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GIRLS AFTER THE GUNFIRE:

*A study of recently released girl child soldiers rehabilitating in an Eastern Sri Lankan
Vocational Training Center*

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Abstract

In disadvantaged areas of Eastern Sri Lanka, girls tend to be more vulnerable to both voluntary and forced recruitment by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This thesis focused on how a group of recently released young female ex-combatants re-integrated into their community. This was done through a case study of girls in a vocational training program in Eastern Sri Lanka, who had been released by the Karuna faction of the LTTE in April 2004. Concepts derived from empowerment and vulnerability theories have been used to examine the challenges faced by the girls during their reintegration process. In contrast to the claim made by some recent studies that the LTTE empowers women through their 'equal' role within the militancy, my study showed that the released girls are disempowered and vulnerable. They suffered from a fragile sense of self, a lack of confidence in an uncertain environment, and a lack of opportunity due to a prolonged absence from formal education. Further, I argued that the case study illustrated that unless programs offer empowerment opportunities and address gender specific needs, the ex-combatant girls cannot be successfully reintegrated. In order to prove helpful in not only the Sri Lankan context but in the larger, global level discussion of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs, the conclusion offered some recommendations on how current reintegration programs can improve to empower ex-combatant girls.

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Foreword

Writing this thesis was a journey like no other, and I am grateful to all of those that accompanied me along the way. Firstly, I would like to thank my family for your love and support both during my decision to go to Sri Lanka, the rushed western unions when in crisis in Colombo, and your continued encouragement during the writing phase. The writing phase would have never been complete without the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Sidsel Hansson. Your support and encouragement during my coursework at Lund continued over the course of my fieldwork. I cannot thank you enough for your mentorship during the difficult writing phase. This thesis would not be what it is without your guidance.

I would like to thank Dr. Tudor de Silva at Peradeniya University who provided mentorship and guidance during my arrival and launch of my fieldwork. Most importantly, I would like to thank everyone I met while in Batticaloa. Words can not express the kindness that was extended to me by local activists, NGO, and INGO professionals who are truly dedicated to improving the lives of those affected by war. I respect their commitment and their drive.

I came to Batticaloa as a researcher, but I left Batticaloa feeling like a member of a family. The members of the center took me in as one of their own. The afternoon teas, laughs, discussions, impromptu Tamil lessons and surprise birthday party are memories that I will always hold dear to my heart. While I discuss in my thesis improvements which could be made to the training center, in no way do I mean to criticize the work that you do. Your center did the one thing that no one else would do: provide security, love, support, and training to children in need. Without this security, no program and no reintegration would be possible. Your dedication to others is truly inspiring.

Finally, I would like to thank the girls. I still remember the first morning when you woke me up, shouting, "Sister, Sister." I remember your laughs, your smiles, your songs, your complaints of short hair, your surprise knowledge of 'Baa Baa Black Sheep, your dances, you riding on the back of my bicycle through monsoon like rains, you painting my nails, your surprised faces when you realized my legs were shaved and my arms weren't, and the sadness in your eyes when it came time for me to leave and you asked to come with me so you wouldn't get abducted again. Your writings provided an insight into your lives that was hidden by your laughter and I truly appreciate you letting me into your thoughts. I respect your courage and your bravery which was also noticed by Kamala, another student in your training program:

I am studying computer science here. After I came, other students joined us. These girls had abandoned their studies due to the unstable conditions in our country. They had abandoned their studies as a result of joining the LTTE both voluntarily and involuntarily. They have also sacrificed their siblings as a result of this. Such a situation should not come again in Sri Lanka. Everyone should be given an equal level of respect. People hope that another war will not be experienced in Sri Lanka.

I, too, hope that another war will not be experienced in Sri Lanka and that you can finally live in peace.

A few sorrows in my life: Sorrow in separation

We who live in a tank called life
Like seeking water in a parched land
My life in the design of time
My hurt mind
Cries
Wails and shudders
Pushed over the edge of sorrow
I have made paradise my happiness and
Loneliness my friend
Yet I shudder in the separation of human life.
- Poem by Madhavi (released girl combatant)

Part 1

1. Introduction

I remember as a child innocently laughing with a friend as we would go up and down on the seesaw of our neighbourhood playground. Somewhere in Sri Lanka there are girls playing on a seesaw, but this seesaw is much different, this one has model automatic weapons fixed and painted in camouflage paint (De Silva et al, 2001:130). Around the world girls aren't just playing on seesaws, but they're also *playing* with guns as they make up a significant part of the estimated 300,000 children fighting in armed conflicts today (Lorey, 2001). Between the years 1990 -2003, girls were part of fighting forces in 55 countries, and were involved in armed conflict in 38 of these countries (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:21).

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are a sophisticated and well-trained rebel group fighting for an independent Tamil mono-ethnic state in north-eastern Sri Lanka. It was perhaps the world's first rebel group to use child soldiers. It is estimated that up to 60% of its 18,000 strong cadre are children. Sri Lanka's Directorate of Military Intelligence estimates that at least 40% up to 60 % of LTTE fighters are below the age of 18 (Gunaratna, 1998:2). At least 40% of these child soldiers are girls who are not only trained to be tactical fighters but are also raised to be martyrs at the expense of igniting a suicide bomb (Waldman, 2003).

The LTTE is not the only rebel group known to use girls in its fighting forces, but it is one of the few rebel groups that reportedly strictly prohibit relationships or sexual contact between boys and girl. While in Africa, many girl child soldiers are forced to serve an additional role as a 'sexual slave' or 'wife' this may not be the case in Sri Lanka (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:18). Evidence suggests that females are given the same

roles and responsibilities as their male counterparts: they conduct suicide bombings, they are trained and prepared like men, they are given arms and taught how to use them, and they must carry a cyanide capsule with them which they are to take in the event they are captured (Beyler, 2003). Veluppillai Prabhakaran, leader of the LTTE maintains that he is liberating women in the LTTE:

With pride I can say that the origin, the development and the rise of the women's military wing of the Liberation Tigers is one of the greatest accomplishments accomplished by our movement. This marks a revolutionary turning point in the history of liberation struggle of the women of Tamil Eelam. Women can succeed on the ideal path towards their(own) liberation, only through joining forces with a liberation movement. (Women) can change into revolutionary women who have heroism, abandonment (of life), courage and self-confidence. Only when women join forces with our revolutionary movement that has formulated (a path) to liberation of our women, our struggle also shall reach perfection (Prabhakaran cited in Shalk, 1992;49-50)

My point of departure for this study are the observations made by researchers such as Adele Ann (1993, 2001), Peter Shalk (1992) and Margaret Trawick (1999) who believe that the LTTE is indeed liberating women through their 'equal' involvement in the LTTE. Other academics and activists such as Rajani Thiranagama (1990), Radhika Coomaraswamy (2001), Neloufer De Mel (2001, 2003) and Samarasinghe (1996) have pointed out how the LTTE have used these women as a means to an ends and are skeptical that women will be liberated in an independent Eelam.

The LTTE's use of child soldiers was highlighted in March, 2004 after an unexpected and unprecedented split within the LTTE, an organization known for its cadres' allegiance. Col. Karuna, the commander of the LTTE forces in the East, split from the main LTTE forces, based in the Vanni and loyal to their leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran. In April 2004, the Vanni LTTE attacked and defeated Karuna's forces in the East. This defeat forced Col. Karuna to go into hiding and disband his cadres. The exact number of released cadre is unknown, but it is estimated to be around 6,000 people of which 2,000 were children. These children presented a challenge to both international and local NGOs in the area as the sheer number of these children went beyond the infrastructure and support these NGOs and INGOs could provide. These children were also left without formal release papers, leaving their status in question, as well as their reintegration process. Technically, they didn't fall into the scope of the Action Plan for Children's guidelines for re-habilitating and re-integrating child soldiers.¹ The formal Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration process would have meant housing

¹ Interview with INGO, Batticaloa District, November 2004

these children at one of three transit centers (two in the east), which was not followed in this case. The number of children greatly outnumbered the spaces available in transit centers, and as the majority of parents were eager to have their children back at home, most children went directly to stay with their families or extended families.² Each child who had registered with UNICEF upon their return was visited by a caseworker. The two primary choices each child was given were to return to school or vocational training.³

I travelled to the East five months later to meet with these newly released girls and observe their reintegration process. As Vidyamali Samarasinghe has pointed out the true test of reshaping women's roles occurs after the fighting is over (1996: 221), my three months living with recently released combatants beginning to start new lives outside of the LTTE provided me with a vantage point for studying the issue of LTTE, gender, and empowerment.

2. Thesis statement

In my thesis, I will address the ongoing debate on whether or not the LTTE is 'empowering' the girls that have fought in their fighting forces and have since left the movement. Concepts derived from empowerment theory (Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1999) will be used to examine the extent to which girl child ex-combatants (in contrast to adult female ex-combatants) are empowered, that is, have a sense of self, confidence and agency, and are capable of making choices and creating their lives during their reintegration into society. The discussion on the challenges faced by girls during their reintegration process also draws upon vulnerability analysis (Blaikie et al, 1994; Moser, 1997). This is done through a case study of approximately 45 of 1000 recently released girl ex-combatants participating in a vocational training program in the eastern part of Sri Lanka in the Fall of 2004. While these girls may not be representative of every girl child soldier, I believe that their experiences and fears provide an illustrative case which is helpful in the formation of future reintegration programs. I will argue in my study of these girls that they were not empowered for a life outside of the militancy and instead lack of an identity, education, and confidence. The LTTE has trained them for one thing only: a life in the LTTE. Instead, I will show how their experiences have left them disempowered and vulnerable. In my discussion of what can be done to empower ex-combatant girls I will highlight the significance of creating programs that have a 'real gender component.'

² Interview with INGO, Batticaloa District, October 2004.

³ Interview with NGO, Batticaloa District, November 2004.

3. Research frontier

The notion of the LTTE liberating or empowering women through 'equal' opportunities within the movement is found among a number of observers and researchers. Adele Ann, the Australian wife of the LTTE's political theorist Anton Balasingham, extols the LTTE female cadre as interesting and admirable, having created for themselves a legend of fighting capability and bravery (1993, 2001). Peter Shalk (1992) goes in depth in describing the role of women in the LTTE. He states that the LTTE projected the equal possibility of death for men and women in its organization as "the teacher of equality in life" (81). Margaret Trawick (1999) interviewed female cadre and is convinced that it is possible for a women to achieve liberation with a gun in her hands.

On the opposing side of the debate, Radhika Coomaraswamy (2001), UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, argues that the LTTE's use of women has more to do with the need of a constant supply of cadres rather than actually working to liberate women. Neloufer de Mel (2001, 2003) describes how within the militancy, a woman loses the ability of emotional expression and "the reality of her driving impulses lies in the complete obedience of the will of the militant leadership on whose behalf she struggles" (56). I find that Samarasinghe's insights into women's roles in combat is especially relevant to my own study. Samarasinghe (1996) suggests that militaristic operations have given women new space to be active participants within the fighting force. She observes, however, that this space is determined by men, the true test of reshaping women's roles occurs after the fighting is over. Rajini Thiranagama (1990) was a co-author of the controversial book, *The Broken Palmyra*. It aims to give a fair account of all sides of the conflict, detailing the abuses performed on each side. Thiranagama was murdered because of her work on this controversial publication in which she states her belief that the LTTE did not recruit women in order to 'liberate' women but began to recruit them due to a lack of available men.

Yvonne Keairns's recent study (2003) on LTTE girl child soldiers is essential in gaining further insight into the experiences of girl child soldiers. In addition to Keairns' report, Jo Becker's recent *Human Rights Watch* report has been vital to my study (2004). Becker's report is especially pertinent because she addresses the issues of released combatants in Eastern Sri Lanka at roughly the same time period of my own fieldwork. Becker interviewed a myriad of girl child ex-combatants many of whom were forcefully conscripted into the LTTE and lived in a state of fear. She notes their physical displacement due to their short hair which marks them as an ex-combatant.

There is an identifiable gap in literature dealing with the empowerment and liberation of adolescent girls who have left the LTTE. There are numerous articles which either support or critique the notion of the LTTE's ability to liberate women through their inclusion into the fighting forces. Little has been said in how their military training and education empowers them for new roles within civil society, a civil society which is either directly or indirectly under the control of the LTTE. No one to date has identified the impact the removal of young girls from formal education will have on future generations when the girls grow into undereducated mothers. This study will contribute to filling this gap by showing the needs (and fears) of these young girls and the challenges vocational training programs have in training these girls in economically viable occupations.

4. Analysis and Concepts

I have used empowerment theory (Kabeer, 1999; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1999) to discern and discuss the aspects which must be taken into account when examining the question of whether girls emerge empowered from their LTTE experience. My initial conclusions after my first literature reviews were that the girls would be empowered to take on new roles in society after their experiences within the LTTE. During my field study, it became clear that this might not be the case. Therefore, I have used insights offered by recent vulnerability theory (Blaikie et al, 1994; Moser, 1997) to broaden the examination of the girls' disempowerment by looking at the ways in which girls may be at risk. I will be discussing the issue of empowerment from a feminist approach (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment of girls specifically will be discussed and the first tier choices available to them as opposed to their male counterparts upon their release and reintegration into the community.

4.1 The Concept of Empowerment

After interviews with senior members of a British NGO staff it was observed that, 'Empowerment was a term avoided by some interviewees as being dangerously political, but embraced by others as the key to meaningful development' (Dolan, 1992). I will be using both Naila Kabeer's (1999) and Jo Rowland's (1997) discussions on empowerment as well as Sen's (1985) description of a person's capabilities to examine the reintegration of the ex-combatant girls.

Upon their release from the LTTE, the girls had to begin creating a new life for themselves. This process involves making choices and setting goals. Kabeer believes

that *empowerment* entails both one's ability to make choices and the opportunity to set goals and aspire towards them (Kabeer, 1999:436). These choices come in both first tier choices (choices critical for people to live the lives they desire) and second tier choices (less important choices which may improve the quality of life but do not define it.) Decision making is closely linked to agency.

Rowlands points out that personal empowerment involves an individual developing a sense of self, a sense of agency, and individual confidence. Rowlands maintains that the 'core' of personal empowerment is the "development of self-confidence and self-esteem, and a sense of agency, of being an individual who can interact with her surroundings and cause things to happen" (Rowlands, 1997;111). As the girls largely were re-integrating as part of an ex-combatant group participating in a vocational training program, Rowlands discussion on collective empowerment will be useful for my inquiry. Collective empowerment happens when individuals work together towards a common goal to achieve more than what could be done by any one individual. Personal and collective empowerment are tied together because it is difficult for a person to take part in a group if they are not empowered individually. Also, the actions and support achieved through group collective empowerment can add to a person's sense of agency and personal empowerment (Rowlands, 1997;15).

The vocational training program involves capacity building. Sen discusses a person's capabilities as the combination of resources and agency which gives a person the potential to live the kind of lives they want and achieve valued ways of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985). The crucial question of the girls' resources will be further examined by use of vulnerability theory.

4.2 The Concept of Vulnerability

Eastern Sri Lanka, as will be discussed later, in the aftermath of a prolonged civil war is a very poor area. Very little resources were available for the newly released girls. Caroline Moser defines the concept of 'vulnerability' as 'the insecurity of the well-being of individuals, households or communities in the face of a changing environment (1996;2). Moser also states that the ability of individuals to avoid or reduce vulnerability depends on their ability to transform their initial assets into income, food, or other basic necessities (1998). An important point will be to identify the girls' 'initial assets' and make an assessment of how far they are going to be able to transform these assets.

In this analysis gender must be taken into account. Piers Blaikie has shown that vulnerability is a gendered process with women tending to be more vulnerable than men. He argues that gender is a dividing factor in all societies which 'channels access to social and economic resources away from women and towards men' makes women more vulnerable (1994). This is pertinent to my study, as it applies to the difficulty of women training and finding work in male dominated skills.

5. Field Methodology

The methodology used to investigate the problem is multiple and consists of three different parts: (1) Semi-structured interviews (2) Participant Observation and (3) Collection of ex-combatants' life stories. All of the data was collected in Sri Lanka from September to November, 2004.

I conducted over 25 semi-structured interviews on the topic of girl child soldiers and reintegration programs with an array of actors in order to gain a broad analysis of the situation. I interviewed 3 academics, 3 religious leaders, 1 journalist, 2 activists, 3 local NGO staff members, 12 INGOs, and vocational training students in Colombo, Kandy, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, as well as insecurity in the region, a tape recorder was not used during the interviews.⁴ The interviews were free-flowing discussions in which I took notes both during and after the interviews which I believed allowed me to garner more information as it put the interviewee at ease. Participant observation took place from October – November 2004 as I lived onsite with the female ex-combatants as a volunteer. This afforded me the opportunity to see their interactions amongst themselves and with other children who did not have a past in the militancy. Finally, I collected the stories of the girls themselves, as written by the girls. I asked each girl to write about what it was like to be a girl in Sri Lanka. I told them that everyone had their own story, and that I wanted to hear their story. I used this method as it was the most secure way for them to communicate. They were able to keep their stories anonymous and did not have to contribute a story. Of the 45 children I asked to write stories, I received 19 of them back. Fifteen of these stories were by ex-combatants, eight of them who 'volunteered'⁵ and the other seven were forcefully abducted. The girls' stories combined with my

⁴ My tape recorder and tapes were stolen in Colombo which prevented me from recording some of the more non-controversial interviews.

⁵ The children do not use the word volunteer in their story, but it is assumed when they use the words 'I joined' in opposition to the other girls who described their abduction or that they were captured.

personal observations allowed me to understand parts of them that remained hidden as well as grasping the meaning behind some of their external behaviors.

I have also consulted a myriad of secondary sources which include formal documents and agreements, studies on child soldiers both in Sri Lanka and abroad, newspaper articles documenting conscription during this time period, various websites, and a variety of articles on women in the LTTE. The International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Kandy and Colombo with its wealth of articles, books, newspapers and knowledgeable librarian were invaluable to me.

6. Validity, Reliability, and Generalization of Results

The girls in my study were 45 girls of the approximately 1000 girls released from the LTTE in April, 2004. The background of these girls were diverse in their age, family, experiences in the LTTE, education, and goals for the future. My select group shared similar security problems and were all in one specific vocational training centre. A larger group may have provided different results.

Communication problems were a factor in my results. I relied on observation and simple communication to understand the girls. The length of time I spent with them as well as the discussions with those who had known them for an extended period of time allowed me to make a reliable interpretation of the girls' feelings. The girls' stories were limited both in their insight and the criticism of the training program. The fact that the girls relied on the training program as a means of shelter, security, and sustenance may have hampered the expression of their true feelings in regards to the program training and their own personal aspirations. Furthermore, the girls were part of a special group of children in April 2004 that fell outside the scope of formal Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation programs. They faced a special set of security issues which affected the entirety of the reintegration process. Children formally released either before or after April 2004 will likely find challenges in re-integrating but not on the same level.

Only 42% of the girls handed in their life stories which was due to several factors.⁶ I believed that any information I could attain would be a glimpse into common feelings held as they shared many of the same experiences in their combatant lives. The training center and living conditions are not representative of other centers in Sri

⁶ See Field Notes.

Lanka. It is simply one vocational training center in Eastern Sri Lanka. NGO professionals expressed how programming challenges faced in this vocational training center were similar in other training centers. It is important to note that there is no rehabilitation center for the group of child soldiers released in April 2004. The isolated case of these girls in one locality allowed me to observe the gaps in the rehabilitation/reintegration process and issues that need to be addressed for future returnees.

The data I gathered in Sri Lanka will shed light on issues that many released girls face which can still be applied to the large number of children released last year who have yet to enter vocational training programs. More importantly, these girls' experiences provide lessons in how to re-integrate a large number of children in hopes of the LTTE releasing all of the children in its cadre. While these girls do not speak for every girl child soldier, I believe that their experiences and fears provide an illustrative case which is helpful in the formation of future reintegration programs.

7. Ethical considerations

The climate of fear in Eastern Sri Lanka was the key determinant of my ethical factors. In no way was my research meant to put anyone's life at risk. For this reason, I do not list the names of the NGO and INGO staff members that I interviewed, nor do I mention the organization. My utmost concern was to the ex-combatants themselves and all names have been changed in order to ensure anonymity. Originally, I wasn't planning on interviewing the girls because I did not have a psychology background and ethically I didn't think it was fair to bring up traumatic experiences, etc. Although, as I was able to interact with the girls they would openly discuss their time in the LTTE and were comfortable doing so. Unfortunately, due to our different languages we were limited in our communication. I was unable to hire an interpreter to interview the girls due to the possibility that I may be putting the girls or the interpreter at risk. I concluded that I would have the children write about their lives and have the documents translated by a trusted individual. In order for the girls to feel safe and secure, the exercise was completely voluntarily in its entirety.

8. How the thesis is organized

Firstly, I will be introducing the physical setting of the study and the vocational training program in which the girls participated. Various aspects of the reintegration process will be discussed in section 10, followed by an overall analysis and discussion where I will identify the ways in which the girls are challenged. I will then transition to a

discussion how to empower the girls where I highlight one vocational training program which works to meet these challenges. I conclude with policy recommendations and directions for future research.

9. The setting

My study was conducted in Batticaloa district in the eastern province of Sri Lanka.⁷ Batticaloa is a multi-ethnic district of mostly Tamils and Muslims which contribute to its population of almost 500,000. The eastern province has some of the lowest physical quality of life figures and some of the worst social and economic indicators for the whole country as noted in the chart below (Human Rights Commission, 2003;2).

	Sri Lanka	Batticaloa
Female Literacy Rate	83.2%	61.9%
Maternal Mortality Rate	2.3/10,000 births	5.1/10,000 births

Batticaloa district has also suffered greatly from the war both in physical terms and through the destruction of buildings and in terms of lose of life. Poverty and war affected children in other ways, specifically through recruitment into the LTTE which remains an issue after the February 2002 ceasefire. Between the signing of the ceasefire agreement and November 2004, UNICEF documented 3,516 cases of child recruitment by the LTTE, with the largest number taking place in Batticaloa district (Becker, 2004; 15). It has long been the policy in the east that each family must give one child to the LTTE (Becker, 2004;19).

The split of Col. Karuna as described in the introduction contributes to the current culture of fear in Batticaloa. Upon my arrival I was told, “In Batticaloa, the only time people open their mouths is when they are eating.”⁸ People don’t open up their mouths to speak because of the climate of fear. No one knew who they could trust, including their co-workers⁹ and neighbors. More recently, Batticaloa has also suffered greatly from the December, 2005 tsunami with over 63,717 families affected.¹⁰

⁷ See Appendix 1 for a map of Sri Lanka.

⁸ Interview with a religious leader, September 2004.

⁹ During one interview with an international NGO, a staff member stated that she needed to be careful about what she said even amongst her own staff as she was unsure of who she could trust. She kept the door open during our interview and was very limited in what information she would disclose.

¹⁰ Batticaloa district has the most tsunami affected families in comparison to other districts in Sri Lanka. Statistics are from the Sri Lanka National Disaster Management Center on 1/26/05.

9.1 The Vocational Training Center and its Program

This study was conducted in a vocational training center in Batticaloa district. The vocational center opened during the civil war to train youth in employable skills. Over the years the vocational training center (VTC) has grown into a program which trains its students in a myriad of skills taught by expert instructors. The students were comprised of primarily vulnerable youth who have suffered the effects of war. Many of these vulnerable children were recently released ex-combatants.

VTC students began their day at 7:30 with a breakfast that was provided to them. They received training from 8:00 – 4:00. The courses provided at the center included: carpentry, masonry, computer repair, air conditioning and refrigeration, electricians, welding, sewing, and secretarial courses. The courses were segregated by sex with the girls enrolled in either the sewing or secretarial courses. The courses ranged from six months (sewing) to one year. Most of the girls in my study were in the sewing program due to their lack of formal education. Upon conclusion of the training program, some girls are given a sewing machine so they can start self-employment at home.¹¹

There was no formal psychosocial aspect to this training program to address the ex-combatants' fears and concerns as they made the transition to civilian life. Through discussions with individuals working at the training center, staffers addressed multiple hurdles they overcame while working with ex-combatants in contrast to other participants. In the residential setting, staffers taught basic hygiene and nutrition principles, calmed their fears and insecurities, and taught non-aggressive means of dispute resolution.

Part 2

10. Aspects of the Reintegration Process

10.1 Identity Issues

A question many researchers have asked (Keairns, 2003; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Brett & Specht; 2004) is “who are girl child soldiers?” In this section, I will not discuss who these girls are and what led them to either voluntarily or involuntarily to join the LTTE. Instead, I will explore the released combatants' sense of self, a core component to personal empowerment (Rowlands, 1997: 121).

¹¹ See field notes for more detailed information regarding the vocational training center.

I have used the girls' written journals in order to interpret how they identify themselves. I looked at what they held most important to them and their position within this environment.¹²

daughter, sister, student □ (before recruitment)	soldier □ (time with LTTE)	daughter, sister, provider (after release)
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Nearly half of the girls who submitted written accounts, described a forced conscription which in my analysis represents an abrupt, unwilling change in identity. There were more voluntary conscriptions than what typically is the case. On a larger scale, Harendra de Silva found in 2004, that eighteen of nineteen children who join the LTTE are forcefully conscripted (de Silva as cited in Becker, 2004:20). Vicki, who was forcefully conscripted wrote that, "Since our village was in the LTTE controlled area, the LTTE forced people to give one child per family."¹³ While all children (both boys and girls) will face this abrupt change in identity, I will argue that the abrupt and drastic change affects girls more as they move in, out, and back into traditional gender roles.

Firstly, the girls noted their initial identity as daughters, sisters, and students as many described the importance of family in their lives. Kavetha is one child who has a strong love and connection with her family as she began her story with the following, "My family is a small family consisting of 7 people. I have three elder sisters and one elder brother. I am the youngest in the family and I am loved and cherished a lot from when I was very young until now."¹⁴ The abrupt change in identity and the removal of her family was a traumatic experience for Shyamali:

We [family] were very united. When I was 13 years of age, the LTTE came around asking for a combatant from every household. They took me by force and I went with them crying. I couldn't understand why I couldn't live like the others.¹⁵

The girls' new lives in the LTTE and away from their families will strip them from the identity they knew as a daughter and a sister. In addition, they feel vulnerable through the loss of their support structure.

During their indoctrination into the LTTE, the girls were not only given a new identity: they were given a new name (Keairns, 2003;16). In my interaction with

¹² The environments which are included in the girls' stories include: home, school, LTTE, and the vocational training center.

¹³ Story by "Vicki," Batticaloa district, November 2004

¹⁴ Story by "Kavetha," Batticaloa district, November 2004

¹⁵ Story by "Shyamali," Batticaloa district, November 2004

the girls, some of them went by their given names while others went by their LTTE names. In one interaction, the girls were making henna designs on their hands. Shyamali, a vibrant 16 year-old, painted a “T” on her hand and explained that this was her LTTE name.¹⁶ They were still weaving between names and identities as they eased out of their identity as a soldier and back into their former roles as daughters and sisters. Physically, it will take these girls longer to transition out of their identity as a soldier. When the girls joined the LTTE, their hair was cut very short in contrast to the traditionally long hair of a Tamil woman (Becker, 2004;4). Until their hair grew out, a timely process, the ex-combatants would continue to be identified as ex-combatants. To the outside world, the girls’ primary identity will be as a former soldier until their hair grows out to that of the length of a traditional Tamil woman. This physical identity as a soldier continues to leave them vulnerable in a way that released boys are not as they continue to feel insecure in a changing environment (Moser, 1996;2). The fact that society will continue to label these girls as child soldiers and the associated stigma which comes with that identity negatively influences the girls’ capacity to become an individual ‘who can interact with her surroundings and cause things to happen’ (Rowlands, 1997;111).

As these girls move away from their identity as soldiers and are readapting to their role as daughters and sisters, they bring their past experiences with them which are an integral part of their personal identities. In my interactions with the girls I found that the girls often wanted to share experiences with me which ranged from LTTE songs, dances, skills, physical exercises, and acquired skills. Unfortunately, the policy I routinely heard from NGOs was that the ex-combatants’ time in the LTTE was a subject not to be bridged with ex-combatants. The general attitude was that once the children leave the LTTE, they leave that life behind them and are never asked anything about their time with the LTTE, negative or positive. A community member at the vocational training center who worked with released children also stated that their time in the LTTE was a sensitive topic and was never talked about. The burden of keeping their experiences and feelings inside contributes to a lack of confidence and fragile sense of self as they believe others are not able to identify with their experiences and that no one will understand. Selvi exemplifies this inner turmoil:

¹⁶ See field report for explanation and other examples.

When I was studying an unforgettable incident occurred in my life. My brother suddenly left us and joined the LTTE. As a result of this I was unable to concentrate on my studies. I was very sad that my brother had gone to fight in the war. A few years went by like this. While studying in grade 9, unable to bear the torture of the Sinhalese I too decided to join the LTTE. A few days after joining I felt sad. After six months, I had the good opportunity of meeting my brother. My brother came to the place where I was. I was overjoyed, thought that my life had taken a better turn and confided in my brother about life. My brother then had to leave. I continued my life like 'water on parched land.' After a few months with Karuna's sudden turmoil¹⁷, I got the chance of going back home. I met my parents who were living on the edge of sorrow and heartbreak. I was happy again. After three months, Prabha's Tiger representatives¹⁸ began to trouble me a lot. I was saddened and was in confusion not knowing what to do. I was yearning for someone to share my sadness with.¹⁹

Selvi's account reflects how the LTTE experience has been traumatizing for the girls. Not being allowed to talk about these experiences with adults probably increases the risk for post traumatic stress and lessens their possibility for dealing with challenges in their lives in a constructive and empowering way.

Upon their release and entry into this vocational training program, these girls are beginning to forge new identities as sisters, daughters, and young women. This new identity will be an amalgamation of their traditional feminine upbringing with their untraditional 'masculine' experiences in the LTTE. I saw the adjustments made between these identities as they would demonstrate their ability to do push-ups or proudly describe their ability to shoot a gun in the midst of them doing each others' nails, trying to make their hair look as long and feminine as possible, showing off their new jewelry, and talking about their boyfriends. The latter topic of boyfriends is a new topic for these girls as they deal with their sexuality for the first time. Within the LTTE, 'sexuality is seen as a threat to discipline and structure' (de Mel, 2003;65). As a young woman outside of the movement, they will have to deal with this new 'sexual identity.' Keairns pointed out that it is important for DDR programs to provide ex-combatants a safe space in which "to begin to recover their sense of identity knowing that identity is a life-long process and reduce the great discrepancy and contradictions that continue to haunt them" (2003;13). This vocational training program offers them an informal way to begin this process and helps to form identities for girls like Riyasha who are unsure

¹⁷ Karuna's sudden turmoil refers to the split of Col. Karuna and his eastern cadre from the LTTE. The two sides were to be labeled the Karuna and Vanni factions.

¹⁸ Prabha's Tiger representatives are LTTE representatives (Vanni faction). Prabha refers to Velupillai Prabhakaran, the ideological leader of the LTTE.

¹⁹ Story by "Selvi," Batticaloa district, November 2004

of their future shown through her statement, “I cannot tell how my future will progress and what I think of it.”²⁰

Many of these girls aspire towards a future role as providers not only for themselves but for their families as they adapt their vocational training into paid work. Sundari, at the young age of 14, believes that it is important to contribute to her family through her sewing, “I am studying sewing and am making every effort to become a good child after studying. I have to study well for my brothers and sisters and do a job. This is my happiness.”²¹ Madhavi echoes the importance of contributing to her family, “Once I finish learning to sew, I need to work and take care of my mother, father, and siblings.”²² The hope that they will be able to provide for their family by employing their sewing skills gives these girls a valued sense of ‘being and doing’ (Sen, 1985).

As shown in the above the girls are in the process of forming identities based on an amalgamation between traditional feminine and masculine components. This may provide the girls with a position from which to challenge traditional gender norms. However, their identities have abruptly and dramatically changed during the course of their young lives with a lack of adult support in dealing with these experiences. They have been stigmatized as soldiers, feel pressure about their future capacity as providers, and are expected to readapt to gender roles defined by patriarchal traditions. The personal journey each girl experiences to overcome these obstacles and form a new identity is an essential component to personal empowerment (Rowlands, 1997). As their hair slowly grows and helps them physically blend in with their female counterparts, so to it will take time, understanding, and assistance for these girls to form new personal identities.

10.2 Confidence and the Psychosocial Aspect

As the girls form their new identity and sense of self on a path towards personal empowerment, it is equally important for them to build individual confidence. Individual confidence will allow them to feel able and entitled to make decisions (Rowlands, 1997;14). A person, adult or child, male or female, cannot feel empowered or confident if they live in fear. This fear and lack of security decreases their mobility and minimizes the choices available to them. In my analysis, I have used Naila Kabeer’s definition of *empowerment* which entails both one’s ability to make choices and

²⁰ Story by “Riyashi,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

²¹ Story by “Sundari,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

²² Story by “Madhavi,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

the opportunity to set goals and aspire towards them (Kabeer, 1999;436). Almost all of the children were at this training facility due to personal or parental fear, and lacked confidence in their future. The lack of security and instability in the east contributed to their vulnerability under Moser's concept of 'vulnerability' which is 'the insecurity of the well-being of individuals, households or communities in the face of a changing environment' (Moser, 1996;2).

A major reason these girls were unable to feel confident was due to their physical appearance of very short hair which set them apart from other girls. This physical branding of their past with the LTTE as stated in the above section makes them less confident than their released male counterparts and unable to move freely due to the real threat of a subsequent abduction. In the beginning of my stay, a couple of the girls had expressed to me, "December, LTTE, Go." I was to find out later what they meant by this was that they believed the LTTE would abduct them once they returned home upon the completion of their vocational training program. I would often accompany the girls to their vocational training program (a 15-minute walk) in order for them to feel safer. They would also walk in groups of three in the eventuality of the LTTE abducting them so only three would be taken as opposed to a van load.

Some of the girls in my study articulated their fears while others concealed them. Through their writings, many girls revealed fears which had been hidden by laughs and smiles in my daily interactions with them. Kavetha exemplified both the tendency to partly express and partly conceal a lack of confidence in her security and her future. While usually a smiley, happy child, proud of her English she learned while in medical training for the LTTE, she would also talk about her fear of being abducted. She had related to me on several occasions that when she went home the LTTE would abduct her. She would communicate this to me by saying, "Go home, LTTE come" while she took her right arm and clenched her left wrist simulating the LTTE physically taking her. She later describes her fear:

When I was studying in Grade 8 the LTTE forcibly entered our house and captured me. My father has suffered a lot because the army beat him up. My father is the breadwinner for the whole family. After the problems within the LTTE we all returned home. Even after returning my mother was worried because the LTTE was again trying to re-recruit children. If I had stayed back in our village I would have been forcibly taken by the LTTE too. I do not go home now.²³

²³ Story by "Kavetha," Batticaloa district, November 2004

Another child, Shyamali, was a bubbly, outgoing, daring child on the outside who physically looked older than her 16 years of age. Shyamali showed another side to her in her writings when she described the fear she lived and the horror from her past:

When I was 13 years of age, the LTTE came around asking for a combatant from every household. They took me by force and I went with them crying. I couldn't understand why I couldn't live like the others. Now, I am 16 years old, but when I joined the LTTE I was 13 years old. One day, unknown people in masks abducted me. Only when we reached our destination did I realize who they were. I was with them for 3 years and came back to my parents as a result of the problem that took place within the LTTE. Later, there was talk that they wanted to take us back. I am at present studying sewing. I still live in fear.²⁴

Another contributing factor to the girls' lack of confidence was their lack of support, and their feelings of loneliness. While they did have each other as a support network, they were without the 'true' guidance, love, and support of an adult. This guidance, love, and support had been absent for years while the girls were in training and continues to be absent in the residential setting. These children didn't have an individual support network to give them confidence in themselves and help them achieve their goals. They had to rely on their own strength. This loneliness is evident in Madhavi, a quiet girl who carried herself with a maturity beyond her age, who displayed how lost she felt through the following poem:

A few sorrows in my life: Sorrow in separation

We who live in a tank called life
Like seeking water in a parched land
My life in the design of time
My hurt mind
Cries
Wails and shudders
Pushed over the edge of sorrow
I have made paradise my happiness and
Loneliness my friend
Yet I shudder in the separation of human life.²⁵

The girls live in an insecure and unstable environment. They do not have the support of family to lean on and their experiences are far from their families' comprehension. They have each other for support which provides some collective empowerment in shared experiences but as they all share the same insecurities and are all children there is no one to provide guidance, assurance, and confidence. The collective strength they feel having shared past and current experiences cannot be depended on as a future

²⁴ Story by "Shyamali, Batticaloa district, November 2004

²⁵ Poem by "Madhavi, Batticaloa district, November 2004

form of collective empowerment. When the vocational training program ends, the girls will be alone in the experiences they have had. The collective empowerment they have achieved needs to be transferred into individual empowerment and individual confidence. When another person is confident in an individual, this helps the individual build inner confidence. This collective empowerment to achieve individual confidence can be achieved through better sharing of skills. Many girls had individual talents which included skills such as music, dance, English, art, math, computers and when the individual teaches this skill to another it contributes to their individual confidence and their self-worth. It is also helping another girl fulfill what according to Kabeer is a person's need to set goals and aspire to them.

As shown in the above, the insecure situation and unsure future beyond the safety of the vocational training program prevented these girls from forming confidence in themselves. Adele Ann argues that, "LTTE training transformed the women cadres into well-disciplined, armed combatants capable of confronting the most difficult and dangerous combat situations" (278). I have illustrated through the girls' experiences that they are scared, lack confidence, and are unprepared for life in non-combat situations. Their verbal and written expressions of fear are signs of their vulnerability as they navigate through this volatile and insecure situation. This vulnerability makes it impossible for the girls to achieve real empowerment without the ability to make choices and the opportunity to set goals and aspire towards them (Kabeer, 1999;436).

10.3 Education, Skills, and Competence

As mentioned earlier, Sen believes a person's capabilities are the combination of resources and agency which gives a person the potential to live the kind of lives they want and achieve valued ways of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985). Education, skills and competence are key components which allow a girl child ex-combatant to achieve a valued way of 'being and doing.' Unfortunately, many of the girls perceive the years of formal education they have missed as an impediment to achieving their previous goals which has therefore limited their choices in life. 80% of the girls mentioned their education in their writings. This is the most frequently mentioned topic with almost all of them mentioning their studies prior to their conscription.

Ananthi stresses how important her education meant to her:

I was very eager to go to school when I was small. I usually got up very early to get ready for school. I used to study well and loved going to school. I didn't like not going to school. As I was studying in this

manner, war broke out in our country and I had to abandon my studies at a very young age and join the LTTE. I was very upset about having to abandon my studies at a very young age but what could I do? Our country was at war. If I had continued studying I would be in the 10th grade now. This is my biggest heartache.²⁶

Malini, a vibrant, smart, and natural leader regretted the years of schooling she lost while in the LTTE and the inability to attain her dreams. She relates, “My present sorrow is that the goal I had during my school years could not be realized.”²⁷ Malini despite her time reconciled to a vocational training program continued to show a thirst for knowledge. On a daily basis, she would seek me out to have English classes and to be challenged. She also independently arranged tutoring from a fellow vocational training student in the secretarial course. I would find the two of them together in the evening going over their shorthand. Malini’s determination to educate herself illustrates two very important points. Firstly, the LTTE certainly didn’t empower Malini by abducting her and removing her from the formal education system, to empower Malini would mean to help her achieve her goals. Secondly, children themselves are an asset to each other and are an under-utilized resource in training programs. These children have skills both prior to the LTTE and learned in the LTTE (medical training, etc) which are an asset to the other girls. Independent exchange of skills amongst trainees should be fostered and encouraged.

The girls are also aware of how their lack of education limits their future opportunities. Riyasha points this out, “While I was studying the LTTE came and captured me and I couldn’t continue my studies. I wonder what my future would be like.”²⁸ Sundari is also unsure of what opportunities she has without a proper education. She states, “What can I do? I couldn’t study because I was in the LTTE. I regret not studying.”²⁹ Every effort should be made to help these children continue their education for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the girls are correct in their assumptions that their education does expand their options in life and every effort should be made to provide an education to a child that wants to learn. Secondly, the girls’ belief that they are undereducated and are unable to achieve their goals contributes to their lack of confidence. As they grasp new concepts and learn new skills through both traditional and alternative education, their confidence will grow. An educated girl often grows into a more confident, empowered woman.

²⁶ Story by “Ananthi,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

²⁷ Story by “Malini,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

²⁸ Story by “Riyasha,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

²⁹ Story by “Sundari,” Batticaloa district, November 2004

Without formal education and a lack of transferable skills the girls found hope in their vocational training program. Many girls cited in their stories the hope that their tailoring studies would give them a useful skill which they could then use to help contribute economically to their families. Madhavi stresses her need to contribute to her family, "This is my last aim. Once I finish learning to sew, I need to work and take care of my mother, father, and siblings."³⁰ Riyasha also feels responsible for the needs for her families, "I must finish my sewing classes and take care of my siblings and come to a good level in life. Our family has suffered a lot. I will study well and work for my future."³¹ Therefore, vocational training programs need to encourage women to learn new skills if they are serious in finding a way to contribute economically to their family. Shyamali dreams of being able to support herself, "My dream is to be able to independently work before I grow old."³²

When I had the opportunity to speak with different young women in vocational training programs (outside of the residential program I visited), there seemed to be an overriding theme. The women felt that a skill which was able to be done at home was the most worthwhile skill to be done and the most economically viable. The reason behind this belief was that women felt that if they were employed outside of the home, once they would get married they would lose this employment as they would have to stay at home to not only to take care of their home, but to also raise their future children. These women understandably wanted a lifelong occupation which could sustain themselves and their families for the foreseeable future. For a majority of the women, the sole occupation which fits these criteria is *sewing*. I will outline in my policy descriptions how vocational training programs can broaden self-employment options in order to meet women's needs.

As noted in this section, access to education is the most important contributor to enable a girl to feel empowered. The lack of formal education due to time spent in the LTTE has left the girls severely disempowered in that they lack the basic education of their peers and they are not confident in their intellect. Their personal belief that they can no longer achieve the goals they had previous to joining the movement severely debilitates their future options and leaves them vulnerable. Moser believes the only way to avoid or reduce vulnerability

³⁰ Story by "Madhavi," Batticaloa district, November 2004

³¹ Story by "Riyasha," Batticaloa district, November 2004

³² Story by "Shyamali," Batticaloa district, November 2004

depends on their ability to transform their initial assets into income, food, or other basic necessities (Moser, 1998). The girls' lack of education and lack of transferable skills (from the LTTE) contributes to this vulnerability. Appropriate vocational training programs in economically viable skills can work to decrease this vulnerability as their new valued skills and competence gives them a 'valued way of being and doing' (Sen, 1985) and individual confidence. Vocational training is a means to empower these girls after their lack of education has exacerbated their vulnerability.

10.4 Gender Aspects

While it is true that both boys and girls face challenges during the reintegration process, girls face challenges particular to their gender. As I have mentioned earlier, girls must endure ridicule due to their short hair, which was cut by the LTTE. This haircut is in deep contrast to the very long hair of a traditional Tamil woman and is physical evidence of their background and their connections with the militancy. Boys who have served do not have any physical attributes that set them apart from non ex-combatants. Their short hair both inwardly and outwardly makes the girl feel unable to participate in events due to stares as well as harassment. Following the release, girls would be questioned by strangers as to what side they supported. These girls were stereotyped as aggressive children who were prone to violence. Parents did not want their children to be seen with ex-combatants as they feared their child would join the movement either forcibly or voluntarily. Upon their release it was important for these girls to get identification cards which as a Tamil is essential for mobility reasons. A photograph is needed for this identification card and a photograph of a girl with this short hair would be a lasting impression of their links with the LTTE and would continue to make them feel less secure. Even though their hair would eventually grow out so there would be no physical signs of their former lives, the identification card would remind others of their former identity.

Girls are also smaller in stature and are less able to protect themselves, especially without guns. They may feel at an increased physical threat in comparison to their male counterparts who are bigger and stronger with a better ability to fight back or run away.

Girls have a meandering of gender roles as they maneuvered in and out of the militancy. They have went from domicile, feminine, obedient daughters to being

a trained soldier holding a gun, wearing trousers, performing skills outside of their traditional realm. Upon leaving the LTTE, they must transform themselves back into the lives they had which is more of a dramatic situation than the boys. For a girl who has come to enjoy driving a motorcycle and wearing trousers, reintegration into society where neither is allowed will make her ex-combatant life more difficult.

Girls in vocational training programs are usually limited in what courses they are able to learn or must endure harassment if they train in nontraditional skills. The current skills have names which are associated as masculine skills which women tend to shy away from. Men are also not willing to open these traditionally masculine professions to women. Creatively naming new courses which have more 'feminine' or neutral names to teach traditional male skills will increase female participation. For example, the occupation of masonry is considered a 'masculine trade.' At the residential training program masonry was an all-male class. These young men were using their mason skills to make decorative flower pots. Later, I had the opportunity to visit another vocational training program, *home decorating*, which was conducted by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) which has a gender component that will be examined later. The *home decorating* course was in fact making the same exact flower pots as the young men in the aforementioned masonry course. The only difference with the *home decorating* course was that it was 95% female, of the approximately 30 students in the room only 2 were male. I believe the name *home decorating* has a feminine feel to it which attracts more women. Also, women felt that they could perform these masonry skills from the comfort of their own home which was a big attractor for these women (see below for women's descriptions in why they feel sewing is the most economically viable skill for them). Through *home decorating* these women were able to use a valuable skill which they could use to their benefit either in the home through self-employment, or if they were so inclined they could use their masonry skills outside the home in construction.

All ex-combatants face difficulties re-integrating into civil society, especially in the tenuous environment of Batticaloa. Girls have specific challenges to overcome due to their pronounced difference in physical appearance, the difficulty of protecting themselves, their meandering of gender roles, and the lack of economically viable skills open to them for future employment. These

challenges make them more vulnerable than their male counterparts and call for specialized programs.

10.5 Summary

As shown in the preceding four sections the girls face significant obstacles in their ability to attain a valued way of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985) with a fragile sense of self, a lack of confidence, and an inadequate education. Factors contributing to their disempowerment and vulnerability are, firstly, the abrupt and unforeseen life changes that have negatively impacted their identity formation, and infringed on the 'core' of their empowerment process, i.e. their ability to develop a sense of self-confidence and a sense of agency so they can interact with their surroundings and cause things to happen. Secondly, the girls' insecure environment has prevented them from making 'first tier choices' (Kabeer, 1999), as their decisions are focused on safety and survival, and consequently, their ability to set goals and aspire to them has been limited. Finally, the absence of formal education during their time in the LTTE, and the lack of training in economically viable skills open to women during their reintegration period, have contributed to increasing the girls' vulnerability. It is unlikely that they will be capable of transforming their 'initial assets' (Moser, 1998), i.e. the skills that they have acquired into income, food, or basic necessities. Vocational training programs which take into account the gender specific needs of vulnerable women and girls are essential to reducing their vulnerability and helping to build the 'core' to personal empowerment so that they can interact with their surroundings and achieve a valued way of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985). By way of starting my discussion on possible solutions, I will in the next section present WUSC, which as far as I know is the only training program in Sri Lanka with a gender profile.

11. Vocational Training with a Gender Dynamic

The inability for vocational training programs to address the needs of women is not limited to Eastern Sri Lanka. Mozambique faced the same challenges as women pursued vocational training subsequent to their demobilization from FRELIMO after achieving independence. An ILO-commissioned study of the gender aspect of skills training and employment programs in Mozambique concludes:

Participation of women has been low, skill, offered have been gender-segregated and little encouragement has been given to women's take-up of 'non-traditional' skills. Training has been variable in quality, not will

integrated with market demand, or not providing sufficient skill to support a viable livelihood. (S. Baden as cited in Jacobson, 1999;184)

World University Service of Canada (WUSC) is an INGO working in Sri Lanka which supports vocational training programs with gender as its cross-cutting theme.³³ WUSC ensures 40% of its students are females in all of its training programs. They provide extensive orientations for their female participants to prepare them for their training in nontraditional skills as well as mid-course gender training for female and male participants. Women are supported through all phases of training and all WUSC teachers have had extensive gender training. The training programs conclude with on the job placements and entrepreneurial training to foster successful self-employment.

WUSC extensive week-long orientation empowers its female participants by helping them to create a sense of self (Rowland, 1997). Their extensive vocational training and entrepreneurship development course helps the girls set goals and aspire towards them (Kabeer, 1999). WUSC decreases women's vulnerability by giving them the ability to use their economically viable training in nontraditional skills to provide income, food, or other basic necessities (Moser, 1998). This new role as provider gives them a valued way of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985).

12. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, girl ex-combatants face significant obstacles in their ability to attain a valued way of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985) with a fragile sense of self, a lack of confidence, and an inadequate education. Vocational training programs which take into account the gender specific needs of vulnerable women and girls have the capacity to reduce their vulnerability through economic self-sufficiency and helps build the 'core' to personal empowerment so that they can interact with their surroundings and achieve a valued way of 'being and doing' (Sen, 1985).

Unfortunately, NGO and INGO professionals routinely stated that sewing and tailoring were no longer viable employment opportunities, but rarely stated the solution to this problem. My following recommendations are aimed at these professionals in order to expand options for young vulnerable women. If the LTTE were to meet the demands of the human rights community and release the children in its ranks, there would be an outpouring of girls and boys numerically much larger than the 2,000 seen last April. Steps must be taken to increase the amount of employable skills open to women as

³³ See Appendix 14.3 & 14.4 for an in-depth description and chart of WUSC vocational training programs.

vocational training is most likely their primary reintegration tool. An effective training program will contribute to the empowering of these girls and their new found economic self-sufficiency will decrease their vulnerability. They will be able to transfer the positive leadership and teamwork skills they developed in the LTTE with their fellow trainees and possible co-op members post course. Adequately trained in a needed skill will contribute to the girls' confidence and will not only give her an identity as a provider for her family but also for herself. As a girl begins her vocational training program, she is carrying out what Kabeer defines as the empowering process of setting goals of economic self-sufficiency and aspiring towards them (1999). Gender based vocational training programs will help ensure a female can find a 'valued way of being and doing' as she contributes these new skills to her surrounding community and provides for her family (Sen, 1985). Finally, her success will have developed the individual confidence and sense of self which according to Rowlands is core to personal empowerment(1997).

12.1 Policy Recommendations

In order to make vocational training programs a place to truly empower female ex-combatants, I make the following recommendations:

Creativity:

Vocational training programs need to be daring and creative in how they market their training programs in order to attract females into nontraditional training programs. Creative female friendly names such as *home decorating* are important marketing tools to entice women into a broad range of vocational training programs.

Self-employment: Self-employment in nontraditional skills needs to be fostered in order for women to believe that non-traditional skills offer them viable long-term employment they can continue after marriage and during motherhood.

Programs for all women:

In order for ex-combatants to feel comfortable using nontraditional skills they may have learned in the LTTE, it is important for all women to be trained in nontraditional skills. By doing so ex-combatants are less prone to feeling their nontraditional skills will single them out as ex-combatants.

Donor Support of Nontraditional Training

Donors must provide adequate funds to support a real gender component to vocational training programs which must be met with real results and proof that they are making more than a 'politically correct' effort. This fiscal and resource investment will encourage vocational training programs to implement a genuine gender component to their training programs.

Life Skills Training/Basic Literacy and Numeracy

All vocational training programs should include basic life skills training as well as basic literacy and numeracy guidance for those who are unable to pass a basic exam.

12.2 Directions for Future Research:

As I mentioned in the beginning of this study, a segment of previous writing on women's role in the LTTE (Adele Ann, 1993, 2001; Shalk, 1992; Trawick, 1999) supported the LTTE's assertion that the militancy is a platform for women to not only contribute to their people's liberation but their own liberation through the expansion of gender roles and empowerment for women in a liberated in land. In contrast, my study illustrates how the LTTE's use of girl children has severely hampered their future possibilities due to their lack of education, lack of security, lack of skills, and lack of confidence. In order to provide a more nuanced analysis of women's role in the LTTE, I suggest that future research should address the LTTE's unlawful use of girls and how their military training has prepared or not prepared them for a substantive role in civilian life. Likewise, I suggest researchers whom have critiqued the LTTE's use of female combatants expand their field of study to include girl child combatants.

On the whole, more research needs to be done on successful vocational training programs for females in nontraditional skills which takes into consideration the needs of the females, their families, employers, and the local community. This research needs to take into account the needs of ex-combatants who may have suffered a prolonged absence from formal education. As noted earlier in the Mozambique reference, the lack of vocational training programs with a true gender dynamic is not limited to Sri Lanka. This research could be adapted to fit the needs of women's vocational training programs in other post conflict environments.

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Appendix 14.1

Stories Collected

Sindu	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Seetha	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Suganthini	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Riyasha	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Gayathri	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Shyamali	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Malini	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Sita	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Selvi	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Vicki	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Kavetha	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Anandi	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Madhavi	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Sundari	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Ananthi	Ex-combatant	November 2004
Indra	Vocational Training Student	November 2004
Aruna	Vocational Training Student	November 2004
Sivani	Vocational Training Student	November 2004
Kanchana	Vocational Training Student	November 2004

Appendix 14.2 Map of Sri Lanka



Map No. 4172 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

Appendix 14.3 WUSC Training Program

World University Service Canada has been supporting Vocational Training Programs in Sri Lanka for the last 15 years through its use of local partners. WUSC is the only INGO in the region with gender as a cross-cutting theme through all aspects of training from the initial marketing phase to the final employment process.

WUSC funded programs begin with an initial marketing phase which informs people of new courses. WUSC will do this through signs, poster, booths at festivals, etc. In areas, where female involvement has been traditionally low and communities are not receptive to women in nontraditional roles WUSC gets more involved. They will conduct meetings with video aides showing female trainees, they will recite successful case studies in which women have been successful, and will personally calm people's fears through these presentations.

Each training course guarantees a minimum of 40% female trainees with the duration of courses lasting from 3 – 12 months depending on the difficulty of the skill. (English as a Second Language is taught to everyone independent of the skill to encourage learning and make them more employable). The age range (with some flexibility) is from 17-29 with exceptions being made for vulnerable youth (ex-combatants) and older women in order to meet the needs of widowers. Each participant also gets a basic stipend to cover a basic payment and travel and may also qualify for residential housing. Participants are asked to open up bank accounts where their basic payment is deposited. This helps them learn how to use the bank, save money and budget.

The beginning of the training course starts with pre-course which is a 10 day seminar for all participants and includes: career orientation training, safety, first aid, gender and development, and health and nutrition. In the first month, there is a five day residential orientation course for females which prepares them for their training, catches them up on skills, introduces them to new hardware, prepares them for harassment issues, and builds leadership and team building skills. It is an orientation to empower new female participants.

Subsequently, there is a mid-term gender and development training which again covers gender related issues. If for some reason a participant drops out of the course, (the majority of drop-outs are female due to harassment, etc), the trainee is promptly visited

by a trainer. If the matter is not resolved, a WUSC official will visit the trainee in an attempt to persuade the trainee back into training. In the last month of on-site training, there is a four day post-course training in order to prepare trainees for their on-the-job training. This course covers worker's rights and responsibilities as well as CV and interviewing skills.

After successful completion of the final exam, trainees leave for on-the-job training which lasts about half the length of the term of the course. This is in a Western sense an internship or apprenticeship for the trainees. WUSC continues to pay its participants stipends and employers are encouraged to take on females as they are free trained labor. Following OJT, 10% of WUSC females trainees are offered continued employment at their OJT while others pursue self-employment or are hired on to become trainers themselves. There is a two-day credit forum after OJT which links bankers and trainers and helps trainees collaborate on projects to form co-ops in order to assist them in their self-employment ventures. Finally, an elective 21 day residential training program in entrepreneurship development is offered to trainees in order to further help them reach their goals of economic self-sufficiency. This training covers project proposals, getting bank loans, general banking and accounting, etc.

Appendix 14.4 WUSC PRET Cycle Chart

