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RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION OF IDPS IN POST-CONFLICT SRI LANKA

A CASE STUDY OF A VILLAGE IN VANNI

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ABSTRACT

The 2002 Ceasefire Agreement in Sri Lanka has resulted in mass-migration of IDPs back to their places of origin. Vanni, in the northern LTTE-controlled part of the country, is also seeing a large number of IDPs coming to settle, including Muslims that had been forced to leave the area by the LTTE. The question is how this resettlement process is taking place, who is involved in it, and what are the conditions for rehabilitation in this war-affected area. In order to investigate these questions, a case study was conducted in a village in Vanni. The data was collected through interviews with villagers and involved NGOs. The study found that the voluntary return of Muslims is mostly due to a low quality of life during their resettlement, and the opportunity to generate income from their land in Vanni. There appeared to be little interaction between the Muslim returnees and the current Tamil population in the village, causing some tension. Also, the indirect control of the LTTE seemed to have influenced the implementation of some rehabilitation projects. Still, the involvement of the government, the LTTE, and NGOs in the resettlement and rehabilitation efforts may be an indication that materialistic and civic development will take place in the village.

FOREWORD

This study was conducted in Vanni on the northern mainland of Sri Lanka. Vanni is controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a group fighting for autonomy for the Tamil-dominated areas in the country. This area has been severely affected by war, but also by the 2004 Tsunami. In 2002, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka. The interviewees in the study expressed a hope for a lasting peace, but many seemed disillusioned after more than two decades of warfare. Many were also concerned about the upcoming presidential election which was believed to decide the future path of the peace process. On the election day, November 17 of 2005, it became apparent that the LTTE had recommended for people in their areas not to vote. Hence, the candidate that won was the one assumed to be least “peace-process”-friendly. Violations of the Ceasefire Agreement have been committed by the Sri Lankan Army, but in particular by the LTTE. At the end of 2005, the situation in the country is tense, and the Nordic peace monitors anticipate that the conflict is likely to resume.

Mr. Arne Follerås with Norwegian NGO Forut, kindly helped me get LTTE’s permission to be in Vanni, and he was also helpful when it came to other practical arrangements.

In order to conduct the interviews, it was necessary to find an English-speaking person who also had access to the area. A young student, Mr. Jeyakody Thushyanthan, took on the challenge and did a good job translating.

Finally, thanks to my supervisor at Lund University, Mrs. Sidsel Hansson, I was “put on the right track” and provided with constructive advice before and after the field study.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following paper is based on a minor field study conducted in a village in the northern part of Sri Lanka in October 2005. This part of the country has experienced years of violent conflict between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Today parts of the north are controlled by the LTTE, and a large section of the original population has become refugees. These are not only living outside, but also within, the state borders. The majority of the refugees are Tamils, but also Sinhalese and Muslims. Over the past years, the phenomenon of such internally displaced persons (IDP) has become a frequent subject in studies and reports. Another current topic is the resettlement of IDPs in their place of origin, due to recent conflict resolutions in a number of countries. The LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) signed a Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in 2002, and rehabilitation efforts were initiated. The focus of this paper will be post-conflict resettlement issues and rehabilitation efforts in the LTTE-controlled Vanni area, based on the perceptions of the IDPs themselves and on observations made by external agents.

The conflict in Sri Lanka involves the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority population, but the Muslim inhabitants in the country have also been severely affected by the war¹. In 1990, the LTTE commanded the Muslims the LTTE-controlled areas to leave. Today, some of these Muslims have returned to their native homes in an area that is still governed by the LTTE. This may seem like a paradox, and will be further discussed in this paper. Another issue that will be further analyzed is that of ethnicity. How are the relations between the Tamil and the Muslim populations after 15 years of displacement?

The LTTE and the GoSL have both committed to assist the IDPs in their resettlement, and several (I)NGOs² are also involved in this process. The question is if these aid efforts are successfully implemented in the LTTE-controlled area where the government has little access and the NGOs are dependent on the cooperation of the Tamil Tigers. This issue will also be looked at in this paper.

¹ The use of the term *war* is, in this case, subject to debate. Still, it will be used here to describe the armed conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE combatants.

² (I)NGO – (International) Non-Governmental Organization, for instance the UN and the Red Cross.

1.1. Purpose and Problem Formulation

The purpose of the field study was to conduct a case study in the LTTE-controlled region of Sri Lanka in order to map part of the post-conflict resettlement and rehabilitation process in relation to internal refugees. Hence, the problem formulation is how the resettlement and rehabilitation process is taking place, and how this process is perceived by the IDPs and other agents involved?

In order to examine the process, a number of sub-questions will be raised. First, which factors have led Muslim IDPs to return to an area still controlled by the LTTE? Secondly, what is the situation of the Tamils, and how are the relations between the ethnic groups in the area? Next, are dimensions such as ethnicity, age and gender significant for perceptions of the resettlement and rehabilitation process? Then, what role do external agents - the government, the LTTE, and NGOs - play in the resettlement and rehabilitation efforts? Finally, is civil society characterized by ethnic segregation or inter-ethnic interaction?

The findings will be discussed in the context of post-conflict Sri Lanka, and in relation to recent research on displaced minorities and ethnicity and conflict as outlined in the analytical framework.

1.2. Method

In order to get access to Vanni, it was necessary to get permission from the LTTE. A representative from the Norwegian NGO Forut, arranged for temporary permission on order to get approval from the LTTE to conduct the study. The selection of location and respondents was done without any involvement from the LTTE. The study was conducted in the Killinochchi District in a fishing village with approximately 40 households, both Tamil and Muslim. The main method of obtaining data was through observation and interviews with representatives among both Muslim and Tamil IDPs, together with conversations with (I)NGOs. The primary data derived from semi-formal interviews with 15 households in addition to conversations with people possessing more formal roles in the society, such as the government representative and union leaders. The selection of households was made through the method of “snowballing”, but respondents were selected in order to make sure that all ethnic, age and gender groups were represented. Some basic questions were posed to all

interviewees and then followed up by subsequent questions depending on their responses. Qualitative interviews as a means of collecting data may be debated since it does not provide objective data to be analyzed. In relation to this, Steinar Kvale states that “Narratives and conversations are today regarded as essential for obtaining knowledge of the social world, including scientific knowledge” (1996:8-9). Hence, interviews and conversations are useful when trying to understand the viewpoints of the objects in the study, and therefore served as the primary method for obtaining data in this case. Interviews were conducted with members from 15 households, the local government representative, two union leaders, and the Catholic priest in the area. Also, representatives from three NGOs were interviewed, in addition to informal conversations with staff from other NGOs.

This study is illustrative rather than representative. By using the method of “snowballing” in the selection of interviewees, the results are also illustrative when it comes to the opinions of the villagers. Still, based on the findings of other studies and feedback from NGOs, it may be assumed that the material provides good insight into local perceptions and events.

Robert K. Yin defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2003:13). Alternatives to doing a qualitative case study would be to do an ethnographic study, a survey, or apply a more quantitative approach. In this case, the case study method provided a framework for analyzing a specific social phenomenon, namely the resettlement and rehabilitation of IDPs in a village. The aim was to find and understand different aspects of this phenomenon, aspects that may be too varied or complex to function as statistics. Hence, doing a case study was preferred to other methods.

The methodological perspective of the paper will be interpretative. The choice of an interpretative approach is based on a belief that there is no objective world to be studied. Here I have taken a cue from hermeneutics which provide tools for attempting an interpretation and analysis of other “life-worlds”, taking into account the subjectivity of the interpreter (Alvesson – Sköldbberg 2000:54-58). In other words, the understanding and analysis of phenomena will necessarily be colored by the theoretical training and personal opinions of the interpreter. When it comes to interpreting and presenting the views of “others” in this paper, it is therefore assumed that this will be done within the cultural framework of the author.

1.3. Limitations

Initially, the intention was to study Muslim returnees to Vanni. After having discussed the topic with some of the present NGOs and peace monitors in Killinochchi, it was decided to change the focus of the prepared research plan. Members of these NGOs suggested that the study should not be limited to the Muslims, to avoid disapproval from the LTTE. After having found an area hosting both Muslim and Tamil conflict-induced IDPs, the aim of the study was altered to look at different aspects of IDP resettlement and post-conflict rehabilitation. As Vanni is strictly controlled by the LTTE, there are limits to movement into and within the area. Still, the village and interviewees were chosen without any interference by the LTTE.

After the Tsunami, the number of IDPs in Vanni increased. Since the aim of the study was to study war-related IDPs, issues concerning post-tsunami rehabilitation were not included in the study.³

In order to conduct the interviews, it was necessary to obtain the assistance of a translator. It proved difficult to find someone in the area who spoke English sufficiently well, in addition to being available for assisting with translating. A student from Vavuniya – the government-controlled town nearest to the "LTTE-boarder" - was available. Since his family had also been displaced from Vanni, he had permission to enter the area. The trips between Vavuniya and Killinochchi, and from Killinochchi to the village took a long time to complete, due to distance, bad roads, and check point procedures and opening hours. Hence, it was clear that the visits to the village would be restricted to taking place between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. As the translator was not trained in social science and had no previous experience of translating in this context, it is likely that the intended formulation of the questions sounded differently in Tamil than in English. Also the answers may not be formulated exactly the way they were presented in Tamil when translated into English.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the gathered information was discussed with NGOs. Also, the findings were compared to the results of other studies on IDPs in Sri Lanka and related topics.

³ The village in which the study was conducted, had not been particularly affected by the Tsunami.

1.4. Ethical Principles

The study was conducted following the ethical principles applying to studies of vulnerable populations. Precautions have been taken to ensure that the interviewees cannot be identified, whereas the identities of NGO representatives have not been concealed.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Research Frontier

The issue of internally displaced people is naturally closely linked to the global refugee situation of an unprecedented amount of displaced people. Some of these have migrated voluntarily, some have been forced to move in favor of development projects, and some are victims of natural and human-caused disasters. Conflict-induced migration involves war, mass violation of human rights, and repression of minorities (Kumar 2004:1). Many of the armed conflicts in the world have recently been settled, and with that follows a new challenge related to war-refugees; return and rehabilitation. The implications of these resettlement processes have been studied by different scholars and organizations. The challenges faced in this process involve topics like property rights (Kibreab 2002), gender issues (Marques 2003), and the development of civil society (Varshney 2001).

Sri Lanka is one of several countries which have experienced war in the past decades. The conflict was triggered in the mid-50s, and an armed conflict broke out in 1983 causing mass displacement of the population. A large number of the Sri Lankan refugees live abroad, and the majority of these are Tamils from the north. After almost two decades of periodic warfare, there is also a large number of internal refugees.

Jessica Skinner, has recently presented a study of IDPs in the Trincomalee⁴ district in north-east Sri Lanka. She has studied to what extent ethnic identities and relations transform and continue throughout displacement. Skinner states that there was a fear of "ethnic colonization and ethnic cleansing" among the IDPs (2005:67). She claims that the refugee camps were ethnically divided, although there was no mentality of a clear ethnic division among the IDPs. When asked about a potential return to their native areas, the IDPs' hopes for the future did not necessarily revolve around a desire to return to a physical or ideological home. Instead, the emphasis was most often placed on conflict resolution. In relation to this, Skinner is critical to peace-building projects which have proved to have a tendency to work along ethnic lines (Ibid:51-70).

⁴ Trincomalee district is in the Eastern Province and has an approximately equal amount of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

Geographer Cathrine Brun, has also studied IDPs in Sri Lanka. Her study focuses on the Muslims from the north resettling in Puttalam on the western coast. Brun argues that Muslim internal refugees negotiated and created a separate space in the resettlement area. The settlers were segregated from the local Muslims both in terms of accommodation and everyday practices. The competition over scarce resources and a lack of continuous engagement by local Muslims, may have caused the interaction and negotiations to become more violent. Another reason is that large Muslim settlements were established in the middle of Sinhalese communities (Brun 2000:100).

Continuing on the topic of Muslims in Sri Lanka, there are two studies concluding that there has been an increased ethnic awareness among the Muslim population (Rødseth 1999, Korf and Silva 2003). This phenomenon may be interpreted as a group responding to the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict by aiming to carve out a culture and society with stronger ties to "correct" Islam. Manuel Castells sees this as a response to pronounced ethnic conflict (1997).

When it comes to the development of a functioning civil society in the war-affected areas in Sri Lanka, Skinner points out that NGOs seemed to perpetuate the ethnic division through their projects. In the LTTE-controlled areas, a large portion of the post-conflict rehabilitation and development efforts are conducted by NGOs. In relation to this, Vance Culbert points out the problem with the LTTE directly or indirectly controlling all actions in the area, including government rehabilitation efforts and the work of NGOs. The authoritarian system, within which the efforts are made, seems to be an obstacle to efficiently developing the area and the civil society (Culbert 2003).

This study may be seen as a small contribution to the studies of post-conflict Sri Lanka. First of all, it will try to follow-up prior studies conducted among Sri Lankan IDPs, including studies of the Muslim refugee population. Secondly, it will to some extent be a document of part of the rehabilitation efforts and civil society development that were initiated in Sri Lanka after the Ceasefire Agreement. Finally, it may also be seen as a contribution of information from inside the LTTE-controlled area, within which very little research is conducted.

2.2. Central Concepts

Two terms that will be frequently used in this paper are *ethnicity* and *civil society*. Both of these are complex concepts with no obvious relation. The academic discourse on ethnicity provides a number of explanations for the term. Here, ethnicity will be used in a broad, overall sense, drawing upon the definitions of Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Ashutosh Varshney. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, defines ethnicity as “groups whose respective members perceive themselves as culturally different” (translation by author) (1993:311). According to the definition of Ashutosh Varshney, ethnicity means ascribed group identities such as “race, language, religion, tribe or caste...” (2001:3). In this study, ethnic group will be used to designate different IDP communities irrespective of whether their identities are based on religion (Muslims), language (Tamil), or both (Christian Tamils).

As earlier mentioned, the study will include an examination of relations between ethnic groups, especially how they interact in civil society settings. It is debated whether or not the concept of civil society is applicable in studies of non-Western settings. For instance, voluntary associations are rare in many parts of South Asia, and especially the rural areas. Civil society is the space between the family and the state, space that enables individual and family interconnections, and space that is independent of the state.

In his discussion of how to extend the concept of civil society beyond a Western framework, Varshney raises the question of whether or not these civil society connections necessarily have to be organized and modern based on voluntary associations, as claimed by Ernest Gellner, among others. Varshney claims that both “...informal group activities and ascribed associations should be considered part of civil society so long as they connect individuals, build trust, encourage reciprocity, and facilitate the exchange of views on matters of public concern – economic, political, cultural, and social” (2001:5). Varshney argues that civil society is important in order to achieve peaceful inter-ethnic relations and to manage inter-ethnic tension. In urban areas, civil society consists of both formal organizations and informal everyday relations, while as rural areas in South Asia usually lack the formal type of civil society. Varshney argues that both forms of civil society may have a positive effect on general inter-ethnic relations, but that formal organizations must be present in order to manage more serious inter-ethnic tension. When civil society is organized along intra-ethnic lines, it is more

likely going to be used as a tool for inter-ethnic strife. From this perspective, it is interesting to examine whether inter-ethnic relations in Vanni are characterized by segregation or integration (2001:3-5).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Account of the Conflict and Ceasefire Agreement

The conflict in Sri Lanka involves the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. Very briefly, one may say that the Tamil minority was favored by the British in the colonial administration, which provided many Tamils with favorable societal positions. The Sinhalese political elite that has been in power since independence, tried to mend the “imbalance” by adapting policies that would benefit the Sinhalese (Gunaratna 1998:104). The Sinhalese political elite has been dominated by two rivaling groups, which has contributed to the biased politics of the Sri Lankan governments. The frustration grew among many Tamils concerning the way the country was ruled, and in the 1970s an armed separatist movement took shape in the north. The group that emerged to dominate the fight for an independent Tamil Eelam⁵ was the LTTE, headed by Velupillai Prabhakaran (Swamy 2002:31, 64). In 1983, the antagonism erupted in war, mostly concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the country. The conflict has developed into a complex matter, and may, for instance, be described as an ethnic conflict, terrorism, or war for liberation.

In 1990, the LTTE launched an offensive to gain control of the intended area of Eelam. Muslims, making up 7% of the Sri Lankan population, were forced to leave their homes in the LTTE-controlled area. The Tamil Tigers started to develop a separate administration in the north, including local government, taxation, and welfare. In 1995/-96, the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) regained control of Jaffna and Killinochchi. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people from the Jaffna peninsula became internal refugees (Gunaratna 1998:24-29). It is estimated that approximately 800 000 people have been displaced as a result of the conflict in Sri Lanka (Narman – Vidanapathirana 2005:19). In 2000, the LTTE had won back parts of the land occupied by the SLA, including Killinochchi, which became the unofficial capital of “Tamil Eelam” (Dissanayaka 2004:197).

Several attempts to halt the war have been made. In February 2002, the Ceasefire Agreement was signed between the GoSL and the LTTE, with Norwegian diplomats functioning as facilitators. The GoSL took on the responsibility of finding permanent solutions to the IDP problem. For instance, a government contribution of 15 000 rupees is to be given to all

⁵ Eelam is the Tamil word for *homeland*.

returnees, regardless of needs and losses (Kumar 2004:4). Three ministries have a direct bearing on assistance to IDPs; the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees (MRRR), the Ministry of Eastern Development, and the Ministry for Assisting Vanni Rehabilitation. In addition, the country receives aid from international agents and direct help from (I)NGOs ([http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(http Envelopes\)/084E175B92A93266802570B8005AAF2F?OpenDocument:1, 2](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(http%20Envelopes)/084E175B92A93266802570B8005AAF2F?OpenDocument:1,2)).

Another result of the CFA, was the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North-East (SIHRN), installed by the government and the LTTE in 2003. The same year, the LTTE pulled out of the peace talks and the whole process was put on hold (Ibid:2). While as the Tsunami has brought Indonesia closer to a peaceful solution to the conflict between the GAM Guerrilla and the Indonesian government, the natural disaster has fuelled the tension in Sri Lanka (Andreassen 2005:18). At this time (December 2005), the future of the peace process is still uncertain.

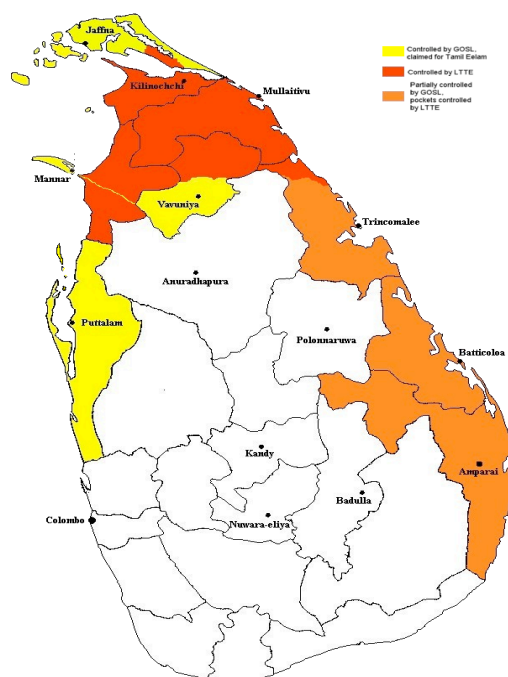
3.2. Setting

The village where the study was conducted, is situated on the coast in Killinochchi district. There are approximately 40 houses. A number of them are made from cement, some are intact some are in ruins. In addition, there are huts made by palm leaves. The buildings are spread out among tall palm trees. In the center of the village is a mosque that is being restored. Nearby is a school teaching grade 1 to 11, and a community building. The children attending the school come from the village and the surrounding areas. Closer to the water are two churches, but only one is intact. The village makes up part of a larger parish and government representative area. The presence of NGOs is apparent through the number of signs stating who is funding the different buildings. Many of the houses also have plastic covers donated by NGOs on their roofs. Different UN organizations are represented, but there are also signs of other (I)NGOs, such as Forut, ASB, and Sewalanka.

The living conditions are poor. There is no electricity, and many of the households lacks proper water and sanitary facilities. A majority of the men are fishermen, while most of the women are occupied in the household.

Before the 1990 order for Muslims to leave Vanni, this village was predominantly a Muslim town. According to Tamil publications, the area was the home of 600 Muslim families (http://www.tchr.net/reports_wcar_detail.htm)⁶. The rest of the population was made up by Christian Tamils. The warfare in the 1990s resulted in a mass exodus from the Jaffna area in the north. A large number of these Tamils settled in the village. Today many of these have returned to their place of origin, but some have stayed. This means that the approximately 70 Muslim families have returned to an area with relatively recently settled Tamils. The exact number of inhabitants is difficult to estimate due to the ongoing migration. Also, due to the insecurity in the northern and eastern part of Sri Lanka, no censuses have been conducted in the area in recent years.

3.3. Map



(Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/6e/Extent_of_territorial_control_in_sri_lanka.png)

⁶ When searching for information about the LTTE-area on the Internet, a large number of the web pages are run by Diaspora Tamils. I have tried to be careful when using these sites as sources of information, since they tend to be biased.

4. THE VILLAGERS' EXPERIENCE OF RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION

4.1. Muslims

The Vanni area is controlled by the LTTE and it may seem like a paradox that Muslims choose to return to the area that they were forced to leave in 1990. According to UNHCR statistics, the majority of the recent domestic returns to Vanni are spontaneous and not arranged by the UN or other NGOs (<http://www.unhcr.lk/Stats%20and%20Maps/Statistical%20Summary/Stats%20August%202005.pdf>). So why have the Muslims chosen to return to Vanni?

4.1.1. Factors Contributing to the Return

The Muslim interviewees mention the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) as a precondition for the resettlement and informed that they had returned voluntarily. The most frequent push factor was that their living conditions in Puttalam had been bad, and that there was little work for them. The main pull factor was that they owned land in this village in Vanni, which could generate income. In most cases, this implied the growing and selling of coconuts. Equally many said that they wanted to return, because this was their birthplace and their families had lived in the area for many generations. Other factors that were mentioned, was that they considered the school in the village better than the one in Puttalam, and that relatives had returned to the village. In order to get their land back, the Muslims have to present documentation of the ownership to the LTTE. All the interviewees said that they had been given their land back without any problems.

When talking about their situation in Puttalam, the interviewees seem to have different perceptions of the experience. Some have stayed with relatives, some have lived in camps, and some had managed to buy their own house. Two of them said that the permanent Muslim residents in Puttalam helped them by giving them food and providing land for the Muslims refugees. Three respondents said that there were some problems with the permanent population, both Muslim and Sinhalese. For instance, that the Muslim refugees, in the beginning, had offered services for a lower price than the usual. Another issue was that the refugees were "last in line". For instance, they had to wait until the others were finished if they went to the tank to take a bath. These comments may be linked to similar observations

done by Cathrine Brun and Eirin Rødseth. Both scholars state that the Muslim inhabitants in Puttalam welcomed and helped the Muslim IDPs in the beginning, but that conflicts gradually developed between the groups. Brun writes that there were more Muslims than Sinhalese in Puttalam. Still, they were not a formal majority, because the Muslim IDPs were not considered Puttalam citizens (2000:100). Rødseth mentions some perceptions that the Muslims residents have about the Muslim IDPs. For instance, there was some frustration that the refugees sold their labor below market price at the same time as they received food from the authorities and NGOs. Also, they had claimed that the IDPs were “bad Muslims” who did not live the right way (1999:26).

When talking to representatives from UNHCR⁷ concerning the returning of Muslims from Puttalam to Vanni, they had some suggestions as to why this was taking place now. They emphasized that most IDPs are not returning, and referred to a study done in Puttalam where only a minority of the displaced people were planning to return. One of the UN staff suggested that reasons for not returning could be difficulties in establishing and running businesses, bad infrastructure and children born and raised outside of Vanni. On the other hand, three years of relative peace may have created a sense of stability which may be an incentive to return. Another employee had the impression that only poor people returned, the ones that had not been able to resettle permanently and start businesses outside of Vanni. He thought that Muslims - usually involved in trade – were discouraged from returning by the strict control of the LTTE which was an obstacle to businesses. Accordingly, the Tamil Tigers implement heavy taxation and do not allow much entrepreneurship. He also said that some Muslims had returned and claimed their rightful land just to sell it and leave again.

Low quality of life in Puttalam and a desire to return to their area of birth and where their ancestors had lived, were mentioned by the Muslims as the main factors for returning. Most of the respondents had owned land in the village, which could contribute to the income of the households. When returning after the CFA, the Muslims had been given their land back by the LTTE. The UNHCR staff suggested that economic reasons lie behind the current return of Muslims. They had the impression that people who had not been able to settle and make a living in Puttalam, were the ones that were now returning to Vanni.

⁷ UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

4.1.2. Living Under the LTTE

Although the majority of the Muslim interviewees seem to have experienced poverty and other problems in Puttalam, it may seem strange that they voluntarily have moved back to an area governed by the LTTE. The Muslim returnees were asked if they now felt safe in Vanni. Some of them were also asked about their perception of the LTTE.

One respondent explained the ambiguity related to the decision to return to the area. He had come back to live under LTTE-control, because the LTTE now were taking care of the Muslims. But, he was afraid that what had happened in 1990 could happen again. Another reason for their insecurity was, according to this interviewee, the large number of Tamils now living in the village. Hence, they felt safer in Puttalam, since the population there was mostly Muslim. When asked if the Ceasefire Agreement had provided him with a sense of safety, he said that the agreement was only in writing, not in reality. He did not want to say if he thought it would lead to a permanent agreement. According to him, “peace is in the hands of the LTTE and the president”. This situation of insecurity prevented the Muslims from starting businesses, he said. If the war would break out, and they had to leave again, they would lose their investments. Another respondent explained that the LTTE protected them now. When asked if that meant that he trusted the LTTE today, he said no. Three respondents explained that they were afraid that the war could break out again. In other words, they would not feel safe anywhere. When asked if the LTTE had helped them in any other way than giving them their land back, all the Muslim respondents answered negatively.

It may seem like the Muslims experienced a higher level of security when they lived in Puttalam. Still, they chose to return to Vanni. It is possible that the economic incentives weighed more than the safety concern. On the other hand, the Muslims expressed a fear of the war breaking out again. In other words, their trust, not only in the LTTE, but also in the Sri Lankan government, may be limited. Kumar states that “...the LTTE for its own long-term gains, from time to time have forced the Muslim community living in the north to leave the area...” (2004:2). LTTE’s occasional maltreatment of them may be a way of “showing who is in charge”. According to Rødseth, the Muslim minority has not been as politically independent as the Tamils, but rather supported the parties that could benefit them the most (1999:24). The fact that LTTE is now taking on responsibilities for the Muslim IDPs, may possibly be seen as a sign of commitment and responsibility to the peace attempts. Especially

since this is an issue that will be followed closely by international agents, among which the LTTE wants increased legitimacy.

4.2. The Tamils

The Tamils, native to the village, are predominately Christians, whereas the "Jaffna Tamils" are both Christian and Hindu. The majority of the Jaffna Tamil IDPs had returned to their native areas after the CFA. Those who have not gone back gave a number of reasons for this: The land they owned there was in the army high security zone, and as long as there was no permanent peace they chose to stay. Also, their children wanted to stay where they are, and some said that they had to look to the safety of their children first.

During the interviews it became apparent that there were two groups of displaced Tamils in the area - the IDPs from the Jaffna area, but also people originating in the village who had escaped to India during the war. These refugees had also started to return to Vanni. The Tamils, native to the village but now returning from India, gave wanting to live at the place they were born as a reason for their return. They had stayed in India as long as there was war in Sri Lanka, but now they thought they would be able to make a living in the village.

Both the Muslim IDPs and the Tamil refugees to India mentioned the Ceasefire Agreement as a precondition for returning to the village. These had decided to return to the village in Vanni to try to make a living there, even if they were not sure that the CFA would last. The displaced Tamils had decided to stay in the village, primarily due to insecurity about the future of the Ceasefire, and because their land in Jaffna was in the high security zone. The Muslims claimed to feel insecure no matter where they lived, and expressed a lack of trust in both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. The Tamils expressed concerns about their security if they were to return to Jaffna, since this is a likely target for attacks by the Sri Lankan Army if the war was to resume.

5. GROUP RELATIONS IN THE VILLAGE

It was likely that there would be some tension among the village inhabitants. First of all, the composition of the population had changed from being predominantly Muslim to Tamil. There were also a large number of people that are trying to make a living off of the same vocation, namely fishing. Property rights and housing could also be an issue, in addition to the possibility that there could be a feeling of NGO assistance being unequally distributed. There was also a chance that there could be some distrust of the Tamils by the Muslims due to the 1990 ethnic cleansing. When asked if there are any conflicts between the Muslims and the Tamils, a majority of the interviewees said that there were no conflicts and that there was mutual respect between the groups. Still, two topics came up during the conversations. The first was a situation with the school, and the second issue was related to fishing.

5.1. The school

The school was registered as a Muslim Mixed School, but since 1990 the majority of the students have been Tamil. After the return of the Muslims, the school was again run as a Muslim school. According to the principal and the Catholic Priest, the Tamil parents have asked to change the name to the Muslim and Tamil Mixed School, but this had been declined by the government⁸. Additional Tamil frustrations were further explained by the Father. Tamil parents had come to him with their concerns. Among other things they were worried because school let out early on Fridays for the Muslim prayers because this could affect the education of the children. According to him, the non-Muslim parents wanted to start a separate Tamil school for their children. When asked how they were trying to achieve this, he said that the zonal director of education, the bishop in Mannar, the Ministers of Education and Christian Affairs, and Mr. Tamilselvan⁹ had all received a letter about the situation. So why are the Muslims opposing changing the school name and regulations? One of them explains that it is traditionally a Muslim school, and also the last one in Killinochchi district.

⁸ The Sri Lankan government is responsible for the public schools in all districts, also in the LTTE-area. The schools are usually ethnically divided, with the majority of the students belonging to the same ethnic group. A law from 1956 states that if more than 50% of the pupils are Muslim, the school may be registered as a Muslim school (Rødseth 1999:31).

⁹ Political Head of the LTTE.

5.2. Fishing

The other topic that is mentioned, is fishing. A majority of the men in the village are fishermen, and there are two fishermen's unions. The first one was established three decades ago, the other was founded in the mid 90s by Tamil IDPs. Some of the Muslim returnees have joined the original union. In addition, it turned out that some of the local Tamils who had just returned from India, were about to start their own union.

The leaders of the two original fishermen's unions, were both Tamils. Both of them brought up the issue of registration. One must be registered in the village in order to get a license to fish there. Registration is implemented by the government, for instance the IDPs will receive financial aid when they register in their native area. LTTE, on the other hand, does not seem to require registration to spend time in the area. The leaders of the first unions both expressed that there were no conflicts between the unions. Both also said that the unions had some trouble with Muslims from Puttalam who came to fish for a shorter period of time without registering. Both emphasized that if the Muslims would register, they would be allowed to fish. According to the union leaders, some of the Muslims do not want to register there, to avoid losing their registration in Puttalam. Both of them expressed concerns that people from the outside, who stayed there temporarily without registering, were coming to get information about the area in order to pass it on to the Sri Lankan Army. According to one of the union leaders, the SLA wants information about the coast in case of war. He therefore wished that the LTTE would apply stricter control in the area.

The Muslim fishermen have a different view of what causes problems with the fishing. It seemed like the Muslims were less involved in fishing than they had been before 1990. Very few of them owned a boat. One informant said that only two Muslims own their own boat, the rest of them rent from the Tamils. One respondent said that the Union was making it difficult for him to fish because his helpers were not registered in the Village. A third interviewee mentioned that the Tamils now rule the fishing. Also, the LTTE taxation on fish is high. This respondent's work occupation was to dry and sell fish, but he had to buy the cheaper fish from the tank instead of fresh fish from the fishermen on the shore.

Most of the respondents emphasized that there were little problems between the fishermen. The two union leaders said that the only problem with fishing in the area was with the non-registered Muslims who came to fish. It should still be noted that the fact that a second fishing

union was established in the mid 1990s and that a new one is under way, may be an indication of some internal differences. Also, the leader of the 1972 union of fishermen originating in the village, said that there was a problem because the "Jaffna Tamils" had more modern equipment. The members of his union only had old nets, and were therefore less efficient than the others. In other words, the problems are not only between Muslims and Tamil groups of fishermen, but also within the Tamil fishing organizations.

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth has argued that ethnic groups are most secure and enduring when the groups occupy different ecological niches, which makes them mutually dependent and prevents them from competing (1969). Kibreab states that "Returning refugees may be perceived as a burden by stayee populations because their arrival may constitute increased competition for scarce resources such as land water...and employment opportunities" (2002:54), hence, it was not surprising to find that there were some internal differences when members of different groups have the same occupation. Still, none of the respondents (both union leaders and fishermen) seemed particularly concerned about there being too many fishermen. "Fish is for all people" as one of the union leaders put it.

5.3. Village Relations as a Whole

Even though there were some problems related to the school and fishing, the most striking feature was the lack of tension. When talking to interviewees about the relations in the village, many said that there were no problems between the Muslims and the Tamils. When asked about problems between the groups, a number of the respondents made a distinction between individuals and the group per se. For instance, by saying they have problems with "some Muslims" or "the Tamil fishermen". Instead, many expressed a sense of tolerance and consideration for the villagers of another religious background. One Muslim said that "God tells them that the Muslims should be kind to all communities". And, when talking to the Tamil priest about the Tamils wanting a separate Tamil school, he said that "the Muslims feel like the Tamils are taking their school, but the Tamils do not want to take anybody else's school". No respondent claimed that others had received more aid than them. Instead, they expressed a need for more aid for the entire society.

It is difficult to know how the village relations were before the Muslim departure. Some of the inhabitants who had lived in the village before 1990, said that there used to be more

interaction between the groups, and one Muslim respondent used the expression “like brothers” to explain the earlier relations. He explained that today there are “many new faces and some ask if he is Muslim”. This makes him worried. Another Muslim interviewee said that “the Muslims want to live in an area of their own, because it is very hard to live in this area”. It seems as if the Muslims are keeping to themselves. A Tamil respondent said about the Muslims that “their culture is that they want to live alone”. This was also mentioned by some more Tamils.

The two communities seem to exist somewhat independent of the other. Areas that were described as problematic, were the only areas where there is interaction between the Muslims and Tamils, namely the school and fishing. As suggested by one of the UNHCR staff, this does not have to be due to pronounced ethnic antagonism. The Muslims have been severely affected by a conflict that they are not directly involved in. This may have led the community to seek together for sustainability and support, and by that also distance themselves from other communities.

6. INCREASED ETHNIC AWARENESS AMONG MUSLIMS

This study is naturally much too short and general to suggest any trends when it comes to increased ethnic awareness among Muslim IDPs in Sri Lanka. Still, it will briefly touch upon the topic. Increased awareness among the Muslims seems to be a national phenomenon. Over the past two decades, more Muslim political parties have been formed in Sri Lanka, and the Muslim political leadership has claimed that the Muslims should be present together with the Tamil and Sinhalese representatives at the peace negotiations. Castells also suggests that groups that fall in between when other groups fight, respond to the conflict by developing an increased self-awareness (1997).

A study on processes of cultural and religious changes, similar to those of Rødseth and Korf and Silva, has not been conducted among Muslim IDPs. Should one assume that increased ethnic awareness has taken place among the IDPs as well? In the case of this study, it is difficult to make any comparisons of the village dynamics before 1990 and after 2002, simply because there is no early documentation. Despite the fact that the Muslim IDPs have mostly lived in Puttalam over the last 15 years, they did not seem to have adopted many of the cultural traits as described by Rødseth, for instance increased use of veiling among women in Puttalam. According to Rødseth, the “new” focus on clothing and religious practices is related to a desire to show that they are Muslims by distinguishing themselves from the Tamils (1999:72, 160). The Muslim women in the village in the study, were only wearing a light veil, and many of them were not covering their hair, not even when strangers appeared. The hijab¹⁰ was only worn by the Muslim schoolgirls, and just one man in the village was observed wearing the fez on his head. Another observation is that the Village Muslim School is mixed, while Rødseth writes that the Muslim schools in Puttalam are gender segregated which gives girls an opportunity to get an education (Ibid:31). Hence, it may be suggested that the villagers in Vanni have adapted less to the display of Islamic belonging observed in Puttalam. This may be due to less exposure to the more traditional Muslims. As mentioned earlier, many of the IDPs seemed to exist as lower strata in Puttalam, impeding direct influences by resident Muslims. Also, the Muslims from Vanni may to a lesser extent, be exposed to work emigrants returning from the Middle East, bringing “Arabic” influences impacting on the Islamic traditions in Sri Lanka. Finally, although the increased Muslim awareness was not so obvious

¹⁰ Cloth that frames the face and covers the upper-body.

in the village, it seemed clear that both Muslims and Tamils perceived the former as a distinct group. Vanni has been more affected by the war than Puttalam. Together with the poverty in the area, these are also probable reasons for why the Muslim villagers do not focus as much on their cultural distinctions as seems to be the case in Puttalam.

7. GENDER AND AGE

Much literature on the theme of post-conflict, states that women and children are particularly vulnerable in resettlement situations. An obvious issue is that of violence, but also failing to target women in the resettlement process is mentioned (Marques 2003:23). Concerning children, Kibreab states that “For those refugees born in exile, return may mean going to a strange and threatening place” (2002:55).

The Muslim women were asked if they had rather wanted to stay in Puttalam, even if their husbands had wanted to return to the village in Vanni. All of them responded that they too had wanted to return. Still, there seemed to be some discrepancy between the Muslim parents’ desire to return and their children wanting to stay. It was mostly the younger children who expressed a desire to have stayed in Puttalam. Among the Tamil IDPs, both men and women brought up the safety of their children as a concern when deciding to stay in the village.

The young people in the village have experienced a great deal of challenges uncommon to their age. The young Muslims are mostly born in Puttalam, but have recently moved to the village in Vanni. Also, the Tamil children returning from India, were now “returning” to their parents’ native area. When it came to the younger generation of the Tamil IDPs, some were born in Jaffna, while some were born in this village. Except for the youngest ones, these children have experienced air raids by the Sri Lankan Army; some of them showed the scars on their arms caused by explosives.

Gender did not appear to be a significant dimension for differences in perceptions among the villagers. Age, on the other hand, seemed to be somewhat significant. As opposed to their parents, most of the recently resettled children had not wanted to move to the village.

8. EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

What role has NGOs, the government, and the LTTE played in the resettlement and rehabilitation process?

8.1. NGOs

The school building had a UNICEF-sign on the wall, and several roofs in the village states UNHCR, verifying that the UN has been involved in the resettlement process. The returning IDPs also informed that they had received buckets, clothes, food, tents, nets, etc., when they came back. Based on the “name-dropping” of the benefic IDPs, it is unclear exactly which NGOs were involved in the initial phase. The recently returned Muslims and Tamils had received some financial aid and items. The Tamils who came during the war, said that they had not been given any help. There was a chance that there could be some tension between those who had received help and those who had not, since this seemed to have happened in some of the post-tsunami rehabilitation projects. This did not seem to be the case in the village, though. Instead, the general response was that they had all received too little help and that the village per se needed to be developed. It may be worth noting that the Catholic Priest and some of the respondents, claimed that the village and surrounding areas had been forgotten by the authorities. The Priest said that most of the aid in the area was provided for tsunami relief efforts, hence the post-war rehabilitation was impeded. This topic was brought up with both UNDP¹¹ and the Tamils’ Rehabilitation Organization (TRO)¹².

The Project Manager at the Tamils’ Rehabilitation Organization, said that the war-induced refugees now would be their main priority. He also described the aid provided for the Tamils by TRO, together with (I)NGOs, as “the best of the best”.

The Project Manager (P.M.) for UNDP’s Transition Program in Vanni, said that the war-affected population would now be one of their main focuses. UNDP had been informed about the situation in the village and had been told that the current problems must be addressed in order to avoid conflicts in the future. He emphasized that it was important to answer the needs of both Muslims and Tamils in the community. It was also important to target the population that never really left the area and not only the IDPs, in order to avoid internal tension. The

¹¹ UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

¹² TRO is a large local NGO. It is independent, but assumed to have close links to the LTTE.

UNDP project manager seemed confident that the program in the war-affected areas would succeed. In the village area the problems could be faced, for instance, by building a school for the Tamils in the area. He pointed out that the Tsunami-IDPs are a bigger challenge because of the buffer zone rule and the problems that follow with resettling everyone. Separate programs for Tsunami- and war-IDPs had been developed, and the latter had just been initiated in five different areas in the country, including the object of this study. This is to be a community based project and the beneficiaries will get aid in return for participation.

According to the P.M., many IDPs are used to relying on external help, so it is important to mobilize the communities. The success of the program is dependent on strong local leaders and common effort. When asked if the projects would be channeled through the local NGO system, he answered that “we avoid that”. Instead, UNDP had a mandate directly from the government. The UNDP has certain criteria for starting projects, but it is the government that has the final word in the selection of beneficiary communities. There are two target groups, people that are returning to their own land, and resettlers whose land has been destroyed and need help with acquiring new land. According to the P.M., it is the policy of the Sri Lankan government that all should have land, and that the implementation of this principal would be monitored by the Government Agents.

It appeared that the war-induced area would be targeted by NGOs in the near future. The TRO representative seemed very concerned about the situation. He spoke grandly about upcoming projects and the resources of the aid agencies in the area, but the choice of words made the plans seem somewhat unrealistic. UNDP was about to start projects based on activating the community. Also, the UNDP seemed positive towards providing the Tamils with a separate school in order to prevent conflict. Finally, the success of NGOs in Vanni may not only depend on the competence of the NGOs themselves. According to one of the SLMM¹³ staff, the LTTE’s relation with the different NGOs is, some extent, based on personal connections and not on the organization itself. If one NGO manager has a good relationship with the LTTE authorities, it is not implied that the rapport will be passed on to the next manager. This determines a lot of the NGO’s abilities in the area.

¹³ SLMM – Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, peace monitors from the Nordic countries.

8.2. GoSL and the LTTE

When asked, the village inhabitants expressed that they had only received modest aid from authorities and NGOs. Most of the Muslims had received 25 000¹⁴ rupees from the GoSL after returning. One Muslim family had kept their registration in Puttalam, and had therefore not got the money. The two Tamil families who had recently returned from India, had also been given money by the government, while as the Tamils who had come to the village during the 1990s, had not received any government financial aid. One of these Tamils said that the government had informed them that if the family returned to Jaffna, they would get the money. One Tamil family also said that the government had given them some household products after the Tsunami. Even though the village had not been particularly affected by the tidal wave, they still had been unable to go fishing for some days.

The Government representative, Grama Servakar (GS), in the area was asked about the government projects. He said that the government has certain obligations to assist people with the resettlement, but that they do not fulfill their commitments. The government had helped with the rehabilitation in other areas, but not there. The LTTE was not involved either, according to the GS. In stead they have had to rely on NGOs and loans from TRO. When asked if the inhabitants could get help through him, he said that it is the Government Agent in Killinochchi who decides about aid. He is new, but has many plans for water purification, rope making¹⁵, etc. The problem was that they lacked the necessary funds.

As mentioned, both the GoSL and the LTTE have committed themselves to assist the IDPs in their resettlement. It is apparent that the government, to some extent, has succeeded in providing the resettling IDPs in Vanni with financial aid. None of the respondents mentioned any concrete aid efforts made by the LTTE. But, as mentioned on page 17, it was apparent that all the returning Muslims had been given their land back by the LTTE in a consistent manner.

¹⁴ There may be some uncertainty whether or not this number is correct, but it is clear that the IDPs have received a double digit grant from the Sri Lankan government.

¹⁵ It turned out that there already was a rope factory in the village started by Sewalanka, but it had been closed because no one paid the salaries.

8.3. Authority Efforts

What do the present NGOs think about the efforts of the national and local authorities when it comes to assisting the returning IDPs? According to UNHCR's Associate Liaison Officer, the GA had been involved in the resettlement of the Muslims, while the LTTE "did not exactly encourage the Muslims to return". The UNDP Project Manager said that, unofficially, the LTTE wanted IDPs to return to Jaffna, This was because the Sri Lankan Army has occupied land there, but when returnees reclaim property, the government is obligated to return their land. Hence, the army would loose strategic land. Also, the NGO system in Vanni ensures that the LTTE has full control of all actions in the area.

It is very probable that the strategies of the government and the LTTE in the resettlement process, are carefully chosen to serve their own interests. The government has showed initiative to provide all citizens with the necessary aid, though it may not have been completely successful. The LTTE does not seem to have been particularly active in the aid efforts, but it should be noted that they have fulfilled part of the bilateral agreement by ensuring that land is given back to the Muslim IDPs. The UNDP P.M. insinuated that there is some strategy behind the actions of the LTTE, when he said that the Tamil Tigers wanted people to return to Jaffna. At the same time, it is worth noticing that the government does not seem to pay the resettlement aid until the IDPs have registered in their native area, including Jaffna.

9. CIVIL SOCIETY

In this section, the civil society situation in the village will be analyzed. As mentioned in the section on External Involvement, some of the NGOs have tried to start “peaceful co-existence” projects, but these have failed. The failure seemed to be due to the inefficiencies related to the local NGO system. Still, there appeared to be a few small projects going on in the area. For instance, when visiting the community building there was a local NGO-meeting concerning a micro-finance project. In addition, The Catholic Priest in the neighboring village ran theoretical and practical classes - a “life-brightening center” - for all religious communities. This was to increase the level of education and skills in the area. The priest claimed to have donated bicycles to the communities, so that they could get to the classes held in a building next to the church. He also expressed a sense of disappointment with Hindus and Muslims for being “more interested in their rules and regulations”, than realizing the importance of raising the level of education and skills in the entire village. The villagers in the study were asked if they knew of, or had participated in, any community projects. All but one declined to have attended any projects, one Tamil girl had taken a sewing course. A Muslim woman said that she knew that the Father had a sewing project in another village. According to her, “Tamil girls could go to the classes, but the Muslim girls cannot ride a bicycle, so they do not go”. The Muslims’ activities seemed to be related to the mosque, for instance the Friday prayers and Arabic classes.

According to Varshney, the level of ethnic tension in an area may depend on how the civil society is organized. In this village, it appeared to be limited civic interaction between Muslims and Tamils, and the organized activities are for the most part ethnically divided. The tension observed in the village was concentrated to the two areas where the villagers did interact across ethnic lines - school and fishing. This is according to Varshney’s claim that a segregated civil society is likely to be used as a tool for inter-ethnic strife. The chances of ethnic violence erupting in the village are probably small. The school and the fishermen’s unions are organizations able to manage the tension. Also, the villagers expressed a strong sense of tolerance towards the other group. At the same time, the conflict in Sri Lanka has

showed that apparently peaceful individuals may engage in violence against the neighboring groups. It is also likely that the population in the north is war-tired and will not easily participate in worsening the situation in their area. Another important factor for preventing the eruptions of violence, is the rigid control of the LTTE.

10. CONCLUSION

The return of the Muslim IDPs to Vanni from Puttalam was voluntary and seemed to be economically motivated. For the majority, their quality of life in Puttalam had been rather low, while as they still owned land in the village in Vanni which could generate some income. This explanation was also supported by members of the UNHCR staff, who also pointed out that most Muslim IDPs are not returning. Another main factor mentioned by the Muslims was the want to return to the place of origin of their family. The Muslims did not seem to trust the LTTE, but still chose to return to live under their control. This can probably be related to the previously mentioned factors contributing to the return. Also, some of the Muslims said that they did not feel safe anywhere. After registering in the village, they had all received a grant from the government. The landowners had also been given their property back by the LTTE. Some indications of increased ethnic awareness among Muslims were also observed, but far from the extent mentioned in studies of Muslims in other parts of Sri Lanka.

The Tamils in the village are both internally displaced from Jaffna, and locals who are returning from asylum in India. They were now the majority compared to the Muslims. The Tamil IDPs had decided to stay because their land in Jaffna was inside the Sri Lankan Army high security zone. Also, they were not sure that the Ceasefire Agreement would last and then Jaffna would likely be the main target. The ones returning from India, did so, because they wanted to live in their hometown and thought that they now would be able to make a living there. Both Muslims and Tamils mentioned the ceasefire agreement as a precondition for their return. Ethnicity seemed to be the primary factor for perceptions in the village. Gender and age were of less importance, except that the younger recently settled children had not wanted to move to their parents' native area.

The civil society in the village is characterized by ethnic segregation, although the villagers expressed respect and consideration for the other group. Attempts to establish cross-ethnic projects had not been predominantly successful, although some organized interaction was observed. UNHCR reported that their "peaceful coexistence"-project had failed, mostly due to the inability of the local NGO in charge of the implementation. On the local level, the courses arranged by the Catholic Priest for all communities, were little attended by the villagers. In the two arenas where the communities met tension could be observed. This concerns the school, which is run according to Muslim regulations, and the fishing industry. The Tamil

villagers wanted to change the current structure of the school or to have an independent Tamil school, whereas the Muslims wanted the school to remain Muslim. There was also frustration among the Muslims concerning the Tamil dominance of the fishing, while some Tamils were concerned about unregistered Muslims coming to fish in the village. UNDP and TRO were going to address the war-IDPs in order to develop the area and prevent further conflict, for instance by building a Tamil school. As mentioned, the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE are also contributing to the resettlement process.

As Skinner points out, rehabilitation efforts are often conducted along intra-ethnic lines, although this case only implies two ethnic categories. There have been attempts to implement inter-ethnic projects, and the local NGO-system was indirectly blamed for these failing. This is according to Culbert's study stating that LTTE's rigid control in the area impedes the development of a functioning civil society. The school and the fishing appeared to be the main reasons for tension in village. As mentioned, the UNDP representative said that a Tamil school would be built to assist the area and prevent further tension. This may be an efficient method for suspending potential conflict. Still, this may lead to fewer meeting points and less interaction between the Muslims and Tamils in the area, which may have negative consequences in the long run.

Rødseth and Korf and Silva have observed an increased ethnic awareness among Muslims in other areas of Sri Lanka. It was not surprising to find that this was less obvious in this village in Vanni, based on the high level of poverty and lack of exposure to religious and cultural currents. Still, it was claimed that the Muslim and Tamil communities were more divided now than they had been before the displacement of the Muslims.

Finally, the fact that the Muslims have returned voluntarily and that the GoSL, the LTTE, and NGOs are involved in the resettlement process, may be perceived as a step in the right direction. The apparent increased efforts by NGOs to address war-induced IDPs are also a good sign that this area may experience both materialistic and civic development in the near future. If the ceasefire is broken, there is a chance that the Muslims will leave the area on their own initiative and that the work of NGOs will be further restricted. Although the village population had a tendency to be ethnically divided, a fear of the conflict resuming was expressed by villagers across ethnic lines.

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Glendinning, David (Associate Liaison Officer, UNHCR). Notes taken during interview, October 11, 2005.

Marafatto, Massimo (Project Manager, UNDP's Transition Programme in Vanni). Notes taken during interview, October 19, 2005.