunities created by economic deterioration and discrimination (Chingono 1996) and war is essentially a time of economic deterioration and discrimination (particularly for women).

Moreover, militarization and the culture of violence generated by war can exacerbate gender-based harassment and violence, constraining women's option to work outside their homes. As Sarvananthan (2014) argues, military phobia was one of the main factors which limited the economic activity of war-affected women in the North of Sri Lanka. Rape is a kind of torture and trauma experienced uniquely by women particularly during times of war and conflict (Amnesty International 2004; Kottegoda et. al. 2008; Meger 2011; Zilberg 2010). According to a report published by the ILO (2010), many women face social stigma in relation to being rape victims, either by virtue of being ex-combatants or by virtue of being a civilian. The report argues that in both scenarios many women were sexually abused either at the hands of the male combatants or by army personnel as civilians. Bandarage (2010) points out that there is a very real possibility of never really knowing about rape as a weapon of war in the Sri Lankan context. Rape victims face serious social challenges in reintegrating themselves into society. Therefore, in Sri Lanka, women who have been victims of rape have added impediments to overcome in achieving empowerment. In addition to dealing with social

stigma, they have to overcome the psychological and emotional trauma of being raped.

As described above, the general social context in the North and East does not create a social environment within which it is easy for women to secure livelihood opportunities. Additionally, these women have undergone the losses and pains of war and continue to be challenged by the remnants of war. It is an established fact that the impact of war is felt more by women rather than men (ESCWA 2007; Plümper 2006). However, research has also shown that women are more likely to have access to livelihood opportunities and be economically active during and after the war in their attempt to recover and rebuild (Calderón, Gáfaró, and Ibáñez 2001; Petesche 2011). Exploring these possibilities fully continues to be a problem even for women with the skills and financial capital required for livelihoods in post-war Northern Sri Lanka due to the prevailing gender beliefs and practices in the region.

### **3. Conceptual Framework**

In order to make sense of the data, many concepts were drawn on. This section intends to discuss the various concepts used in the paper and how they are relevant to the paper. It will consider: a) livelihood and the sustainable livelihood framework; b) social capital; c) intimate relationships; and d) the gender contract.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework has been widely used in understanding individuals' livelihood activities, particularly in the field of development studies. The concept was promoted by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the British state development cooperation agency (Haan 2012).

It provides a more holistic means through which to approach livelihood studies. According to Carney (1998) “A livelihood system comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources), 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.”

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework identified five types of capital, namely human, physical, financial, natural, and social capital. Human capital refers to the labour required in order to engage meaningfully in a livelihood activity. Physical capital are those resources such as buildings, machinery, and equipment. Financial capital includes money in a savings account or a loan for example. Natural capital refers to those natural resources which are available to the individual to use in furthering their livelihoods, which are more important in rural settings rather than urban settings (Mishra 2009).

This chapter will draw heavily on the final type of capital identified in the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, i.e. social capital. Social capital has been defined in many ways. In essence, it captures the importance of social bonds and social norms in strengthening livelihood activities. According to Farr (2004), social capital is “complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which is essential for . . . future collective action or goods.” DFID identifies three basic components of social capital. They are relations of trust, reciprocity, and exchanges between

individuals which facilitate co-operation; common rules, norms, and sanctions mutually agreed upon or handed-down within societies; and connectedness, networks and groups, including access to wider institutions (Overseas Development Institute, 1999). Social capital looks at, but does not restrict itself to, the manner in which connectedness enables, and at times disables, the pursuit of gainful livelihood activities.

The impact social capital has on livelihoods, as well as the impact external stimuli has on social capital, has been the focus of many researchers. Mishra (2009) analyses both the negative and positive impacts that coal mining had on the social capital of communities living in Orissa. Sanyal (2009), using quantitative data, argues that microfinance serves to increase social capital amongst women in rural communities. This, in turn, has positive repercussions for their livelihood activities as well. LaLone (2012) sees social capital as a vital component of community resilience efforts and argues that it can play an important role in post-emergency situations.

War can be perceived as a period during which these social ties diminish or weaken due to militarization, death, and trauma. Death has a direct negative impact on social capital as it removes individuals with whom relationships have been maintained. Militarization and trauma lead to a lack of trust among members of a community which may weaken the social capital of the community as a whole as well as that of the individuals. However, Deng (2010) stresses that war may not always have a detrimental impact on social capital. Through his study with communities from Southern Sudan, he argues that communities exposed to endogenous counter-insurgency experienced a loss of social capital while those exposed to exogenous violence resulted in a deepening and

strengthening of social capital. The war and violence experienced by communities in Northern Sri Lanka can be perceived as a mix of endogenous and exogenous violence. It is endogenous because the LTTE was a Jaffna-based movement and exogenous because the government armed forces appeared largely as an external force. Therefore, the impact of war on the social capital of women in the North of Sri Lanka has been somewhat mixed. Large-scale displacement of communities and large numbers of deaths have resulted in weakening the community ties women had prior to the war and thereby the women's social capital. The common socio-cultural beliefs and practices in the region pertaining to gender roles have exacerbated the situation by providing restricted allowance for the empowerment of women. In the absence of strong community bonds, women have either tried to protect their intimate bonds within the family or considered the development of new intimate relationships as a way of ensuring their security and survival through difficult times (Lakshman, Schubert and Rajeshkannan, forthcoming).

It is important to note that social capital, while possessing the capacity to transform livelihoods for the better, also can adversely affect the livelihood pursuits of certain individuals, groups, or communities (Overseas Development Institute 1999). This is sometimes referred to as the "dark side" of social capital by some critics (Upton 2008). Social capital also involves social norms and beliefs. As such it can sometimes negatively influence certain groups. This is particularly true of women living in patriarchal societies. Caste, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity could often hinder a meaningful engagement in livelihood activities. Social norms and social institutions, which partially constitute social capital, limit the livelihood opportunities available to women while

also limiting the extent to which they can engage in their livelihood activities. Generally, women's livelihood activities are constrained by two factors: women are responsible for reproductive functions within the household, and women's involvement in work outside the village generally carries negative connotations (Kodoth 2005). Research suggests that social norms regarding women places greater restrictions on married women rather than unmarried women's activities (Mannon 2006). This is due to the fact that married women are expected to fulfil their reproductive and caregiving function within the family, ahead of the productive role outside the family. In the case of Northern Sri Lanka, belief about the purity of women, virginity, and fidelity may work against women engaging in livelihoods.

In exploring the relationship between social capital and livelihoods of women in post-war Northern Sri Lanka, the study pays attention to a specific group of people, i.e. persons with whom women maintain intimate relationships, particularly husbands/partners. According to Robert Putnam (1995), the family is a crucial component of a person's social capital. Coleman (1998) identifies the importance of parent-child relationships as a factor of social capital and he argues that "strong families" generate social capital. However, both Putnam and Coleman note the declining significance of family in modern times. It is perhaps the work of Pierre Bourdieu on social capital that is most relevant to this paper. For Bourdieu, the family is a motor of social capital (Gillies 2003). As such families with symbolic and material resources are capable of drawing on these resources to develop themselves. This, however, leads to inequity, as not everyone has access to the same resources and the same opportunities to develop themselves.

Bates (2002) also has looked at how middle class families work hard to ensure that benefits are reproduced.

Intimate relationships then have a crucial role to play in generating social capital. Social capital is an indispensable component of the livelihood framework. Therefore, intimate relationships and the manner in which they are structured and operate will have important consequences on war-affected women's capacity to engage in economic activity. It is on this basis that intimate relationships, particularly spousal relationships, are explored in this paper. The analysis will also pay secondary attention to other intimate relationships with parents, siblings, and children to understand how these relationships supplement or substitute severed spousal relationships. Current literature stresses the important changes that are taking place in the family and how these changes affect women. Given economic pressures and other factors the household structures across the world are undergoing significant change. There is a shift from a breadwinner/homemaker model to a dual career model (Mannon 2006). Writing about the Latin American context, Vincent (1998) refers to the "Grapes-of-Wrath" effect to describe how, in households where men's economic resources are no longer sufficient, women transform their reproductive activities to "provide for the household in new ways." However, though women engage in economic activity, these activities are still greatly dependent on social norms regarding what is, and is not, permissible for a woman to do. There is a tendency for paid work to take place at home and/or mimic women's domestic responsibilities, which in turn serves to reinforce traditional gender boundaries (Estrada 2002).

Marriage creates a new relationship between man and woman. It creates a new household and also a new production unit (Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2005). According to Fafchamps and Quisumbing (2005), throughout history marriage has provided the basis for not only household formation but also production within the household by way of providing a means for men and women to access land and labour. The composition of family and the sex, age, and other characteristics of household members are seen to play a key role in determining the livelihood strategies of a household in social contexts with strong gender-based division of labour (Thomas 2008). In societies where the general socio-cultural make up is not conducive towards females joining the work force, “wives” are likely to remain as housewives or opt for household-based income generating activities. Therefore, marriage plays an important role in the life of a woman, particularly with regard to decisions she makes concerning the pursuit, or non-pursuit of livelihoods, and the manner in which she should engage in that activity.

In their discussion of returned migrant women who have migrated from rural to urban Ghana, Tufuor, Sato, and Niehof (2016) claim that recently returned migrant women make decisions regarding their livelihood by balancing moral obligations to the household on the one hand, and self-maximizing desires on the other hand. The study shows the negotiations women have to make between their personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of the family. Women are responsible for ensuring cooperation within the family rather than conflict. It is in light of this burden that women make decisions regarding their livelihood activities. Therefore, it may be noted once again that the manner in which intimate relationships are

formed and the manner in which they are maintained, determine livelihood activities of women.

Hirdman (1991) discusses the idea of a “gender contract” that is useful in understanding the balance women in patriarchal societies are expected to maintain between their household and workforce responsibilities. She attempts to understand the manner in which the gender contract has changed in Sweden over the last two centuries since the onset of industrialization. According to Rantalaiho and Heiskanen (1997) a gender contract is understood as “a pattern of implicit rules on mutual roles and responsibilities, on rights and obligations, and it defines how the social relations between women and men, between the genders and generations, and also between social production and reproduction, are organized in our societies.” Hirdman (1991) dismisses the possibility of gender relations being a static reality in society and argues that gender relations are constantly negotiated in the everyday practice of men and women in society. The post-war context opens up a space for a great deal of negotiations to take place regarding the place of women in society and gender relations within the household as well as wider society.

The above section has attempted to highlight the different ways in which social capital, intimate relationships, and gender intersect in determining the livelihood activities pursued by women. The war-affected women exist within a patriarchal social structure. Women who are still married live in male/husband-headed households while those who are widowed, divorced or separated from their husbands have the responsibility of heading the household. In the case of the latter, even though a husband is not physically present the women seem to suffer from

either fond memories of the husband or from bitter memories of the exploitation caused by their ex-husbands. All women are burdened with dual responsibilities within the household and at work. In the case of the widowed, divorced or separated women, the dual responsibility is mandatory while married women have the option of non-engagement in livelihoods as they live under the security and protection of a husband. Three key factors that have an impact on women's social capital within post-war Northern Sri Lanka have been identified: 1) cultural norms and practices in the region; 2) war-related trauma; and 3) extended family relations. A woman's social capital plays a significant role in determining her position within the household. The success achieved by women in their livelihoods, and having supportive family relations within the household, enhance the women's social capital. The reciprocal relationship between intimate relationships of a woman and her livelihood activities essentially contributes to the strengthening or weakening of her social capital.

#### **4. Research Methods**

This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in all five districts of the Northern Province, namely Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. Under the GROW project<sup>2</sup> 120 in-depth interviews were conducted in the Northern Province. Participants for the research were selected using a non-random, purposive sampling method and were selected on the basis of their current or previous engagement with a livelihood activity. For the purpose of this particular paper 30 translated transcripts out of the 120 interviews were analysed. These 30 interviews were

---

2 Post-War Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women in Sri Lanka (GROW) is a project undertaken by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

also purposively chosen to cover a wide range of issues and social factors which influence war-affected women's livelihood activities in the North. Of the 30 interviews chosen, seven interviews were done with married women (of whom two were remarried), 12 with widowed women, and 11 with separated women.

In analyzing the data, a thematic framework emphasizing intimate relationships was adopted. This framework allowed for a detailed analysis of how relationships between people, rather than social institutions, shaped livelihood activities.

The paper has certain limitations, which would be wise to keep in mind when proceeding. Firstly, the fact that the sample is entirely purposively selected restricts the generalizability of the findings. The non-random sampling technique used makes it very difficult to generalize the research findings to the entire Northern Province. Secondly, much could have been lost in translation. The interviews were conducted in the Tamil language and the transcripts of the have been later translated into English. Therefore, valuable nuances that provide useful insights into the lived experiences of war-affected women engaging in livelihood activities may have got lost in translation. Thirdly, the researcher did not have first-hand field experience as fieldwork was conducted by research assistants. This may have had an impact on the final analysis.

## **5. Intimate Relationships of War-affected Women and their Livelihoods in Northern Sri Lanka**

In war-affected regions of Sri Lanka, the nature of intimate relationships emerged as a salient factor in women pursuing and sustaining their livelihoods. The data clearly reveal two broad ways in which intimate relationships affect women – by either enabling

or constraining them to engage in livelihood activities. Prevailing socio-cultural norms and practices, as well as conflict-related factors such as exposure to violence, disruption of education, and early marriage shape intimate relations to enable or disable women from pursuing livelihoods and decrease or increase their vulnerability as social actors.

Information revealed by the 30 women that are the subject of this paper point to some common characteristics of these women. It is important to understand these common characteristics prior to a discussion on the impact of intimate relationships on these women's livelihoods. The characteristics also explain the nature of experiences faced by these women during and after the war. Except for one woman who was never displaced, all other 29 women have experienced multiple displacements during their childhood and/or teenage life.

Another common characteristic of these women was their low levels of educational achievements. The experiences of war and financial difficulties created an environment that made it difficult for these women to continue formal education. Of the interviewees, one had studied up to Grade 4, 12 between Grades 6 and 11, 10 completed the G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) Examination and one completed the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination. Data on the education levels of six women were not available. In many cases, these women, after discontinuation of education, were given away in marriage either to protect them from being abducted by the LTTE or to fulfill some ulterior family motive.

This socio-economic and cultural milieu within which these women's life stories have been written contributed towards them

having to ensure their survival under very vulnerable conditions both within and outside of the home. Vulnerability in the outside world was created by factors such as war, poverty and low levels of education. Vulnerability inside the home was created by weak and fragile intimate relationships either with parents or husbands. In both situations, the fact of being a woman was a prime reason for being vulnerable. War and post-war conditions exacerbated these vulnerabilities.

In this backdrop, the data presented in this study looks at these women's intimate relationships and their impact on women's livelihoods with particular attention placed on their marital relationships. The role of other intimate relationships within the family is considered as secondary relationships that substitute or supplement a severed spousal relationship.

## **6. Impact of Marriage and Severance of Marriage on Women's Livelihoods**

As in many patriarchal countries in South Asia, the common perceptions and expectations of marriage in Northern Sri Lanka closely resemble the conventional gender contract discussed by Hirdman (1991). Furthermore, Rajasingham-Senanayake (2004) writes about Hindu cultural notions of the auspicious married woman and the inauspicious widow in Northern Sri Lanka. Religiously established gender beliefs of this nature are likely to form the foundation for gender practices in these parts of Sri Lanka making it very difficult for a woman to live an economically and socially secured life in the absence of a husband or at least a "protective" male figure. The husband would "provide for and protect" his wife and children in exchange for the wife's "care giving" services for the husband and children. Norms, beliefs, and

practices pertaining to gender in the region are formed around this perception of marriage and women are seen largely as a group that needs the protection of a husband or at least the protection of an older and/or stronger male family member such as a father, brother, or son.

The marital expectations of the women interviewed during this study closely resemble the description above. At the time of marriage, all women have anticipated to being “provided for and protected by” the husband. Their perception of marriage is clearly depicted in the following statement by a woman who was given away in marriage at the age of 16.

*After dropping out of school, I was given away in marriage. He was a mason and labourer. He earned about Rs. 2,000 a day. He buys grocery items. When he worked I was at home. I had children. I didn't go to work after my marriage. I cook at home (Kilinochchi, 55).<sup>3</sup>*

However, the majority of women in the sample have been denied this kind of protection either due to the death (of the husband), which is an inevitable consequence of war, or due to separation, which may have also been an indirect result of the war. Many women who were separated from their husbands have been forced to make that decision in response to unbearable amounts of financial, physical and/or emotional abuse that they have been subjected to by their husbands. This kind of abusive behaviour has been identified as a male form of response to prolonged exposure to conflict (see Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). Abusing and

---

3 Data presented as quotations will indicate the area from which the respondent came and her age within brackets.

traumatizing their wives could be a means of relieving the stress and trauma of war for men who are themselves traumatized by the experience of war either by direct involvement or by seeing and hearing of violence on a daily basis.

*My husband caused most of the problems I faced. He doesn't go to work and he doesn't let me go to work. (Interviewer: Why is that?) I don't know, he is very suspicious of me. (Interviewer: Why? What is he suspicious about?) He is afraid that others might talk to me. (Interviewer: What does he do? Does he fight with you about that?) No, he doesn't do anything to me, but he will pick fights with others if they talk to me or he would go around telling people that I am going to work without his permission (Mullaithivu, 24).*

*When my son was 1 ½ years old, my husband's behaviour was not o.k. So I left him. My mother was in Neelamadu. I left him and went there . . . After seven months he also came there. For about two months he was o.k. Then I conceived my second son. Then again he started to misbehave (Interviewer: What do you mean misbehave?) Alcohol, women, and more than that, he was suspicious of me. When I was five months pregnant, our fathers also advised him. But he didn't listen. So I left him. Then he went away. After that, I was with my mother for about five years (Mannar, 46A).*

Wife-abuse was, however, not common only to men who failed to fulfil the clichéd breadwinner role attributed to husbands. Sometimes men who fit the stereotypical male breadwinner role

were also abusive of their wives. Whatever the nature and cause of abuse, such abusive marriages, except for a few, have eventually ended up in separation.

*He looked after me very well. If I give the list, he would bring it home. I need not go to the shop. Everything he brought home. (Interviewer: Was your husband an alcoholic?) Yes. He used to hit me as well as my eldest child. I sit and cry. Some days I scream. Then my father comes to my rescue. So I don't like my husband (Kilinochchi, 36).*

*(Interviewer: Did your husband have any bad habits?) Yes. Drugs, alcohol, gambling, and women everything was there. (Interviewer: Did he beat you?) Yes, he did. So I have decided I don't want him. I didn't work when he was there. He looked after us well. He maintained us. I don't know what happened. Some said that someone had cast a spell on him (Mannar, 42).*

*(Interviewer: When did you marry?) In the year 2001, My daughter was born in 2002. (Interviewer: When did he abandon you?) I sent him abroad in 2003, with that he separated from me. (Interviewer: To which country did he go?) To Qatar. He fought with his employer and stayed without work. He didn't send me money. I sent him money by pawning all my jewels. They were all redeemed only after my brother went to Qatar for work and sent money. There was no help from my husband (Vavuniya, 41).*

Not all women who were abused by their husbands opted to leave their husbands. Their decision to remain in the relationship was mostly influenced by cultural norms prevalent in society. Some women continued in abusive marriages for the sake of having a male “protector” for them and their children’s well-being. These women believed that retaining the father of their children in the house would ensure social recognition for children and ensure that children have access to any assets that may be in the possession of the father (Yount and Li 2009).

*Whatever said and done the children need their father. My father is old. How long would they look after me? So I thought it’s better to live with him (KIlinochchi, 34).*

*(Interview: Are you divorced?) No. I only filed a case for alimony. I do not want a divorce. What if my children ask, “Why did you divorce him?” when they are grown up? He wanted me to apply for it. And his father wrote the land in my name in his will. Both of us have to sign if we are to do something with that land. I do not want my children to lose it. So I only filed a case for alimony. He said he will only pay 7,000 rupees. It was decided that he has to pay 20,000. He only pays 5,000 (Jaffna, 39).*

The above quotations clearly indicate the negative impacts of voluntarily severing a marriage in this socio-cultural context. In this war-affected social scenario, people might treat a widow sympathetically as death is seen as a vicious consequence of war. However, sympathy will be offered only as long as the widow acts within the boundaries socially assigned as appropriate for a (once) married woman. As explained by respondents, when a woman

(widowed or otherwise) crosses this boundary and takes up the role of the family breadwinner, which may require more social engagement outside the house, these sentiments of sympathy usually convert to envy and disgust. However, the community does not seem to shed sympathy on women who “voluntarily” sever marital relations through separation or divorce. As explained by one respondent, the community does not consider the causes of separation/divorce but always finds fault with the woman who decides to leave the husband (see later). Severance of marriage due to death, separation or divorce, has a detrimental impact on a woman’s social capital, irrespective of the cause for severing the marriage (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004). For women who have not hitherto engaged in any livelihoods, severance of marriage is sure to shatter their financial capital base. Likewise, their social capital is also likely to weaken as they lose the social recognition that was once attributed to them as married women. The weakening of both financial and social capital due to severance of marriage would make it difficult for the women to find and/or sustain livelihoods.

The abusive husbands described above have not provided the anticipated financial protection nor have they allowed the women to find such protection by themselves. Furthermore, husbands’ abusive behaviours have stigmatized the women socially and traumatized them, making it difficult for them to have a “normal” social life. In some cases (see above Mullaitivu, 24), abuse seems to be a case of “over protection.” Men who are raised according to the accepted gender norms and practices of the region, seem socially constrained by their anticipated role as the sole breadwinner of the family, incapacitating them of realizing their wives’ potential to engage in livelihoods; a situation that could result in the

“over-protective” behaviour towards the wives. Additionally, prolonged exposure to war is likely to have “taught” these men the vulnerability of women and hence the need to protect them physically by keeping them in the house. Irrespective of the cause of abuse, it has undoubtedly contributed to a weakening of the women’s financial capital as well as social networks which has, in turn, restricted their potential for livelihoods even after the severance of marriage. The abuse has traumatized women physically and psychologically, debilitating their physical and psychological capacity to find and engage in livelihoods.

Widowed or separated women’s experiences during the time they were married not only determined their perception of marriage but also had a significant impact on their self-dignity. Widowed women who have had fulfilling marriages, were very nostalgic of their past while separated women who were married to abusive men were pleased to be alone. However, many of these women, irrespective of the reason that encouraged or forced them to seek employment, have gained confidence and become empowered as a result of being “employed.” The separated women who have been once abused by their husbands showed less potential for success in livelihoods. The trauma of abusive marital relations has made it difficult for these women to succeed in livelihoods and face the social challenges of being separated. The trauma of abuse seems to have had a severe detrimental impact on the women’s self-dignity affecting their competence in the world of work.

*For two years I was mentally ill. As soon as he left I was so upset. For five years I took tablets. Even now I cannot sleep without pills (Mannar, 42).*

*I was married in 1996. Then started work in 1999 or 2000. I was working for three years. We have to categorize the prawns and crabs. Then at that time, my husband started to quarrel with me. He fought with me all the time. He came to my working place and fought. At that time we were living separately . . . He doesn't go to work. He was an alcoholic . . . Then he physically abused me. Many times I tried to commit suicide. Once I tried to burn myself. I consumed 30 sleeping tablets and was unconscious for five days in the hospital. I cannot survive. I cannot look after my children. How much society puts you down and criticizes you when you don't have a husband (Mannar, 39).*

The war that lasted for over three decades has essentially been a determining factor in shaping the life conditions of these women. Some widows who have enjoyed comfortable times when their husbands were around blamed the war for all their current miseries. Such deaths have weakened their social networks and also denied them the protection of a husband (and/or the protection by an older son). Women who have been considered the “protected” now have to be the “protector,” not just of themselves but also of their dependents.

*(Interviewer: Do you think your life would have been better if there was no war?) Of course, I wouldn't have known this side of life and I'd have been happier. My husband took me everywhere in his lorry and I didn't even know how to get to the road. He did everything for me, he is so loving and caring. Now, I have to walk everywhere. Sometimes, it's too hot to walk in the sun and sometimes*

*I feel so tired while walking, but there is nothing I can do other than cry about my life now . . . The Army took him with them. They asked everyone who worked with the LTTE to surrender to them, so my husband surrendered. Then after a while the army brought his documents and told me that he was shot by LTTE. (Interviewer: The Army took him and told you that the LTTE shot him?) Yes, what can I do? I cried and cried and asked them to show his body, they didn't. I asked the Grama Niladhari and other officers to provide me with his death certificate, but they didn't. They are telling me that someone must confirm his death. What can I do to prove to them that he is dead? I haven't even seen his body (crying) (Mullaitivu, 52).*

*If there wasn't a war, I wouldn't have lost my husband and sons. My two sons would have looked after me well if there wasn't a war. Why are we in this state? Why should we be like this? My sons would have been income earners. Even if my husband had left me, my sons, who were educated up to grade nine would have definitely looked after me in a better way (Kilinochchi, 47).*

As explained by the first widow above, the war has not only taken away the women's husbands but also the social recognition they once received as married women. Lack of social connections and women's subordinate position within society seem to constrain them further making them feel even more helpless in the absence of a man. For example, one could argue that the above woman could learn to drive the lorry that was once owned by her husband. However, constrained by the narrow rules put in place by society, a majority of the women interviewed did not even consider such

choices as feasible solutions to their problems. Driving a lorry or hiring a three-wheeler alone is not perceived as suitable solutions to the difficulties of walking under the blazing sun by a woman (once) married. In addition to the war, several other social forces seem to act toward disempowering the women. The gender norms and practices prevalent in the region were a main disempowering force which restricted women to the house. These norms were not conducive for widowed or separated women to engage in livelihoods in the absence of a male figure in the family.

*Society expects women to dress up nicely and cook at home. That's all they are allowed to do, anything that requires going out of the house is not allowed. We have a lot of issues in the society. A woman who lost her husband cannot dress well at all in this society. If she dresses well and goes out for whatever reason, the only implication is that she is meeting a man. The situation is worse if a woman leaves a man. The reason why she left him is not taken into account. People will never point their finger at a man. It's always a woman's fault. A widowed woman has to go to Samurthi, DS office and everywhere all by herself, but all that people say is she is seeing a man. I am not exaggerating; this is what happens in the society. It's always a problem when there is no male travel companion with you. It's quite less within the areas of Killinochi and Vavuniya, but if you pass those areas you are prone to harassment. I was harassed on my way back home after sending off my husband to Qatar. That is one thing I am scared of while travelling. Sometimes I travel with my uncle, but it's not always possible to have someone to travel with (Mullaitivu, 35).*

Society in the Northern Province, in general, seemed less tolerant of working women irrespective of the presence of a husband or not. Some married women were forced to seek livelihoods due to their husbands' ill health. In such cases the work involved was usually done with the support of the husband. However, women's visible presence in the "world of work" temporarily without a husband created challenges even for married working women.

*He is like, not mentally all right. He is allergic to fire, heat, and cement. When we married he was a labourer. In the nights he falls sick. He says his skin is burning because of the cement. He used to go one day and stay back the next day. So we started to sell string hoppers. If I make he would supply. Once he was admitted to the hospital. I went to supply. Men said something at the hotel. It hurts. It's very difficult for a woman to supply. If he is not there it's very difficult . . . Some said, "Wait, will you?" some held my hand while giving the money. I was scared (Mannar, 36).*

The situation was worse in the case of widowed or separated women who did not have a husband at all. Some women shared stories of how they were harassed by some individuals or groups that exercised power over them in their workplaces. Certain officials in government offices and aid agencies too seem to possess this kind of attitude. The points made by Mannon (2006) and Kodoth (2005) about social norms and negative connotations that govern women's social position is relevant here. Members of the community and/or officials in organizations harassed women on the basis of these norms either by way of direct comments at the women or by way of gossip.

*When we go out alone, and when they inquire and find out that the woman is single, they pass hints or follow you. I have suffered. I come home and cry. They continuously follow. Some say, "Get into the three wheeler, we will drop you". Before I bought a cycle, many wanted to drop me home. Sometimes I have argued with them too . . . If I go for an aid, they ask for a death certificate or a divorce certificate. In one place a lady officer at XXX<sup>4</sup>, asked, "You said you don't have a husband but you are wearing pottu (the dot worn by Tamil women on their forehead)? Have you married again? " I said I don't want your aid. I don't have the necessity to answer your question. And I left (Mannar, 46).*

*There was a storeroom at the shop (where I was working). Sometimes I need to go there to take supplies to the shop, the owner also comes with me during such times. The three-wheeler drivers observed this and fabricated the story (that I am having an affair with him). They always make up such stories. I couldn't accept this as I have a daughter with me. I immediately informed this to the wife of the owner and his cousin and told them that, "I cannot continue the job in this situation" (Vavuniya, 41).*

Another problem that debarred the widowed and separated women from engaging in livelihoods was the difficulty of attending to their children while working. Although the severance of abusive marital relationships gave the women the freedom necessary for engaging in livelihood activities, by such time many women were

---

4 Name of the organization has been taken out to ensure confidentiality.

burdened with the responsibility of caring for children. Inability to look after children, particularly girls, and inability to attend to children's needs were mentioned by many women as reasons for not engaging in livelihoods or for seeking home-based livelihoods. The situation was aggravated in the absence of able parents and/or siblings who would be willing to help these women with childcare. Having young children has been raised as a factor that determines the employment options taken up by women (Van Putten et.al. 2008). Some women had to abandon profitable employment due to the difficulty of looking after their children while going to work. Women who could find formal employment outside of home sought home-based self-employment opportunities so that they could attend to their children's needs as well as their protection while working (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004).

*When I married he looked after me well until he got used to this drinking habit. Whenever I ask for money he doesn't give. So I thought I should work. Whatever he gives is also not enough. I can work. My only barrier is no one is there to look after my children. Then I have to drop and pick them from the montessori and the school. So it's difficult. I can work from home. (Interviewer: So if there's someone to look after the children you will work?) Yes, but that will never happen I can only do something from home. I like making snacks but it will not work here. I can't sell them. We have to work hard to make a profit. If he supports I can do. But he will not do it (Kilinochchi, 34).*

*It was a good earning at the Garment Factory. However, my children struggled to a great deal. If I go to the factory nobody looks after them. They could not*

*manage themselves, if they go to school the dressing was incomplete. Sometimes they forget to put on their socks. I usually press their dresses though. No one was available to prepare them to go to school. My younger sisters are residing nearby but, they don't take care of my children. If I ask them to do so, they come up with comments like, "You are going to work and all" (Vavuniya, 34).*

*(Interviewer: Since you don't have work that gives you enough money, what do you want to do?) If I can restart my short eats business that will be more than enough. I don't like to go out for my work. Because I have two daughters, if I go out to work, I will not be able to spend time with them or get back home on time in the evenings. In that case, my daughters will be alone in the house. I don't want that. You know what happens in the country these days. You cannot leave your children alone at home. Also, I don't like to go out to work. If it's the short eats business, my eldest daughter will help me with it and I will also find ways to expand it (Mullaitivu, 52).*

Abusive marital relationships have been a recurring theme in the lives of many women interviewed. These women who have been denied the expected protection from a husband, were faced with the additional stress and trauma of being abused by their husbands. Experiences of war, low levels of education, and early marriages are all interrelated factors that may have resulted in abusive marital relations. In a cultural context where girls were being raised to be "looked after" by a man, the education of girls was paid inadequate attention; a factor that encouraged dropping out of school and early marriage (Kottegoda et.al. 2008). Many

women in the sample have been forced into marriage or consented to it without fully realizing what they were getting into at an early age, particularly after dropping out of school. While some girls who had fallen in love after dropping out from school consented to marriage, others were forced into marriages arranged by parents. In other cases, young girls and boys opted or were forced into marriage due to fear of being forcibly recruited by the LTTE. Whatever the reason for marriage, women often regretted having been married early because many such marriages have eventually become abusive

*I was good in studies and sports as well. The family didn't have the necessary facilities to educate me further. Father was bedridden. I only had a brother. No one to help me. So I studied up to the 10th grade but didn't do my O/L exam. I married at 16 due to the war. My studies were interrupted due to poverty. My parents were scared that we might join the movement. So when he was interested to marry me, they gave me away in marriage. Poverty was the reason for giving up studies (Mannar, 46).*

*I would say it is a forced marriage. It's not like I loved him. But we were seeing each other. Our families had some issues so his family wanted me to come into their family as a revenge on my family. My parents didn't accept us, but his family was okay. I was nineteen years old when I got married, I didn't understand what was going on (Jaffna, 32).*

*That was during the time the LTTE was recruiting people, and I kind of had to marry him. He took me with him to marry me while I was studying because he was afraid that the LTTE might take him with them. We were in love and when he asked me to come with him I went with him because he was in trouble. He convinced me that he will be taken (Mullaitivu, 24).*

A common solution sought by many abused or widowed women has been to return home seeking assistance from parents for childcare and financial stability. In some cases, extended family members, such as siblings, uncles or aunts have come to the rescue of these women. The extended family, which becomes less significant in a woman's life after marriage, re-enters her life when the marriage breaks down as a source of empowerment both socially and financially. This pattern is confirmed in some quotations cited above. In some cases, going in line with the accepted gender norms of society, the extended family has not allowed the women to seek employment outside the house. In such situations, the parents and/or siblings have both helped financially and looked after the woman's children.

*Even though my father's earnings are not enough to conduct the family, I could not leave my children behind. My father said let's manage with whatever we've got. So he went to work, leaving me to look after the children... I wanted to work. My father's salary was not enough, right? But he didn't let me. Since he has no job now, I decided to go (she has been working in a mixture factory since 2014). But I have health issues. Headaches. My eyesight became poor as well (Kilinochchi, 40).*

*(Interviewer: Is there any other reason you don't want to go outside and work?) No, my mother raised me that way. My father is a government officer. And even when I was married, I go out with him if I have to, but I am not very interested going outside my house. I get everything I need inside the house. After he died, my parents were looking after me. Now my father is helping me, so I am okay (Vavuniya, 39).*

*I don't have enough money. I mean I don't know how to tell someone about my problems, but I am telling you because you asked me. I asked my brother to help, so he is helping my children to get an education. My father will give his pension for other expenses. That is how life goes (Vavuniya, 39).*

Loss of a male breadwinner adds more stress to the life of a widowed/separated woman who has to now work for a living in addition to fulfilling the care-giving responsibilities she has been providing for her family. A clear violation of the gender contract is visible here and it has resulted in a re-negotiation of the homemaker/breadwinner roles within the household (Mannon 2006; Vincent 1998). Some widowed/separated women's understanding of their role as breadwinners of the family also was shaped within socially accepted cultural beliefs and as a result they seemed fully content that their parents and/or siblings were providing for them. Cunningham (2001a and 2001b) observed how parental attitudes had a significant impact on the formation of young adults' conception of gender roles within the household.

However, many of these women, with or without support from the extended family, have realized that they cannot strictly go by what society expects of them given their unique situation of having to care for their children both as a mother as well as a father. These social circumstances and sentiments seem to have given these women mental strength to get through with their life. Here too, sometimes the encouragement provided by parents, particularly mothers, was visible.

*My mother was very encouraging. She said, "Whoever says whatever, you are the judge of yourself. As long as you are correct you don't have to worry about anyone. You need to worry only if you do wrong. Wherever you want to go you go. You protect yourself." My mother's confidence and guidance are the reasons for my career. Otherwise, my life also could have been a disaster... Mother married when she was 35. No one can go near to her. She is a very strong and tough woman. No one dares to tease her. She is not soft like us. Very tough. All were scared of her. She says, "Don't be scared, if you cry and sleep in a corner, there will be cats sleeping in your stove. No one who teases you is going to feed you. So you have to earn. You have to be courageous" (Mannar, 46).*

*No one really likes me driving a three-wheeler. From my mother to my relatives—they all have a problem with it. I told them I need to take care of my own problems as a head of household and I don't care about who is talking about me and who is making fun of me. I only care about my work and my future. They think women shouldn't drive an auto. They also said it's indecent to drive an auto*

*and many other reasons. An auto is better than driving motorbike. They don't get it (Mullaitivu, 36).*

Some separated/widowed women considered the option of remarriage to overcome the issues they faced as single women. In some cases remarriage has contributed to an improvement of the women's social position while in others it has further exacerbated their vulnerabilities. Irrespective of the outcome of remarriage, the desire to remarry highlights the cultural significance attributed to marriage as a form of "protection."

*My parents are old and my mother is sick. When they are gone I am going to be all alone with my son. No one will take care of my son and if I am alone, others will talk different things about me, so my life would be complicated. I need someone to support me when I get old and I am still young. I got married young and I have a son. So, if I married someone I will be supported and safe, that is why they let me remarry (Jaffna, 30).*

*When I was with my ex-husband, yes, it was like living in a prison. I was like a slave. He was always suspicious of me and treated me very badly. But after I left him and married this one, I am so happy. My husband is a good man (Jaffna, 32).*

*(When my husband died) I had little children and I'll be honest with you, my last son was born after I came here. I got pregnant by my closest cousin. He promised me he will look after me but he cheated on me and said he is not the father of my son. I went to court and took the test and*

*got the birth certificate. He is married now; he has no connections with us. I was young and helpless and trusted that he will look after us. I regret it happened... However, my relatives and neighbours shunned me. I felt very bad, even my parents didn't understand me. It's only now, that people are slowly starting to talk to me. A woman shouldn't live without her husband. If you make one mistake in one weak moment, people will always judge by the mistake. People still talk about me. It's something that you have to face if you are a woman. I wish I am never born a woman again. People even told me that I got the housing scheme because I slept with one of the male officials (Kilinochchi, 36).*

Amidst these difficulties and trauma, however, research shows that war has a unique way of economically (and therefore socially) empowering the widowed, divorced or separated women by forcing them to take up the breadwinner position within the household (Calderón, Gáfaró and Ibáñez 2001; ESCWA 2007; Petesche 2011). Some widows who opted to start a business have excelled in their livelihood activities. For example, a woman who was a very successful entrepreneur had won several awards and trainings for her food products. Though she regretted her husband's death, she was in a way happy about her achievements as an individual.

*If my husband was alive, I could have depended on him. But I lost him and everything in the war. Starting a business was my only option and along the way, I learned a lot. It was all good experiences (Mulaitivu, 36).*

Successful women, like the one above, however, have had one common feature. They have had some form of financial capital (cash or an asset) that could be invested in a business or the support (in cash or in kind) of a family member (parent or sibling) to help them with the establishment of a business. Furthermore, none of them spoke of being abused or cheated by their husbands while being married; an indication of marriage not being detrimental to their self-dignity as women (Loring 1994; Sackett and Saunders 1999). These conditions have supported them to strengthen their financial and social capital to excel in what they did.

All women in the sample, whether successful or not in livelihoods, explained how they continue to be vulnerable to sexist/gender-based harassments in the absence of a husband, as gender norms and beliefs are intact.

*I became strong; I do the work a man does. I have to make all the decisions and take care of everything about my family . . . I learned how to live through the hardships. And I also learned how to live in this society and how to adjust to the society and I also learned farming. I have never done any of those work before. I don't want my children to go through the same. I teach them to be wise. I am worried about my daughters, not my sons. Because girls are more vulnerable than boys, you know what happens in the society now. Since I made a mistake, people may try to treat my daughter like they treat me. I don't want that to happen to her (Kilinochchi, 36).*

*It's good if you can stand on your own feet. When I suffered no one was there to support me. At the same*

*time I don't have any capital to improve my economy. If I ask for help they immediately ask "Oh! Don't you have a husband? Can you give your phone number?" Society is such (Mannar, 39).*

Women who were married "rich" and of higher social status had more potential for being successful in livelihoods. These women were less likely to be abused by their husbands and were of relatively higher educational backgrounds. There were two women from the Vellalar caste in the sample and their experiences had a similar flavour of "good fortune." While it may be possible that these women were more committed and motivated than the others, their experiences also suggest an exposure to more positive social conditions as indicated by their level of education (one woman had studied up to the G.C.E. Advanced Level) and the initial capital that would have been necessary to start the kind of businesses they were involved in (cement pillar making and food products). Both women had several employees working under them, which also indicates the magnitude of their businesses. These two cases clearly point out the positive impact of having access to social and financial capital for successful livelihoods by women.

The study reveals that being married significantly improves a woman's social capital in the war-affected zones of Northern Sri Lanka making it difficult for women to engage in livelihoods in the absence of a husband. Widowed and separated women encountered several difficulties in strengthening their financial and social capital base which was necessary for effective livelihoods and vice versa. Women who were married to abusive husbands faced additional psychological challenges, which had a detrimental impact on their social capital. Their social network

was shattered due to psychological trauma and stigma caused by abusive relationships with husbands. In the long term, the trauma of being abused has damaged the women's self-dignity to the extent that they are unable to function effectively in terms of livelihood activities.

Many women sought one of two solutions to their problem of having to play a dual role as the breadwinner father and the care-giving mother. Some women returned to their parents/extended family seeking support, while others opted to remarry. Both solutions had positive and negative impacts on the livelihoods of women in the sample. Re-marriage has resulted in further abuse for some women while for others it has provided the anticipated protection and support. In the case of the latter, their livelihood activities have also been successful. Returning to one's parents/ extended family after an abusive marriage has supported the women with childcare enabling them to engage in livelihoods. In the long-term, returning to parents/extended family has enhanced women's protection and self-dignity. These women appear happier and more confident than the ones not so supported by their extended families.

## **7. Conclusion**

The paper attempted to understand the impact of marital relationships on women's livelihood capacities during and after the war in the Northern parts of Sri Lanka. Thirty in-depth interviews with married, widowed and separated women provided data for analysis. However, the fact that the data was collected for research more into the area of economic aspects of war-affected women's livelihood activities is a main limitation of the current

analysis. The data was analyzed to see the impact of marriage and of severance of marriage on these women's capacity to engage in livelihoods.

Socio-cultural norms and beliefs promote women in the post-war areas, as elsewhere, to think of marriage as a form of security and protection for women. These norms promoted practices that looked upon women as deserving the care and protection of a husband or a strong male figure such as father, brother or son. These gender norms resulted in a social climate which made it difficult for a woman, particularly a widowed, divorced or separated woman, to engage in livelihoods. Such women were prone to sexual harassment at the workplace and society in general. Some married women were kept away from livelihoods by their husbands in order to avoid this kind of harassments, while others were supported by their husbands to engage in livelihoods. Women who were supported by their husbands in their livelihood activities were very happy and satisfied with their life, which improved their self-dignity. Another group of women who were struggling in their livelihoods had tarnished self-dignities as a result of being abused by their husbands.

Marriage, in this cultural backdrop, essentially forms a significant portion of a woman's social capital. Severance of marriage or marriages with abusive husbands was detrimental to a woman's position in society as well as her opportunities for livelihoods. Women who have been abused by their husbands had the added disadvantage of a tarnished self-dignity, which made it even more difficult for them to succeed in the world of work. Social capital in the form of heightened or an untarnished self-dignity, along

with some financial capital to invest in livelihoods, seemed like the perfect recipe for a woman's success in livelihoods.

Some widowed and separated women returned to their parents upon the loss of their marital ties. Support received from parents and/or extended family also contributed to the enhancement of these women's protection as well as self-dignity. Women receiving support from parents and/or extended family seemed happier and confident in their livelihoods as well as day-to-day existence. However, the support received from parents did not have the same impact as did a supportive husband. In many cases, parental support was adequate for the mere survival of the woman and her offspring. In some cases the parents did not allow their daughters to engage in any livelihoods. Instead, they offered to earn and provide for them and their offspring. This kind of financial dependence, though resulting from a protective parental attitude, seemed to make these women more vulnerable.

Deaths due to war or ill health were reasons that led to the severance of marital relationships. Death of the husband forced these women to seek livelihood opportunities to ensure their and their children's survival. It also created a void in the women's social and financial capital, which then had to be filled by way of livelihoods. Successful engagement in livelihoods offered women improved earnings, which was an essential component of their financial capital. Likewise, the social recognition and status that came with successful livelihoods improved the women's social capital.

Women affected by war have been put in a situation where they are forced and encouraged to negotiate the gender roles they

are familiar with. Their expectations of marriage, which are determined by the gender norms and practices of the region, have been breached by their husbands in many cases. This has led to a situation in which women have been forced to take over the breadwinner role instead of their traditional role as homemakers. The study looked at marital relationships as a form of social capital, which could enhance and facilitate women's social position. A reciprocal relationship could be observed between women's social position and their livelihood opportunity. Women with higher educational qualifications and of higher caste possessed stronger social capital, which made it relatively easy for them to succeed in livelihoods. Success in livelihoods further enhanced their social capital. Others who did not have a strong social capital base struggled in their livelihoods due to lack of financial and social capital. Many of these women also had to overcome the psychological trauma of being abused by their ex-husbands. A tarnished self-dignity seemed to have a strong detrimental impact on women's livelihood success; a far greater detrimental impact compared to not having access to financial capital.

The findings suggest the need for psychological interventions along with financial interventions in order to support war-affected women in their livelihoods. The same psychological interventions could also support men who are abusive of their wives.

## References

- Amnesty International. 2004. "Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: sexual violence against women in the armed conflict." London.  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/document/?indexNumber=amr23%2fo40%2f2004&language=en>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Arunatilake, N., S. Jayasuriya, and S Kelegama. 2001. "The Economic Cost of the War in Sri Lanka." *World Development*, 29(9), 1483-1500.
- Bandarage, A. 2010. "Women, Armed Conflict and Peacemaking in Sri Lanka: Towards a Political Economy Perspective." *Asian Politics & Policy*, 2(4), 659-667.
- Calderón, V., M. Gáfaró, A. M. Ibáñez. 2011. "Forced migration, female labor force participation, and intra-household bargaining: does conflict empower women?" Documento CEDE, (2011-28). [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1917615](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1917615), Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Carney, D. 1998. "Implementing the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach." In: D. Carney (ed) *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: What contributions can we make?* DFID, London.
- Chingono, M., 1996. "War, Economic Crisis and Emergence of the Grassroots Economy." In: M. Chingono, ed. *The State, Violence and Development: The Political Economy of War in Mozambique 1975-1992*. Aldershot: Avebury, 71-126.
- Coleman, J. S., 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(5), 95-120.
- Cunningham, M. 2001a. "Parental Influences on the Gendered Division of Housework." *American Sociological Review*, 66(2), 184-203.
- Cunningham, M. 2001b. "The Influence of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors on Children's Attitudes toward Gender and Household Labor in Early Adulthood." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(1), 111-122.
- Deng, L. B. 2010. Social Capital and Civil War: The Dinka Communities in Sudan's Civil War. *African Affairs*, 109(435), 231-250.
- Department for International Development. 1999. *Social Capital*, s.l.: Overseas Development Institute.
- ESCWA. (2007). "The impact of armed conflict on women." Beirut-Lebanon: United Nations. <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/files/Download.pdf>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Estrada, S. L. 2002. "Work, Gender, and Space: Women's Home-based Work in Tijuana, Mexico." *Journal of Developing Societies*, 18, 169-195.
- Fafchamps, M. and A. Quisumbing. 2005. "Marriage, Bequest, and Assortative Matching in Rural Ethiopia." *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 53(2), 347-380.

- Farr, J. 2004. "Social Capital: A Conceptual History." *Political Theory* 2004, 6-33.
- Gillies, V. 2003. *Family and Intimate Relationships: A Review of Sociological Research*. London: South Bank University.
- Haan, L. J. D. 2012. "The Livelihood Approach: A Critical Exploration." *Erdkunde*, October, 345-357.
- Hirdman, Y. 1991. "The Gender System." In: T. Andreasen, ed. *Moving on. New Perspectives on the Women's Movement*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 187-207.
- International Labour Organisation. 2010. *Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Guidelines*, Switzerland: International Labour Organisation.
- Kodoth, P. 2005. Fostering Insecure Livelihoods: Dowry and Female Seclusion in Left Developmental Contexts in West Bengal and Kerala. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(25), 2543-2554.
- Kottegoda, S., K. Samuel, and S. Emmanuel. 2008. "Reproductive Health Concerns in Six Conflict-Affected Areas of Sri Lanka." *Reproductive Health Matters*, 16(31), 75-82.
- Lakshman, I.M., M. Schubert, and R. Rajeshkannan. Forthcoming. "Continuing Education during Times of Disaster: War and Tsunami Experiences of Children in Northern Sri Lanka" (In) Perera, S. (ed) *Education, politics and ethics of education in Sri Lanka*, Oxford University Press.
- LaLone, M. B. 2012. "Neighbors Helping Neighbors: An Examination of the Social Capital Mobilization Process for Community Resilience to Environmental Disasters." *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 6(2), 209-237.
- Loring, M. T. 1994. *Emotional Abuse*, New York: Lexington Books.
- Mannon, S. E. 2006. "Love in the Time of Neo-Liberalism: Gender, Work, and Power in a Costa Rican Marriage." *Gender and Society*, 20(4), 511-530.
- McKay, S. 2004. *Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War, Rights & Democracy*. 1st ed. Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.
- Meger, S. 2011. "Rape in Contemporary Warfare: The Role of Globalization in Wartime Sexual Violence." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 1(1), 100-132.
- Ministry of Resettlement, Reconstruction and Hindu Religious Affairs, n.d. "Details of Women Headed Households in Northern and Eastern Provinces," Unpublished data sheet.
- Mishra, P. P. 2009. "Coal Mining and Rural Livelihoods: Case of the Ib Valley Coalfield, Orissa." *Economic and Political Weekly*, October-November, 117-113.

- Morrisson, C. and J.P. Jütting. 2005. "Women's discrimination in developing countries: A new data set for better policies." *World Development*, 33(7), 1065–1081. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.04.002>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Moser, A. 2007. "The Peace and Conflict Gender Analysis: UNIFEM's Research in the Solomon Islands." *Gender and Development*, 15(2), 231-239.
- Onyango, G., A. Atyam, C. Arwai and J. Acan. 2005. *Girl Mothers of Northern Uganda*. Bellagio Conference on Girl Mothers in Fighting Forces and their Post-War Reintegration in Southern and Western Africa.
- Overseas Development Institute. 1999. "Policy Planning and Implementation: Social Capital." Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UK.
- Pallas, S. 2011. "Women's land rights and women's empowerment: one and the same?" C. Verschuur (Hg.): *Du Grain À Moudre*. Genre, Développement Rural et Alimentation. Geneve. [http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/genre/shared/Genre\\_docs/Actes\\_2010/Actes\\_2010\\_Pallas.pdf](http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/genre/shared/Genre_docs/Actes_2010/Actes_2010_Pallas.pdf). Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Pena, N., M. Maiques, and G.E. Castillo. 2008. "Using rights-based and gender-analysis arguments for land rights for women: Some initial reflections from Nicaragua." *Gender & Development*, 16(1), 55–71.
- Petesche, P. 2011. "Women's Empowerment Arising from Violent Conflict and Recovery: Life Stories from Four Middle-Income Countries. USAID." <https://www.microlinks.org/library/womens-empowerment-arising-violent-conflict-and-recovery-life-stories-four-middle-income-cou>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Plümper, T. and E. Neumayer. 2006. "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy." *International Organization*, 60(03). <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818306060231>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Putnam, R. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University.
- Quibria, M. G. 1995. "Gender and Poverty: Issues and Policies with Special Reference to Asian Developing Countries." *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 9(4), 373-411.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. 2004. "Between Reality and Representation: Women's Agency in War and Post-Conflict Sri Lanka." *Cultural Dynamics*, 16(2–3), 141–168.
- Rantalaiho, L. and T. Heiskanen. 1997. *Gendered Practices In Everyday Life*. 1st ed. New York: MacMillan and St. Martin's Press.
- Sackett, L. A. and D. G. Saunders. 1999. "The Impact of Different Forms of Psychological Abuse on Battered Women." *Violence and Victims*, 13(1), 1-13.

- Sanyal, P. 2009. "From Credit to Collective Action: The Role of Microfinance in Promoting Women's Social Capital and Normative Influence." *American Sociological Association*, 74(4), 529-550.
- Sarvananthan, M. 2014. "Impediments to Women in Post-Civil War Economic Growth in Sri Lanka." *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management, Special Issue on Gender (In) Equality in South Asia: Problems, Prospects and Pathways*, 2(1), 12-36.
- SIDA. 2009. "Quick Guide to What and How: Increasing Women's Access to Land." (Women's Economic Empowerment). Stockholm: SIDA.  
[http://www.sida.se/English/publications/Publication\\_database/publications-byyear1/2009/september/quick-guide-to-what-and-how-increasing-womens-access-to-land/](http://www.sida.se/English/publications/Publication_database/publications-byyear1/2009/september/quick-guide-to-what-and-how-increasing-womens-access-to-land/), Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Somasundaram, D. 1998. *Scarred minds: The psychological impact of war on Sri Lankan Tamils*. Sage Publications.
- Sorensen, B. 1998. *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Swaminathan, H., R. Lahoti, and J.Y. Suchita. 2012. "Women's Property, Mobility, and Decisionmaking: Evidence from Rural Karnataka, India" (IFPRI Discussion Paper No. 01188). IFPRI. <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/126959>. Retrieved on December 18, 2016.
- Thomas, F. 2008. "Remarriage after Spousal Death: Options Facing Widows and Implications for Livelihood Security." *Gender and Development*, 16(1), 73-83.
- Tolin, D. and E. Foa. 2006. "Sex Differences in Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Quantitative Review of 25 Years of Research." *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(6), 959-992.
- Tufuor, T., C. Sato, and A. Niehof. 2016. "Gender, Households and Reintegration: Everyday Lives of Returned Migrant Women in Rural Northern Ghana." *A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 23(10), 1480-1495.
- Upton, C. 2008. "Social Capital, Collective Action and Group Formation: Developmental Trajectories in Postsocialist Mongolia." *Human Ecology*, 36(2), 175-188.
- Van Putten, A., P. Dykstra, and J. Schippers. 2008. "Just Like Mom? The Intergenerational Reproduction of Women's Paid Work." *European Sociological Review*, 24(4), 435-449.
- Vincent, S. 1998. "Gender Ideologies and the Informal Economy: Reproduction and the 'Grapes of Wrath Effect' in Mata Chico, Peru." *Latin American Perspectives*, Volume 25, 120-139.
- Yount, K. and L. Li. 2009. "Women's 'Justification' of Domestic Violence in Egypt." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(5), 1125-1140.
- Zilberg, J. 2010. "Mass Rape as a Weapon of War in the Eastern DRC." In Falola T. and H. Haar (Eds.), *Narrating War and Peace in Africa* (113-140). Boydell and Brewer.

## **Chapter 7: War and Recovery: Psychosocial Challenges in Northern Sri Lanka**

*Jeevasuthan Subramaniam*

### **1. Introduction**

Women experience the direct and indirect negative consequences of armed conflict more adversely than men. Armed conflicts have created large numbers of female-headed households where the men have been conscripted, detained, displaced, have disappeared or are dead. The term “women-headed households” is defined as a significant group of vulnerable people in the world and it is not a new social phenomenon (Gandotra and Jha 2003) because challenges relating to conflict-affected women date back to ancient Greek, Roman and Hebrew wars. Historically, these women and their experiences have been silenced, and this continues to occur globally (Strohmetz 2010).

The women who head households face both instant and sustained impacts of armed strife in many countries. In times of crisis, they face deaths or forced abductions of loved ones, sexual assaults, confrontations, and life threats from armed personnel (Aoláin 2011). Due to these dreadful experiences, they undergo extensive trauma, other mental health-related challenges or become compelled to undertake duties that are traditionally or culturally not part of their life. In conflict situations, most women live in poverty conditions, as well as despondency, and they share all the war-related devastation with men (Korac 2006; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002).

As Thiruchandran (1999) asserted, “Usually, the rapid numbers of households headed by women are easily attributed to the detrimental outcomes of the conflict.” Armed conflict also challenges women’s sexual morality and increases female dependency on male breadwinners and other male heads of households. They are also bound to accept responsibilities for child rearing and care of elders, as well as to bear with sexual harassment and assaults (Tambiah 2004). In addition, they face significant gender discrimination and challenges related to poverty, hunger, malnutrition, overwork, domestic violence, and sexual violence. The challenges encountered by these particular marginalized groups are deliberately ignored and their voice silenced during conflicts or in their aftermath. The World Health Organization also stated, “Failure to address women’s mental and health problems has undesirable social and economic consequences on communities” (WHO 2004, 1).

### **Internal armed conflict and its impact on women in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is another great victim of internal armed conflict in the Asian region. The Sri Lankan armed ethnic conflict lasted for more than three decades, starting from the early 1980s, and caused massive destruction in every aspect of the country (Sarvananthan 2006). A new social phenomenon has evolved as “women who head families” from the minority and majority ethnic groups (Surendrakumar 2006) and over 100,000 women who head households have been identified (Association for Women's Rights in Development 2012). Though women and men both suffer the death and disappearances of their loved ones, destruction of properties and livelihood, displacements and negative psychological consequences, many aspects of the war

affect the psychosocial well-being of women disproportionately (Kastrup 2006).

Thiruchandran (1999) found that although war widows and some displaced women are relieved to avoid the restrictions of marriage due to war, they find that they are still subject to patriarchal practices including discrediting women from a moral perspective, sexual teasing, harassment, and violence (Hewamanne 2009, 159). Women are severely affected by gender-related violence and uncertainty in times of crisis, and even after the conflict terminates. It was also noticeable that these challenges may be aggravated in the midst of inadequate income, frailty, and frustration, which often occur following forced internal expulsion. Access to essential services and goods, including food, water, shelter, and healthcare is a problem faced by many women in a post-conflict context. Women who head families face discriminatory treatment when officials who are mostly male largely control commodities and services.

In many conflict regions, the customary roles of women in the family, the community, and the “public” domain have been completely changed. And, the gendered roles of women and traditional family structures have encountered a remarkable transformation. This is an unintentional phenomenon. The collapse of family and community structures forces women to undertake new and unfamiliar roles. Women are compelled to bear a greater burden for their family members and of livelihood responsibilities. The absence of male leaders often heightens the insecurity and danger for the women and children left behind and accelerates the breakdown of the traditional protection and support mechanisms upon which the communities—especially

women—have previously relied. Women are heads of households and breadwinners, taking over responsibility for earning a livelihood, caring for farms and animals, trading, and being active outside the home—activities often traditionally carried out by men. This necessitates the development of new coping skills and confidence and requires courage and resilience to help sustain and rebuild families and communities torn apart by war (Lindsey and Lindsey-Curtet 2001).

Finally, it is essential to understand the vulnerable situations, because the negative impact of armed conflicts and politically-motivated violence hampers women who head households differently. These categories of understanding can be divided into: before-war occurs, the period of conflict and transformation periods, and development phases.

### **Problem Statement**

An independent survey conducted in 2013 revealed that nearly 100,000 women who head households have been identified in the Northern Province alone (Perera 2013). Many studies on women heading households during the ethnic conflict and its aftermath in Sri Lanka have been published over the years by different scholars and institutions. However, few scholars have concentrated on the women who head households in the Northern Province through the case study method, where war-affected women who head households have been identified as a subculture.

The conservative perception among the Tamil community stigmatizes widows, preventing them and their children from gaining social acceptance and limiting their access to essential

services and facilities (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the situation of women who head households in the Northern Province and how they are able to maintain the welfare of their households in the midst of social and psychological complexities. This study mainly focuses on aspects such as the ability of women who head households to make decisions on their family matters, carry out livelihood tasks, guide their children, and face any adverse situation with confidence. Therefore, this study highlights the psychosocial recuperation of women who head households through a scholarly perspective, as it is a prominent issue in the Sri Lankan post-war scenario.

This study intends to meet the following objectives.

1. Study the psychosocial challenges encountered by women who head households in the Sri Lankan post-conflict context.
2. Identify the strategies and efforts employed by women to recuperate from their situation and their roles in livelihood initiatives in the changing social and political landscape.
3. Explore the views of women who head households on their prevailing living conditions and how they are reviving their engagement in psychosocial domains after the end of the armed conflict.

In sum, this study will present evidence of a women's community, gradually coming into existence over the past 30 years of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, encountering different challenges and adapting to daily changes in the post-conflict scenario.

## **2. Conceptual and theoretical approach**

This paper uses a constructivist approach (Robson 2011) to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by women who head households in post-conflict and development phases, as it deals mainly with the perceptions of women on their current situation, and their initiatives to sustain or change their everyday lives. The term “psychosocial” refers to the combination of psychological and social components of an individual. It is also related to a person’s social scenario of his/her psychological and emotional well-being. According to the United Nations Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF 2003) the term “psychosocial” is applied, assuming that a combination of psychological and social factors is responsible for the psychosocial well-being of women who head their households, and that the biological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, mental, and material cannot necessarily be separated from one another. The term psychosocial will direct the researcher’s attention toward the totality of participants’ experiences rather than focusing exclusively on the physical or psychological aspects of health and well-being.

As this study is designed to explore the specific challenges and better understand the factors that create the challenges from the perspective of the participants encountering them consideration is given to understand the impact of conflict on women in Northern Sri Lanka as well as on the landscape for the restoration of normal life (Robson 2011). From this, specific factors significant to this research and which are inevitable to the identification of research findings are identified. Furthermore, the participants were provided with an ample opportunity to express their grievances that remained unaddressed. This study also recognizes women

who head households as actors or presenters, not merely as respondents (Blackburn and Chambers 1996).

Moreover, the study also allowed the researcher to practice a mindful inquiry into personal and crucial issues and an opportunity to adopt a holistic approach to investigate the complex and multi-faceted interactions and experiences of the participants and the contexts in which they live (Hopkins 2000).

The theoretical and conceptual approach of this study take account of different challenges and coping strategies of war-affected women, the way the women adjust to the unfamiliar situation, their need for empowerment and the role of change agents, and the role played by social support systems in enhancing their lives.

The following theories are applied to meet the above requirement:

1. Coping Strategy Theory
2. Adjustment Theory
3. Social Support Theory
4. Community Empowerment Theory

The Coping Strategy Theory is used in this study to understand the three major components of coping strategies of women who head their households: biological/physiological, cognitive, and learnt (Lazarus 1993). Therefore, behavioural, cognitive/information seeking, and emotional aspects of the study population, have been scrutinized.

Adjustment is found to be fundamental in a person's life. It implies harmonizing the relation between a person's needs and his environment. It is a process enabling a person to build a balanced

behavior between the incompatibility of life and the environment. Considering this aspect, the adjustment theory was applied in this study to understand how war-affected women continued their lives despite multi-faceted challenges and led their families successfully.

The Social Support Theory gives a theoretical idea on who might be social support providers and what mechanism could be employed to deliver such supports (Dow and McDonald 2003). The social support theory is used in this study to identify support providers and their processes to provide social support to the war-affected women in their areas. Therefore, the study examines the tangible and/or intangible support initiatives, which protect war-affected women from any adverse and unexpected overwhelming situations (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney and Lillis 1997).

The Community Empowerment Theory is deployed to investigate the role of change agents in providing support to women who head households during post-conflict and development phases and to identify the aspects considered as crucial factors to be changed by the change agents.

### **Coping Strategy Theory**

Coping strategies are a blend of three spheres of a person's life: behavioural, cognitive/information seeking, and emotional (Maria et al. 2009). Behavioural aspects constitute a process of actions which helps the individual to be prepared for an action and its results. The information sought by an individual to adapt to changes is regarded as the cognitive part of a coping strategy. Lazarus defined "coping behaviour as a process that changes over the course of a situation. Coping behaviour is dependent on the

meaning of the event, the context, and the goals of the person in the situation (1993, 234).”

Coping strategies depend on an individual’s unique quality. Individuals cope with their stress, appraising the situation through a mental process. This process functions in two ways: either an assessment of a situation by which an individual is engulfed or managing the situation with the support of available resources around her/him. These resources can be identified as psychological resources, physical resources, and social resources. The households living in armed conflict situations have to enhance their livelihood and adopt coping strategies to restore their social, economic, and political capital, accordingly (Justino 2009).

Emotional coping strategies are related to unreasonable and non-active processes ranging from simple to multi-faceted emotional processes. Thus, a coping strategy is derived from a combination of these three components. Based on its nature, coping strategy could be typified into six categories, which are emotion focused, social support, withdrawal, attitude modification, control, and denial. The term focused signifies the ability of an individual to seriously consider the challenges and looking forward to solving them successfully. Social support implies obtaining information, advice, and moral support to handle an overwhelming situation (Maria et al. 2009).

Any potential overwhelming event or challenge to which an individual/human body is exposed is likely to be subjected to internal and physiological changes. When people are facing a stressful situation, social support plays a vital role in helping individuals to cope with their stress. Social support is divided

into three subdivisions: intangible (emotional), tangible (money and material), and informational (Taylor et al. 2004). At times persons who experience a problem may opt to keep away from it and resort to daydreaming, imagination, or adopting negative strategies, including consuming alcohol, chewing and smoking tobacco excessively, drug abuse, or gambling. They also remain socially withdrawn.

Coping strategies and psychological, physiological, social, and cultural aspects are mutually affected and interconnected. Coping strategies are determined by physiological, cognitive, and learnt aspects of a person. Conversion of attitudes indicates the transformation of behaviour, morals, or cognitive ability. This differs from acceptance, turning to God, which acquires a philosophy of life, or cracking jokes over the issue or a particular challenge. Control means domination over the situation through the organization of behaviours or activities and suppressing the emotions. This includes control over the ability to restrict impulsive behaviour or to confine to certain decisions. The person who is stressed is more prone to develop serious medical challenges like heart disease and cancer. However, some personalities are “hardy” and possess the ability to have control over their situations, accept responsibilities, and be prepared to take risks. Denial is the case when the person behaves as if she/he does not experience any problem, having fun or living in a fantasy world (Maria et al. 2009).

Women who head their households may adopt their own or culture specific coping strategies to handle overwhelming situations. The main objective and the research question have also been framed to obtain information on these items. Therefore, this body of

knowledge would be useful to conceive an elaborate idea on coping strategies adopted by women who head their households and the support system available for them to deal with their challenging situation in the Sri Lankan post-conflict scenario.

### **Adjustment Theory**

Adjustment theory focuses on the adjustment adopted by human beings when their lives are in jeopardy. Constructive coping methods are always helpful to aid a person's adjustment. Therefore, it could be said that there is a positive relationship between coping strategies and adjustment (Picken 2012). A previous study has proved that efforts and coping strategies have an important impact on people's adjustment (Abdullah, Elias and Mahyuddin 2010).

According to this theory, human beings have their individual life demands or life needs. These include: basic needs and other needs. While basic needs remain common for every human being, the other needs may differ from person to person. When the person's environment responds poorly or is not capable of meeting his/her life needs, the relationship between the life needs and the environment would be hostile. This hostility prompts human beings to adopt an adjustment between their needs and environment. This adjustment is essential for human beings to survive and to be successful in daily life (Laurence 1999).

Adjustment is built on a person's life ambitions and psychological wishes. Life ambitions are something the person wishes to achieve, while psychological wishes are the person's desire to achieve life ambitions. When life ambitions and psychological wishes work enough in a person, they enhance the person's skills to cope with

the hostile relations between life needs and the environment. In other words, they influence the person to be adjusted between his unmet needs and unsuccessful environment to achieve life ambitions. Now the person finds the relations between his life and environment positive. He wants to harmonize life and the environment. He is carrying out this either by adjusting life needs according to his environment or changing the condition of the environment according his life needs (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi and Bross 1998).

Adjustment is found to be a fundamental aspect in a person's life. It is a process enabling a person to build a balanced behaviour between the incompatibility of life and the environment. A well-adjusted person has a good understanding of his strengths and limitations, satisfaction of basic needs, flexibility in behaviour, a capacity to deal with adverse circumstances, a realistic perception of the world, a feeling of being productive in his environment (Chang and Kim 2000; Laurence 1999; Ross 1990).

This theory is deployed to this study to recognize how war-affected women continue to be prepared to face the challenges in their daily lives despite their environment and lead a meaningful life in the absence of other breadwinners. Furthermore, the post-conflict scenario can provide women with new opportunities by forcing them to take on unfamiliar and non-traditional roles and responsibilities. Transformation in economic aspects and decision-making within families, dealing with various stakeholders of their own free will or under compulsion, transformation in their "identity/consciousness," and formation of self-help strategies are explored in this study (Sorensen 1998).

## **Social Support Theory**

The Social Support Theory argues that social support is a tool for human beings to recover from any negative effects of life and rehabilitate their well-being after suffering (Dow and McDonald 2003). In providing social support, two main aspects are to be considered carefully. They are support resources and support processes. Support resources include all those who provide social support to people in need. Government, civil institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-governmental individuals can all be support resources. They are the resources who could extend support to people in responding to satisfy their unmet needs. They may be involved in basic needs, physical and mental health, education, employment, counselling, information, and awareness. Support processes would be essential means for support resources to provide these supports to the people. Public laws, social policies, programmes, campaigns and awareness are all support processes. Social support is not possible without both support resources and support processes (Chang and Kim 2000; Dow and McDonald 2003; Jiang and Winfree 2006).

For the purpose of this study, the four specific supportive measures available for war- affected women—emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal will be investigated. It is also crucial to consider that the participants may utilize their own or culture-specific supportive services to handle overwhelming situations. The main objective and the research question have also been formulated to obtain information on these items. Therefore, this body of knowledge would be useful to conceive an elaborate idea on available support systems for women who head households to deal with their challenging situation in the Sri Lankan post-conflict scenario and development phases.

## **Community Empowerment Theory**

Given the consequences of war, violence and trauma, women's empowerment alone without considering the empowerment of the community as a whole within which the women are located, would be inadequate. Community empowerment theory is about empowering the disempowered community. This theory argues that the community can be disempowered for several reasons. Natural and man-made incidents all disempower a community. Such disempowerment could involve social, economical, psychological, emotional, cultural, religious and political aspects. Any form of disempowerment would disturb the community's natural life and destroy the community's social capital. It challenges the community's psycho-socio-economic goals and produces negative perceptions of life among members of the community. It makes the community helpless and leaves its members' needs unmet. It undermines the skills and abilities of community in rebuilding their lives themselves. It also at times threatens the very existence of the community. This disempowerment needs to be responded to and a disempowered community needs to be sufficiently empowered (Adams 2003; Williamson and Robinson 2006).

To empower a disempowered community, there should be empowerment agents like civil institutions, community-based organizations (CBOs) and social. They can empower a community by many ways. Social education, campaigns based on religion and culture, issue-based advocacy, public participatory initiatives, training, guidance and advice of different sorts, are some of the empowerment tools. This empowerment process can begin first for members of a disempowered community or it can be target the entire community in general (Williamson and Robinson 2006).

The roles of community-based individuals and grassroots organizations are most crucial as community empowerment agents. They strive to empower a vulnerable community in many ways. These kinds of change agents empower socially incapacitated communities utilizing their specialized skills to rebuild the affected communities' destroyed institutional network. The change agents empower a psychologically and emotionally disempowered community guiding the rebuilding of their capacity to handle situations and make decision for themselves. To economically empower an underprivileged disempowered community, the change agents act as facilitators between communities and sources of help. In empowering a community, change agents employ several tools: guidance, advice, awareness and social education (Adams 2003).

### **3. Methodology**

This paper used primary empirical data from the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) programme being delivered by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in the Northern Region of Sri Lanka and gathered using qualitative methods through purposive sampling with participants most appropriate to the subject.

The exact data collection methods were determined by ICES and the researcher opportunistically made use of this data with the ICES's consent. The empirical evidence consisted of data collected from in-depth interviews carried out with war-affected women in five districts of the Northern Region: Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Jaffna, severely affected by the three decade-long armed conflict and well recognized for the rapidly

increasing number of women who head households in the post-conflict scenario.

The analysis was carried out based on emerging themes from the collected data, literature review and theories. Then analysis was directed toward narrowing down the information into significant points or quotes (Creswell, Hanson, Plano and Morales 2007). During the analysis the following steps were followed prudently:

1. The qualitative interviews were carefully scrutinized so that the researcher could obtain an insight into the dynamics of the phenomenon.
2. The data coding was conducted based on the statement of the problem and research questions.
3. The data were broken down and merged back together in a new form to make comparison and interpretation. Finally, the paper is presenting the main findings according to the objectives of the study.

The researcher did not require to directly interact with participants as the interviews were already carried out by ICES in the Northern Province. The researcher was provided with an opportunity to choose the interviews and define the number of interviews based on an appropriate justification.

This study used the convenient (and pragmatic) sampling strategy, recommended for qualitative investigations (Palys n.d; Thomas 2003). The selection of in-depth interviews for the study purpose was based on self-made sampling criteria, which were adopted to choose the potential participants. The researcher utilized primary empirical data shared by the ICES. The researcher received 75 interviews from ICES in the form of raw data and it was decided

to exclude the single participant who was above 45 years as the young age group of women who head households is considered to be a newly emerging social phenomenon in the Sri Lankan post-war scenario (Handunetti 2011 and Jayathunge 2010). The qualitative empirical data were collected from participants representing different districts of the Northern Province. These included; Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaitivu. The number of participants/sample size was confined to a small size for the study purpose. Therefore, a total of 30 participants were selected and the richness of the data was also considered carefully.

### **Perspective of women who head households on psychosocial challenges**

This section strives to capture some of the multiple forms of psychosocial challenges faced by women who head households which do in fact fuel the collective vulnerability, but go under focused in most post-conflict research. Informants talked at length about psychosocial challenges, with many immediately linking it to their tragic experience.

### **4. Psychosocial challenges: Conceptualizing Psychosocial Challenges**

Most of the informants noted the gravity of armed conflict, describing it as being the “barrier for ordered social life.” Psychosocial challenges were not only talked about in terms of daily stressors, but were also discussed in broader terms such as the combined influence of psychological factors and the surrounding social environment on the physical and mental wellness of the participants and challenges to their respect and recognition.

## **5. Economic challenges: Insufficient income, lack of stable livelihood opportunities, health issues, poor housing and homelessness**

### **Insufficient income**

Insufficient income and lack of livelihood opportunities were talked about in reference to economic challenges. Most agreed that this is the crucial challenge and cannot be fixed except upon livelihood opportunities and a strong social support. The income they received was insufficient to meet their daily needs. The respondents strongly believed that they face many other challenges directly or indirectly connected to insufficient income. *“We are managing now with what we earn, the rest is with God,”* said one informant from Mannar. The likelihood of rapidly increasing multifaceted needs was a common challenge that affected them considerably. One respondent from Mullaitivu stated, *“I am living in a tight economic situation. It is worse compared to the time before the war. The cost of living has increased and things in general like groceries have definitely gone up”*. Another participant from Jaffna was more succinct, *“I need extra money for my daughter’s treatment. It would be good if I increase my income because it is necessary for her medical needs.”*

Although informants talked extensively about the problem of lack of income, it was reflected in different occasions and they were unique in nature. They faced challenges in providing their dependents with sufficient food. It was found that, already, many families are being forced to “eat less preferred food, limit portion sizes, reduce number of meals per day,” according to the participants. A woman from Mannar stated, *“Sometimes we*

*eat, sometimes we don't. Known people would give something."* They struggled to meet their medical expenses and provide a good quality of education to their children. A participant from Jaffna said, *"I need extra money for my daughter's treatment. It would be good if I increase my income because it is necessary for her medical needs."* A woman from Mannar said, *"The income is not enough to educate children. It was a difficult task for me. So I left my son with my relatives in Parpangkandal for studies."* Women also had to borrow money from different financial institutions due to the lack of savings and investments. *"I pawned the jewels and got the loan for my son's medical expenses,"* said a participant from Mannar.

### **Lack of stable livelihood opportunities**

The lack of stable livelihood opportunities was another challenge acknowledged by most of the participants from all the study areas. The majority of the participants were employed in seasonal, menial labour or unprotected self-employment such as rearing chickens and goats, selling food items, or tailoring in a small scale. It seems that they find it difficult to continue with these kinds of opportunities. One participant who sold food items in Jaffna stated, *"People eat but do not pay. Then the money they owe me will increase to 1000 or 2000 rupees. Thereafter, we cannot do anything and we thought that it was good to stop and then stopped. Now my mother goes out to cook for another house and does other odd jobs."*

Poultry production was affected by frequent rain, hot weather, and infectious diseases. *"Yes, I had about 30 chickens. They all died during the rain last month. I gave them medicine and everything, but they all died,"* a woman from Kilinochchi stated.

Yet, the availability of alternative livelihood opportunities was limited due to lack of education, skills and training. A participant also from Kilinochchi admitted, *“We make only mixture snacks. I do the packing. Only if I make 1000 bags will I get 550 rupees. It’s hard, it’s not easy. Sometimes I have to bring it home and make it overnight.”* Most of the participants are reluctant to go outside of their area to work. Another negative impact of lack of income is the high school dropout rate and the neglect of children's education. Some of the participants preferred to send their male children to work in order to satisfy the basic needs. One participant from Vavuniya said, *“My eldest son left his studies at the age of 15 and I sent him for a job as a mechanic.”* Settling back loans was also another major issue the women faced due to insufficient income and unavailability of permanent livelihood opportunities. Some of the women have taken loans from banks or from financial institutions to rebuild or renovate their houses. It has further aggravated their economic vulnerability.

### **Housing and infrastructure challenges**

Along with the challenges in meeting food, medical, and children’s education needs, housing or a shelter is one of the most crucial challenges for the participants. Some participants are either house-less or land-less or live in a thatched hut or uncompleted or partly-constructed houses or in houses owned by their relatives, friends or unknown people. *“We are seven girls. A small house. It belongs to younger sister’s husband. We have been living like this. We have to leave this house by this December. I don’t have a residence. That’s the big problem to me and I’m getting tension by thinking a lot about the future,”* a participant from Jaffna noted. She also told further, *“If I had my own land I could do anything. If I had a house built with bricks, it’s enough for me.”*

Another participant when talking about poor housing said, *“We live close to the drainage. Our house is in low land. When it rains we face a water problem. My house leaks and water comes into the house.”* Similarly, another participant from Kilinochchi said, *“My house construction is still not completed, so, I am staying in the temporary shelter. I cannot say this is a secure one.”* *“We don’t even have a toilet in our home. We have to go to our sister’s house for that too,”* said a distressed participant from Jaffna.

Due to the lack of income, some of the participants were unable to rent individual house for their families. Therefore, those living with host families/relatives faced many issues. One participant from Vavuniya worried *“We struggled a lot when my daughter was doing her Advance Level. We don’t have a house of our own. We live in a rented house.”* Participants who live in the host families’ houses had to share common living halls, kitchens and even bedrooms. Some of the participants kept shifting their residences as they do not have a permanent house to stay and some participants in Jaffna had to live in dilapidated or collapsed buildings. A participant from Jaffna lamented, *“Yes, we lived in collapsed buildings. We did not have our own house, the house we lived in belonged to a Muslim family. Then they asked us to leave. Then we vacated the house. The houses belonging to Muslims were being repaired and they told us that it would not be good for Tamil people stay here. It would be better if we stayed in a place permanently rather than looking for houses and to be scolded.”* Participants from Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi had to borrow money from banks or pawn their jewellery to build their own houses. It was noticeable that even though most of the families were able to receive approximately Rs. 350,000 under the government’s housing scheme it was not sufficient to complete

their construction work due to frequently imposed price hikes on building materials and increased wages of workers. A participant from Mannar confirmed the point, *“It’s very difficult. I have nothing. Even the earrings have gone. We take loans from here and there to complete this house.”* Similarly, another participant from the same study location said, *“Yes, I borrow the jewellery from relatives or known people and pawn it because I have to finish the house. Now the loan is about 4 to 4 ½ lakhs.”*

### **Challenges with regard to health**

Information revealed that different health issues were prevalent among participants. Women talked about health issues in reference to physical and psychological challenges. Most agreed that diseases cannot be treated without sufficient income. A reasonable income among family members was seen as crucial to a well-functioning family.

Some of the participants mentioned that they suffer from different ailments like diabetes, blood pressure, knee pain, chest pain, stomach pain, back pain, heart disease, cholesterol, piles and respiratory disorders. Some participants who were injured during the last phase of the war in 2009 still live with pieces of explosive in their bodies. The women admitted that they happened to endure these adverse health/physical conditions due to their poor family background and could not neglect their family needs and as a breadwinner, looking after their children and dependents are their prime concern. It seems that they are helpless and unable to take any precautionary action to prevent these troublesome health issues due to lack of income and financial support. It was also found that performing multiple and unfamiliar responsibilities led to different kinds of health issues among the participants.

A participant from Jaffna who is involved in rolling *beedi* suffers respiratory issues due to inhaling tobacco leaf dust. *“Everyone tells that to avoid inhaling the dust. This work is on our own wish. No one compelled us to do this. So, if we went for a medical consultation, the doctor would ask why you we do this work knowing the effects it can have.”* Another participant from Jaffna who involved in cooking and suffering from diabetes and cholesterol worried that, *“Doctor advised me to reduce my walking here and there, avoid sitting in one place and working for a long time, and not to inhale dust. Even though I have cholesterol and diabetes, I decided to go for housework. Then I can earn more. I have a daughter and I have this illness. What else can I do?”* Another participant from the same study location suffered from hypertension: *“I am having blood pressure and doctor advised me not to think about it too much and refrain from hard work. Thereafter I reduced working. However, I went to do cultivation work three days after being discharged from the hospital. If I stay home who will give me money?”* A participant from Vavuniya who worked in a rice mill and suffered severe back pain said, *“Doctor advised me to give up my job because I was weak and I have to eat healthy foods to do that job. They gave me this advice because of the heavy work I did such as carrying heavy pails.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi disclosed, *“During the final war I got injured on my hand and neck. There is still a piece of explosive in my neck that could not be removed. So I can’t do anything. I can’t even move my hands. My hands are still swollen.”*

Some of the women have been diagnosed with mental health challenges as well but it appears that the affected participants do not receive regular medical attention due to unawareness of the importance of medication. *“When I was hospitalized last time,*

*they said I was affected mentally. I told them there are no persons in our descendant having mental issues. I discharged myself from the hospital by saying I don't have such issues. I didn't go to hospital thereafter.*" Another participant said, *"Now I am worried that my husband is mentally ill."* One participant from Mullaitivu district was concerned about her mother's health condition: *"I have to look after my mother because my mother had a surgery this morning; she had to remove the womb."* Another participant from Mannar who is looking after her sick mother stated, *"My mother is now bedridden and it's very difficult to look after her with my workload and house responsibilities."*

When prompted, participants talked at length about their children's health issues, with some immediately linking it to lack of income and difficulties of accessing treatment. The children experienced various health issues including urinary tract infection, mental retardation, difficulty in breathing, bed-wetting and physical injuries. Some of them suffered *from diseases* caused by genetic issues like impaired speech, physical disability and mental retardation. *"My elder daughter can't speak and I am extremely worried about her future,"* said a participant from Jaffna. Another from Jaffna also agonized over how to deal with her child's disability. *"My daughter is a differently abled child, has problems with her both legs, and cannot walk. She is sick as well."*

Women heads of households suffer without sufficient income or financial support to receive advanced medical care. They approach government officials and NGOs or individuals to obtain assistance. One participant from Jaffna stated, *"I have to buy medicine for my daughter every week from the pharmacy. She fell ill with a urine infection."*

## **Unfamiliar multiple responsibilities**

Performing multiple roles is one of the crucial challenges acknowledged by all of the participants. The complex and unaccustomed responsibilities included: income generating activities, preparing meals and cleaning the kitchen and utensils, taking care of children, washing clothes, attending school meetings, approaching aid agencies and government officials for assistance, helping children in their education and taking them to school and tuition classes and fetching them, cleaning the surroundings, and many other chores. Performing multiple tasks prevented them from being successful in income generating activities and forging relationships with others in their community. At times they found it difficult to look after their family members, including their children. *“I also worked in houses, when I supplied foods for the canteens. I gave powdered milk to my son as I was going out to work. I couldn’t breastfeed my son sufficiently. My eldest son left his studies at the age of 15. As I was also going for work, I could not look after him,”* said a participant from Vavuniya. Taking care of dependents, including injured persons, amputees, sick and elderly persons, was another widespread issue reflected in almost all the interviews. Since most of the participants’ families are nuclear structured, it was difficult for them to obtain support to share their household chores. A participant from Jaffna said, *“Since my husband goes to work, I have to cook for him early. I have to look after my children. Therefore, I do not go anywhere. I do not have anyone at home to help me to go to work. I have a differently-abled girl child. I do not like to leave her alone and go to work. My daughter has to go to the toilet often to urinate due to her illness. So I need to be with her. Therefore, I did not have a chance to leave her alone to go to work. I cannot go leaving her at home.”*

A participant from Vavuniya had decided to undertake multiple livelihood responsibilities in order to earn additional income for her children's education. *"I undertake a variety of work relating to horticulture, working in a rice mill, doing childcare, and washing utensils and cooking in shops or hotels. When I had stomach ache, I couldn't go to distant places for work. I stayed at home and supplied food items for canteens."* A participant from Kilinochchi who is tired of playing multiple roles, conceded that, *"Before the war, I was living with the help of my husband, but, now I am doing everything alone including looking after my children. I feel that now I am taking care of the responsibilities of my husband as well. I feel that I am playing a role as a mother and a father for my kids. I can't say my present status is strong, I am weak right now."*

### **Negative influence of patriarchal dominance**

In all districts, informants spoke extensively of the challenge of patriarchal dominance and its impact on their psychosocial domain. They experienced: men's sarcastic comments and jokes with double meanings in public places like markets or on roads; family members fabricating stories; relatives and members of the community, manipulating women's vulnerability to sexually abuse them; men visiting their houses without valid reasons and harassing women under the guise of helping. Friends and acquaintances also kept watch over women's personal contacts and activities. The women who head their households worried about possible blame or accountability for any misdemeanor that might occur.

When describing the ill treatment of community members, a participant from Jaffna anxiously divulged: *"Nine years ago I*

*got separated from my husband and have been listening to such stories. My neighbors told that I laughed at men like this and I have received money as well. My sister was in India and invited me to come over to India. I had to collect my passport so I hired a three-wheeler. I did not give him the three-wheeler charges immediately. I asked him whether I could give him the money when my brother deposited it. I would give the total amount then. Meanwhile would he come for hires, and he agreed. They spoke ill of me since we went like that. They cooked a story that we had an illegal connection and therefore he was travelling with me. His wife called me and scolded me with filthy words.”*

### **Violence of intimate partner and close relatives**

Intimate partner violence, stalking, and psychological aggression by a current or former spouse are common issues, which were frequently highlighted. The intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing injury or harm was a common type of violence encountered by participants. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to, slapping, punching, and hitting. Participants conceded that there was a repeating pattern of physical and psychological violence and it causes fear or concern for their own physical and mental safety or the safety of their children and family members. *“We lived together in my sister’s house. Then after six months, he started fighting. I came back. I again went with my husband a second time and stayed with him for another six months. After three years I joined him again but stayed only for six months. Again I had to fight with him because he did not earn for a living,”* said one participant from Jaffna. Women had to tolerate the violence inflicted by their husbands in order to protect their family prestige or for the future benefit of their children or

just to continue with their lives. A participant from Jaffna who tolerated her husband's violence for too long lamented, "*I have a girl child at the age of 16 and ready for marriage. So, I have to live under him if there would be any marriage proposals for her. The first thing to consider is family background. Not only that, I need to respond to thousands of questions from the people.*" Some violence include repeated beating and unwanted control over participants' activities and making phone calls when the participants do not want to be contacted or threatening them with physical harm. A participant from Jaffna who was restricted by her husband from getting involved in a livelihood initiative on her own acknowledged that, "*My husband doesn't like me to stand on my own feet. He doesn't want me to do something on my own and be separated from him.*" Another participant from Mannar faces similar challenges: "*My husband doesn't like me going out. Not even to shops. He only goes.*" Some partners are not physically abusive but they are suspicious over the behavior of the spouses of women who head their households and this led to many challenges in their day-to-day lives. This situation is reflected in the following statement made by a woman from Kilinochchi: "*My husband started quarrelling for every single rumour about me. Problems arose between us as he believed what the villagers were talking about me and he went back to Qatar. I let him go and I have been on my own since then.*" Some women concurred that their husbands are really barriers that prevent them from becoming actively involved in livelihood activities.

It was noticeable that the participants were restricted from forging contacts for their personal needs and obtaining support from different stakeholders due to fear stemming from patriarchal dominance. A participant from Jaffna was compelled to restrict

her business to customers visiting her doorstep to buy her products and hesitated to expand it: *“People talk about us that we are going here and there, and attack our reputation. Therefore, we sell our products only to those who come to our doorstep, avoiding bad names from the people.”*

In addition to the intimate partner violence, a number of other factors were also raised by informants with regard to difficulties and concerns with the patriarchal system. A woman from Mullaitivu described her violence inflicted on her by her father-in-law: *“Last time I went there to see my daughter, my father-in-law beat me up and kicked me out. Since then, I go to her school to see her.”* Another participant also depicted a similar experience: *“One of my husband’s elder brothers assaulted me once with a big stick. I was hospitalized. They said that there was a fracture in my vertebral column and I needed to do surgery in Colombo. I haven’t done that surgery yet as I want to stay with my children until my death.”* A participant revealed her younger brother’s violence on her: *“I was going through the worst time of my live. I struggled a lot with my younger brother. Last year, he forced me to lend him 800,000 rupees. I went to the police. So one day he barged into the house and broke the windows and shattered the light bulbs. My son was sitting for the scholarship exam, so I had to stay somewhere else. I went through a lot because of him. He brought a big knife once, I was so afraid.”* Another participant from Jaffna had a similar experience: *“A woman living close by once stormed into my house with some men and wrongly accused me for having an illegal relationship with her husband. The men beat me up mercilessly and scolded me in malicious language in front of my children and neighbors.”*

Though it was not a common issue, some participants acknowledged that their children also have to endure physical violence of their fathers. *My husband attacked my son with a knife his wounds required five sutures at the hospital,*" said a woman from Jaffna. Given these experiences, intimate partner violence was the most crucial issue acknowledged by a majority of the participants. They believed that they are powerless before patriarchal domination and its impact and they decided to continue their lives amid all the serious psychosocial challenges inflicted on them.

### **Sexual and verbal harassment**

Participants in many instances admitted to the dilemma of sexual violence and associated issues like sexual harassment. Blood relatives like father, other men living around them, and some service providers caused sexual abuse on women and their children, especially on their female children. Men were accused of coercing the women to exchange sex for a favour such as lending money or doing some work for them. However, the incidents of child abuse by their fathers were not a common issue. When talked about the prevalence of parental child sexual harassment, a participant from Jaffna disclosed a painful experience: *"My husband abused our eldest daughter twice. Yes, I know. She can't speak and she was only six years old then. Due to this I separated from him."* When probing into sexual harassment inflicted by other men on children, a participant who works outside her home in Mannar leaving her two girl children alone does so in fear: *"There was no electricity at home. I finish work by 8.30 p.m. Children say that they are scared because people were peeping through the fence. Some men even peep when my girls are having a bath. My children's underwear goes missing. I have a fear within me to leave the children alone."*

Another woman going out for work said, *“It's common for men to make fun of us, whether we are married or not, when we go to work we have to face those problems. We cannot say there are no issues.”* Another participant from Mullaitivu was quiet upset with the men in her neighbourhood: *“There are some men in the village who verbally harass me and try to cross the line”*. She also talked about an incident of harassment caused by her neighbours: *“When I was building the house I needed some money urgently. I asked someone and he asked me what favour I could do to him in exchange for money.”* Another participant from the same study location revealed the harassment of an insurance salesman: *“They call me on the phone and ask me to sleep with them at least once. Once there was an insurance guy who wanted to do the insurance for my daughter. He got my number and called me one day and harassed me.”*

Patriarchal influences affected the participants adversely and restricted them from seeking support from outsiders or public servants even for an emergency. A participant from Mannar said, *“As I don't have a land I went to register for land at Land Registration Department. The officer in-charge, who is a married man and a father, took our number. Then he started calling officially. Later, his attitude changed. He started to call in the nights. He said he remembers me if he closes his eyes. Then I stopped answering his calls, I gave up the land matter too. Then a new officer came to that post. He also behaved in the same manner. He said he has a land. I can live there. I refused and said you need not to give me land and walked out. Then I gave up that too. I missed a land which is allocated by the government for people like us due to this.”*

In addition to physical violence, participants raised issues on verbal abuse. A participant from Mannar who endured her husband's verbal abuse said, *"He is suspicious about everyone. No one is left. He is suspicious even about the relationship I have with my brothers. I tolerated that too. Finally, he said that I have relationship between me and my son, when my son was only nine years old, and I decided to leave him."* A Muslim participant from Jaffna also spoke about her husband's verbal abuse: *"Sometimes if I go and work outside home, he would say that I'm going out to work, I'm an immoral woman. How can I bear that?"*

An informant from Mullaitivu said, *"I am afraid to sleep in my own house at night. I used to be harassed over the phone several times. I had to change my sim card three times. But I am still afraid that people may harass me. So, I go to my aunt's house to sleep at night. People will speak even if someone comes to my house for nothing."* A participant from Jaffna also admitted that she faced verbal harassment from men in her area: *"There are men in our area to make fun on us, whether we are married or not, when we go to work. We have to face those problems. We cannot say there are no issues."* A participant from Mannar who suffered harassment of men in her neighbourhood said, *"When we go out alone, and when men inquire and know that the woman is single, they pass comments and follow us I have suffered. I came home and cry. They continuously follow. Some say get into the three-wheeler, we will drop you and many wanted to drop me home."*

## Challenges with regard to sexuality

Another negative impact of patriarchal dominance, which was discussed by participants on many occasions, is the challenge with regard to sexuality. Some women who head their households and young married girls were vulnerable to violence and unwanted pregnancy. Neighbours and relatives talked ill of participants who had extramarital affairs. Extramarital affairs were also found to be an issue, which challenged their social status. Some of the participants agreed that they had extra marital affairs and illegitimate children. This is directly and indirectly increased the vulnerability of women and their children. A participant from Jaffna who is married to an already married man said, *“I married a man. He is a Muslim but I am Tamil. He has a family with three children. Many people talked ill of me.”* A participant from Mullaitivu conceded that she was harassed via phone due to her lack of concern about using a mobile phone with care. *“I am naïve. When someone asks me my phone to make a call I give them my phone, so they get my number. They call me and talk unnecessarily.”* Another participant who gave birth to a boy due an extramarital affair said, *“Yes, my last son is not my husband’s but my cousin’s and he didn’t force me or anything. This happened because of me. It was my fault.”* Another participant who had a love affair with a young boy who is three years younger to her said, *“A boy who was three years younger to me helped us. He was good to my parents also. And soon the villagers got to know about the love. Slowly it became a huge issue in the village. Then the villagers started to believe in the rumor.”*

Another challenge was the fact that some young women failed to recognize the possible negative consequences of their social

interactions. *“Whenever I go out people don’t believe that I am married. They ask for my phone number and ask me to speak with them. I have a lot of problems like that in the society. Sometimes, if I like then I will give my phone number or talk with them even if they don’t like.”* Loneliness and immaturity are two key factors. Another young participant said, *“I will talk over the phone but will not have any physical contact.”*

### **Ill-treatment by community members**

Talking ill of participants was another practice related to the harmful influence of patriarchy. Malicious and sarcastic comments and fabricating stories about women’s behaviour were common issues reported by participants from all of the study areas. Even their family members and close relatives talked ill of them. One participant from Kilinochchi said, *“If I go outside alone, they are thinking about me in a different way. Even if I go out for my work, they talk like I go and meet other males. However, I never go the way that they talk. Even my mother-in-law fabricated a story about me.”* Another participant from the same study location stated, *“People used to talk badly about me if I happen to talk with anyone. I talk to people secretly. They accuse me of having relationships with people who are older than me or even younger than me. But they don’t mind if my father or my brother does something like this. Society keeps sharing rumours. They ask why is she talking to this person for so long? They say she has an illicit relationship with that person.”* A participant from Jaffna also conceded a similar experience: *“They would speak ill of me. When we go out, sometimes we laugh with known people, which may be turned into other stories. Because of this, we have to stay at home.”* A Muslim woman who faced lots of issues in working

outside her home due to patriarchal influences said, *“Those who are not married can work but Muslims will not allow it. They say that you have attained puberty so do not go out and keep us inside the house. This has been a tradition.”* Another Muslim participant who was ill-treated by neighbours said, *“If I lived alone all will misunderstand me. If I go anywhere, all will look at me with a skewed eye. They will come with questions. I have to face these types of people and problems.”*

### **Negative consequences of patriarchal domination**

Patriarchal dominance was the most destructive experience, which challenged the well being of the participants. Most of the women admitted that patriarchal cultural practices are the key obstacles to their social development. The issues that participants endured included: intimate partner violence, receiving sarcastic comments and double meaning jokes in public places, being the subject of gossip and fabricated stories, and people creating problems under the guise of helping even knowing their vulnerable family situations. Given these experiences, intimate partner violence was the most crucial issue acknowledged by a majority of the participants. They had to tolerate the violence inflicted by their husbands, male siblings or any other male relatives in order to protect their family prestige or for the future benefit of their children or just to continue with their lives.

### **Negligence of the law enforcement apparatus**

Crimes and violence against women were overlooked by responsible officials. Due to the absence of a strong legal system against the perpetrators, the affected women were not delivered justice and the number of incidents increased. There was an accusation of

discriminatory approaches practiced by the police officials with regard to abuse cases and family disputes. The participants believed that they are discriminated against and those officers did not actively function to find a remedy to their grievances. Their state of vulnerability prevented them from talking about this to others. They were afraid of aggravating their existing susceptible condition.

A participant from Jaffna who was severely affected by intimate partner violence and lost her faith in the police stated: *“When I went to the police station to lodge a complaint, there were some old complaints also against him. Then he also created problems for my children and my family. But the, police did not take strict action against him.”* She further described: *“My son was beaten up by his father and my son got beaten by the police.”* When talking about her bitter experience one participant from the same study location said, *“If you ask me about the police station, I would say going there would be in vain. I faced a lot of problems when I went to the police station. At last, I received nothing”*. Another participant who got humiliated by the police in Mannar said, *“I was afraid that they are not being respectful towards us. I am from a village and sometimes they treat us like we are small, you know . . . sometimes they say that oh you are from that women’s organization and things like that. Even other people say that to us sometimes. Mostly police say things like that.”*

A participant from Vavuniya who was unsatisfied with police action against her husband regarding a transaction, said, *“My mother-in-law’s brother disputed with my husband due to this transaction and he went to the police station. The police warned my husband to give the money to me. However, since then, he*

*disappeared. Therefore, I couldn't get the money.” Another participant from the same study location had a similar experience: “If I go to a police station, they will keep the perpetrator in judicial custody for sometimes and then they will release him. He will do the same thing again after the release.” Yet another participant from Vavuniya spoke about the difficulties she faced with the police and her longing for justice: “I went to the Nanaattan camp and inquired about my husband. They told me that his name was not on the list and instructed me to lodge a complaint at Mannar police station. In the police station no one paid enough attention to me.”*

Lack of income and limited livelihood initiatives in the post-conflict scenario and the slim possibility of effective support from both governmental and nongovernmental organizations are the main impediments, which lead to the multifaceted challenges faced by the participants. The women who head households are compelled to scrape out a living that might meet their essential needs but holds no guarantee for the future.

### **Psychological challenges endured by the Participants**

This section describes the immediate and long-term psychological challenges encountered by the women who head their households in a post-conflict scenario. In this section, trauma inflicted by armed conflict and incidents associated to it, cognitive dissonance, social stigma attached to women's current status and social role, stress with multiple and unfamiliar responsibilities, a feeling of being controlled by host family members, and the challenges of emotional immaturity are discussed.

## **Trauma inflicted by deaths and disappearances of family members, relatives, and collective loss of community members**

Most of the participants have witnessed the deaths or separation of their husbands, children, parents, siblings, relatives and others who were living around them during the war. Their family members and relatives were arrested, surrendered to the military, or found dead/subjected to forcible disappearances. Nobody knew what happened to the persons disappeared who included children, women and elderly persons. Participants and their family members suffered severe emotional pain and its negative consequences due to loss of their loved ones. They have been enduring extreme guilt for being unable to cope with their emotional pain and continued looking for their loved ones who were missing. Participants who managed to escape the unfolding human tragedy were separated from their family members and communities, sometimes never to be seen again, and lost all their belongings and assets. It's believed that distressing memories could be changed over time depending on life conditions. However, this is always a challenge among the participants. It was also noticeable that deaths and disappearances were more common among the Vanni participants compared to people from the other districts. When describing her heart-breaking experience, a participant from Jaffna stated, *“My husband was wounded in a shell attack and injured near the lungs during the final battle. He was barely alive for half an hour only with no medicines or treatment available. He was speaking with us for a while and died because of blocked breathing.”* Another participant from Jaffna who lost her mother, considered to be a brave and kind woman and believed to have been killed by an unidentified armed group, recalled her dreadful memories and

said, *“When we heard the firing sound, we just came out of the house to see that it was our mother. Her brain was outside of the head. She did not do any wrong to anyone. She loved everyone like herself. She helped all. She was never afraid of anything. Even if men made a mistake, she would punish them to change them.”*

A participant from Kilinochchi recollected her horrendous memories on her daughter who went missing and the challenges she faced in providing treatment for her daughter’s illness: *“We almost lost our daughter during the mass displacement. She was lost in the camp when she was nine. She was separated into a different camp with her grandmother while she had chicken pox. We thought she was going to die. It was very hard to get food or medical services. It was really hard, and it is hard to explain the struggle.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi had a similar experience: *“There were times we starved and lost my children in the crowd, it was all so emotionally scarring for us. We even lost my father in-law in the crowd. He is not yet found. We searched for him for years and he hasn’t come back yet, so I believe he is dead. We lost so much not only him and the properties as well, but a lot more than that.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi spoke about the forcible conscription of her son by the LTTE: *“My son went missing. The younger one went with the church itself. We all were hoping that the church would save him. However, the church people said my son was taken by the LTTE.”* A participant from Kilinochchi who lost her two sons and husband is struggling to meet her family’s daily needs: *“If there wasn’t a war, I wouldn’t have lost my husband and sons. My two sons would have looked after me well. Why are we in this situation? My sons would have been income earners and they would have definitely looked*

*after me in a better way.”* Another participant from the same location had still not received any financial compensation from the government for her son’s death: *“For the past seven years not even a cent was given for my son’s loss. I have gone to so many places, each time they record something but nothing happens.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi who lost her husband and faced challenges in protecting her children and cattle, and was unable go out to work leaving her children behind said, *“I do not have any one to help at home. So I have to be at home. I have to protect my daughters. I can have cattle or goats. But, there are lots of thieves. If there is a man in the house, no one would dare to come. There is a difference in a house where there is a man and a house without a man.”*

### **Multiple displacements and its repercussions**

The unpleasant experience of multiple displacements of participants since 1990 ensued in emotional distress. It was a common phenomenon that people had to flee from one place to another during continuous fighting and heavy bombardment. People embarked on their deadly journey with their valuable belongings and ended up with nothing. They were deprived of food, medical assistance, drinking water and a proper place to sleep. The devastating armed conflict left them empty-handed and they had a feeling of incompleteness. Their entire hard-earned investments were destroyed during the last battle. All of the participants’ experiences were alike in this regard. One participant from Mullaitivu evoked her upsetting memories: *“We were displaced many times when we sought protection from shelling and aerial strikes. Many of us witnessed deaths, and starved for many days with our children. We had to hide in the hastily prepared safety*

*bunkers. We did not even have an extra dress to change. It is really a pity to think about our past memories.”*

A participant from Jaffna described multiple displacements: *“First, we were displaced from Maviddapuram in 1989 and stayed in Suthumalai and then moved to Thavady. We stayed until 1996 there. Finally in 1996, we went to Visuvamadu in Mullaitivu. We were living in Vanni from 1996 up to the final war in 2009. Then we were sent by the military to the Vavuniya refugee camp and we stayed there for around three months. After that, they brought us to Jaffna. They handed us over us to the Jaffna Divisional Secretariat. After that we stayed in Manippai at our elder brother’s house for one year. After one year we rented a house and stayed there for two years. Finally we came here.”*

Participants invariably recollected the devastating consequences of multiple displacements. This was perceived to be an obvious reason for their current situation. One Jaffna participant, who experienced multiple displacements since 1990, explained, *“My mother would take us from place to place. She brought us to Colombo and then took us to Puttalam. I did not know where else she took us when we were kids.”* Some of them had to stop their education or were compelled to get married due to constant displacement. One participant from Jaffna said, *“While studying for my O/L examination, my mother took us to Anuradhapura because she wanted to go abroad. She left us at our aunt’s house. I had to marry because my aunty did not look after us properly. Then we came back to Jaffna.”* Similarly, another woman who stopped going to school due to multiple displacements said, *“I was born in 1989 and displaced in 1990 and left school in 1998 after studying up to grade 9. Another Kilinochchi participant who lost all her belongings and valuables said, “We have lost*

*everything due to the war and displacement. I think in 1996 we lost everything. Even our clothes. We just ran with whatever we were wearing.”*

Another participant from Kilinochchi with similar experience explained: *“We lost everything and we started from zero to get where we are now. We would have had a better life if we didn’t have to be displaced at least.”* One participant described how her family lost their belongings and valuables: *“We took most of the things with us on a tractor to one place, when we moved from that place to another we took the things by a land master and by cycle to another place. When we finally went in to the army controlled area we were only able to take things in a plastic bag—mostly documents and things like that, not even knickers for my children.”*

The participants refrained from reminiscing about the enjoyable moments of their past. Most of them worried about their present living conditions and social status, were pessimistic about their lives, and had negative thoughts. The challenges they currently face make them unsure about their future. They believed that the harassment and violence inflicted on them was due to anomic social situations created by the war. Most of the affected women are still pessimistic of their ability to lead a meaningful life.

Most of the women who head households are young and they are unable to properly respond to different situations. They usually do not have the ability to recognize the coping strategies needed to deal with their emotions and they are also unaware of that. In their case, basically, their behaviours are controlled by their emotions. They do not know how to efficiently control their feelings and safe guard themselves. They are simply trapped and their age may be

one of the major reasons. However, it may be, they are not prepared to learn from their past experiences. Some of the girls are subject to multiple sexual abuse and pregnancy. The unsatisfied sexual need is a problem among the women who head households as they belong to a very young age group. They do not even talk about that since it is a taboo in our traditional society. However the negative impact of sexual problems and suppressed sexual needs reflect on their day-to-day lives.

### **Summary of findings on psychosocial challenges**

The findings revealed that the social challenges faced by women who head households include lack of income, multiple and unaccustomed responsibilities, health issues, patriarchal dominance, sexual harassment by men in general, the negative implications of sexuality, new communication tools, especially mobile phones, being abused for the purpose of sexual coercion, and negligence of officials and law enforcement apparatuses.

As for psychological challenges, the participants acknowledged that they experienced trauma inflicted by the death and disappearance of family members and relatives or the community due to constant and prolonged displacements. The findings also showed social stigma and stress with multiple responsibilities and emotional immaturity.

### **Strategies adopted by women who head households to cope with psychosocial challenges**

The findings showed that participants had adopted various strategies to handle the psychosocial challenges created by the

complete destruction of their family and social life. The views of participants are presented as they were expressed. The strategies that adopted fell into two major categories—thought processes and sets of activities. These two categories are predominantly emerging from the theories of Coping Strategy, Community Empowerment and Adjustment.

## **6. Social coping strategies**

Social coping strategies are presented under two main categories: survival strategies, and strategies adopted to triumph over patriarchal dominance and sexual harassment in the Sri Lankan post-conflict scenario. Survival strategies consist of resorting to formal resources and informal resources.

### **Strategies adopted by women who head households to cope with livelihood challenges**

Coping strategies adopted by women who head their households to manage survival challenges are mainly categorized into two aspects: informal resources and formal resources. Under informal strategies, support obtained from family and relatives, traditional labour, menial labour and child labour have been discussed. The formal strategies included: receiving support from the government, non-government sector and non-governmental individuals.

### **Resorting to informal strategies to cope with survival challenges**

The informal resources resorted to by the participants to deal with their survival challenges include agriculture and menial labour, sending their children to work, borrowing money, and making use of traditional resources to enhance their livelihood.

### **Multiple livelihoods as an informal survival strategy**

To supplement the household income they took up various initiatives including poultry and goat rearing; cooking and selling food items; making garlands; beauty culture; household work; menial labour; selling margosa chips (*vadakam*), snacks like mixture, patty, tapioca chips, fried and salted peanuts and fryums; selling dried fish; collecting and selling coconuts; vegetable cultivation; sewing; rolling *beedis*; going abroad for work; and making palmayrah leaf mats and palm products like candy and crafts.

Some women helped fishermen separate/segregate fish and sell them. They also helped clean the boats. In order to expand their livelihood, they prepared a variety of edible items and adopted different strategies to sell their products among fishermen. It was also observed that some of them opted to send their children to work at mechanic shops, for fishing or daily wage work and participants also obtain their children's support in livelihood activities and household chores. A participant from Jaffna who engaged in multi livelihood tasks elucidated, "*I grow crops such as onion, chilli and paddy cultivation. I am doing it myself without hiring labourers. I have taken the land on lease to do cultivation. I am doing this from the time I separated from my husband. I have done cultivation previously, so I managed to do it. If I have free time I would work as an agricultural labourer.*" Similarly, when talking about her multiple livelihood activities, another participant from Jaffna said, "*I farm poultry, do some sewing; make flower garlands and "Gowri Kaappu" thread (A religious thread worn on the hand).*" Performing multiple livelihood tasks is a common phenomenon acknowledged by the participants from

other study locations as well. One Kilinochchi participant said, *“I sell grocery items sometimes. Then I work as a labourer on a daily income basis. I know all the work. I can cook. I go to cut grass. It was only after we were resettled that I started poultry farming.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi who sent her children to work and performs livelihood activities at home stated *“I raise cattle, before that I did poultry rearing, but all the birds died because of disease. My son and daughter are working. That is how we are running our lives.”*

Some participants are skilful in handicraft such as knitting mat box (Jaffna), making thalikody (Mannar), making garlands (Jaffna) and sewing handbags with banana fibre. It was also observed that some of participants (Kilinochchi) are able to make dresses and prepare food and snacks such as mixture in a large scale and provide employment opportunities to others as well. A participant from Mullaitivu makes concrete posts and blocks and sells them to building contractors. Another participant from Mannar works as a handicrafts trainer. However, the results show that the most common practice among the participants is getting involved in agricultural and daily labour.

### **Traditional resources as a positive measure of livelihood**

Some of the women heads of household are generously supported by their family members in many ways, including by the provision of material support and support for their livelihood activities, considerably reducing their financial burden. They receive physical support from their parents, siblings, relatives and people living around them. They receive money to start their livelihoods, educate and provide treatment to their children, and build or repair their houses. Some of the respondents involved in preparing foodstuffs

received support from their parents especially from their mothers, siblings and children. The demand and the market for their products are promising since these items are quite popular among the locals. Their products are mostly fast-moving in nature and involve traditional techniques. Participants representing different study locations admitted that their family members and relatives were very supportive and helpful in many ways. A participant from Jaffna said, *“We were under our elder sister’s caretaking for three years. Her husband was pretty good. He looked after us. Then he too was killed in a shell attack after two years of our sister’s marriage. After that, she didn’t get married again as she wanted to look after us.”* Another participant from Jaffna had a similar experience: *“My first elder sister is a person who faced all difficulties. The second elder sister too helped us a bit. She was separated from her husband. The younger sister also got married and she also helps my family in many ways.”* One participant who was financially and physically supported by her friend said, *“It was difficult at that time. I brought cosmetic items from the shops and sold them. My friend paid regularly. She also cooked for me every day. She was very helpful.”* A participant from Jaffna whose mother and aunt are very encouraging and thoughtful of her livelihood activities and the well-being of her children acknowledged their support: *“As I have children, I cannot go for outside work. My mother and aunt stay with me and assist us. So I do all these income-generating activities at home. I don’t have problems. If I go outside, my mother and aunt will cut fodder and feed the goats.”* Another participant from Mannar recollects her mother’s support: *“My mother grinds and sells flour. She cooked for orders. My mother sold dried fish at the beginning. Later she started to deal with Indian business people. She supported me financially.”* One participant remembers her

neighbour's generosity: *“My husband sometimes goes for work. Sometimes we eat, sometimes we don't. Known people would give something to eat when we don't cook meals at home. We manage with that.”* An Islamic priest supported a participant by meeting the costs of her daughter's medical treatment: *“I approached a Moulavi from our area mosque and he pledged a small monthly financial donation for her medical needs.”*

Another participant who manages her daily needs with the support of a pensioner currently staying with her said, *“This old man is with me for five years. He is receiving a pension. I managed my household needs with his payment of 5000 rupees.”* Another participant who receives support from her mother said, *“My mother also supports me. My brothers provide for my mother. Since I have a small child, my mother helps me from what she earns.”*

### **Learning a livelihood by themselves or from an individual/organization**

Most of the participants are involved in traditional livelihood activities and they learnt them either on their own or from someone from their family or neighbourhood. They prudently make use of indigenous recourses to initiate a new livelihood or enhance the existing one. Some participants conceded that their living condition and serious economic challenges compelled them to learn a livelihood on their own or with others' support. NGOs or GOs also provided them with opportunities to get them trained in various livelihood tasks including bridal makeup, sewing, making handicrafts, and computer skills. A participant from Jaffna who learnt how to roll *beedi* on her own said, *“It was by observing the*

*others who roll beedi at home. Because of poverty we all learnt this by observing. My younger sister, elder sister and other sisters we all did it.”* Similarly, another participant from Jaffna) stated, *“My mother sews. My mother looked after us by making money from sewing. I learned from her. Even now, she is the one who cuts the material for us to sew.”* Making garlands is one of the multiple livelihood tasks performed by another participant from Jaffna: *“I learned making garlands at school by myself while studying. During day time, my mother would pluck flowers needed for garlands and showed me how to make garlands at home. I also learnt how to make “gowry kappu” when we were living at the house near the temple. I am doing this as a source of income after shifting here.”* A participant from Mannar who became a trained teacher in making handicrafts said, *“I had to earn. Then, we were staying in the Madu camp. My mother can do handicrafts. I learnt from her then learnt some extra skills from a teacher at the Madu camp. Then they wanted to train the girls in the Madu camp. They had an interview. I came first. So they appointed me as a teacher.”* Another participant from Mannar cuts and styles the hair of the poorest people for free and makes cakes as a part-time income generation task: *“I learnt making icing cakes from my sister when I was 13. And, I learnt how to do hairstyle from a friend. I learnt it for free. I didn't do it for money. Still I do it for the poorest. But free.”*

### **Resorting to formal strategies to cope with survival challenges**

The formal resources participants opted to use to deal with survival challenges include receiving support from the governmental and non-governmental organizations and financial entities. Different

programmes implemented to support war-affected women were the frequent focal points of the interviews. *“We do not get the work every day. Only if there is work we go. The rest of the days are very hard. We use to pawn earrings at banks. Then redeem and then pawn. We are managing like that”*. Another participant who took a loan from a private entity said, *“I took a 50,000 loan for the business from the LOC bank for 15 months. So far I have paid five months.”* One participant who took a loan for poultry said, *“I took a Rs. 5,000 loan and in the coming month I should pay 2000 and 100 interest and it’s useful that way. When the chicks lay eggs, I will be able to pay back”*. One Kilinochchi participant said, *“I took a loan and struggle very much to repay. I feel that no one is struggling as much as I am, right now. However, I engage in rearing hens. I would pay back once I sell them.”* Another participant said, *“I took 40,000.00 rupees from a bank. “It is for business. I gave this loan money to my brother-in-law, who takes care of us. Every day he gives me 200 or 300 rupees for the loan repayment. I save the money and every Tuesday I pay the instalment.*

### **Progressing with NGO support**

Some women without any relatives’ support have achieved a respectable social position because of their dedication and hard work, with minimal support from NGOs. They also engage in small-scale home-based products like poultry and goatery. The women who head households sold their products and used them for their household’s consumption as well. Therefore, they were able to give their children nutritious food like milk and eggs. They had to put forth their best effort to compete with men and maintain its sustainability. Almost every participant was the

recipient of *pichaisampalam* (Public Assistance of Monthly Allowance—PAMA) worth Rs. 500 a month. However, it was not worth their time to claim it because they had to travel far to claim it from the Department of Social Services. Most of the participants were also receiving *a monthly financial assistance from the Samurdhi* programme. They borrow money from their relatives, siblings or friends to meet their needs. Some of them pawned their gold ornaments and jewellery and redeemed them once they received some income. Though they did not like to be in debt, their family situation forced them to borrow money. They preferred not to borrow an amount of money that exceeded their repaying capacity.

### **Strategies adopted to combat patriarchal dominance**

In this section, coping strategies adopted by women who head households to deal with sexual harassment and patriarchal dominance are presented. To combat sexual harassment, participants adopted strategies based on their individual abilities. These include avoiding contact/interactions with men, using cultural measures as a buffer, being prepared to face any adverse situations, and having relationships with men out of wedlock.

### **Avoidance as a strategy of combating harassment**

Women who head their households avoided talking to strangers, officials or even with men living in their neighbourhood. Though they maintained a healthy relationship with the neighbourhood women, they were cautious with the men. Strong family ties also helped them to ward off sexual harassment. Women who are economically independent were not affected and they normally

refrained from interacting with unknown men. They built a virtual safety zone around them to avoid interference from the outside men. In some cases, with their family members' support, the participants were able to challenge traditional barriers that limited their mobility. Some of the women have extra-marital relationships with men. They sometimes maintained this to protect themselves from sexual harassment from other men living around them.

### **Using negative experiences as a strategy for empowerment**

The war, displacements and their negative experiences and the appalling impact of patriarchal domination have considerably strengthened the resolve of the participants in many ways. It seems that women who head households are able to lead a meaningful life and make an effort to improve their present economic, social and psychological condition amid all the challenges they are faced with. They admitted that they are prepared to face even more challenges due to the constant changes taking place in their lives. A participant from Kilinochchi stated, *“I have gained so much confidence. You can put us anywhere and through any kind of situation, and we will survive. We can get through all of it and survive. I think that’s what the war experiences have taught us.”* Another participant from Mannar also spoke of a similar experience: *“Displacement must have been a bad thing for some people, but for me it has taught me many lessons and I have learnt a lot about human beings. My husband left me. However, his presence and absence are the same. There's no problem. I had the thirst for knowing and learning.”* Similarly, another participant from Kilinochchi also felt the same way: *“Sometimes I feel like we have more things to do than men. But most of the*

*time I am so happy that I am a woman.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi who got empowered by a self-help group stated, *“We gather every Sunday at 4 at my house under this tree. We talk about everything, we share our happiness, sorrows and everything and we save money as well.”* In the same way, another participant from Kilinochchi) said, *“We have formed little groups in this village with people who are victims, abandoned, elderly and needy. Her small group has 20 members and I am the secretary. We divided ourselves into different groups to do different things. Even last month, I went to Kandy for a workshop and received a certificate.”* Another participant from Kilinochchi involved in social activism said, *“If there are children who are not going to school, we will meet their families and talk with them. If there is intimate partner violence or domestic abuse we would meet and talk about that and take it to someone who can help.”* Another participant from Mullaitivu who was pregnant when her husband died of shelling and didn't have moral support *“There was no husband and even mother died as well. My brothers also got married. I have a differently-able child. I wanted to die. But I thought why should I die? I had strong confidence that I could earn for my living. And I was pregnant. I thought of the unborn baby and changed my mind”.* Some participants performed much better than earlier even though their husbands or partners tended to be violent and unsupportive. Most of them are not discouraged by these difficulties and work single mindedly to overcome the challenges. Another participant from Jaffna who also bravely tackles her husband stated, *“I have to face these types of people and problems. If I listen to these gossips I have to sit on a corner and have to cry. But, I won't do like that. I have to bring up my daughter without considering my husband's words. So, I'll come out bravely for my daughter.”* When talking about the way she

tackled men after her husband became disabled by the war a participant from Mullaitivu said, *“I do not accommodate any men in the house, so no one really talks negatively about me. Since my husband is sick we do not allow men in the house, my mother is helpful in that.”*

### **Coping strategies adopted in relation to the behavioural domain**

Almost all of the participants are focused on and predominantly occupied with their household responsibilities. The overburden and constant involvement in household chores made them mentally engaged. Most of the participants accepted that their day-to-day life is flooded with multiple responsibilities. In the beginning, their parents and relatives were taking care of these families and they had enough time to grieve. Now, the tendency is completely different and it would be difficult for them to find time to worry about what happened.

## **7. Conclusion**

Three decades of protracted armed confrontation resulted in deaths from all three major ethnic groups, displacement of persons, and devastation of infrastructure mainly in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. It has also created a new social phenomenon called women who head their households. This new vulnerable community includes households with family leaders who were killed, disappeared, physically or mentally disabled, and in rehabilitation institutions and detention camps.

The research study found that the war-affected women who head their households endured different challenges including lack of

income and limited livelihood opportunities, problems inflicted by patriarchal dominance, and discriminatory policies and practices. They also adopted some coping strategies to handle with the social and psychological challenges. The support which was provided by the government entities and non-state actors to them was not sufficient and not much appropriate. With the problems of inefficient support and inadequate policies and practices to improve the quality of life of women who head their households, they faced challenges within the households, from their relatives and neighbours. They were marginalized in many ways and their problems remained unfocused. All these factors caused a perilous situation in their social lives since their psychosocial well-being was ignored and challenged.

Although the government is expected to be the principal actor in enhancing the psychosocial well-being of women who head their households, its role has largely been downplayed and women who head their households could not receive any sustainable support from the government to restore their lives. The government was only liable to providing livelihood support, which was insignificant. Since the psychological challenges and protracted grievances were acknowledged as crucial issues, it is the government's responsibility to take appropriate measures to empower the affected women psychologically and motivate relevant stakeholders to promote the mental well-being of the war-affected women. It is, therefore, the government's responsibility to reduce the presence of the military and create an environment without fear in order for women to be better involved in livelihood and social activities.

To restore their psychosocial well-being and lead a sufficiently good social life the women heads of households require effective support, including material and knowledge empowerment/sensitization from the government, NGOs, and the international community. Furthermore, an intervention model also has to be proposed to highlight the potential roles that could be played by various stakeholders, including GOs, NGOs, non-governmental individuals, religious institutions, the community and the Tamil diaspora to alleviate the negative impact of the psychosocial challenges faced by this community.

### **The role of host communities**

It's the responsibility of the host communities to accept women who head their households and their children instead of humiliating them because of the stigma attached to their social status. The impact of patriarchal influence and cultural norms heavily affected these women's personal affairs. The personal conduct and the daily activities of women who head their households were closely watched by men and women living in their neighbourhood and sarcastic comments were passed on them. The host/own communities should realize their responsibilities and embrace these women and their children without discriminating against them. Mainstreaming former fighters and their families and empowering men to respect the women would in turn greatly contribute to women's recuperation and empowerment in a post-war scenario.

## References

- Abdullah, M. C., H. Elias, J. Uli, and R. Mahyuddin. 2010. "Relationship between coping and university adjustment and academic achievement amongst first year undergraduates in a Malaysian Public University." *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 3(11), 379-392.
- Adams, R. 2003. *Social work and empowerment*. Palgrave: Macmillan.
- Aoláin, F. N. 2011. *Women, vulnerability, and humanitarian emergencies*. Mich. J. Gender & L., 18, 1.
- Association for Women's Rights in Development (Canada). 2011. *The status of war widows in Sri Lanka: A fact finding report*. Retrieved from [http://www.sangam.org/2011/08/Status\\_Widows.php](http://www.sangam.org/2011/08/Status_Widows.php).
- Chambers, R. and J. Blackburn. 1996. *The power of participation: PRA and policy*. IDS policy briefings. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton. Retrieved from <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/briefs/brief7.html>
- Caligiuri, P. M., M.A.M. Hyland, A. Joshi, and A.S. Bross. 1998. "Testing a theoretical model for examining the relationship between family adjustment and expatriates' work adjustment." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(4), 598-614.
- Chang, H., and Y. Kim. 2000. "A study on family stability and social adjustment of North Korean refugees and women's role." Retrieved from <http://www.kwdi.re.kr/data/02forum-8.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W., W.E. Hanson, V.L.C. Plano, and A. Morales. 2007. "Qualitative research designs selection and implementation." *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(2), 236-264. doi: 10.1177/0011000006287390
- Dow, B., and J. McDonald. 2003. *Social support or structural change? Social work theory and research on care-giving*. *Australian Social Work*, 56(3), 197-207.
- Galappatti, A. 2003. "What is a psychosocial intervention? Mapping the field in Sri Lanka". *The International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict*, 1(2), 3-17.
- Gandotra, V., and M.T. Jha. 2003. "Female-Headed Households: A Database of North Bihar." *J. Soc. Sci*, 7(4), 315-321.
- Handunetti, D. 2011. "Protracted war has changed traditional roles played by men and women in Jaffna." Retrieved from <http://transcurrents.com/news-views/archives/34>.
- Hewamanne, S. 2009. "Gendering the internally displaced: Problem bodies, fluid, boundaries and politics of civil society participation in Sri Lanka." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), 157-172. Retrieved from <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol11/iss1/11>.

- Hopkins, W G. 2000. "Quantitative research design." *Sport Science* 4(1), 3-7. Retrieved from [sportsoci.org/jour/0001/wghdesign.html](http://sportsoci.org/jour/0001/wghdesign.html).
- International Crisis Group. 2012. Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding under the military. Asia Report No. 220. Retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/220-sri-lankas-north-ii-rebuilding-under-the-military.pdf>.
- Jayathunge, R. M. 2010. "The mental health issues of Sri Lankan war widows." *Sri Lanka Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2010/03/mental-health-issues-of-sri-lankan-war.html>.
- Justino, P. 2009. The impact of armed civil conflict on household welfare and policy response. Institute of Development Studies: Brighton, UK. and Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University: USA.
- Katrup, M. 2006. "Mental health consequences of war: gender specific issues." *World Psychiatry* 5(1), 33-34. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1472268/pdf/wpa050033.pdf>
- Korac, M. 2006. "Gender, conflict and peace-building: Lessons from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia." *Women's Studies International Forum* 29 (5): 510-520.
- Langford, C. P. H., J. Bowsher, J.P. Maloney and P.P. Lillis. 1997. "Social support: A conceptual analysis." *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25(1), 95-100.
- Laurence, F. S. 1999. *The psychology of adjustment*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lazarus, R.S. 1993. "Coping theory and research: Past, present and future." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 55(3), 234- 247. doi: 0033-31/4/93/55O3-O234\$O3.OO/O.
- Lindsey, C., and C. Lindsey-Curtet. 2001. *Women Facing War: ICRC study on the impact of armed conflict on women*. International Committee of the Red Cross, Division for Policy and Cooperation within the Movement.
- Maria, T., A. Ourania, B. Vassilis, P. Christos, and S. Spyr. 2009. Culture specific stress coping strategies used to alleviate occupational stress among Greek nursing personnel. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Culture+specific+stress+coping+strategies+used+to+alleviate...-a0203955297>.
- Melville, A and Scarlet, F (1999 - 2001). *IDS: Psychosocial Interventions Evaluation of UNICEF Supported Projects*. Retrieved from [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_14322.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_14322.html)
- Palys, T. (n.d.) *Purposive sampling*. Retrieved from <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Purposive%20sampling.pdf>.
- Perera, A. 2013. *South-North Development Monitor, Sri Lanka: War or peace, women struggle to survive*. Retrieved from [www.twinside.org.sg/.../women/.../7625%20women...](http://www.twinside.org.sg/.../women/.../7625%20women...)

- Picken, J. 2012. "The coping strategies, adjustment and well being of male inmates in the prison environment." *Internet Journal of Criminology*, 1-29.
- Rehn, E., and E.J. Sirleaf. 2002. "Women, war and peace: The independent experts' assessment on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building." <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3F71081FF391653DC1256C69003170E9-unicef-WomenWarPeace.pdf>.
- Robson, C. 2011. *Real World Research* 3rd Ed. UK: Wiley.
- Ruwanpura, K., N. 2006. Conflict and survival, *Asian Population Studies*, 2(2), 187-200. doi.org/10.1080/17441730600923125.
- Sarvananthan, M. 2007. *Economy of the conflict region in Sri Lanka: From embargo to repression*. Policy Studies. East-West Center in Washington. Retrieved from <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/3498/ps044.pdf?sequence=1>
- Strohmetz, C. (n.d) *Rape, Women and War*. Retrieved from. [https://www.usm.edu/gulfcoast/sites/usm.edu.gulfcoast/files/groups/learning-commons/pdf/rape\\_women\\_and\\_war.pdf](https://www.usm.edu/gulfcoast/sites/usm.edu.gulfcoast/files/groups/learning-commons/pdf/rape_women_and_war.pdf).
- Sorensen, B. 1998. *Women and post-conflict reconstruction: Issues and sources* (No. 3). DIANE Publishing. Retrieved from [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/uxPages/631060B93EC1119EC-1256D120043E600/\\$file/opw3.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/uxPages/631060B93EC1119EC-1256D120043E600/$file/opw3.pdf).
- Surendrakumar, S.Y. 2006. *The IDPs in Sri Lanka since 2002: On the road to recovery?* Retrieved from [http://www.issi.org.pk/old-site/ss\\_Detail.php?-dataId=301](http://www.issi.org.pk/old-site/ss_Detail.php?-dataId=301).
- Tambiah, Y. 2004. Sexuality and women's rights in armed conflict in Sri Lanka. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 12(23), 78-87. doi: 10.1016/S0968-8080(04)23121-4.
- Taylor, S. E., D.K. Sherman, H.S. Kim, J. Jarcho, K. Takagi, and M.S. Dunagan. 2004. "Culture and social support: Who seeks it and why?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(3), 354. PMID:15382985
- Thiruchandran, S. 1999. *The Other Victims of War: Emergence of Female-Headed Households in Eastern Sri Lanka*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Thomas, D. R. 2003. "A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis." *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246. doi: 10.1177/1098214005283748.
- United Nations, Sri Lanka. 2015. "Mapping of Socio-Economic Support Services to Female Headed Households in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka." Retrieved from <https://www.google.lk/h?q=United+Nations%2C+Sri+Lanka%2C+2015+Mapping+of+SocioEconomic+Support+Services+to+Female+Headed+Households+in+the+Northern+Province+of+Sri+Lanka>

- WHO. 2004. Prevention of mental disorders. Effective intervention and policy options. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/en/prevention\\_of\\_mental\\_disorderssr.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/en/prevention_of_mental_disorderssr.pdf).
- Williamson, J., and M. Robinson. 2006. "Psychosocial interventions, or integrated programming for well-being?" *Intervention*, 4(1), 4-25.

# INDEX

## A

- ADB. See Asian Development Bank  
Adjustment Theory, 517, 521  
AIPW. See augmented inverse-probability weights  
Asian Development Bank, 12, 114, 347, 382, 396, 409  
ATE. See average treatment effect  
ATET. See average effect of the treatment on the treated, See average effect of the treatment on the treated  
augmented inverse-probability weights, 312  
average effect of the treatment on the treated, 308  
average treated outcomes, 306, 307

## B

- bottom-up approach, 165, 364

## C

- capability approach, 67, 124  
central human capabilities, 67  
functionings, 67  
CBOs. See community-based organizations  
CEDAW. See Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
CEFE. See Competency Based Economic Formation of Enterprise  
Centre for Poverty Analysis, 12, 292, 349, 460

- CEPA. See Centre for Poverty Analysis  
Commercial Credit, 442, 444  
Community Empowerment Theory, 517, 518, 524  
community-based organizations, 524  
conflict-induced shocks, 129, 224  
Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms, 457, 459  
coping strategies, 433, 517, 519-521, 552, 554, 561, 565, 568-569  
coping strategy. See coping strategies  
Coping Strategy Theory, 517-518

## D

- de la Rocha, Mercedes Gonzales, 399-401, 403-404, 432, 460  
de Mel, Suresh, 156, 291, 347  
Department for International Development, 2, 9, 12, 470, 507  
Department of Census and Statistics, 28, 52, 106, 117, 131-135, 137, 152, 166, 168-169, 173, 175, 191, 192, 240, 247, 266, 279, 283, 350, 356, 360, 396  
Department of Social Services, 438, 561  
DFiD. See Department for International Development  
disaster capitalism, 408  
domestic consumption, 447  
domestic cycle, 413, 427, 429  
dual role, 503  
breadwinner, 359, 360, 423, 458, 466, 475, 483, 486, 497, 500, 503, 506, 532  
care-giving, 497, 503, 567

## E

economic liberalization, 131  
educational attainment, 86, 143, 145,  
191, 221, 226-227, 230, 236, 248,  
250, 257, 338  
primary education, 88, 153, 191, 257,  
283, 371  
secondary education, 88, 191  
EGLR. See Employment Generation  
and Livelihoods through  
Reconciliation  
Employment Generation  
and Livelihoods through  
Reconciliation, 12, 294  
employment outcomes, 47, 50, 88,  
130, 137, 145, 149, 154, 166, 172,  
173, 175, 224-225, 252, 254, 274,  
28-288, 325, 334-335  
agricultural sector, 22, 253, 255-256,  
267, 269-270, 272, 281, 284, 326,  
338, 343  
blue-collar, 154, 277, 290  
contributing family worker, 175, 253,  
326  
non-agricultural sector, 253  
own account workers, 17, 133-134,  
175, 282, 319  
private sector jobs, 255, 286  
public sector employment, 257, 268,  
271, 285, 338  
self-employment, 18, 145-146, 175,  
177, 212, 217, 223-224, 268, 272,  
284, 290, 315, 331, 334, 336, 338,  
340, 343, 400, 402, 418, 435, 441,  
458  
white-collar job, 143, 228, 235, 243,  
250, 255-256, 271, 277  
white-collar jobs, 229  
extended family, 478, 496, 498, 503,  
505  
extramarital affairs, 543

## F

FAO. See Food and Agriculture  
Organisation  
feminism, 62-63, 121, 124  
Marxist, 63  
Radical, 64, 124  
Socialist, 63, 115  
Third World, 62, 353  
FHH. See female-headed households  
financial protection, 486  
Food and Agriculture Organisation,  
409  
formal resources, 554, 559

## G

GAD. See Gender and Development  
GDP. See Gross Domestic Product  
Gender and Development, 12, 62, 123,  
127, 509, 510  
gender contract, 470, 477, 481, 497  
Gender Inequality Index, 106, 152  
gender roles, 20, 27, 29, 40, 45, 50,  
75, 78, 83, 91, 98-99, 101, 102,  
105, 110, 112, 142, 145, 148-149,  
151, 154, 159, 285, 338, 364, 376,  
392, 473, 497  
German Agency for International  
Cooperation, 409, 412  
GIZ. See German Agency for  
International Cooperation  
Gross Domestic Product, 12, 22, 25  
Gunatilaka, Ramani, 6, 9-10, 28, 32,  
33-34, 37-38, 42, 46-47, 52, 88,  
107, 118, 128, 136-137, 153-154,  
155, 227, 229, 234, 236, 351-352,  
399  
Gunewardena, Dileni, 107, 118, 136,  
152, 155, 352

## H

health, 15, 32, 43, 45, 46-47, 50, 54, 62, 70, 72, 84, 88, 97, 100, 106, 107, 112, 138, 147, 149, 152, 165, 189, 190, 216-218, 221, 223, 226, 230, 235, 240, 248, 251, 285, 289, 290, 337, 341-342, 362, 367, 382, 395, 403, 407, 413, 451, 491, 496, 505, 511-512, 516, 523, 528, 532, 534, 553, 568, 570

mental health, 45-46, 533

physical and psychological challenges, 532

precautionary action, 532

psychosocial well-being, 43, 44, 46, 50, 99, 513, 516, 565, 566

respiratory issues, 533

HIES. See Household Income and Expenditure Survey

host communities, 566

Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 13, 137, 166, 350, 356, 359, 396

HRBA. See Human Rights-based Approach

human capital theory, 274, 276

## I

ICRC. See International Committee of the Red Cross

IDP. See Internally Displaced People

ILO. See International Labour Organisation

Indian Housing Scheme, 442

informal resources, 554

intimate partner relationship

intimate partner violence, 89, 115, 375, 539, 540, 545-546, 563

Internally Displaced People, 25

Internally Displaced People multiple displacements, 357, 480, 551

prolonged displacements, 553

resettlement, 31, 172, 386, 414, 420, 428, 436, 442, 448

International Committee of the Red Cross, 13, 367, 409, 568

International Labour Organisation, 361, 401, 409, 508

International Labour Organization, 13, 52, 353, 361

Intimate partner violence, 119, 537

intimate relationships, 464-465, 470, 473-481

inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment, 312

IPW. See inverse-probability-weighting

IPWRA. See inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment

## K

Kabeer, Naila, 33, 53, 57, 64-66, 70, 73, 89, 117, 120, 138, 352, 362, 365, 368, 371-372, 392, 396-397, 399, 401, 433-434, 447, 461, 463

## L

labour demand, 141, 232, 234

Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey, 132

labour market outcomes, 17, 34, 42, 128-130, 136-137, 147, 162-163, 165-166, 172, 174-175, 224, 252, 256-257, 259, 263, 269, 285, 287, 289, 302, 306, 335, 340

employees in the government or semi-government sector, 224

employees in the private sector, 224, 255

labour supply, 139-141, 148, 162, 251

bargaining models, 140-141

income effect, 140, 228

standard neo-classical model, 139

substitution effect, 140, 230, 235

unitary model, 140

- Land Development Ordinance, 13,  
109, 160
- land ownership, 93, 109, 161, 236, 267
- land rights, 92-93, 114, 122-123, 146,  
509
- landholding, size of, 92, 194
- landholding, size of, 15
- landholding, size of, 195
- landholding, size of, 267
- parappu, 194-195
- title deed, 192, 193
- LDO. See Land Development  
Ordinance, See Land  
Development Ordinance
- LED
- Local Economic Development  
through Tourism, 13, 291
- LEED. See Local Empowerment  
through Economic Development
- Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam,  
19
- livelihood intervention programmes,  
16, 19, 37, 38, 44, 50, 161, 210,  
214, 291, 295, 305-306, 308, 314,  
325, 334-335, 339, 340-341
- capital-centric, 289, 294, 315
- cash only programmes, 318-319, 321,  
331
- cash plus programmes, 318-320
- follow up to, 38, 303
- level of helpfulness, 302
- source for selection, 298
- livelihood strategies, 15, 42, 128, 130,  
158, 162-164, 166, 174, 176, 180-  
181, 201-202, 210-212, 215, 285,  
287, 336, 432-433, 446, 476
- diversification of, 162
- farming, 37, 154, 176-177, 180, 183,  
184, 221, 254-256, 268, 270-271,  
292, 315, 334-336, 340-341, 359,  
404, 409-410, 427-429, 434, 437,  
438, 501, 556
- multiple livelihood activities, 555
- non-farm, 37, 131, 142, 177, 180, 183,  
215, 220-221, 254-256, 267-271,  
275, 283-284, 315, 339-344, 461
- wage employment, 122, 145-146, 177,  
180, 183, 216-217, 276, 284
- Local Economic Development  
through Tourism, 291
- Local Empowerment through  
Economic Development, 13, 291,  
349, 410
- logit model
- binary outcome, 225, 329
- explanatory variables, 226, 253-254,  
310, 318
- marginal effects, 571
- multinomial, 17, 225, 252, 259, 274,  
315, 317, 322
- LTTE. See Liberation Tigers of the  
Tamil Eelam

## M

- Mannar Women's Development  
Federation, 439
- marriage, 41, 64, 140-142, 153, 167,  
172, 351, 361, 369, 372-378, 393,  
395, 402, 420-423, 444, 452-453,  
465, 467, 476, 480-482, 485-487,  
494-496, 499, 501, 503-504, 506,  
513, 538, 557
- dowry, 41, 106, 373-374, 393, 435,  
452, 467
- MGD. See Millennium Development  
Goal
- Micro credit, 407
- micro enterprise, 399, 417
- microenterprises, 156, 157
- Microfinance. See Microcredit
- militarization, 207, 357, 469, 472
- army occupation of land, 437
- military phobia, 469
- Ministry of Women and Child Affairs,  
13, 409, 417, 462
- MoWCA

Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.  
See

## N

National Action Plan on Women  
Headed Households, 456  
National Action Plan on Women-  
Headed Households, 417  
National Enterprise Development  
Authority, 13, 409  
national labour force survey, 153  
National Policy Framework for SME  
Development in Sri Lanka, 416  
natural widows, 402  
NEDA. See National Enterprise  
Development Authority

## O

omitted variable bias, 243

## P

paid work, 76, 79-80, 82-85, 88, 92,  
114, 138, 142-143, 188, 216, 220,  
223, 228-229, 285, 338, 378, 475  
PAMA. See Public Assistance of  
Monthly Allowance  
patriarchal  
dominance, 102, 151, 536, 538, 543,  
545, 553-554, 561, 565  
system, 27, 31, 46, 78, 91-92, 342,  
345, 368-369, 371, 373, 438, 521,  
539, 545  
pawn, jewellery, 197, 531-532, 560  
per capita expenditure, 183, 185,  
220- 221  
potential outcome model. See Rubin  
causal model  
poverty  
incidence, 28, 135-136  
Poverty

head count ratio, 23  
power  
decision-making, 59, 64-65, 78, 108,  
155, 293, 362, 363, 365, 370, 377,  
393  
positive-sum game, 59  
zero-sum game, 59, 70  
Power Cube, 58  
psychological interventions, 506  
Public Assistance Monthly Allowance,  
14, 445  
Public Assistance of Monthly  
Allowance, 561

## R

RA. See regression adjustment  
Rajasingham- Senanayake, Dharini,  
355, 467  
randomised control trial, 289  
Rapport, Julian, 55, 64  
RCT. See randomised control trial  
regression adjustment, 312-314  
religion, 41-42, 66, 76-78, 116, 217,  
357, 369, 377-378, 393, 473, 524  
inter-religious tensions, 376  
remarriage, 141, 424, 453, 499  
reservation wage, 251  
Rubin causal model, 309

## S

sample selection bias, 225, 274, 279,  
283  
Heckman selection bias correction,  
227  
Sample selection bias  
Maximum Likelihood Estimation, 13,  
273  
Samurdhi, 206, 377, 390, 400, 409,  
445, 455, 561  
Sarvananthan, Muthukrishan, 27, 41,  
53, 111, 124, 160, 207, 355, 429,  
435, 462, 467, 469, 510, 512, 569  
seettu, 441

self-dignity, 45, 49, 487, 501, 503,  
504-506  
Sewalanka, 401, 409-410, 412, 414  
sexual abuse, 98, 540, 553  
small and micro income generation  
projects, 406  
SME. See small and micro income  
generation projects  
social networks, 34, 50, 89, 100, 144,  
148-149, 163, 165, 200, 222, 229,  
355, 487-488  
social norms, 58, 74, 76-78, 92-93,  
98, 139, 148, 152-153, 241, 251,  
392, 464, 469, 471, 473-475, 491  
Social Support Theory, 517-518, 523  
Somasunderam, Daya, 450  
Sustainable Livelihoods Framework,  
15, 128, 164, 172, 335, 470-471  
asset pentagon, 165, 189, 221, 231  
financial capital, 45, 196, 197, 221,  
336, 470, 486-487, 501-502,  
505-506  
Financial capital, 471  
human capital, 47, 49-50, 86, 135,  
138, 144-149, 165, 189, 191, 202,  
221, 230, 235, 253, 274, 297, 345,  
349  
Human capital, 471  
institutional environment, 20, 33, 37,  
50, 67, 78, 164-165, 166, 203, 206,  
226, 233, 242, 335, 341  
Natural capital, 471  
physical capital, 32, 192, 195,  
221-222, 337  
Physical capital, 471  
Social capital, 338, 471-473, 475, 504  
vulnerability context, 163, 201, 222,  
335

## T

Tamil Diaspora, 131, 160  
teffects\ command, 325  
Thesawalamai, 27, 111, 160  
transfer income, 32, 35, 180, 220,  
226, 230, 235, 285, 319

trauma, 31, 44, 100, 111, 148, 161, 190,  
364, 401, 449, 463, 469, 470, 472,  
478, 483, 487, 494, 500, 503,  
506, 511, 524, 547, 553

## U

UNDP, 14, 77, 83-84, 101, 106, 117,  
119, 126, 138, 149, 152, 355, 397,  
401, 409, 460  
United Nations, 12-14, 53-54, 70-71,  
92-93, 115, 117, 123-127, 351,  
354-355, 401, 409, 412, 460, 507,  
516, 569  
Convention on the Elimination of All  
Forms of Discrimination Against  
Women, 105  
Human Rights-based Approach, 13,  
68  
Millennium Development Goal, 13,  
53, 71  
Sustainable Development Goals, 14,  
54, 70  
UNDP, 412, 413  
UNFPA, 14, 69, 126, 360, 383  
unpaid work, 33, 54-55, 80-82,  
84-85, 99, 138, 142, 149, 229  
USAID, 14, 98, 123, 126, 354, 397,  
409, 509  
U-shaped relationship, 143, 234  
Uthuru Wasanthaya, 25

## W

wage or earnings functions, 225  
earnings functions, 273  
wage functions, 273  
war widows, 36, 111, 161, 402, 513,  
567, 568  
war-related experiences, 16, 163, 203,  
222, 232, 242, 249, 251, 272, 286,  
321, 335  
WDO. See Women's Development  
Officers

WHO. See World Health Organization  
WID. See Women in Development  
Women in Development, 14, 62, 126  
Women's Development Officers, 363  
women's economic empowerment,  
    19-20, 27-28, 41, 48-49, 55, 72-75,  
    80, 84-86, 91-92, 95, 97, 101, 104,  
    108-109, 111-113, 118, 128, 160,  
    207  
women's labour force participation,  
    11, 32, 76, 79, 87, 107, 139, 143,  
    144, 149, 153, 224, 227, 233  
women's economic empowerment  
achievements, 65, 66, 106, 107, 152,  
    338, 339, 480, 500  
agency, 26, 29-30, 34, 49, 57, 58,  
    65-67, 73, 75, 95, 102-104, 111-112,  
    125, 151, 162, 214, 361-362, 365,  
    392, 425, 455, 470  
barriers to, 41, 93, 111, 128, 173, 356,  
    357, 364-365, 378, 380, 392, 395,  
    429  
degrees of, 66  
individual barriers, 365  
instrumentalist perspective, 70  
resources, 64-66, 71, 87, 89, 92-97,  
    99-100, 112, 120, 125-127,  
    146-147, 149, 159, 160, 342,  
    382-384, 394-395, 413, 429, 433,  
    455, 474-475, 519, 523  
structural barriers, 50, 363, 365, 368,  
    393  
the intrinsic value approach to, 70  
World Bank, 66, 68, 71, 73, 76-77, 79,  
    82, 86, 88, 92, 114, 119-120, 122-  
    124, 126-127, 152-153, 155, 350,  
    351-352, 355, 396, 398, 402, 409  
framework for understanding and  
    measuring empowerment, 66  
smart economics, 71, 124, 127  
World Health Organization, 14, 512  
World Vision, 409, 439, 443-444

# Exploring Women's Empowerment

Edited by  
**Ranmini Vithanagama**

The revival of economic activity in those areas most affected by the civil conflict were given priority after the war ended in 2009. The development of infrastructure, the resettlement of communities and rebuilding livelihoods were key areas of focus for the state, humanitarian actors, the diaspora and the private sector.

This research sets out to understand how these initiatives have changed the economic landscape for women in the North of Sri Lanka. More specifically, it explores the economic opportunities that have been created for women's advancement and empowerment in the North since the end of the war. By employing a multi-disciplinary approach, the different studies in this book have been able to uncover not just economic factors, but also cultural, social and psycho-social reasons associated with women's decisions to work, their livelihood outcomes and their state of economic empowerment.

The research shows that while the conflict has unquestionably created a strong regressive impact on the overall well-being of women, long-term structural challenges stemming from deep-rooted gender norms, and flaws in post-conflict livelihood intervention initiatives also stand in the way of women's economic empowerment in the North.

The research is based on field work undertaken in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka during 2015 and 2016.



INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR  
ETHNIC STUDIES



Printed by Horizon Printing (Pvt) Ltd.