



CIVIL SOCIETY AND UNDP IN SRI LANKA: PARTNERSHIPS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

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PARTNERSHIP IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

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FOREWORD

“Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that that ever has.” **Margaret Mead**

Sri Lankan civil society has played a pivotal role in promoting peace and sustainable development through policy advocacy and grass-roots initiatives. Its role expanded after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami claimed the lives of more than 30,000 in Sri Lanka alone, and left about 500,000 displaced. Civil society actors readily responded and emerged as significant disaster response partners, particularly in the northern, eastern and southern districts. There the population was most vulnerable because of their geographic location and deteriorating humanitarian situation as a result of about 20 years of armed conflict.

Judging from civil society’s more recent successful response to natural disasters and ongoing conflict, UNDP in Sri Lanka has wisely embraced this force as a genuine partner in

development and today collaborates with more than 1,000 local organizations. This report takes a snapshot of the aforementioned collaborations which promote sustainable peace and improved living conditions for those affected by conflict, poverty, and natural disasters; and seek to highlight innovations that can potentially be replicated elsewhere.

Economic recovery and peace building with institutional strengthening and community empowerment are the two primary cross-cutting issues on which this publication focuses. Through the documentation of collaborative efforts we hope to underscore achievements, offer recommendations to remaining challenges, and facilitate more meaningful partnerships with civil society partners in making Sri Lanka a better place for all.

Neil Buhne
UNDP Resident Representative

ACRONYMS

BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
BPA	Business for Peace Alliance
BRSP	Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CFA	Ceasefire Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	District Advisory Committee
DRB	District Review Board
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GA	Government Agent
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IO	Intermediary Organization
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MED	Micro Enterprise Development
MNE	Multinational Enterprises
NAC	National Advisory Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSE	Non-state entities
OCG-RRR	Office of the Commissioner General for Relief Rehabilitation and Reconciliation
SGF	Small Grants Fund
SGP	Small Grants Programme
STRONG PLACES	Sustaining Tsunami Recovery by Organizations Networking at the Grass-roots level through Promoting Local Accountability and Capacity Enhancement Systems
TAFREN	Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation
TP	Transition Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



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OVERVIEW



The civil society tradition in Sri Lanka is vibrant and intricately woven in the fabric of the nation. In light of the country's protracted ethno-political conflict and recovery from the 2004 tsunami, civil society¹ has resettled displaced communities, restored livelihoods, coordinated interventions, collaborated with decision makers, and worked toward peaceful resolutions.

Civil society actors have faced many challenges; most carry out activities in unstable conditions and insecurity. Smaller and newly-formed CSOs are limited by operational factors such as financial and technical capacity – two internal environmental dynamics that impact programme results and sustainability.

UNDP in Sri Lanka has sought ways to develop, promote and nurture its engagement with local civil society organizations in a manner that is mutually beneficial. To date, CSOs serve as implementing partners, service providers, consultants, advisors, and suppliers to many UNDP programmes. This report highlights two important achievements in this regard. The first is the concerted effort by UNDP to strengthen the institutional capacities of its CSO partners; the second is UNDP's endeavor to change its relationships with CSOs from mere contracts to genuine partnerships founded on mutual respect. This journey has presented opportunities for UNDP to share, learn and apply many lessons.



The decision to document this challenging but rewarding journey was recommended by the CSO Division of the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships (BRSP), which undertook a mission to Sri Lanka (2005) and noted the successful outcomes of UNDP-CSO liaisons. These successes were also recognized by the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) in its review of the Small Grants Programme (SGP). Both bureaux highlighted the need to raise awareness of the benefits of partnering with civil society in general, and to promote such partnerships as a way to improve coordination in crisis situations. This report attempts to satisfy the aforementioned objectives by highlighting innovative projects, best practices, and lessons learned.

Chapter 1 overviews UNDP's engagement of CSOs and discusses the challenges and opportunities in partnership building. Chapter

2 examines the topic vis-à-vis crisis prevention and peace initiatives. Chapter 3 discusses approaches adopted for institutional capacity development and strengthening of CSOs. Chapter 4 reviews the engagement of CSOs in the delivery of socio economic recovery for conflict and tsunami affected communities.

Empowerment of communities cuts across all UNDP projects and is more closely examined in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 presents a composite list of lessons that UNDP in Sri Lanka has learned in its collaboration with CSOs in crisis situations. This report documents the growing importance of civil society actors in delivering support in complex emergencies. This publication is also relevant to advancing UNDP's global agenda of working closely with local communities and seeks to capture innovations that can be replicated and scaled-up in areas with similar contexts.

¹ One accepted consensus on the concept of civil society is that it is an arena of voluntary collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values distinct from families, state and profit-seeking institutions (Fowler 2002). In this document, the term civil society connotes the full range of formal and informal organizations that are outside the state and the market – including social movements and mass-based membership organizations, NGOs, and community-based organizations, as well as communities and citizens acting individually and collectively.

² The December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami affected 13 coastal districts in Sri Lanka. An estimated 35,000 people died in the tsunami and more than a million were displaced as a result of the tidal waves – some of which destroyed infrastructure and homes as far as 1.5 km inland. The government estimate of the total cost of reconstruction stands at \$ 2.2 billion from a three to five year-period.

³ The three-decade ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka has internally displaced many citizens living in the North-East of the country. More than 68,000 people are estimated dead as a result of the on-going conflict between the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lanka armed forces. The LTTE is fighting for an independent homeland. A ceasefire agreement was signed in 2002. However, hostilities resumed in 2006 and are on-going.

UNDP AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SRI LANKA



CHAPTER 1

On a global scale UNDP engages civil society organizations depending on the contexts and needs of the country. UNDP in Sri Lanka collaborates by way of informal and formal consultations. An example of an informal consultation is having CSO staff participate in project-management and policy-related decision making through memberships on the national advisory, project steering and project appraisal committees. Formal consultations result in UNDP engaging civil society in one of the following three relationships; the last two are the most common:

- 1) As a manager of a UNDP project: The CSO is an Implementing Partner or an Executing Agency.
- 2) As a contractor: Procurement procedures and contracts apply.

- 3) As a grant recipient: An agreement is made in vis-à-vis a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).²

CSOs as contractors

Within the contractual framework UNDP and the CSO agree on the scope of services and administrative issues such as deliverables, payment and reporting requirements.³ The capacity of the CSO therefore becomes a key consideration in selection. There is a tendency to select CSOs with proven capacities; thus, smaller and newly-formed organizations are sometimes left out of the process. Unless pre-empted, this unintentionally reinforces the very patterns of privilege and exclusion UNDP aims to eradicate. To guard against this, UNDP has established special institutional strengthening measures. For example, less-established CSOs are

selected and given the opportunity for capacity development during the course of partnership. Such capacity-building opportunities are ideal entry points for UNDP to include organizations that are otherwise overlooked and for UNDP to increase the diversity of civil society actors engaged in partnerships.

CSOs as grant recipients

A number of projects are designed to provide financial assistance to NGOs and other civil society organizations under the Small Grants Facility (SGF). An SGF is either incorporated into technical cooperation programmes or implemented through NGOs or CSOs. Grants of the latter variety are usually given on the basis of requests for proposals.

In this case UNDP establishes the conceptual and logistical terms of reference and invites civil society to submit proposals according to the organizations' interests, needs and capacities. Competitive bidding does not apply, rather proposals are selected according to the predefined criteria of the independent steering committee (or selection committee), and includes factors such as originality, feasibility and sustainability.⁴

Such committees comprise individuals representing a cross-section of civil-society interest and expertise. The members are entrusted with developing criteria for initiatives,

reviewing and selecting proposals for funding, and making recommendations on how projects are carried out. National steering committees are sometimes complemented by local variants (e.g. district steering committees) vested with the authority to perform the same function. Steering committees are advised and encouraged to support CSOs that lie outside of the 'donor net'.

As the Sri Lankan experience demonstrates, the SGF is an effective way to strengthen civil society and enables local organizations to play a stronger role in post-disaster response and recovery. The SGF is also useful for improving coordination, facilitating participatory decision making, and addressing the capacity constraints of lesser-established organizations.

Formal consultations on programming, implementation and policy

UNDP in Sri Lanka formally consults civil society using permanent mechanisms such as advisory committees and steering committees; and ad-hoc mechanisms such as project appraisal committees. The District Review Board (DRB) is one steering committee established under the Transition Programme project, and comprises representatives mostly from UNDP, CBOs CSOs, NGOs, local cooperatives, and is chaired by the Government Agent (GA) of each district. The DRB

discusses and develops projects administered by UNDP in its relevant district. The Board receives technical support from sectoral experts and the input and endorsement of the GA. The DRB is also responsible for monitoring project progress and supporting project evaluations and assessments.

The DRBs have proven highly effective in providing a forum for discussion among district-level government officials and CSOs, while the majority of Conflict Prevention and Recovery (CPR) projects are administered by central- or district-level steering committees comprising government representatives, civil society organizations the private sector. Both bodies have proven effective in bridging civil society and government participation in the humanitarian response and development of the country.

Informal consultations on policy issues

Informal consultations on policy issues take place on a daily basis as UNDP has established a dialogue with CSOs to ensure that programme initiatives respond to the dynamic and diverse needs of the participant community. The chapters that follow explore these modalities in greater depth and demonstrate how each has been used to build and foster meaningful partnerships between civil society and UNDP in Sri Lanka.

² See UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Toolkit for Strengthening Partnerships (2006) for a complete description of various instruments used by UNDP to engage with CSOs. http://www.undp.org/partners/cso/publications/CSO_Toolkit_linked.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ See UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Toolkit for Strengthening Partnerships (2006) for a complete description of various instruments used in UNDP to engage with CSOs. http://www.undp.org/partners/cso/publications/CSO_Toolkit_linked.pdf

ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE BUILDING



CHAPTER 2

Civil society organizations are often the ears and eyes of the community and are the first to respond to tensions between individuals and groups. CSOs also serve as intermediaries between government stakeholders, non-state entities (NSEs), and civilians. During the immediate aftermath of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) of 2002, UNDP in Sri Lanka took advantage of the unique position held by Sri Lankan civil society and tailored some projects to harness peace-building capacities. The abrogation of the Ceasefire Agreement in January 2008 has opened up a new and perhaps more challenging environment for engagement in peacebuilding. However many of the achievements and lessons described below may well endure nonetheless. This chapter underscores such notable collaborations between civil society and UNDP in Sri Lanka.

Strengthening information capacities for the peace process (Peace Secretariats)

The 'Strengthening Information Capacities of the Peace Process' project worked in close partnership with the three established Peace Secretariats to improve the information and communication capacities. It was premised on the belief that it was important for the Secretariats to improve their partnerships with each other and to communicate information and ideas about the peace process with their respective constituencies in order to develop and sustain public support for peace in the country.

The project adopted a two-pronged approach towards meeting its aims. First, it supported the three Secretariats to improve their information and communication capacities. Second, it established

a Small Grants Fund (SGF) modality in order to support civil society initiatives that sought to build public awareness and participation for peace.

Creating dividends of peace

The 2002 CFA underscored the importance of establishing a government body with the responsibility for administering relief and rehabilitation to the country's conflict-affected areas. With this mandate the Office of the Commissioner General for the Coordination of Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation (OCG-RRR) was established that same year. UNDP accepted the Government of Sri Lanka's call to provide organizational support to the OCG-RRR and has assisted in the development of the National Action Plan for Reconciliation. Though essentially State-led, the planning process actively sought the experience and expertise of civil society actors and developed into a platform for dialogue between representatives of the state (government ministries, civil servants etc) and civil society (academics, CSOs, religious leaders etc). In fact, NGOs spearheaded each of the four working groups constituting the Action Plan, facilitated far-reaching consultations, and eventually developed recommendations which were incorporated into the final document.

Invest-in-Peace: Business for Peace Alliance

Since 2002 UNDP has worked with the government to implement the Invest-in-Peace Project. The Project's premise is that business is good for peace: Generating jobs, goods and services, tax revenues, capital and foreign exchange, technology and markets. Reciprocally, peace is good for business: restoring confidence and security for trade and investment, as well as creating fresh opportunities for private-sector participation in national economic reconstruction and development.

Invest-in-Peace adopts a three-pronged strategy: i) enhancing the enabling environment for investment and trade; ii) building sustainable capacity in business-supporting institutions; and iii) encouraging business to work proactively for peace. Some of the achievements thus far have been the strengthening of the North-East construction industry and skills development, strengthening Regional Chambers of Commerce and SMEs and the creation and strengthening of the Business for Peace Alliance.

International Alert collaborated with UNDP to establish the Business for Peace Alliance (BPA), a working group of 36 business leaders that

represent 18 local chambers of commerce.[1] The business sector has emerged as a unique partner into the peace-building arena which has not traditionally been a part of civil society; as such, the number of stakeholders in the peace process has increased, as has the potential for diverse and innovative resolutions.

Key Achievements

- Support to civil society institutions through the Small Grants modality paved the way for greater involvement of civil society in the peace process and inter alia improved their outreach to the communities on peace issues.
- The SGF has enabled CSOs to develop innovative projects to communicate and generate public dialogue on peace. These projects in have had the 'multiplier' effect by increasing public participation in peace-building.
- Peace-building work has been diversified through efforts such as the production and dissemination of trilingual publications on conflict resolution.
- The reconciliation exercise created a forum in which multiple stakeholders could discuss once-contentious issues of national importance.



- The National Action Plan for Reconciliation exercise was a rare model of effective cooperation between State and civil society in the peace building arena.
- The activities of the BPA helped improve commercial and inter-personal relations between communities in the north, east and south; for example, exchange visits between the Chambers of Commerce and peace visits by the Regional Chambers paved the way for commercial cooperation and also improved interpersonal relations and cross-cultural understanding.
- Linking regional chambers of commerce gave the organizations a stronger platform for dialogue with policy makers, State industries and multinational enterprises (MNEs).
- Alliances built under the BPA proved useful post-tsunami, as the Chambers were able to meet affected communities and represent their interests to those entrusted with the response and recovery efforts.
- The BPA continues to make representations to various parties on the importance of peace and remains a resilient voice for peace amid increased hostilities.
- The SGF gave UNDP an opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships with CSOs by simultaneously providing institutional and programmatic support.
- Capacity building activities under the SGF enabled participant organizations to function more effectively and with greater consideration for transparency and accountability. For example, CSOs have been able to retain full-time staff instead of relying on part-time and volunteer staff. Many have set up project-monitoring for the first time. Other areas of the project cycle that have improved include proposal and report writing, and financial and accounting reporting.
- Civil society actors have taken ownership of local initiatives and have increased accountability and transparency in actions as a result of institutional strengthening. UNDP-led actions such as frequent field visits to CSOs reinforce relationships and



Key Challenges and Lessons Learned

- Escalating conflict and political instability limits the ability of organizations to implement sustainable peace-building efforts. These trends also discourage non-traditional peace constituencies such as the private sector from entering or remaining engaged in peace building.
- Other Constraints include limited resources (human, time, and competing priorities). The SGF-steering committee model, for example, promotes local ownership and transparency and attracts members with the necessary expertise. Yet challenges remain in getting committees to meet, arranging field visits or facilitating CSO training because members participate on

a voluntary basis and are bound by prior professional commitments.

- While providing institutional support is essential for sustaining the work of CSOs, organizational change takes commitment and time. Clearly, CSOs receiving institutional support have improved and gained greater credibility but the full impact of UNDP support is difficult to measure in the short- and medium-term.
- Some CSOs receiving institutional and programmatic support remain motivated during the lifespan of the project but lose interest once material support ends. Such organizations say that the normal 12-month funding cycle is inadequate

to conduct long-term peace-building work. However, UNDP has found that indiscriminately extending funding cycles leads to dependency and a subsequent inability to sustain civil society work independent of external support.

- The implementation of the SGF took longer than anticipated due to various start-up problems and the interruption of routine operations with those of tsunami response and recovery. Despite the slow start, the SGF boasts several unique vertical linkages between CSOs cooperating across cultures and districts. Progress on the development of horizontal linkages between CSOs and national-level stakeholders and processes has been relatively slower.



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