Engaging Tamil Diaspora for Peace and Development

January 2009- March 2011

Concepts, Insights and Key Lessons

Internal Evaluation Report
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Executive Summary

Between January 2009 and March 2011, Berghof Peace Support (BPS) and the Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (CJPD) undertook a two-year pilot project with the Tamil diaspora in the UK, with the aim of empowering the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora (in the UK) to contribute to sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has long been seen as an archetypal example of a protracted ethnopolitical conflict. The violent war ended in May 2009 with the defeat of the LTTE, the dismantling of the territories under the LTTE's de facto control and the killing of its leaders. The military defeat of the LTTE, killings, displacement, disappearances and the humanitarian disaster that unfolded in the latter stages of the war all had a traumatic impact on the Tamil diaspora. Even 18 months after the war ended, political grievances have not yet been addressed. The Tamil diaspora had a significant impact on the peace and conflict dynamics in Sri Lanka during the protracted war. Even after the end of the war, the diaspora is active and has shown its capacity to mobilise effectively many times.

In light of this highly complex situation, the BPS and CJPD had to adjust the project "Engaging Tamil diaspora for Development and Peace" to adapt to various changing dynamics. Project activities had to be re-oriented to account for the highly volatile situation in Sri Lanka, and the significant impact that the manner in which the war ended has had on the Tamil diaspora. However, the high degree of mobilisation and re-orientation after May 2009 did not, ultimately, render the project objectives obsolete. To the contrary, it became apparent that the Tamil diaspora would continue to be a key stakeholder in any sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, especially in a context where less political space was available to the local Tamil community on the island. The more this space for Tamil politics on the island decreased, the more the Tamil political discourse shifted onto the Tamil diaspora, which thus became even more actively engaged in creating and occupying democratic spaces in host countries.

Several activities have been conducted during the course of the project in order to explore ways for the Tamil diaspora to constructively engage for peace. The project has also generated a greater understanding of the nuances of the Tamil diaspora and offers tentative future recommendations for the constructive role of the Tamil diaspora in conflict transformation. The purpose of this report is to publicise the main findings and insights of the project and to share the challenges, dilemmas, and lessons learnt during the pilot phase with a wider audience of diaspora activists, academics and peacebuilding practitioners.

Introduction

'Engaging Tamil Diaspora: Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace' was a comprehensive 'Action Research' project targeting the politically active section of the Tamil diaspora in the UK. The primary aim of this project was to strengthen the Tamil diaspora in order to allow it to play a more constructive role in enabling a sustainable, peaceful solution to the ethnopolitical conflict in Sri Lanka. To achieve this overarching goal, the project conducted several dialogue workshops,

produced a number of policy papers, established a Core Group, facilitated interactions with a selected group of members of the Sinhala transnational community and offered a space for reflective analysis and networking. The overall duration of the pilot phase was January 2009 - March 2011 and the project received funding from the Conflict Prevention Pool of the British government.

The Tamil diaspora think-tank, the Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (CJPD), and the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support (BPS) partnered to deliver the envisioned outputs. The project was built on the experience which both organisations have amassed from undertaking similar activities in the past and, more importantly, it drew on the insights of a cross-section of Tamil diaspora activists and academics. Leading Tamil diaspora experts, academics and practitioners from the project Advisory Group have provided backstopping and functioned as a sounding board. The purpose of this final evaluation report is to disseminate the main findings and lessons-learnt from the project.

Before proceeding, a few words on our methodology and guiding principles should be included. Action Research[1] is the methodological tool we adopted to achieve our goal of supporting processes of sociopolitical change, which is essentially the conjunction of three principles: *participatory research* (the production of social knowledge), *action* (the contribution to processes of conflict transformation) and *participation* (the inclusion of stakeholders in every step of the work, from the preparation and implementation, to the evaluation phases). As such, the boundaries between 'observer' and 'observed' and between 'researcher' and 'subject' are far from rigid and both seek to embark on a joint quest for supporting social change processes. Moreover, reflection and adaptation are significant features of Action Research methodology which have been built into the main pillar of our work. In addition to an internal evaluation and monitoring plan, we used all available forums to check and challenge our personal research biases with the aim of developing a shared theory of change with the Tamil diaspora participants.

The primary monitoring procedures included regular project team meetings to conduct in-depth review and reflection, Advisory group meetings, peer-reviews and our long-term evaluation process, which ranged from *ex ante* mechanisms (concept notes, risk assessments, etc.) to *ex post* mechanisms (feedback sheets, focus group discussions, reports, etc). Furthermore, internal capacity building measures (knowledge management and organisational development) were implemented to enhance the abilities of the partners.

The principles of multipartiality and inclusivity, along with promoting a negotiated solution and adapting a partner-oriented approach, were of central importance to our project. Except for the

1 The term 'Action Research' was first coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. Lewin intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice in social research by advocating Action Research as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action" (Lewin 1997, 144). According to Lewin "[r]esearch that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (Ibid). The theoretical underpinnings of Action Research draw on various sources, among others, existentialism (the importance given to choice over causal explanation), phenomenology (privileging of subjective experience as a source of knowledge) and the idea of the 'hermeneutic circle'. The conceptual development of Action Research also originates in the critique of positivism and the search for "new epistemologies of practices" (Reason and Bradbury 2006, 3). Action Research overlaps significantly with qualitative, constructivist and critical theory approaches in several respects, for example: Action Research blurs the boundaries between the researcher and research object, it does not rely on a clear-cut division between objectivity and subjectivity; it is closely linked to issues of social justice and, finally, it is based on the idea that researchers can support social change processes and encourage subjects to influence decision-making (Reason and Bradbury 2006, xxiv).

concept of multipartiality, all the other principles are more or less self-explanatory. The term multipartiality has, however, led to many misunderstandings, ranging from a lack of equidistance to the parties to simply ignoring human rights and social justice issues. The concept of mutipartiality is none of these, but underscores the importance of engaging, empathetically, with all critical actors regardless of their (perceived) hardline/extremist views. The practical implementation of this principle was not straightforward. During the project, it became apparent that real-world interventions must consider contextual and practical issues without compromising the core value of multipartiality. A proposal for a sequenced approach of this principle is offered in the last section of the report (4.2 Lessons learnt, Para. 8). Our engagement with the Tamil diaspora was further based on the values of respect for diversity (to "agree to disagree"), pluralism and constructive criticism.

Finally, it is important to clarify our understanding of the term 'diaspora'. Over the past decade, the term 'diaspora' has been used for various modes of population dispersal and this, in turn, has diluted the intellectual rigour of the concept. We believe it is important to emphasise the experience of forced migration - associated with violence and trauma - in the understanding of post-colonial diasporas that are predominantly constituted by refugees and asylum-seekers. Our interest in exploring the area of diasporas and transnationalism is to link them to the possibilities of social and political transformation.[2] At this point it is also worth noting that although the diaspora is often referred to in the singular in this report, the project team was well aware of, and has sought to understand better, the cleavages within the UK-based Tamil diaspora itself.

This report is organised into four main sections: the first chapter will elucidate the underlying theories of change, the project's rationale, aims and objectives, as well as the project's assumptions at its inception and how it has had to adapt to changing ground conditions. The second chapter will outline the current trends in Tamil diaspora activism in the UK and the third chapter illustrates the key findings of the diaspora dialogue workshops. The fourth chapter will conclude with a discussion of the key lessons that have been learnt, open-questions, challenges and further recommendations.

Chapter 1. Project Rationale, Aims and Objectives

This chapter begins by setting out the rationale for working with and on the subject of diasporas, in general, and specifically the Tamil diaspora. It then discusses the implicit assumptions of how the project team believe change occurs. In other words, it will look at the set of underlying theories of change that have shaped the project's interventions. The final subsection will illustrate the specific aims of this particular project and illustrate how the individual programme components contribute to the desired outcome.

[2] For a detailed discussion of this see Vimalarajah/Cheran (2010).

1.1 Relevance of the Tamil diaspora as a critical stakeholder

The relevance of the diaspora for sustainable peace in their erstwhile homelands has been the focus of much debate in scholarly literature. In particular, the 'conflict-generated' diaspora has been found to have a significant impact on local conflict dynamics, and is said to exacerbate the conflict by supporting insurgent movements, either financially or through other means.[3] However, recent academic papers have tended to argue that the dichotomy of 'spoilers' (supporting insurgent movements) and 'peace promoters' (advocating peace) does not sufficiently grasp the complexity of social formations and that in reality the diaspora can be both constructive and destructive - depending upon the prevailing context and conditions.[4]

Members of the Tamil diaspora have always been key opinion formers and active stakeholders in shaping the peace and conflict dynamics in Sri Lanka. With over one million now living in the diaspora,[5] it has, historically, played an important role in the conflict. In the publications on the role of the Tamil diaspora, the main focus has been on remittances and its alleged role in 'financing' and 'fuelling' the conflict (Byman et al. 2001; Lyons 2004; Wayland 2004). While growing interest in the diaspora phenomenon has led to ethnographic studies focusing on community formation and identity politics within the diaspora, there is, nevertheless, a tendency to paint a homogeneous picture of the diaspora. Questions related to the political mobilisation of the Tamil diaspora, their political values, network structures, role in opinion-making and the dialectic interplay between the conduct of the host and home countries[6] and diaspora identity formation have not been adequately addressed by existing studies.

Moreover, international foreign and development policies have failed to see the opportunity structures created by migrancy, for example, the immense potential of the Tamil diaspora to foster conflict transformation initiatives and actively engage in development activities in their country of origin. Moreover, the engagement of officials with the diaspora has been *ad hoc* and issue-based (in the context of migration policies or internal security). While the need for a sustained engagement with the diaspora is seen as critical, the ways and means of this engagement have remained unclear to date.

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[3] Benedict Anderson (among many others) is a proponent of this perspective. He argues that diasporas serve as irresponsible long-distance nationalists less inclined to compromise. Anderson warns that "while technically a citizen of the state in which he comfortably lives but to which he may feel little attachment, he finds it tempting to play identity politics by participating (via propaganda, money, weapons, any way but voting) in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat – now only fax time away. But this citizenship-less participation is inevitably non-responsible – our hero will not have to answer for, or pay the price of, the long-distance politics he undertakes" (Anderson 1992, 13).

[4] This argument is similarly made in Smith/Stares, who edited a volume on the question of the constructive and destructive potential of diasporas (Smith/Stares 2007): See particularly Bercovitch (2007, 17-38) and the case studies by Koser (2007, 239-252) and Fair (2007, 172-195) on the Eritrean and Tamil diaspora in the same volume regarding the ambiguous role of diasporas in homeland conflicts. The constructive potential of diaspora involvement in peacebuilding has been emphasised by Cochrane (2007), Fair (2005), Horst (2007) and Shain/Barth (2003).

[5] Most diaspora Tamils are living in Canada, Western Europe, India, the Scandinavian countries and Australia (Cheran 2003; 2007; Fuglerud 1999; McDowell 1999; Orjuela 2008; PILPG 2009; Zunzer 2004).

[6] We acknowledge the difficulties related to the terminology 'host' and 'home' country/state/society. It seems to be more appropriate to say that diasporas have multiple homes (Cheran 2006, 4-8). 'Home' as well as 'host' or 'Tamil diaspora' are terms that have been used in varying contexts and diverse actors use these terms with differently loaded connotations. We use these terms throughout the report for want of a better alternative, using 'hostland' when referring to the country of residence and 'homeland' when referring to the place of origin.

With the end of the ethnopolitical war in May 2009, the public image of the Tamil diaspora underwent many changes. Perceptions of the diaspora ranged from their having "no relevance at all" (Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse) to their becoming the new "external overseas Tigers" (Dayan Jayathileke). A sober analysis of the relevance of the diaspora nevertheless offers a more nuanced picture. The significance of the Tamil diaspora for both the 'host' countries and Sri Lanka can be summarised as the following:

- The Tamil diaspora can be characterised as an 'insider-outsider'. Although they live 'outside' of the territorial boundaries of the Sri Lankan state, they play an active role in shaping local political discourses via modern means of communication. They provide financial support and promote their political allies in the homeland. In this sense, they are both insiders and outsiders. The Tamil diaspora creatively exploits their transnational presence and political networks to further their political goals.
- The less political space there is for the local Tamil community on the island, the more actively engaged the Tamil diaspora is in creating and occupying democratic spaces in the host countries.
- The high level of political activism among the Tamil diaspora indicates that they will remain a critical factor, even in the aftermath of the war. It is to be suspected that they will be likely to increase their activities on the economic front (through sanctions and boycott campaigns, but also increased remittances), on the legal front (collecting evidence of war crimes) and on the diplomatic/political front (by lobbying western diplomats). While recognising the heterogeneity of the Tamil diaspora formations, it remains true that the political identity of the Tamil diaspora, especially the second generation Tamils, has been shaped by what they believe to be the 'indifferent' stance of the 'host' countries to the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka post May 2009. An increased radicalisation of the Tamil youth diaspora movement can be observed that has become cynical of the peacebuilding activities of the host countries. The youth increasingly believe that efforts to mobilise the international community through democratic means have not been effective.

1.2 Underlying change theories

In this sub-section, a brief overview of the key underlying concepts will be given in order to understand the rationale behind the design of this programme. The project team is aware that this contribution to the transformation of the wider conflict cycle, by changing patterns of behaviour and relationships, and enhancing learning and awareness, is only a small step on the ladder to building sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

a) Agents of non-violent change and critical mass

The concept of agents of non-violent change is derived from the understanding that strategically influential groups have to be included in the conflict resolution process to achieve a sustainable and a locally 'owned' solution. Unlike traditional peacebuilding concepts of strengthening local civil society forces (peace constituencies) as key change drivers, the systemic conflict transformation approach emphasises the importance of targeting influential individuals in the key conflict parties and key strategic groups/organisations with access to political, military and economic sources of power. The rationale behind this concept is that all political groups include

both 'hardliners' and 'moderate' forces, and therefore it is unwise, politically, to pigeonhole parties as either extremist or moderate. Thus, it is important to identify the constructive potential within these supposedly extremist groups and work with them towards change. As one study on systemic approaches to conflict transformation elucidates: "…hardliners who decide to switch to non-violent solutions in critical situations, can generally push these through more easily on the basis of their popular support" (Wils et al. 2006, 60). The targeted individuals may come from different ideological and political backgrounds, but base their cooperation on a minimum set of principles: the willingness to bring about change via peaceful methods, the recognition of the need for an equitable political solution, and respect for diversity. It is assumed that a critical mass of these agents of non-violent change functions as catalysts and initiate constructive social change.

In terms of this particular project, the assumption was that working with a number of key opinion formers and diaspora community leaders would result in a ripple effect that would have a bigger impact on the community and at the organisational level. The biggest challenge in working with this concept is that the degrees of influence and political power of individuals alter in changing political environments and this prevents the continuity of participation in a sequence of workshops. This encouraged us to add a new category of 'critical topics' to the prevailing criteria of 'critical actors'. We slightly adjusted our initial strategy of purely targeting individuals to targeting individuals representing a particular line of thinking.[7]

b) Empowerment through learning and critical reflection

Guided by the UNHCR's definition of empowerment, that it is "not something that is done to people; it is the process by which individuals in the community analyse their situation, enhance their knowledge and resources, strengthen their capacity to claim their rights, and take action to achieve their goals" (UNHCR 2008, 20), the project sought to empower the Tamil diaspora. The project provided disparate spaces for the diaspora activists to reflect critically on their activism, forge new alliances and to enhance their knowledge of multiple peaceful options for engagement. The idea of strengthening and empowering actors so that they can make informed decisions goes back to the understanding that when actors possess sufficient knowledge on the multiple peaceful options for engagement, they will be willing to engage peacefully in order to achieve their objectives. Historic records of disempowerment, exploitation, systematic discrimination and exclusion radicalise people/communities and cause them to resort to violence because they see no other way of resistance. The method of empowerment forces people to take responsibility for their actions and motivates them to actively engage in change processes. Rather than seeing

[7] This resonates with the concept of 'critical yeast' that John Paul Lederach discusses in his book *The Moral Imagination* (2005). Lederach uses the metaphor of 'critical yeast' to describe how initial small processes and changes can generate larger change processes. Critical yeast can catalyse social change and describes a strategic element of peacebuilding when few resources are available. Under these conditions, it is intended to "(…) create something beyond what exists from what is available but has exponential potential" (Lederach 2005, 100). The concept is not anchored to a linear theory of change, as Lederach argues that multiple, interdependent processes link people together and bring about change – the focus of the critical yeast concept is to identify relational spaces, connections, intersections and platforms. For Lederach, the critical yeast of like-minded people is the main ingredient of social change. This is based on the idea that a few strategically placed individuals may have the potential to drive change by acting jointly and bringing about growth towards a movement of change. The development of critical yeast is about creating safe spaces to bring people together and induce change processes very carefully (Lederach 2005, 90-91, 100, 181).

individuals as passive 'observers' or 'recipients', this concept puts them in the driving seat of change processes.

The main objective of this project was to empower the Tamil diaspora so that it could play a constructive role in supporting a peaceful and sustainable transition from war to peace. While there are many ways to empower people, the method used in this project was to provide a space for critical reflection on how they conduct their political activism, how they define themselves, how they could become more effective and efficient, what their definition of peace was, etc. In addition, they were brought into contact with other diaspora groups in order to learn lessons, exchange experiences, and interact with each other.

c) Relevance of intra-community work

Peacebuilding in a classical sense looks at the main warring parties and devises tools to encourage the building of relationships, reconciliation and problem-solving. Our experiences show that inter-party work in a conflict-prone context is seldom productive. This is unsurprising given the high-level of hostility amongst the conflict protagonists. An important step towards inter-party peacebuilding measures could start with intra-community work. This could provide a safe space for the communities to critically reflect on their practice and political thinking and is likely to prevent unhelpful behaviour, such as posturing, positioning and bargaining.

d) Sustainable peace

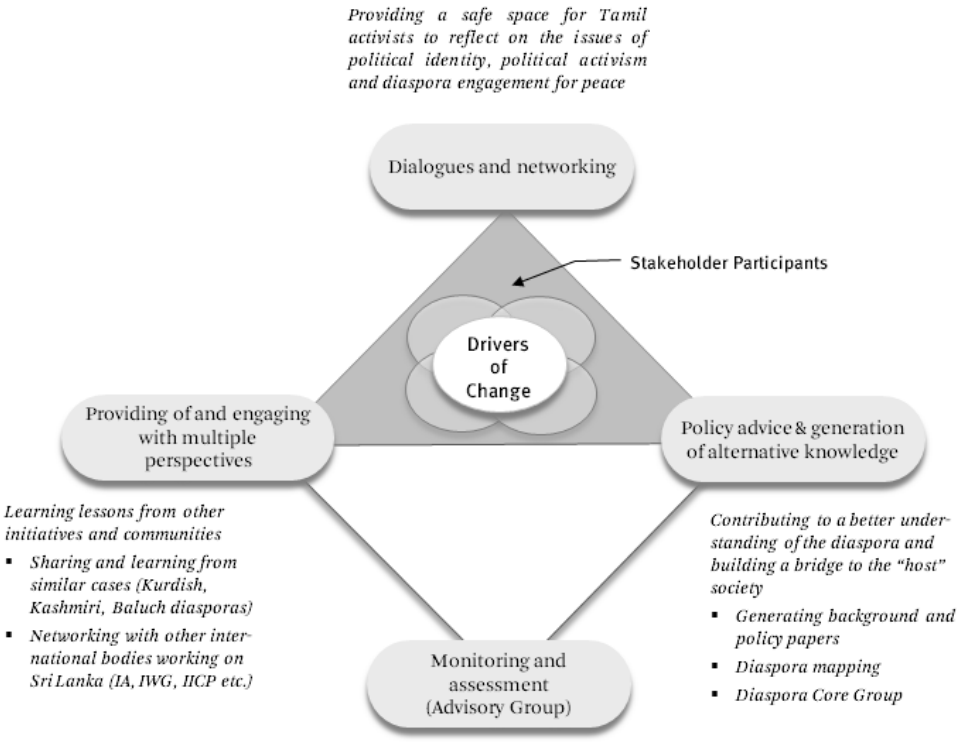
The term 'sustainable peace' refers to Johann Galtung's understanding of positive peace. According to Galtung, positive peace is not the absence of war, but a transformation of the structural, political, social and economic factors that gave birth to the conflict in the first place – positive peace for Galtung is strongly related to working towards achieving social justice (Galtung 1996, 30-33; Galtung 2007, 31). It should be underlined, however, that we had an open approach concerning the concept of 'peace' in all of our workshops, and we left the participants to define their own concepts of peace (see section 3 for more detail).

1.3 Aims and objectives

Based on the above outlined analysis, the project's aims and objectives were:

- Promoting dialogue and cooperation between the different influential sections of the Tamil diaspora;
- Providing space for community-based approaches and critical reflection;
- Empowering the Tamil diaspora to more actively engage and to enable a sustainable political solution and
- Contributing to a nuanced understanding of the Tamil diaspora's political activism and to build a bridge between the diaspora and 'host' country.

Project design



As the diagram shows, the three main areas of work were dialogue and networking, policy advice & institution-building and engaging with multiple perspectives.

1. **Dialogue and networking:** A diverse set of Tamil diaspora activists were given a safe space to reflect upon the issues of political identity, political activism and the limitations and possibilities for diaspora engagement for peace. Civil society activists from Sri Lanka were sometimes invited to the sessions to inspire the discussions. A detailed account of the workshops is given in section three.
2. **Policy advice & generation of alternative knowledge:** The main purpose of this programme component was to contribute to a better understanding of the current political activism of the diaspora and build a bridge to the 'host' society. To achieve this overarching goal we commissioned brief policy and background papers (mainly) from activists to get their views on how they perceive their political activism, as opposed to how 'outsiders' view them. To generate as many policy papers as possible, reflecting diverse viewpoints, the project invited academics, activists and practitioners via a 'Call for Papers'. The 'Call for Papers' on the five thematic areas were disseminated and circulated via academic networks (such as the SOAS and Berghof networks) and activist networks (chat rooms, newsletters, Tamil diaspora organisations, Tamil e-mail groups, etc). Diaspora mapping was also undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the organisational set-up of diaspora organisations, political linkages and patterns of activism. One other main activity in this programme section was the

establishment of the Diaspora Core Group. Members were selected from the attendees at the dialogue workshops to engage in a regular analysis of the situation of the Tamil diaspora in the UK and function as a sounding board for policy-makers.

3. **Engaging with multiple perspectives:** With the objective of learning lessons from comparative international cases, we conducted an international conference with the participation of the Kurdish, Kashmiri and Baluch diasporas. We also actively sought to network with international agencies that were working on the issue of Sri Lanka to embark in peer-reflection and joint conflict analysis processes.

Programme Adaptation

The military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May 2009, large-scale killings, displacement, disappearances and the humanitarian disaster that unfolded in the last stages of the war had a traumatic impact on the Tamil diaspora. New actors, new discourses and new alliances emerged, partly replacing the old structures and topics. This drastic overturn of events on the ground compelled the project team to revisit the initial project goals and to assess whether or not they remained valid. After an extensive process of re-strategising, with the support of the Advisory Group members, it was agreed that we should adapt an open and flexible strategy and place more emphasis on the process than the long-term outcome. Believing that the basic objective of the project – to empower and strengthen the Tamil diaspora – was still valid, the project team and Advisory Group agreed that it needed intelligent contextualisation to refocus on what was possible within the scope of the project. As a result, the project focus shifted slightly to engage with the (emerging) diversity within the Tamil diaspora in the UK, while at the same time continuing to build the capacity of the project's participants towards contributing to a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 2. Mapping Political Organisations of the UK Tamil Diaspora

Tamils have been politically active and organised in the UK since at least the 1970s. Initially, the main focus of most organisations was humanitarian, as they sought to draw attention (and funds) to the aid of refugees fleeing communal violence on the island. However, as Tamil politics on the island evolved, new organisations also emerged among the Tamils in the UK seeking to further their political cause. Many of these organisations were representative of one or another political formation in the Tamil homeland, but some were formed entirely of individuals in the UK to provide general support to the Tamil national cause, rather than to support a particular organisation. For example, the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) was formed entirely by intellectuals in the UK, and recruitment among the Tamils in Sri Lanka and transfers back from the UK led to the presence of the organisation in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. The Tamil diaspora[8] thus has a long history of political activism in the UK.

[8] Unless otherwise specified, the terms Tamil diaspora, diaspora and UK-based Tamil diaspora are used interchangeably in this paper.

Since the emergence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as the dominant politico-military organisation in the 1990s, political organisations in the UK have been identified – and often self-differentiated – on the basis of their support for or antipathy towards the LTTE.[9] In some instances, this has served as shorthand for the substantive political differences between these organisations, but, in many cases, this cleavage masked underlying variations and similarities. Since the military defeat of the Tigers in May 2009, the underlying shades of political activism have begun to emerge and the cleavage itself has become difficult to maintain. This has also made it harder to solidly establish the position of any organisation or the relationship between organisations because new cleavages have not yet been firmly established. This is further compounded by the uncertainty within the organisations themselves, as they seek to position themselves within a new 'order' where old dichotomies are no longer relevant.

Since May 2009, some positions have been disempowered and others empowered by the perceived actions (or lack thereof) of the international community in general. For example, some organisations that were seen as having a relationship with the British government have suffered from their (perceived) inability to get more than words out of the government, especially when it comes to ending the suffering of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. This has disempowered them in the eyes of some members of the diaspora, resulting in the proliferation of numerous other organisations;[10] however, sufficient time has not yet passed to allow for an assessment of how this will impact on the ability of these organisations to represent the views of Tamils in the UK.

Thus the perceived 'failure' by international actors to intervene in the war (the death-toll was often cited, but so too was the fact that other 'war crimes' had not been prevented) had an impact on the Tamil organisations that were seen as working closely with, or actively lobbying, foreign governments, including the British government. This reassessment of the role of Tamil diaspora organisations was driven by (mis)perceptions within the Tamil community (based on claims made by some within the organisations and by, perhaps unrealistic, public expectations) about the ability of Tamil organisations to impact upon the British government in terms of Tamil issues. In addition, the manner in which the war ended brought about this reassessment. It also resulted in a reassessment of political positions within the Tamil diaspora. The roles of 'moderates', 'extremists', 'pacifists', 'hawks' etc., were impacted upon by the defeat of the LTTE and are becoming even more inappropriate for assessing the divisions and positions within the Tamil diaspora. The main division now seems to be based around whether or not individuals or organisations are perceived as nationalist, but the implications of this are difficult to predict and may depend on circumstances beyond the control of the UK Tamil diaspora. This paper begins by setting out some general concepts that are relevant to any understanding of Tamil political organisations in the UK today. These concepts are important for understanding some of the features of Tamil political organisation in the UK. The following sections will discuss three categories of Tamil organisations in the UK – political, human rights/humanitarian, and

[9] This analysis is not suggesting that any organisation or individual was supportive of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam after their proscription under the Terrorism Act of 2000. The paper merely sets out perceptions that some organisations were seen as being more favourably inclined to the LTTE's strategy than others.

[10] During interviews with activists and organisations, an often heard expression was that organisation X had failed (or been unable to) deliver (with the object not 'delivered' ranging from a ceasefire or supplying aid to the war zone, to raising international awareness, etc). This was then often used to justify the formation of a new organisation (often by those previously involved with the old organisation).

development/welfare. The paper attempts to cover the various views that the differing organisations represent in each category. The paper then focuses on the current trend for transnational Tamil politics before concluding with an assessment of what this may mean for future engagement with the UK Tamil diaspora polity.

2.1 Methodology and conceptual clarifications

The organisations selected were chosen on the basis that the focus of this paper is on political organisations[11] among the Tamil diaspora in the UK. Organisations are defined as political if they are involved in activities with the purpose of affecting the structure of state power in Sri Lanka, regardless of whether they are also engaged in other activities in the UK. Thus, political organisations include those engaged in (among other activities):

- Lobbying the British government;
- Raising awareness among the local (non-Tamil) British population;
- Mobilising the UK Tamil population (grass roots mobilisation) behind a particular organisation or opinion about the homeland;
- Seeking to shape the views of the UK Tamil and non-Tamil populations about matters in Sri Lanka
- Investing in Sri Lanka with a view towards shaping the political geography and economy there.

It is acknowledged that the terms political, humanitarian and developmental are not necessarily discrete – there are often significant overlaps between them. They have been separated for the purposes of this paper because many humanitarian/human rights organisations identify themselves as such and disassociate themselves from 'political activity'. Within Tamil diaspora circles, the term 'political' has come to be recognised as shorthand for the advocating of a particular solution to what is known as the 'Tamil question' – i.e. taking a stance on a political solution in Sri Lanka that they believe will be acceptable to the Tamils. The organisations that focus exclusively on highlighting the humanitarian needs and human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, or on developmental activity, expressly disassociate themselves from a political position as they believe any stance adopted will automatically lose them a portion of their target audience. Thus, even when privately acknowledging that their position is political, they will distance themselves publically from politics and a political position. Even the organisations identified as political do not necessarily express a clear political position on the Tamil question - again for fear of losing part of their target audience, even if they are, in fact, clearly engaged in activities with electoral and governmental politics either in the UK (working with British parties and institutions) or in Sri Lanka (working with political organisations).

Organisations not assessed in this paper include those that are formed for particular purposes in the UK, e.g. religious or educational bodies. Some of these organisations are also involved in work in the development/welfare arena (e.g. investing excess funds in humanitarian or developmental projects in Sri Lanka, functioning as venues for the communication of political views, etc.) but as this is not their primary purpose they are not included among the organisations discussed in this paper. Also not included in this paper are the Tamil media organisations. The number of Tamil

[11] The term political is itself indefinite – what counts as 'political' has been subject to much debate, ranging from some who argue that everything is political, to those who seek to limit the term as narrowly as possible to enable analysis and research.

media organisations based in the UK, or primarily driven by actors in the UK, is significant. However, most of these organisations are not involved in what would be described as 'political' activities, as they do not engage with the public beyond trying to shape their opinions.[12] They rarely organise public meetings or engage with the public directly on political matters. Thus, while media organisations such as Oru Paper, Tamil Guardian, GTV and Deepam, as well as a number of radio stations and a large number of websites, are based in, or operated from, the UK, they are not covered here.

Methodology

The Tamil diaspora in the UK was surveyed with a view towards identifying as many organisations as possible, along with their goals. Using community networks, public listings of Tamil organisations and initial contact with a number of these, a list of Tamil diaspora organisations in the UK engaged in political and developmental activities was drawn up. These organisations were then categorised on the basis of the primary activities they were engaged in. The following broad categories emerged:

- Alumni
- Cultural
- Development/Welfare
- Home Village Associations
- Human Rights/Humanitarian
- Media
- Political
- Religious
- School
- Sports

From this broad list, a number of political, human rights/humanitarian and development/welfare organisations were selected to be interviewed in-depth, providing details of the activities and positions of these representative organisations. A long list of potential interviewees was agreed upon by the project Advisory Group, to ensure that no significant organisations were neglected. These organisations were selected on the basis of membership/representation, variety of positions (either representativeness or uniqueness), visibility within Tamil diaspora/political circles, the variety of activities undertaken, the purpose of the organisation and how indicative the organisation might be of the future political organisation of the Tamil diaspora.

The approved list was then refined down to the final shortlist of interviewees based on the willingness of the organisation to be part of this project and their availability for interviews. In conducting the in-depth interviews with the organisations (interviews typically lasted 2-3 hours), the focus was on criteria agreed to by the Advisory Group. Aiming at reflecting the work and position of the organisation, these criteria included:

- Background

[12] An exception is Thesamnet, which is discussed later in the paper.

- Mission/Vision
- Structure
- Activities
- Presence on websites and through publications
- Affiliations

Concepts

The concept of nationalism is one that arises frequently in discussions within the Tamil diaspora in the UK, but, as with politics more broadly, the term itself is also contested by Tamils. For the purposes of this paper, organisations taking a nationalist stance are defined (using the lowest common denominator) as those who recognise the existence of a Tamil nation with a territory of historic habitation in the northeast of Sri Lanka and with a culture and practices that distinguish them from other peoples. Within the Tamil polity there are some differences as to what this equates to. Some argue that this Tamil nation deserves a separate state, while others argue that it has the right to self-determination - which means calling for a referendum on the future for Tamils. Others argue that the future for this Tamil nation is within an all-island political framework, i.e. some form of political configuration short of separation, but which recognises the existence of the Tamil nation.

It must be acknowledged that some organisations, even when they acknowledge the criteria set out above for identifying Tamil nationalists, will not define themselves as nationalists on the basis that traditional nationalist organisations have not done enough to tackle the internal cleavages of caste, region, religion, etc.[13] However, this view of Tamil nationalism would be disputed by those who consider themselves nationalists, as they feel the nationalist drive is also about abolishing these divisions. Without disputing that such cleavages are present, even among the Tamils in the UK, this paper does not focus on these as the interviews conducted for the purposes of this paper rarely identified these factors as significant for the political mobilisation, or organisation, of the UK-based Tamil diaspora.

Another concept worth noting is that the Tamil idea of leadership relies more on ideas than on individuals. Thus those who present themselves as leaders within the diaspora will garner broader support from the diaspora on the basis of the ideology they follow, rather than on individual networks, caste, religious or regional affiliations. While Home Village Associations abound, popular support is not based on ancestral ties, but rather on the basis of support for a nationalist stance, with support differing between individuals on the basis of their personal stance about what a practical solution in Sri Lanka might be. Thus, in the past, a large number of Tamils supported the LTTE[14] and they were seen as the legitimate leaders of the Tamil people by many within the diaspora because the organisation was clear about its nationalist stance. With the demise of the LTTE in May 2009, a power vacuum was created at the top of Tamil politics, not only

[13] Ideologically, most organisations/parties among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, including the Federal Party, Tamil United Liberation Front and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, were committed to overcoming these cleavages, but many argue that they did not do enough to actually bring about this change.

[14] There are no statistical figures to support this, as no survey has been undertaken and the ban on the organisation made it illegal to express this opinion after 2001. However, the numbers of Tamils associated with organisations like the Uniting Tamil Organisation (UTO) and the British Tamil Association (BTA) prior to 2001 anecdotally supported this statement.

among supporters of the LTTE but also opponents, as discussed earlier. This uncertainty in Sri Lanka has also resulted in uncertainty in the UK, with many organisations seeking to reposition themselves in light of this new reality. This repositioning was ongoing at the time of writing and thus will have to be re-assessed by those seeking to engage with the Tamil community at a future date. It is also worth noting that the politically active Tamil community in the UK is relatively small, to the extent that most actors know each other, or at least know of each other. While there are rarely formal alliances between organisations, individuals are often found (on some level) across organisations and a collegiate atmosphere exists between organisations where the political objectives are not seen as contradictory.

2.2 Political organisations

Over the last three years, the British Tamils Forum (BTF) has become the main organisation of the Tamil diaspora in the UK, focusing on political mobilisation, both among the diaspora and within the British political establishment, with both politicians and officials. This is mainly due to the size of its membership (around ten thousand) and the numbers of Tamils – and non-Tamils – it is able to mobilise for mass events (in the tens of thousands at least). It is also due to the organisation's contacts with Tamil politicians and other political activists in Sri Lanka, which provides the BTF with both access and information. Furthermore, the BTF has built up strong links with Tamils with access to the British political establishment, especially the main political parties, endowing it with the ability to speak on behalf of the Tamils in the UK. The BTF is not formally accountable to the Tamil population in the UK (though attempts are currently underway to secure this with elections to BTF constituent organisations), but it is nonetheless accountable through the informal networks within the Tamil diaspora (that keep track of who is saying what on their behalf, and are not reticent about internally voicing support or opposition).

The Tamil Youth Organisation (TYO) in the UK is a group mainly focused on mobilisation and raising awareness among the UK Tamil population, especially those between the ages of 16 and 30. The TYO itself does not operate politically but it works closely with other organisations in the UK that are politically active, such as the BTF and the Tamil National Remembrance Foundation (TNRF), which organises the annual Remembrance Day event on November 27.[15] The TYO's focus is mainly on universities and other venues where significant numbers of young Tamils congregate but, through their networks, they are also able to access and mobilise the general Tamil population, mainly because of their strongly nationalist stance. The TYO is also noteworthy for being a forerunner to current trends for transnational networks – the TYO itself exists in a number of Tamil diaspora centres and these distinct organisations coordinate closely with each other on policy and sometimes in organising events (such as mass rallies for Tamils across Europe gathering in front of the United Nations in Geneva).

The Tamil Information Centre (TIC) operates independently of any other organisation in the UK. Working mainly within limited circles in the Tamil diaspora (rather than through mass mobilisation), they mainly concentrate their activities outside Sri Lanka to briefings and the dissemination of information at governmental and quasi-governmental levels. The TIC works

[15] The BTF also works closely with the TNRF, often taking responsibility for securing the police permission and venue for the annual event.

with other organisations in planning events and conducting seminars, though it works mainly with organisations outside the Tamil spectrum. Even though the TIC's organisers would claim that they are a humanitarian body focusing on the universal rights of oppressed Tamils – i.e. non-political – for the purpose of this paper, it is included within the category of political organisations as it has recently started to move into the political arena (for example, a forum for discussion between Tamil and Muslim politicians from Sri Lanka was organised in Zurich by the TIC in conjunction with the International Working Group on Sri Lanka - a non-Tamil organisation).

There has also been an increase in organisations led by or focusing on the non-Tamil population in the UK. ACT NOW, for example, was formed within the past year to serve a particular purpose of bridging the gap between the Tamil diaspora and the broader UK population. It is unusual in its focus on non-Tamil participation (its directors are both non-Tamil) and in spreading the message of a Tamil political issue within the broader British (non-Tamil) population. Thus, while also participating in mainly Tamil events (such as mass rallies and public meetings), ACT NOW is more focused on measures targeting non-Tamils, such as mainstream music events and political rallies. ACT NOW leads the boycott Sri Lanka campaign, targeting Sri Lanka's economy, with the support of both Tamil and non-Tamil organisations and individuals.

Another Tamil political organisation in the UK is the Tamil National Council (TNC), which was the lead organisation behind the referendum in January 2010 that resulted in over 99% of more than 64,000 voters supporting an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the northeast of Sri Lanka. The referendum itself was held in conjunction with a number of other Tamil political organisations, including the BTF, TYO, and CWG. The TNC itself consists of a handful of individuals and was due to disband after the polls were held, however at the time of writing, the organisation continues to function, albeit with no projects in place.

Although Thesamnet is a website that operates to highlight instances of oppression in Sri Lanka, it also functions as a rallying point where Tamils with different political opinions can share their views; thus it is included here as a political organisation. While Thesamnet was formed in 2007 by a few individuals who felt that there was insufficient coverage (within the Tamil media) of the oppression of the Tamils by the LTTE, since the demise of the LTTE the organisers have attempted to emerge as a nexus around which Tamils of differing opinions can gather. The organisers deliberately distance themselves from nationalism as they object to what they perceive as the caste, class, regional and religious cleavages within the concept of nationalism, but find common ground with the nationalists on issues such as the recognition of a historic Tamil homeland, the Tamil nation, etc. It is on these grounds that they are attempting to emerge as a forum for the airing and sharing of divergent views across the Tamil polity.

The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum (SLDF)[16] is another organisation that is active in the UK. According to their website, the SLDF is a "global network of human rights and democracy activists committed to promote democratisation and inter-ethnic co-existence in Sri Lanka". The organisation's strongest presence is in London, though it has activists in a number of other countries. Formed in 2002, the organisation has "campaigned to stop the use of child soldiers, to

[16] Though a number of attempts were made to interview SLDF representatives in the UK, they did not respond to any of our requests. Thus this summary is taken from the organisation's own website.

stop political killings, to protect Muslim rights, for equitable post-tsunami reconstruction, for free and fair elections, and a permanent political solution that meets the aspirations of the Tamil and Muslim communities".

Other Tamil political organisations in the UK include the TNRF, the Tamil Democratic Congress, etc. They, like ACT NOW, TNC and TIC, are much smaller than the BTF or TYO, both in terms of ability to access British politics and to mobilise the UK Tamil population, but they operate in niche areas, such as allowing disparate voices to be aired or providing a common forum through which a number of Tamil political organisations can participate in the marking of significant events within the Tamil community.

2.3 Humanitarian/human rights organisations

Unlike the BTF, there is no single, large humanitarian or human rights organisation in the UK. As with the political organisations, the same people are often involved in more than one organisation, as they seek to raise awareness of the humanitarian suffering and human rights abuses in Sri Lanka through whatever means are available, or as they set up new organisations to meet what are perceived to be gaps in current activities.

The Tamil Legal Action Project (TLAP) is designed to highlight and bring to an end the human rights abuses and humanitarian suffering in Sri Lanka. With that objective, the organisation works to assess and formulate the legal arguments that can be made to pressure Sri Lanka into ceasing its human rights abuses. This includes obtaining opinions on the possibility of bringing war crimes charges against responsible individuals and highlighting the continuing targeting of journalists (such as holding public events to mark the anniversary of the killing of Lasantha Wickramatunga[17] and Sivaram Dharmeratnam[18]).

The head office of the Tamil Centre for Human Rights (TCHR) is in France, but the organisation also operates in the UK, with an office in Manchester. As the organisation's focus is on working within the United Nations to highlight the human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, the TCHR is not particularly active within the Tamil community in the UK, but works with Tamil diaspora organisations within the UK and abroad when projects are aligned.

The UK Tamil Students Union (UKTSU) also seeks to draw attention to human rights and humanitarian abuses in Sri Lanka, but its target audience is university students. The organisation is mainly formed of university students from across the UK operating as a loose network to draw the attention of their fellow students to the ongoing problems in Sri Lanka and to ensure that Sri Lanka remains on the human rights agendas of various organisations concerned with preventing rights abuses across the globe.

Beacon was formed to bridge the gap between the Tamil diaspora and the broader UK population, on the basis that the Tamil political and humanitarian position was being insufficiently articulated to the general British population. They focus on spreading the message of Tamil humanitarian suffering within the broader British (non-Tamil) population and are mainly

[17] He was the editor of the Sunday Leader and a human rights activist who was known for his regime-critical statements. He was assassinated in 2009.

[18] Also known as Taraki, he was a popular Tamil journalist who was kidnapped and later found dead in 2005.

involved in organising events targeting non-Tamils, especially professionals and university students.

2.4 Development/welfare organisations

Organisations focusing on the developmental and welfare needs of Tamils in Sri Lanka continue to operate from the UK, although their ability to operate was severely limited by the war, and later by the lack of means through which to directly access those on the island. Some organisations have made direct contact with individuals or groups in the internally displaced camps or with civil society organisations in Sri Lanka and continue to work with them. All of the UK-based organisations concentrated on development work independently, but have been known to collaborate on projects on the ground (on a project-by-project basis). A number of small UK-based Tamil charities have also engaged in development in Sri Lanka, either running their own orphanages, or by funding hospitals or organisations in Sri Lanka that engage in local humanitarian or development work. Examples include Aaropanam, Tamil Orphans Fund and vithu.com, but they are small organisations, often run by a small, but committed, team or even by just one individual.

New organisations are also emerging to cope with the humanitarian crisis that occurred due to the manner in which the war ended. The Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN), an example of an organisation formed after May 2009, is coordinating efforts between a number of UK charities involving medical personnel and volunteers working with orphans and community organisations in the Tamil homeland. Other organisations formed after May 2009 include a number of smaller charities supporting particular causes, such as local villages, orphanages, pregnant women, families of deceased LTTE cadres, students, schools, temples, etc. These are often individual (or family) projects and are thus not generally known beyond the circles of those raising the funds.

The longest existing Tamil developmental organisation is the Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking Peoples (SCOT), which was formed in the 1970s. The organisation continues to fund projects in the northeast of Sri Lanka and it also funds local organisations that are able to present a business plan and can demonstrate their ability to achieve their objectives.

'White Pigeon' remains one of the largest and best known organisations for welfare and reconstruction work. Initially set up to fund the provision of artificial limbs for those affected by the conflict, the organisation also engages in fundraising for humanitarian needs on an *ad hoc* basis (e.g. it led the Tamil efforts to raise funds after the 2004 tsunami) and in raising awareness about the humanitarian needs of the Tamil people among the non-Tamil population of the UK.

The Medical Institute of Tamils (MIOT) was formed as a vehicle through which Tamil medical professionals, of whom there is a significant number in the UK, could contribute their skills in the homeland. Activities of the organisation include not only rotating medical staff through hospitals in the homeland, but also providing free health clinics for locals in the UK. The Tamil Health Organisation (THO) was set up to develop the medical infrastructure of the Tamil areas but since May 2009 they have ceased their activities and are now focusing on the immediate humanitarian needs rather than long-term development. The THO doctors also participate with MIOT volunteers in running *ad hoc* health clinics in the UK.

Alumni associations (AAs) and home village associations (HVAs) are also involved in developmental and welfare work, albeit on a smaller basis. Each organisation is usually limited in that it will only support its own village or old school. However, the kind of support offered ranges from providing pens, textbooks and desks, to supplying computers and erecting buildings and wells. Although each organisation is involved in small-scale support, the significant number of AAs and HVAs in the UK means that the overall contribution of these organisations in the UK to the developmental and welfare effort in Sri Lanka is not insignificant.

2.5 Transnational Tamil politics

With the defeat of the LTTE and the increased mobilisation of the Tamil polity as a result of the events of May 2009, Tamil political organisations have also started to organise themselves globally so as to provide some cohesion of opinion across countries and to share ideas and experiences from the different territorial locations of the Tamil people.

The Global Tamil Forum (GTF) has emerged as a network of country-based organisations loosely coordinating their activities, both for 'economies of scale' and to increase impact. The GTF is represented in each country by the organisation with the largest membership (in terms of numbers and finances). Thus the BTF is the UK's representative within the GTF and all activities in the UK, even when globally coordinated by GTF, will be implemented by the BTF. Similarly, the GTF's global effort to fundraise (to support children in Sri Lanka, for example), is made by the BTF raising funds locally and contributing to the global 'pot', which is then disbursed in Sri Lanka on behalf of the GTF. However, the GTF itself has also been active in raising awareness of the issues concerning the Tamils in Sri Lanka, such as the release of video footage and photographs that are cited as evidence of war crimes. The organisation also has an office in London, where it is headquartered, and from where the global projects are coordinated.

The Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) is another global initiative. The TGTE aims to provide elected representatives to speak and make decisions on behalf of the Tamil diaspora, with representatives from across the globe. Elections were held (or candidates selected unopposed) from all major Tamil diaspora population centres (except India) and a number of sittings have been held. A Prime Minister has been elected and other cabinet members appointed. A constitution has been drafted for the TGTE and elected representatives are working hard to structure their departments and decide how best to deliver the services that fall within their purview. Although the main drive of those involved in working with the TGTE was initially administrative, there are indications that the organisation is rapidly adapting to make itself more visible and more engaged with the diaspora and with assisting the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Another transnational diaspora formation is the Makkal Avai (or people's councils) that have emerged in a number of European countries. However, there was no Makkal Avai in the UK at the time of this report.

2.6 Conclusion

This mapping can only serve as a 'snapshot' of Tamil diaspora organisations in the UK, as new organisations are constantly being formed to meet perceived gaps in the activities of existing organisations. However, this snapshot demonstrates a common position among most active

organisations for the recognition of the existence of a Tamil nation, a historic homeland in the northeast of Sri Lanka and a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. There remain a variety of opinions as to whether this entitles the Tamil nation to self-determination, what form that self-determination should take, and how power should be shared among the peoples of the island of Sri Lanka, but the organisations that find the most support among the Tamil diaspora in the UK are those that espouse a strong stance on the need for Tamils to have political power and control over their economic, cultural (linguistic) and territorial rights.

The future for Tamil political organisations is currently uncertain – less than two years since the military victory, the Sri Lankan government has reshaped the political landscape for Tamils. There is no longer a strong Tamil military force impacting all political activities, and as such, the political decision-making has decentralised, with diaspora organisations claiming more leadership and a greater voice. How this will impact on the struggle for access to political power in Sri Lanka is yet to be determined, but the Tamil national struggle remains a popular project, at least among the Tamil diaspora in the UK, based on the responses during interviews and the continuing public activities of the diaspora organisations.

Chapter 3. Key Workshop Findings

Five dialogue workshops were held over the course of the project and this section will set out the main findings of each,[19] with the final section (4.2 – Lessons learnt) drawing some general conclusions from the findings of these workshop summaries. This section is divided into six parts.

The first section sets out the methodology of the workshops and the selection criteria for participants. The second section focuses on the notion of Tamil political identity among the diaspora, looking at what that identity is and how it is formed and expressed. The third section looks at the UK-based Tamil diaspora's political activism and attempts to identify why this population is active, and in what ways. The fourth section then summarises the discussions on Tamil diaspora engagements for peace in Sri Lanka while the fifth section offers a summary of discussions between Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim participants about the role of the three UK-based communities in Sri Lanka going forward. The final section presents the summary of a discussion amongst members from a number of diaspora groups who shared their experiences in order to find common ground and gain a better mutual understanding.

3.1 Methodology and participant selection

Methodology

The workshops used a number of different interactive methods to encourage all the participants to contribute to the discussions, share their views and experiences with other participants and to build the trust necessary to encourage free exchange. Techniques used included the World Café

[19] As the workshops were held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution of comments to individuals, this section will summarise the discussions without referring to the participants.

methodology, storytelling, conventional working groups and plenary sessions. Emphasis was put on learning, sharing, reflecting and reviewing strategies, ideas and perceptions. Sometimes, resource people were invited to provide input into the workshops. All workshops were conducted under the 'Chatham House' rules (non-attribution of opinions to a named individual outside the confines of the workshop) and often a set of ground rules were established for each workshop, including privacy and confidentiality, non-polemical discussion, no expectation of agreement ('agreeing to disagree'), equality in setting, etc.

Participant selection

In order to facilitate fruitful discussions and to provide enough space and time for participants to express their views and issues in-depth, a limited number of participants (usually around 20) were invited to each workshop. Participant selection usually involved identifying politically influential individuals with strong community backing, who were open to an inclusive approach (tolerance and acceptance of diverse views), willing to participate actively and would be potentially interested in being involved in the follow-up activities. Participants were selected on the basis of their involvement in diaspora politics[20] in Britain (be it the Tamil community, or the participants from other community groups who participated in the last workshop), whether as event organisers, spokespersons, or as active members of organisations. Recommendations for invitees were sought from identified organisations and these were then filtered for age, gender and range of opinion. All of the invited participants took part in their private capacity. An attempt was also made at each workshop to invite participants from outside London.

3.2 Tamil political identity

This section presents a summary of discussions on Tamil political identity among the diaspora in the UK – how the participants defined this identity, what contributed to its formation and ongoing relevance in the participants' lives and how it was expressed. While there was consensus among the participants that identity was not fixed, with individuals having more than one identity and changing identities regularly, they were willing to talk about the broader factors that had shaped their identity, rather than seeking to crystallise their own or other's identities. Political identity was defined by the majority of the participants as collective rather than an individual identity, and is thus about notions of how society should be organised and maintained, with respect to a state and within itself.

Identity definition

The Tamil political identity for the participants consisted of a collective consciousness of being Tamil and British. This identity had a distinctly liberal character, but it was also, for some, ascribed rather than chosen. These ideas are discussed further below.

[20] This was slightly different in the workshop "Challenges and Opportunities in Rehabilitation and Development and the Role of the Diaspora". Since the target group of IA was the business community and some sections of the second generation diaspora, the participants from the Sinhala and the Muslim community came predominantly from those sections.

The collective consciousness – as Tamils – was a main element of the Tamil political identity. Participants argued that this was shaped by the common aspirations of the Tamil people and that the focus was on political identity – these aspirations were centred on the relationship between the Tamil people and the state in Sri Lanka – how state power is organised or how society is structured within the state. Thus the Tamil political identity was shaped by the collective consciousness of those people who identified with a common aspiration with respect to the relationship between the 'Tamils' and the Sri Lankan state.

At the same time, there was a sense of the importance of 'Tamilness' without an in-depth discussion of what this meant. Factors like history, heritage, culture and language contributed to the identity, while religion was only mentioned in the sense that the identity was secular. The increasing 'Britishness' of the Tamil political identity was also stressed, with the values underlying the Tamil identity being driven by experiences in the UK, especially for the second and third generations of British Tamils who have recently become more politically active. Thus, even as the British Tamils continue to demand rights on behalf of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, they do so as British citizens, on the basis that "we want for them the same rights as we have".

This rights-based approach permeated the discussions, whether it was self-determination, freedom of expression, freedom to pursue economic opportunity or respect for human rights. While the homeland was an important part of the Tamil political identity (and thus the idea of self-determination), equally important were the collective rights of the Tamils as a people and especially the notion of equality – which partially referred to individual equality, but more importantly to collective equality between peoples. These liberal notions of rights were felt to be significant to the identity, in that they established the mode of governance under which the Tamils envisaged they would be happiest.

The role of oppression in contributing to the cohesion of the Tamil political identity was also discussed. It was felt that the oppression, racism and discrimination from the Sri Lankan state had led to resistance against it and that this had contributed significantly to the political identity and the forms of its expression. Thus, the sense of a people resisting 'the threat of extinction' was mentioned as a core feature of the current identity. The view was that rather than creating a victim complex – although feelings of anger, grief and frustration were mentioned – this feeling of being an oppressed people assisted in strengthening the will to resist and led to clear statements that to be 'Tamil' was to be 'not Sri Lankan'.

In keeping with the understanding of identity as a flexible and undetermined descriptor, which could nonetheless speak to a collective unity, there was a discussion around identity as being an attribute of an individual/collective versus identity as something ascribed to the individual/collective.

When considering 'what holds us together from within' the participants agreed that the main elements of the Tamil political identity could be summarised by the phrase "Eelam Tamil national consciousness". This referred to the homeland (Eelam), the ethnic and cultural identity (Tamil), the idea that the Tamils are a people or a nation with rights (national) and the notion of a collective or group (consciousness). A final factor also thought to be important to the Tamil political identity, which is not found within this phrase, was the notion of being an oppressed people – a sense that the oppression had strengthened the collective awareness and identity of the group.

Identity formation

In identifying factors in the homeland and hostland that contributed to identity formation, the participants were able to build a timeline that covered events from Sri Lanka's history and the history of Tamil migration to the UK. The range of ages and experiences led to a variety of factors being identified, but did not by any means form a comprehensive picture of Tamil political identity or its formation.

Personal factors played an important part in the Tamil identities of the participants. The role of parents was a common factor among a number of participants. While the second generation Tamils claimed to feel as much British as they did Tamil, they cited family upbringing and the circle of friends they moved in as contributing to making them not 'exclusively British'. The experiences of friends and relatives in the homeland, as relayed through family conversations, also impacted upon the political identity of Tamils in the UK. Others had their own personal experiences, both in Sri Lanka and in the UK. While experiences of racism, oppression, discrimination, political activism, etc. were sometimes tied to major events in the Tamil collective history (the 1958 riots, ethnic violence in 1983, etc.), these experiences were independent of any major event and were particular to the individual participant, such as personal visits to sites such as orphanages and seeing destroyed homes, or personal experiences of discrimination.

The experience of discrimination and oppression in Sri Lanka contributed significantly to the formation of the Tamil political identity of the participants. These included various incidents of riots and pogroms (1958, 1977, 1983, etc.), experiences of discrimination and oppression and internal displacement (significant displacements in 1958 and 1983, and from Jaffna in 1995). The Tamil areas under the control of the LTTE (described as the "*de-facto* state" by Stokke (2006)) and the tsunami also contributed to the formation of the identity by serving as practical projects that reinforced it. While these were mainly the 'large' events, common to a number of Tamils, certain personal incidents were also cited. After 2000, most factors identified were in the hostland rather than the homeland. This was partially a result of the experiences of the participants – most were in the UK during the past decade – but was also a reflection of age, as the younger participants discussed and cited more factors after 2000 and their experiences were mainly in the UK, with only visits or common events (destruction of an orphanage, displacement) being mentioned as factors shaping their political identity.

The conflation of Tamil and Tiger in the non-Tamil media and population also served as a contributory factor with respect to political identity. Participants with experiences from the 1980s spoke of introducing themselves as 'Tamil' and being asked if they were 'Tigers'. This was seen as evidence of an increasing awareness among the British population of the issues in Sri Lanka and a result of the increasing publicity given to the LTTE. However, participants claimed that, post 2000, the question had all but disappeared, with participants being identified – by non-Tamils – as 'Tamil Tigers' when they identified themselves as Tamils. This was interpreted by the participants as the association between Tamils and Tigers moving from question to statement and from vague possibility to more concrete assumption – i.e. people were asked if they were Tigers in the 1980s whereas by 2000, people *assumed* that Tamils were Tigers. Thus participants saw the ascribed identity – the way in which Tamils were seen by others – as now automatically assuming a Tamil was a Tiger. This was felt to contribute to the Tamil political identity for those

who had been exposed to this assumption either rebelling against it, or, more often for the participants, accepting the identity as it was 'going to be assumed anyway'.

Especially among the younger participants, the notion of being British, but not 'exclusively' British, featured strongly. They did not generally have memories of, or experiences from, Sri Lanka to factor into their 'Tamilness' but nevertheless had developed this identity as a result of their experiences in the UK. Questions such as "Who am I?", driven by the awareness that "I am different from my friends and school mates" drove the search for an explanation that resulted in a reinforcement of their Tamil identity. The cultural and linguistic identity was aided by British policies of openness to other cultures and awareness of differences amongst peoples' commonalities. Yet the political identity was driven more by an awareness of differences – through securitisation of political difference, through liberal expectations of the British state that sometimes were not delivered, etc. For this generation of Tamils, their Tamil identity was coterminous with their British identity, meaning that they felt both British and Tamil and saw no contradiction or difficulty in this.

Identity expression

The Tamil political identity was expressed through a number of symbols. These included inanimate objects, but also public events such as demonstrations, Remembrance Day commemorations and Black July events. With regards to protests, the location of protests was felt to reflect the changing Tamil political identity. Thus in London, for example, whilst in the 1980s Tamils habitually protested in front of the Sri Lankan High Commission, most protests are now conducted in front of the Houses of Parliament. This was felt to be an expression of a shift within the Tamil political identity, that ceased to perceive Sri Lanka as the means of resolving the problem, and increasingly saw the west (and, in the UK, the British government in particular) as the means of bringing about a just solution to the Tamils' grievances.

There was acknowledgement that in the UK there seemed to be a move away from older norms. New technology was being readily adopted, be it texting, social networking websites such as 'Facebook', or other new forms of networking. The involvement of celebrities, either to endorse or lead projects, was also seen as a reflection of the current global culture, although such practices have always been inherent to protests. There was a view that the proliferation of Tamil media had assisted in the means through which Tamil political identity is expressed and debated. Ideas could be shared and disseminated in ways that were not available in the past.

Another important aspect of the expression of Tamil political identity was the move out of separating the political from the rest of people's lives to incorporating their politics into all aspects of life. Thus people felt able to email non-Tamil friends to vote for Jan Jananayagam's MEP candidacy on the basis of Tamil issues[21], while others spoke of all their friends being aware of their Tamil political identity even if they were only connected through university or work. Furthermore, the criteria for those qualified to speak on behalf of the Tamils was also felt to be

[21] Janani (Jan) Jananayagam ran as a candidate in London in the 2009 European Parliament elections on a platform highlighting and opposing the genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka. She was unsuccessful, but received over 50,000 votes, the largest number of votes ever won by an independent candidate and more than the votes received by all other independent candidates across the whole of the UK (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/elections/euro/09/html/ukregion_999999.stm).

changing and reflecting a shifting identity. Moving beyond personal experience, it was students who led the protest at Parliament Square, rather than the more established 'community leaders'. Similarly, the figureheads of the Tamil community were now thought to be home-grown 'celebrities' such as pop music artist MIA (Maya Arulpragasam) and Jan Jananayagam rather than foreign celebrities or established older Tamils.

Conclusion

The outcome of the workshop was the conclusion that the Tamil political identity is strong and grows stronger among British based Tamils. Rather than a second generation moving away from an ethnic identity as they integrated, in the Tamil case the integration was reinforcing the Tamil identity, as young Tamils categorised their differences from the local population and then wondered why their relatives did not have the same rights and opportunities as they did. The Tamil political identity was also evolving, as evidenced by the changing leader figures and adapting language of expression. Furthermore, the political identity, especially for the youth, was driven by notions of 'fairness' and 'justice' that were a result of their British upbringing and cultural base.

3.3 Tamil political activism

The second workshop looked at the political activism of Tamils living in the UK. The main focus was on their activism related to Sri Lanka, although a number of the participants were also active in mainstream British politics. The focus was on the kinds of activism engaged in, the drivers of Tamil political activism and the impact of external factors (i.e. from outside the activists themselves) on their activism.

Motivators and expression of activism

Most of the Tamil political activism in the UK was driven by perceptions of suffering by Tamils in Sri Lanka. Notions of 'injustice', 'people in need', 'human suffering', 'exposing hypocrisy' and 'thirst for fairness' were expressed as the drivers of political activism. Some were driven by a personal search for 'self-fulfilment' or 'dignity'. The perception that 'our homeland' has been infringed and 'we' need to fight for 'our right to self-determination' also emerged in the discussions. Issues such as support, rehabilitation and humanitarian needs were raised, as were the lack of human rights, the need for justice (on behalf of people there) and the importance of war crimes prosecutions.

When discussing the aim of Tamil political activism in the UK, the main elements were, again, tied to Sri Lanka and the events there. Featuring high on the list of objectives was 'achieving the aspirations of the Tamil people' and seeking the 'right to self-determination' for the Tamils. There were again also personal factors, such as activism being a means to develop an identity among the youth.

Activism was also motivated by a desire to change the status quo in the UK. Thus, understanding the local political mechanisms, attempting to change the position of the British government, European Union, United Nations, etc. and challenging the label of the Tamil struggle as terrorism

were mentioned as motivators. Others sought to raise awareness of the issue among the broader British population and to 'build bridges' between the Tamil population in the UK (with the assumption that the issues in Sri Lanka were a main motivator of that population) and the wider British population.

The list of organisations involved in Tamil political activism was, from the perspective of the participants, a broad one, including many that might not conventionally have been considered 'political'. Thus Tamil schools, religious organisations and youth organisations were included among political and relief organisations and individuals.

Turning points

Many turning points were identified that changed the nature of Tamil political activism in the UK. The 1977 anti-Tamil pogrom, the 1983 riots in Colombo (also known as Black July), the mass exodus of Tamils from Jaffna in 1995 and the 2009 large-scale killings of Tamils in Mulliyavaikkal were the major events in Sri Lanka that prompted activism among a large number of the UK-based Tamil population. Other factors which increased political activism included the opening of Eelam House in 1996 (and its subsequent closure in 2001), protests against the Indian Peace Keeping Force in 1989, the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the Liberation Tigers and the Sri Lankan government in 2002, the death and funeral of Anton Balasingham in 2006[22], the derailing of the ceasefire in 2006 and the 2008 Kosovar declaration of independence. The factors which led participants to either reduce their participation, or at least question it, included the proscription of the Liberation Tigers in 2001, the arrest of five men on charges of supporting the LTTE and the imprisonment of A.C. Shanthan[23] in 2008.

The proscription of the LTTE under the UK Terrorism Act in 2001 had a profound impact on the activism of the Tamils in the UK; however, the effects changed over time. Initially, there was concern as to what was permissible and what was not under the Act. With no one initially being prosecuted, the fears abated and even the arrests in 2007 did not significantly deter participation. But the proscription had other, non-quantifiable, implications for activism in the UK. Thus questions such as whether the displaying of the red flag with the tiger symbol on it (claimed by opponents to be the LTTE flag and by proponents to be the Tamil national flag) was legal or not remain unanswered. This allows the police to arrest people for carrying the flag on some occasions but not on others.[24] The participants cited similar events during protests in Parliament Square in early 2009, where the police were able to monitor and prevent the use of certain slogans, t-shirts and placards on the basis of the Act with a distinct lack of clarity around what was and was not legal.

Participants also cited other indirect consequences of the proscription, such as measures that created greater hurdles for those collecting funds to support charity work in Sri Lanka and made it more difficult for asylum seekers. It also, according to the participants, made it easier for the Sri

[22] Anton Balasingham was the theoretician and political advisor to the LTTE. He led the delegations during the early rounds of peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers.
[23] A.C. Shanthan (A Crishanthakumar) was sentenced to 2 years in 2008 for supplying materials and documents to the LTTE (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5517148/British-based-Sri-Lankan-jailed-for-helping-Tamil-Tigers-in-terror-attacks.html).
[24] The participants were of the opinion that though a number of people had been arrested for carrying or displaying the flag, no one had been charged.

Lankan High Commission to suppress events locally within the UK, with examples cited including a number of charity events, a cultural event and a photographic exhibition. Participants cited examples of associations' bank accounts being closed 'without explanation', protestors being arrested, Tamils being stopped and questioned by police and general 'harassment' by the police force, especially of younger Tamil men. The predominant view was that the whole community had been criminalised ('labelled as terrorists') as a result of the proscription and that this had impacted on day-to-day activities, from hiring venues for events to engaging in conversations with members of the public, where extra effort had to be made to convince them of the legitimacy of Tamil grievances.

Lessons learnt

When discussing the lessons learnt from past activism, the participants concentrated on the things they could have done better. This included the need for greater focus and targeting of messages and campaigns. They also felt that activism could have been more proactive rather than reacting to external events and that better use could have been made of the spaces available for communication with broader audiences. The need to evaluate campaigns and incorporate feedback into future campaigns was also mentioned, along with the need for protocols on how to behave, what to pursue, etc. and the need for a global brand that could help make the activism more successful.

An area in which a number of past shortfalls were identified was in working in solidarity with other similar movements. It was felt that the Tamils should strive to learn more from the success stories and failures of others and also to work towards establishing an international platform. The need for Tamil political organisations to be more accountable and transparent was also mentioned, while the move to elect representatives to a number of organisations was commented on positively. A need was also felt for Tamil organisations to be more flexible and appropriate to the time, people and circumstances.

Conclusion

At the end of the workshop, there was a perception that Tamils will continue to be politically active in the UK until their objectives are achieved. This includes achieving some notion of justice and establishing opportunities for prosperity for the Tamils in Sri Lanka. While there remain internal disagreements about how best to act and the relative importance of different forms of activism, there was a consensus that action is essential and that, for the participants, political activism would remain an important part of their lives. The question was more concerned with how to become more efficient and effective.

3.4 Diaspora engagement

The third workshop focused on engagement by Tamils in the UK in activities in Sri Lanka aimed at establishing sustainable peace on the island. Beginning by discussing the meaning of sustainable peace, the workshop participants discussed the contribution of the diaspora to sustainable peace on the island and the role of international actors. There was also a discussion about the situation in Sri Lanka and the potential role for the diaspora from the perspective of those on the ground.

The session ended with a discussion of options for ongoing constructive engagement on the island. A resource person from a civil society organisation in Colombo was invited to offer input on how they saw the role of the Tamil diaspora concerning development and peace issues in Sri Lanka.

Definition of sustainable peace

There was agreement that peace was not just the absence of war. Thus the view was that what is being experienced in the Tamil areas now is not really peace, but merely the absence of war. Discussing the concepts that contributed to peace, and in particular a sustainable peace, the participants focused on ideas like freedom (both political and economic) and justice (transitional and retributive). The idea that the Tamils in Sri Lanka needed space and freedom for living was thought to be an important component of a sustainable peace, as was the need for accountability. Ultimately, for peace to be sustainable, it was felt there had to be the opportunity for prosperity and the recognition of identity as an expression of equality and respect between the peoples of the island. There was also an acknowledgement that peace may mean different things to different groups of Tamils, who had all had different experiences of war, and that Tamil notions of peace could be different to those of actors in the international community.

Diaspora activities and their contribution to sustainable peace

The workshop participants were involved, engaged and often divided on how and if diaspora activities contribute to peace in the homeland. Arguing from different perspectives, the discussion ranged from a debate as to whether the focus should be on the immediate humanitarian needs or on long-term political stability, to a discussion of even how the immediate humanitarian needs should be met.

The main discussion was centred on whether the role of the diaspora is to support the Tamil population in the homeland (i.e. provide immediate humanitarian support) or to shape the future so that they could support and develop themselves (i.e. seek a long-term political solution). Thus the 'humanitarian vs. political' cleavage was explored in depth, though there was also general agreement that this was in some ways a false division, as both were necessary. On the issue of which should have precedence or how much attention should be given to each component, there was profound disagreement amongst the participants - reflective of the multiple views among the UK-based Tamil diaspora in general, which has contributed to the plethora of organisations seeking to provide niche services.

There was a discussion about the role of the Sri Lankan government in controlling development/ humanitarian activities on the island and the deterrent effect that this had on official engagement in the efforts by the diaspora. Some would participate in official efforts anyway, while others preferred to use private networks and contacts rather than going through official channels. The perception was that relief efforts – or even development efforts – alone would not solve the problem or contribute to a just and sustainable peace and that the involvement of the international community was essential for a long-term, permanent solution. There was also the view that, until now, the diaspora has undertaken the largest share of the work of supporting the

Tamil community in Sri Lanka, and not the international community or the Sri Lankan government, and that most people in the diaspora expected this to continue into the future.

The situation in Sri Lanka and the role of the diaspora

The participants were aware of the role of the international community[25] in the Sri Lankan conflict, whether as supporters of a combatant, in seeking to enforce global ideals on the island or in seeking to profit from the opportunities on the island. With regard to the role of the diaspora given the situation in Sri Lanka at the time (mid-2010), there was little agreement, but the discussion touched on differences of opinion about the role and safety of Tamil activists, politicians and humanitarian workers, especially if they did not agree with the Sri Lankan government. There was agreement that the political space on the island was limited and that other spaces (development, humanitarian) were also being constrained by the government. Discussions also focused on the credibility of the diaspora as a source of information about the Tamils in Sri Lanka (for example, why statements made by international non-governmental organisations carried more weight than statements made by the diaspora) and why some actors are recognised as legitimate and others are not.

Options for constructive engagement

The participants offered many suggestions for constructive engagement that might ensure a sustainable peace in Sri Lanka. These ranged from the detailed (focusing on reviews of Sri Lankan policy within the UK) to the large-scale (developing a cohesive strategy for development of the Tamil areas and developing a Tamil think-tank). Seeking accountability and justice for the injustices of the war was felt to be a vital step on the journey towards sustainable peace as it was believed that without recognition of past mistakes, reconciliation was impossible. Some, however, felt that any such inquiry should be broader, looking at the 'mistakes' made since Sri Lankan independence, or during the years leading up to it.

In the UK, the suggestions were very focused on becoming more politically active within the local system. Ideas thus included voter registration drives, engaging more with politicians at all levels of government and engaging with the ministries and officials more fully. With regards to raising awareness among the British population in general, the ideas were representative of things already occurring, such as cultural events (to show that the community is fully rounded) and focusing on encouraging the British population to boycott Sri Lankan goods and to avoid holidaying in the country.

Conclusion

This workshop ended on a less satisfactory note than the others as there was still uncertainty about how the diaspora could contribute to sustainable peace in Sri Lanka. However, there was an agreement that there was a role for the diaspora in Sri Lanka going forward, not only because of

[25] The diversity within the international community was also discussed extensively (in particular the role of the Asian powers).

existing ties and the economic power of the diaspora, but also because of the lack of opportunities for the Tamils in Sri Lanka to speak openly and freely.

3.5 Challenges and opportunities in rehabilitation and development for the diaspora

This workshop on post-war development challenges in Sri Lanka was jointly organised by Berghof Peace Support (BPS) and International Alert (Alert). The workshop built upon the work Alert has undertaken with mixed ethnicity diaspora groups in the UK and on the engagement with the Tamil diaspora of BPS in cooperation with CJPD. The workshop sought to offer an opportunity to discuss issues related to challenges and possible opportunities for post-war development, rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-torn areas. Resource people from Sri Lanka were invited to inspire the discussions. The workshop was facilitated by an external expert.

Post-war development

This topic initiated a careful exchange across the diaspora formations about the various challenges that the diasporas are facing due to the current (development) politics of the Sri Lankan government. However, the situation of the three diasporas in the UK differ drastically and the options available for them to potentially contribute to peace in Sri Lanka depend on the relationship of the diasporas to the homeland as well as their situation in the hostland. The current situations of the three transnational communities differ widely with regard to the role of traumatic experiences and grievances, as well as with regard to the political opportunity structures and priorities that seem to be predominant in different activist circles.

The participants discussed the current development policies of the Sri Lankan government under the heading of 'development through the state'. While the participants agreed on the need to provide humanitarian relief to the war-torn areas and the necessity of post-war reconstruction policies, the quest for 'pragmatic solutions' to the humanitarian crisis was controversially discussed. Opinions differed widely what the term 'pragmatic' would mean in this context and the issue of cooperation with the government versus oppositional politics was highly contested. Some participants emphasised that it would be necessary to identify entry points for the diasporas to contribute to development and humanitarian relief, but many remained very sceptical. Diaspora activists criticised the current government's policies of channelling investments through the state, the restricted access given to international aid organisations and the travel restrictions on politically active diaspora members who have occasionally been denied entry to Sri Lanka. Moreover, concerns about 'co-optation' efforts by the government were indicated. Throughout the discussions it became clear that many participants agreed that any potential cooperative initiatives of diaspora activities in the future would need to address the ethnopolitical conflict explicitly and openly.

Diaspora engagement for sustainable peace

In order to support sustainable peace in Sri Lanka, some participants argued that, in the current situation, it is up to the diaspora communities to start thinking about what just peace would mean in the Sri Lankan context. Many agreed that the situation in Sri Lanka is characterised by urgent needs and humanitarian problems that would paralyse development and sociopolitical

change. Concrete suggestions for diaspora engagement focused on ways of promoting democratic freedom and development and the participants agreed that it was necessary to strengthen civil society in Sri Lanka.

Addressing the Tamil diaspora in particular, it was argued that the most important contribution to the rehabilitation efforts in the north and east would revolve around capacity-building and efforts to strengthen the communities. There was broad agreement that solutions would need to come from within Sri Lanka; nonetheless, diaspora engagement for sustainable peace could provide crucial support in the current situation.

Regarding the idea of 'joint' diaspora activities, some participants felt that it would be an important first step to bring the diaspora communities together by organising cultural events where the three communities could carefully interact. Opinions about the usefulness of such common cultural activities were divided among the participants. While some felt it was a necessary initiative to strengthen personal relationships across the groups in order to envision a peaceful future in Sri Lanka, others were very critical of this idea. Opponents of the idea argued that common cultural activities would not contribute to the political solution of the conflict and, rather, evade the political issues. Most of the participants agreed, however, that personal relationships across the communities were not the basic problem and that, in the long-term, the different communities would not shy away from interacting and would get along as well as they did in the past once crucial political issues have been addressed.

Humanitarian engagement and relief work were seen as being urgently needed in the present situation. However, concerns were raised that the humanitarian focus as well as the human rights discourse would have de-politicising effects. These concerns can be summarised by the explicit statement: "as long as we talk human rights, we do not talk politics". Another critique of the humanitarian framing was that the Sri Lankan society is currently in a state of de-politicisation that hinders sociopolitical change on the island. To address this situation, it would not suffice to deal with problems on humanitarian grounds alone. A strong political society would be needed in order to create a situation that enables actors from within to support development and initiate change.

A clear finding of the workshop was that the diasporas shared the challenge of accepting that things would have to change incrementally and that the diasporas would have to redefine their strategies. Even if the current situation is very difficult for diaspora engagement, many agreed that the diasporas should continue to engage in strategy-building for constructive activism. The role of the diasporas in a situation of de-politicisation of most parts of the Sri Lankan society would include working towards re-politicising their communities and using the space that is available in the diaspora situation to reflect upon alternatives, generate ideas for sociopolitical change, and to start building alliances. The participants agreed that the particular potential of the diasporas was their less-restricted agency due to resources, freedom and opportunities in the host countries.

Challenges and conclusion

Bringing the different diaspora formations together in the current situation is a sensitive endeavour. Some participants expressed their unease about attending a joint workshop, mainly

for political reasons among Tamil diaspora activists. Reacting to this challenge, the workshop focus was changed and no longer aimed at providing a common platform for diaspora engagement, but was centred on post-war development more broadly. Despite their initial doubts, Tamil participants finally outnumbered Sinhalese and Muslim participants. But even though the personal and political implications of a workshop with members of all three communities participating were initially an issue of some concern, this first exploratory event was characterised by a constructive atmosphere. The aim of the workshop was to initiate a careful exchange, to provide a safe space for generating suggestions for diaspora initiatives and to explore whether this exchange was seen as a useful and constructive endeavour by the participants themselves. However, as the discussions prior to the workshop have shown, the objective of bringing together different groups with entrenched positions and strong agendas to identify common aspirations is a difficult, tentative, and long-term process. Joint events for the diaspora groups would also need to be focused on specific questions or provide insights about how the diasporas could deal with particular challenges.

3.6 Sharing across diaspora formations

The final workshop brought together activists from four different diaspora groups (Baluch, Kashmiri, Kurdish and Tamil) in the UK in order to share their experiences and knowledge, as well as the lessons they have learnt. The workshop sought to explore similarities and differences between the different diaspora formations with respect to their current situation, as well as to understand the trends and patterns of political activism across diaspora formations in the UK. Continuing the themes of the project, the discussions focused on political identity, political activism and engagement by each diaspora in their homeland. The participants were also interested in the cross-diaspora links that could be established in the UK to build bridges among the groups and to explore opportunities and possibilities for constructive engagement through learning and sharing.

Political identity

The discussions between activists from various diaspora organisations on their political identity reflected the diverse backgrounds of the participants.[26] However, the discussion also built upon important commonalities between the various communities and the discussions quickly revealed some common factors that have a strong impact on their political identities as they share similar patterns of migration due to war, oppression and persecution in their erstwhile homelands. It became clear that an important factor in the political identity of many of the participants is that the Kashmiri, Kurdish, Baluch and the Tamil communities are all striving for political independence. The conflicts in their homelands can be classified as identity-based conflicts and the diaspora communities can be typified as 'stateless' diasporas. In addition to these criteria, the participants represented large sections of the migrant communities in the UK. In addition,

[26] During the discussions on political identity, many participants repeatedly stated that they reject the idea of a single or stable identity and embraced the idea of multiple identities (e.g. as a woman, leftist, regional belongings, ethnic identity, etc.).

hostland factors were an important area of overlap in the experiences of various groups, including (among others) challenges of social organisation and social justice, increasing criminalisation of the communities and securitisation, or discrimination and misrecognition as communities.

Political activism

One of the main similarities between the drivers of political activism was the urge to raise awareness in the host country and demonstrate the legitimacy of their struggles for political change in their erstwhile home countries. In keeping with this main goal, a wide range of political activities was identified, varying from demonstrations, rallies and protests to campaigning, strategic voting and lobbying.

Kurdish community members indicated that their activities were also focused upon raising awareness in the host country – in the host civil society, more generally, by working with local civil society actors in the UK, but also within their own community through educational and cultural activities. They emphasised the need to mobilise people from the grass-roots level instead of engaging with the political parties of the host country, as political parties have their own limitations and political constraints.

There was a common understanding that the empowerment of diaspora communities should be the fundamental goal of diaspora political activism in host countries. All of the diaspora communities seemed to engage in human rights activities, albeit on different levels. The Kurdish community members expressed dissatisfaction with the current discourse on human rights, which very much emphasises the rights of individuals. They argued that the collective rights of groups and communities would have to be strengthened to meet the needs of the communities.

Kashmiri diaspora participants emphasised that they are keen to increase the political representation of the Kashmiri diaspora by campaigning for and electing councillors and MPs from the diaspora communities in the host country. The objective of strengthening community representation in the political structures of the host country resonates with the strategies of Tamil political activism on the local level in the UK.

Another important strand of diaspora political activism can be summarised under the banner ‘struggles for recognition’. While this was not a particular concern of the Tamil participants, Kurdish, Kashmiri and Baluch activists highlighted their focus on recognition of their community’s distinct national identity, the idea of collective rights and the importance of linguistic rights. Some Kashmiri diaspora activists, for instance, have put their efforts into campaigning for recognition of the Kashmiri identity in Britain. The current census system does not include a separate Kashmiri identity, and instead categorises them with people of Pakistani or Indian origin, which is not only a disadvantage in building up community support structures, but is also interpreted as a general misrecognition of the Kashmiri identity and culture. Kurdish participants pointed to similar efforts in their community, as Kurds living in the UK originally migrated from several countries, including Turkey, Iraq, Syria, etc. and thus appear under these nationalities in the census. Participants from both communities expressed their willingness to share strategies of campaigning and lobbying for the inclusion of their national identity in the UK census.

Some diaspora communities, furthermore, face the challenge of internal linguistic diversity (as in the case of the Kashmiris or the Kurds). In this context, language politics are a major thread of the political activism of these groups and there was broad agreement among the participants that language politics and the right to expression in one's own language were crucial elements of political freedom.

The Tamil participants raised some additional issues that were also of particular interest for the political activism of the other communities: the current focus on campaigns for accountability for war crimes, the emerging transnational political activism and activism around the international dimension of the struggle were indicated as the main differences compared to other diaspora communities.

Engagement in the homeland

Strategies for engagement in the homeland included reflections on indirect engagement through lobbying of host governments to putting pressure on homeland actors. Among the communities represented, however, the level of confidence that the host governments or the international community would support them in pursuing their struggles for political change was low. Tamil participants raised this issue mainly with regard to war crimes and claimed that international actors should increase pressure on the Sri Lankan government to deal with war crimes and to enforce legal mechanisms of accountability. Participants from the Kurdish diaspora were slightly more confident than the other groups. Some expressed their hope that the European Union might put more pressure on the Turkish government to engage in peaceful conflict resolution with the Kurdish communities. Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union could provide a strong incentive to address the Kurdish question if the European Union shows the political will to put the Kurdish conflict on the agenda. From a cautiously optimistic perspective, the current situation was seen as a 'window of opportunity' and increased lobbying of EU representatives was considered to be an important step.

Discussing the challenges of diaspora engagement in the homeland, Kashmiri diaspora activists highlighted the problem of the division of Kashmir and described the very different situations in the Indian and Pakistani administered Kashmir as well as the implications of the division for diaspora activities. The Kashmiri participants highlighted the role of the diaspora in shaping the political trajectory of Kashmir and said that, without the support of the diaspora, local politics in Kashmir would suffer both financially and capacity-wise. Kashmiri diaspora participants from the Pakistani administered section expressed their interest in engaging with local politics in Azad Kashmir. Kashmiri diaspora members particularly commented on the lack of a support infrastructure in both the UK and Azad and reflected upon the potential engagement with DFID and charitable organisations as an opportunity to support peace at home.

On the question of homeland engagement, the most important common issues voiced by the participants were development, humanitarian needs and political engagement with civil society actors at home. Unlike the similarities of the political activism, home country engagement differed widely among the diaspora communities – from broad homeland engagement strategies of the Kashmiri (Azad) diaspora to the constrained engagement strategies of the Tamil diaspora, a variety in forms of and possibilities for engagement were observed, with particular challenges for each diaspora community. Tamil diaspora representatives reflected that their guarded engagement

approach centred upon meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of the people in the homeland, which also revolves around community rebuilding and creating community-based networks. Most diaspora communities saw financial resources and evolving political opportunities as key instruments for homeland engagement.

Conclusion

Throughout the various discussions, it became clear that the political activism of a particular diaspora community is determined by the nature of the struggle in the homeland and by its current political situation (i.e. political space and tolerance for diverse political views in the politics of the homeland). The political and financial situation of the diaspora communities in the host countries is another key variable of diaspora political activism. The participants agreed that, even though the situation for diaspora engagement varies across the different communities and depends on concrete political opportunities that are not stable in the long-term, different diaspora formations can constructively participate in the conflict transformation process towards a permanent political solution in their respective home countries. Further exchange activities between diaspora groups could support this trend and allow for discussions on strategies, current trends and mindsets in the diaspora communities. The participants agreed that discussions on concrete relevant areas of diaspora work to address particular challenges, such as international legal mechanisms and humanitarian relief/development contributions, would be particularly useful to help their diaspora communities to participate constructively in the conflict transformation process towards a permanent political solution in their respective home countries.

Chapter 4. Dilemmas, Dynamics and Lessons Learnt

The first section of this chapter sets out some of the dilemmas and dynamics that the project faced in implementation. In the second section, some of the themes which emerged over the course of the project – themes which may have implications for those seeking to engage with the Tamil diaspora in the future – will be summarised.

4.1 Dilemmas and dynamics

1. *Short-term project cycles versus long-term change*

Short term project cycles are an inherent difficulty in peacebuilding projects that aim for long-term behavioural, structural and political change. Although we were able to deliver the outputs as outlined in the project proposal, it is difficult to measure the impact the project had on the various levels of engagement; inter and intra-diasporic, expert community and academia, donor level, etc. Lessons from related projects show that positive impact might be time-delayed and, even then, it would be difficult to attribute the positive change to one particular peace intervention. Aware of these challenges from the outset of the project, we tried to address this issue proactively by involving the Tamil diaspora at every stage: project design, implementation, reflection and evaluation. With the active involvement of the Tamil diaspora in the project, we

could ensure ownership, but, most of all, a certain level of sustainability. It is hoped that certain methodologies, concepts and ideas will be carried forward by the diaspora itself.

2. Continuity versus flexibility

There is a certain level of tension between the goal of involving the critical diaspora actors and maintaining continuity in terms of participation. With the changed ground conditions in Sri Lanka post-May 2009, the political configuration in the diaspora has also changed drastically, with new leaders, concepts and ideologies emerging. The project had to cater to those changes while maintaining a certain level of continuity. The principle of maintaining continuity is significant as it demonstrates reliability and shows respect to the individuals involved in the process. Furthermore, it is difficult to track change if the targeted individuals keep changing. Notwithstanding this, the ground situation compelled us to shift our focus from an 'individual-centred' to an 'ideology-centred' approach. Thus the project firstly identified the main discourses and then identified the main proponents of the different strands of thinking within the political diaspora. This adaptation helped us to keep track of the changes developing within the diaspora and to remain connected to spheres of power and decision-making.

3. The struggle for hegemony and leadership within the diaspora movement

Pre-May 2009 (cautiously framing), personality issues played less of a role in Tamil diaspora politics. People were respected or disliked because of the ideologies they represented. In the post-May 2009 scenario, this began to change with people and their personality traits gaining more sway in garnering support of the Tamil diaspora community. Traditional political dichotomies of 'pro' and 'anti' LTTE factions have been replaced by more complex and diverse Tamil diaspora formations. New alliances have been forged. In addition to this development, suspicion, mistrust and distrust among the Tamil diaspora had increased as a result of the fundamental changes in the political landscape. These developments also had vast implications for our project. Sometimes people stayed away because 'x or y' had been invited to the same event. Careful manoeuvring and organisation of the project became even more necessary.

4. The 'securitisation' of diasporas

In the era of the "war-on-terror", diaspora communities have increasingly been on the radar of home-security agencies. Conflict-generated diaspora communities feel particularly persecuted for their political beliefs, even on foreign soil. Given the frequent confusion as to what constitutes a 'legal' or an 'illegal' action (expression, etc), diasporic political activists have found themselves in legal 'grey zones'. This situation has resulted in much insecurity and confusion. We could also sense the insecurity in some of the discussions at the workshops. Participants carefully framed their sentences and were cautious not to appear to be 'supporting' any 'illegal' entities. Although we used the forum to ascertain the opinion of legal experts and to 'educate' the participants on the legal provisions, we certainly encountered limitations.

5. The difficulty of finding a common framework

The idea behind commissioning short policy papers from activists was to encourage them to reflect on their activism and to disseminate their thoughts to a wider audience (beyond the

activists' circle). While we saw many benefits in giving a voice to those who often feel neglected, we also learnt the challenges connected to this endeavour. The main concern of activists – perhaps naturally – was their political campaign and lobbying efforts. They often felt they did not have the time or support necessary to invest their energy into carefully thought-through concept papers. Although there was much initial enthusiasm among the activists about engaging in intellectually stimulating exercises, this appears to have lessened as the writing progressed. Many papers needed a lot of revision; some papers were rejected as they were sub-standard. This endeavour was an important learning curve for both the project and the activists. For many activists, this was a challenging experience, as they were not used to reflecting on their activism in a coherent and systematic way and they encountered difficulties in complying with a minimum set of academic standards. We had to accept and understand that activists think and act in a way that may not correspond to 'academic' ways of thinking and expression. Eventually the project managed to build a bridge between the two worlds by deciding to present the disparate views of the activists without significantly editing the style/content of their writing.

6. Advantages and disadvantages of 'externals/outsiders' and 'internals/insiders' and perceptions

In the development/peacebuilding arena, the complex of 'internals' versus 'outsiders' as interveners is an ongoing debate that sometimes tends to become dogmatic and rigid in its interpretation. Increasingly, peace-building scholars have started to question the conventional understanding of internals as "partial" and outsiders as "neutral". This project was based on the assumption that both 'internals' as well as 'outsiders' can be perceived sometimes as partial and sometimes as neutral depending on the stance of the viewer, external circumstances/conditions but also on the underlying ideology/interests/motivations[28] that drive their interventions. The underlying criticism for this distinction often lies in the perceived or real asymmetries between these actors and the fact that 'external' actors dominate the scene with less attention, recognition and respect for local community needs.

The subject of 'internals' and 'outsiders/externals' is further complicated by the fact that there are a range of definitions for 'outsiders/externals'. Are these actors 'outsiders' to the subject, 'outsiders' to the geographic location or 'outsiders' to the community under examination? For the first two cases, there are mechanisms to rectify this gap but in the last case, there is nothing to be done, except for the decision to stay away. Alternatively, the "outside" organisation can consciously deal with its situation and, consequently, involve 'insiders' in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as an equal partner. This is the route we took.

When are 'outsiders' useful? When are 'insiders' indispensible?

To enhance local ownership and legitimacy of the intervention, often the "internal" or community-based intervention is optimal. However, if the community is itself polarised and fragmented, it is better to bring 'outsiders' into the process. 'Outsiders' are also useful in instances where it is "dangerous" for local communities to "criticise" the dominant state dogma or the dominant line of thinking in the communities. Sometimes local actors are "paralysed" by internal polarisation, politicisation, leadership struggles etc., which constitute a hurdle for

[28] The intervention of Amnesty International is a classic example here. It is driven by a set of values that may not correspond with the value system of all the 'internals'. For some internals, this may lead to the conclusion that they are "illegitimate outside intervention" while some other internals might welcome such "outside" intervention.

mobility. 'Outsiders' can operate here as a safety-net for the internals and take-on these controversial topics and thus function as the "organisational protection shield." A further advantage of 'outsiders' is that they are often not a part of the "local" politics and thus have a more or less 'clean slate' to start with. However, the longer the 'externals' are connected to the topic, region, etc., the more likely they are to start to develop blind spots.

The advantage of 'internals' is that they are knowledgeable on their own contexts, they have access to "their people", they will be in a better position to identify the formal and informal structures of power in their community and are seen as credible and legitimate in the eyes of many in the community. Above all, insiders are invaluable in countering linguistic barriers to the participation of a cross-section of the society. The disadvantages are that every single person from a conflict context has his/her own political history of alignments and that makes them "partial" in the eyes of many.

This is not to say that both 'internals' as well as 'externals' are not the right actors to accompany change processes but that it is important to make use of the synergies of both. We think the intervention would benefit more if both 'internals' and 'externals' undertake a combined effort to shape social and political changes (with an important caveat: being aware of one´s own strengths, weaknesses and the perceptions of oneself of others). Moreover, we prefer a dynamic understanding of 'outsiders' and 'insiders' that cuts across ethnic and geographic boundaries. Being Tamil, for instance, does not mean that an individual will be seen *per se* as an 'insider' by the community. Here we refer to the discourse around "homeland Tamils" and the diaspora. Diaspora is often seen as 'outsiders', notwithstanding the self-perception as 'insiders'.

4.2 Lessons learnt

1. The analysis of local diaspora politics has to incorporate global diaspora politics

The main change in Tamil diaspora politics since the violent escalation of the conflict in Sri Lanka in 2008 is its transnational focus. Within the global Tamil diaspora, it has been possible to observe an increasing tendency for transnational politics to gain momentum, while purely national politics (British Tamil politics or French Tamil politics) are fading away. While tailor-made campaigns and lobbying efforts (in the run-up to British parliamentary elections, for example) still played a role, it is within the global arena that Tamil diaspora politics is currently being shaped. Confirming this trend is the recently established Global Tamil Forum, an umbrella organisation of more than 14 countries with its headquarters in London, the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam, with elected bodies spread across the globe, and Makkal avai (Peoples' councils) in all important European metropolises. Recent activities also suggest a move away from centrally organised protests to smaller, more spontaneous expressions of local opinion. Rather than formal organisations, social networks have become more important, not only in terms of how Tamils in the UK know when and where to gather for the larger protests, but also for organising smaller, locally-based gatherings or peaceful demonstrations that allow the Tamil diaspora to engage with their local non-Tamil communities. Any local (country-based) effort to engage with the Tamil diaspora has to include its global formations if it is to achieve any long-lasting impact. Any such effort must also find ways to cope with the more 'spontaneously' organised nature of Tamil political activism of the future.

2. *Recognition of the shift from individuals to ideas*

The pilot phase began at a time when the LTTE was a considerable military force on the island; at that stage it was relatively easy to identify the key figures in the Tamil diaspora. With the demise of the LTTE, the political landscape changed drastically and, with that, new actors (often replacing the old community leaders), new discourses and new types of activism emerged. Although the project had to adapt to these changing circumstances, it also offered new possibilities and contributed to a widening of democratic spaces. The adaptation process was not without challenges and, during the run-up to each workshop, we were confronted with the question of who was relevant at that point in time. Since this proved a somewhat tedious process, we started to use different criteria to select the participants for each of the workshops. The selection process moved away from targeting individuals to targeting individuals representing a particular stance or strand of thinking.

3. *The gap between discourse in the diaspora and homeland has to be bridged*

Although there was a lively debate on whether the gap is a 'perceived' or a 'real' gap, diaspora members generally tended to agree that more interaction is needed between the diaspora and the Tamil polity in Sri Lanka to have a holistic understanding of the needs and aspirations of the people back home.

4. *The importance of steering a critical debate towards 'unpopular' topics*

In the series of workshops conducted with the diaspora, one of the central aims was to encourage the diaspora actors to reflect on their activism in a self-critical manner in order to become more effective. After a long period of trust-building, this was, to a great extent, achieved. However, the most critical topic now appears to be for the diaspora to assess its own role in the ethnopolitical conflict in Sri Lanka, something that has not, to date, been openly debated.

5. *Learning from other international diaspora formations has to be focused and sequenced*

The international workshop in which the Kurdish, Baluch, Kashmiri and the Tamil diasporas participated was well-received by all sections. All expressed a keenness to learn from similar experiences and explore non-violent strategies to increase their effectiveness and legitimacy. However, it was felt that a more focused discussion on one or two topics (such as effective lobbying or citizenship issues) would have enhanced the effectiveness of this engagement.

6. *A Community-based approach lends credibility and legitimacy*

There are different ways of involving the stakeholders in the projects - from mere participants to project designers, implementers, facilitators etc. The project adopted the latter methodology of a meaningful involvement of the Tamil diaspora at all stages of the project. This endowed the project itself with significant credibility. The participants valued the safe space offered to them to share their views and discuss critical topics without fear of adverse publicity. They felt that it was 'their' process and that they had a stake in the issues being discussed in the workshops. This approach has a high potential that topics and discourse will be carried forward by them.

7. *Reflection has to be combined with training and learning*

While the opportunity for reflection, sharing and joint analysis was found to be useful by the participants, they also felt that it would have had additional value if those reflective sessions had

been combined with hands-on training sequences. Due to the voluntary nature of diaspora political activism, the methods for raising awareness are seldom based upon a systematic and professional manner. For instance, many participants expressed a desire to receive training on negotiation techniques, effective lobbying, or to further their knowledge of the provisions of International Humanitarian Law, etc.

8. A sequenced approach to 'multipartiality' is more effective

'Multipartiality' is generally an issue in multi-ethnic contexts and rarely highlighted in intra-ethnic settings. Different factions, cleavages and diverse political opinions necessitate that this principle be applied in all dialogue settings. It is, nevertheless, challenging to bring together different parties all the time and a sequenced approach may be more effective in this regard. A sequenced approach involves designing different sequences of settings, for instance, to start working with a more or less like-minded group and to gradually expand the group to include non-likeminded individuals. This process would involve a preparatory phase in which the necessity of including non-likeminded individuals for sustainable social change would be discussed. In our workshops, participants themselves saw the necessity of including the 'other' side, as they did not see the value in coming together as they share many common characteristics. However, this may not have been the case had they anticipated the participation of 'political enemies' in the first workshop. It can be assumed that, in all likelihood, they simply would not have attended at all. Bringing the different factions together should be something which happens at the end of a process, not the starting point.

9. Creative measures have to be explored in working with activists

Conventional workshop settings are often seen as "talk" shops that lack a clear direction. The combination of story-telling and other participatory methods such as the World Café format found much appreciation. We think that more creative ways and means have to explored for working with activists that are more in line with their thinking and political practice.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

I carry two worlds within me
but neither one whole
they are constantly bleeding
the border runs
right through my tongue.
(*Senozak* 1984, 39)

Zafer Senocak's words capture the complex, often contradictory and at times complementary worlds in which the diaspora finds its political and cultural articulation. The notions of 'home' and 'host', 'here' and 'there', have long lost their meaning in the self-definition of diasporas as transnational social entities that paradoxically, or perhaps precisely *because* of their transnational existence, cling to the nationalist aspirations of "territory and distinct cultural identity". As Soguk (2008, 181) succinctly puts it in the case of the Kurds, "(...) the diaspora´s political and cultural organisations take the latent, proto-nationalist feelings among Kurds and issue them forth into a (modern) nationalist identity in surprisingly post-modern forms. This is a nationalism without bounded sovereign space – a nomadic nationalism through which Kurds cultivate and communicate EuroKurdishness (...)". This neatly encapsulates the experiences of the Tamil diaspora post-May 2009, after the demise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – the symbolic embodiment of Tamil nationalism.

Equipped with post-modern concepts of "transnational" governance with direct democratic elements (Referenda), rights-based and retributive justice approaches (war-crimes and genocide claims), the Tamil diaspora has embarked upon a new trajectory to reshape its Tamil nationalism into a modern, democratic and peaceful form that will make it harder for the international research and policy community to ignore them any longer. While the present Tamil diaspora activism is most certainly the continuum of the struggle for legitimacy and visibility: to be "heard", accepted and recognised, it is also a new expression of Tamil activism that appears to have shed the old dichotomies and nostalgic diasporic memories and grievances. Today we find a more technologically savvy, empowered, determined, committed and knowledgeable diaspora. It is a diaspora that is proud to carry the British passport, proud to vote in the UK and to canvass, and yet feels a deep connection to, and responsibility for, its kin in Sri Lanka.

Notwithstanding this, the present diaspora activism is also a story of disempowerment, disappointment and frustration with those who they saw as their natural allies (the international community in its various forms - from states to international NGOs and civil society). In addition to these disappointing external factors, internal factors such as mistrust and suspicion left many disillusioned. Moreover, the self-declared "new beginning" is not based on a collective process of (self) reflection. Although a significant section of the politically active Tamil diaspora is conscious of this, it is, nevertheless, reluctant to embark on the process of openly "dealing with its own past" for fear of criticism within its own ranks. It will be difficult to gain credibility and legitimacy for the new diaspora political movement if the political Tamil diaspora fails to deal critically with the history of its own relationship to the LTTE.

At the time of writing, the diasporic political landscape has become complex and multifaceted, with many community-based national and transnational organisations established with the goal of promoting the shared concerns in spite of the political differences, factionalism, and the struggle for hegemony.

Our project was in the midst of all these developments and was even, at times, torn between "running after the masses" and "ignoring" these rapid developments in favour of retaining and implementing the original plan. The drastic developments on the ground and within the diaspora compelled us to go back to the drawing-board and re-think our strategic priorities in the light of these new developments. After an extensive process of consultation with the diaspora circles, the project team found its initial goals still to be valid. The central objective of the project was to promote a more community-based approach, a way of working in which the Tamil diaspora is directly involved in the planning, implementation, reflection and evaluation phases. In doing so, the project functioned as a complementary mechanism to support the goal of empowerment. The project sought to apply the principle of a meaningful participation and provide disparate spaces for the diaspora activists to reflect critically on their activism, forge new alliances, and enhance their understanding of multiple peaceful options for engagement. The dialogue workshops (encouraging activists to produce papers on their perspectives of Tamil activism), engagement with and among the diaspora, and interactions between the Tamil community and other communities (including the Sinhalese transnational community, the Kurdish community, and the Kashmiri and Baluch activists in the UK), and the Diaspora Core Group, were all oriented towards the goals of strengthening the politically active Tamil diaspora and generating its own mechanisms to inform the policy makers "who they are" and "how they want to be perceived". The project has been shaped from its inception by these moments of internal reflection and by the external pro-active shaping of its perception. The latter objective aimed at building stronger ties between the Tamil diaspora in the UK and the British establishment, so that the community would be more involved in shaping the decisions that affected them, and the British government would thus be more aware of the concerns of the community. Consequently, the changes in Sri Lanka between the design and implementation of the project altered the manner and effectiveness of all its activities, and yet despite these changes, the core of the original objectives remained relevant and significant.

In the project proposal we defined the following set of indicators to assess the "success" of our project

- Awareness among key influentials within the Tamil diaspora is raised about the positive role they can play in bringing about a negotiated settlement to the conflict.
- A significant number of the diaspora members become key actors, influencing the policies of the conflict stakeholders as agents of peaceful change
- Policy makers in host countries have gained a better understanding of the role the diaspora can play in bringing about a negotiated settlement in Sri Lanka.

Concerning the first indicator, this was the main 'red thread' of our project. In all our workshops, research papers, focus group meetings, and even the input of various resource people from Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the main topic has remained: "how the Tamil diaspora could play a pro-active, positive role in contributing towards sustainable peace in Sri Lanka". The roadmap paper

"Empowering Diasporas" explicitly engages with this question, discusses a number of issues, and offers the diaspora a set of recommendations. The roadmap paper was widely circulated, both among the key opinion formers within the Tamil diaspora as well as international actors prior to its publication, and was discussed in various forums (diaspora circles, international meetings with members of the donor community). However, the perception of being "marginalised" and "securitised", unfortunately, continues to prevail in the diaspora. When the peaceful protest marches were not responded positively by the international community, a significant number felt disillusioned, while others felt the need to continue the peaceful political action, albeit in a different form as described earlier. Although this increased activism occurred independently from the project (as a result of external circumstances and the situation on the ground), the project was not only able to provide a space for those who were interested in broadening their knowledge of multiple peaceful options to pursue their struggle for justice and peace and to discuss various strategies from other international cases, but also to take inspiration from civil society actors in Sri Lanka about what their perception of the diaspora is and what, in their view, the diaspora should be doing to remain credible and effective. This indicator was achieved successfully.

The second indicator was not achieved due to the changing framework conditions on the ground. The original intention was to expand the political section of the diaspora that sought to contribute towards a sustainable negotiated settlement to the conflict by actively devising alternative political ideas to further the trajectory of negotiations. With the demise of the LTTE in May 2009, this indicator was no longer relevant.

Regarding the last indicator of success, the project used all available avenues to offer a nuanced understanding of the Tamil diaspora and to encourage policy-makers to make use of this substantial resource for their own analysis and policy-making. An additional component of this indicator was that the Tamil diaspora activists learned the reasoning behind Sri Lanka related policies that were often not straightforward and followed their own logic and constraints. This was only possible because of the willingness and the cooperation of some donor representatives to share their insights off-the-record. Nevertheless, the established contacts were only made use of on an *ad hoc* and sporadic basis (as in the case of the Core Group).

During the course of this two year pilot phase, the project has faced many challenges and dilemmas; however, there were also positive incidents that the project was able to leverage. Some of the major challenges revolved around the short-term nature of the project versus the long-term nature of the problem (and that of any solution). This is an ongoing challenge for conflict resolution related work, not only due to the typically unquantifiable nature of the interventions, but also because of the difficulty in categorising the possible benefits of any intervention. In this project, we attempted to categorise and quantify what we could. Qualitative feedback from participants and others within the Tamil community suggest that some of the methodologies and techniques employed will remain with the community as they continue to work towards a sustainable and just solution in Sri Lanka. Separately, the securitisation of diasporas as a whole, and the Tamil diaspora in particular, had a significant impact on the project, resulting in carefully worded conversations even when the participants were well-acquainted and trusted the

facilitators as well as each other. This continues to be a challenge for any engagement with diasporas.

It is also the realisation of the project that community-based work requires, from all involved, high-levels of commitment, passion, trust and patience. While it was rewarding to see the benefits of the project at various stages, and to see how intensely the project catered to the needs of different stakeholders – above all the Tamil diaspora activists who were/are directly affected by any "external" measures – dealing with the 'external' perceptions and internal expectations as to what the project *ought* to be doing (as opposed to what the actual project objectives were) was often challenging, and often a balancing act. The nature of the work, which required sensitivity and confidentiality, was an additional hurdle and sometimes entrenched and sometimes weakened the differing perceptions and claims.

Some of the noteworthy issues to have arisen from the project include an awareness that diaspora studies still have further to go in terms of comprehending the full range of nuances and opinions within diasporas. Within the Tamil diaspora, the range of opinions, the increased willingness to discuss 'difficult issues' and the ability to, often innovatively, rise to the challenges posed by the military defeat of the Liberation Tigers, all suggest that the community will continue to be active and politically driven for many years to come. Even within this action, there will be change (possibility in different directions in the future) as the Tamil identity gradually adapts under an increasing British influence (from the second generation of British Tamils who are beginning to take on a more active role) and Tamil political activism adjusts to internal and external factors. At the end of this pilot phase, we can observe a community that continues to come to terms with the trauma and devastation of a war that resulted in the deaths of family and friends, but we also find a committed and a resilient community that is pro-actively seeking to overcome its role as victim and become initiators of change. Although fundamental change and a significant shift may take time to take root, the Tamil diaspora remains a community with much to contribute in terms of broader discourses on diasporas, multiculturalism, homeland-hostland relations, hostland-migrant community relations, juggling cultures, etc. It is to be hoped that research and activism (action research) can continue beyond this project.

Appendices

1. List of Abbreviations
2. List of Publications

Appendix 1. List of Abbreviations

AA	Alumni Associations
BTA	British Tamil Association
BTF	British Tamils Forum
CWG	Country Working Groups
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GTF	Global Tamil Forum
HVA	Home Village Associations
IA	International Alert
IWG	International Working Group on Sri Lanka
KHRP	Kurdish Human Rights Project
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MIOT	Medical Institute of Tamils
RRN	Relief and Rehabilitation Network
SCOT	Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking Peoples
SLDF	Sri Lanka Democracy Forum
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TCHR	Tamil Centre for Human Rights
TGTE	Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam
THO	Tamil Health Organisation
TLAP	Tamil Legal Action Project
TIC	Tamil Information Centre
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TNC	Tamil National Council
TNRF	Tamil National Remembrance Foundation
TYO	Tamil Youth Organisation
UKTSU	UK Tamil Students Union
UNHCR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UTO	Uniting Tamil Organisation

Appendix 2. Policy and Research Papers

Author	Title
Bahar Baser	Kurdish Diaspora Political Activism in Europe with a Specific Focus on Great Britain
Sebastian Boll	At Risk of Reaching its Antithesis: How the 2000 UK Terrorism Act May Radicalise the British Tamil Diaspora
Serena Hussain	The Kurdish Diaspora: Complexities of Identity and Mobilisation
Sardar Aftab Ahmad Khan	Unlocking the Potential of the Kashmiri Diaspora in the 'Big' Society for Development and Just Peace
Kurdish Human Rights Project	What Impact does UK Government Legislation and Policy have on the Kurdish Diaspora?
Thusiyan Nanthakumar	Political Activism in the Tamil Diaspora
Madurika Rasaratnam	Political Identity of the British Tamil Diaspora: Implications for Engagement
Senthan Selvarajah/ Nirmanusan Balasundaram	The (Re) Construction of Tamil Political Identity in the UK
David Suntha	Factors Shaping Political Identity in Host Countries: the Case of the Tamil Diaspora in the UK
Sarvendra Tharmalingam	Mapping Tamil Transnational Politics: Past, Present and Future
Luxshi Vimalarajah and R. Cheran	Empowering Diasporas. The Dynamics of Post-war Transnational Tamil Politics

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