Rehabilitation and Reintegration as a Key Activity of Post-War Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka

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Abstract
More than ten thousand former combatants who were fighting on behalf of the LTTE surrendered to the government forces during the last stages of 26 years of civil war in Sri Lanka. The government of Sri Lanka conducted a formal programme to reintegrate them into the society. The aim of this programme was to rehabilitate them by transforming their minds from war to peace. The aim of this paper is to look into the successful of the government’s project as a partner of building long lasting peace in post war era in the country. To fulfil this task this paper uses primary and secondary data appropriately.

The UN theory and other theories of post-conflict peacebuilding focused on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants under the DDR process. Although, the programme illustrate a significant progress of the beneficiaries changing their minds towards peace, some problems have been affected related to their livelihood matters and civil life.

Key words: rehabilitation, reintegration, peacebuilding, ex-LTTE cadres, vocational training

1. Introduction:
The 26 years of protracted civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009 and was defeated the LTTE the separatist militant movement by the government forces. The government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) commenced the peacebuilding and post war reconstruction in the post war country since then. Among the peacebuilding process rehabilitation and reconstruction of former illegal militant groups was a key activity in order to achieve a long lasting peace and confirm the security of a war affected country.

The case in Sri Lanka pointed out that more than ten thousand former LTTE combatants surrendered to the government forces during the last stages of the war. Among those combatants were men, women and children who were fighting on behalf the LTTE over several years. Most of them were experts at using arms and had been brainwashed by the LTTE. Therefore, it is an important undertaking to rehabilitate them by transforming their minds from war to peace. On the one hand, it is very important to reintegrate those combatants to ensure the future security of the country and on the other hand, as individuals it will help to secure their future in civil society as productive and useful citizens. Rehabilitation and reintegration of those former combatants will help to secure a better life for them as well as safeguard the security of the country. The UN documents on post conflict peacebuilding and the other scholarly work of post-conflict peacebuilding focused on the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants under the DDR process, which stands for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. This would demilitarise the paramilitary groups and other illegal militant groups that took part in the civil war. The government could then reduce the numbers of its armed forces personnel and lower the defence expenditure. Reintegrate process involves with former combatants to integrate them into the social, economic and political spheres (DPKO,1999). A successful DDR
aims to fulfil some objectives in connection with former combatants such as facilitating to provide livelihood and economic opportunities, developing family and community relations, minimizing psychological impacts. In that sense reintegration is a long term process which assimilate of ex-combatants to civilian life (Knight, 2010). The World Bank stresses that the reintegration of child soldiers should be consisted of three important components such as family reunification, psychological support and education, and economic providing economic opportunity (Ozedem, 2007). Even though the theory stresses the process of DDR, Sri Lanka does not apply the entire concept of DDR, since the way the war ended in Sri Lanka did not create a situation requiring disarmament and demobilization. Therefore, under the rehabilitation and reintegration sector of the post war peacebuilding process, the government focused on the task of rehabilitation of the ex-LTTE cadres and their reintegration into society since the GoSL assumes it to be an important activity required to build stable peace and reconciliation in the country in future.

2. The DDR process in Asian conflict affected countries

The literature of post-war peacebuilding reveals a number of examples of rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-militant combatants from civil war affected countries. In most cases the peace agreements are embedded with the strategies on rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants as a preventive method against future violations and as a method of sharing the peace dividend. The process of DDR served to fulfil this task, which was proposed in the theory of post-conflict peacebuilding. For example, Aceh is a province of Indonesia, which suffered thirty years of secessionist armed conflict between the government forces and the militants of the ‘Free Aceh movement’. This long running civil war resulted in 15,000 deaths (Askandar, 2007). A peace accord between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was eventually concluded in 2005 to bring an end to the violence and establish long lasting peace. The peace agreement had taken into consideration the issue of the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-GAM activists under section 3.2 ‘reintegration into society’ as a responsibility of the Indonesian government. Article 3.2.3 mentioned that the government of Indonesia will provide all facilities to assist the GAM activists to reintegrate them into civil society and to provide economic support. Article 4.2 says that GAM will undertake to demobilize all of its combatants who had taken part in militant activities. The conflict affected countries in the African region such as Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Sierra Leone initiated rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in their post-war environments in the 1990s. Several studies reveal that the programmes for the ex-combatants and the child soldiers of warring parties to rehabilitate and reintegrate into civil society are conducted with the help of the UN and foreign governments. Those programmes were carried out under the process of DDR largely and beneficiaries could participate in rehabilitation courses consisting of psychosocial counselling, health screening, provision of food and other basic necessities, education and skills training (Dzinesa, 2007; Williams, 2006; Ball 1997). However, some programmes revealed ineffective outcomes for the beneficiaries due to the lack of financial support, low rate of providing job opportunities, and inadequate concern for female ex-combatants (Ball, 1997; Dzinesa, 2007; Knight, 2010).

1 The study focuses on the militants of the LTTE who surrendered to the government forces at the end of the war. The other LTTE militants were killed in the final stages of the war along with their leaders.

2 The peace accord was signed in August 2005 at Helsinki under the auspices of Finland.

3. Rehabilitation of Ex-LTTE cadres

As mentioned earlier, the official reports show that 11,664 ex-combatants surrendered to the military forces and the government felt a strong commitment to reintegrate them with civilian society after a suitable rehabilitation programme. The GoSL’s established institution, “The Bureau of the Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation” carried out the rehabilitation programme for 11,664 ex–LTTE cadres in six rehabilitation centres in the Northern Province. As mentioned in above the LTTE cadres were highly brainwashed by the organization and alienated from the civil society. Therefore, it proved to be an important and challenging task to rehabilitate the ex-cadres in order to reintegrate them into the society. Those rehabilitation centres are commonly referred to as ‘Protection, Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres’ (PARC). The rehabilitation programmes were conducted in four rehabilitation centres in Vavuniya and Polonaruwa districts. Several United Nations and Humanitarian organizations, notably the IOM and HALO Trust, have been assisting the Sri Lankan government in the task of rehabilitation of ex-combatants since 2009. The rehabilitation programme was designed according to the model of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore (Dharmawardhane, 2014). The extensive residential programme was consisted of six modules as (i) educational, (ii) vocational, (iii) psychological and creative therapies, (iv) social cultural and family (v) spiritual and religious (vi) recreational and community rehabilitation and named as the “6+1 model” (Hettiarachchi, 2012:106). The modules of the programme were focused on the following aspects. (1) The first programme was counselling to implant spiritual, cultural and religious values in the ex–cadres. Daily religious observances, meditation and spiritual development programmes, including celebration of religious festivals were organised at this stage. Special tours were organised to visit religious places (From Conflict to Stability- Northern Province, 2012). (2) The ex–combatants who were students were directed to complete their formal education. Education facilities were provided to them by organizing a number of classes up to G.C.E advanced level. (3) Training programmes were organised in vocational training centres to enhance their future livelihood prospects. There were 46 different vocational training courses organised under the modules for eligible men and women in the rehabilitation centres. (4) The programme was designed to mould their thinking so as to get them to appreciate the need for reintegration with their families and society. Several counselling workshops were organised on marital, premarital relationships and family planning. (5) The programme on physiological and curative therapies aimed at individuals and groups. Several cultural programmes in theatre and art work were organized. (6) The programmes were to promote sports and extracurricular activities of the ex-cadres (From Conflict to stability-Northern province, 2012). At present, 11,600 persons have been reintegrated into society after having successfully completed their rehabilitation in the centres (Selvakumar, 2013). In order to support the reintegrated person’s livelihood matters, the government provided facilities for rehabilitated cadres to apply for loans from the “State Banks” to finance their self-employment projects. According to that States Banks provided Rs.250,000 as loans at mere 4% annual interest to rehabilitated ex-cadres (Selvakumar, 2013). After submitting their project proposals the rehabilitated ex-combatants could apply for this loan. The Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation pointed out that the President had allocated Rs.525 million to assist the rehabilitated cadres in their self-employment ventures.

4Rehabilitation centers in Vavuniya district – Poonthottam and Maruthamadu, and Polonnaruwa district - Senapura and Kandakadu.

5The subjects available to the men for vocational training are plumbing, aluminium work, electrical wiring, leather work, tailoring, carpentry, masonry, welding, driving, heavy machinery operation, auto repairs, coconut and mushroom cultivation, chemical fertilizer management and repairing outboard motors. The females are trained in bridal and hairdressing, modelling, beauty and makeup, nursery management, and Juki machine operations.
(Wijayapala, 2013). In addition to the loan facility, the rehabilitation bureau is exploring ways to provide them with employment opportunities overseas.\(^6\)

The Secretary to the Presidential Task Force (PTF) said that among the ex-combatants who surrendered to the government (see Table 1 for details), 118 persons involved in serious crimes were charged and all others were given amnesty by the government.\(^7\) Further, he mentioned that the Army helped the ex-combatants who were given amnesty by the government to establish self-employment projects, after the rehabilitation programmes.

**Table 4.7 Details of the surrendered ex-LTTE combatants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children(12-18yrs)</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>9,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>11,664</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “From Conflict to Stability – Northern Province” (2012) p. 20

There were 594 child combatants, including 231 girls who voluntarily surrendered to the security forces. Out of this, 273 children wished to continue with their formal education. The rest underwent proper vocational training programmes at the technical college in Vavuniya under the Vocational Training Authority.\(^8\)

Further, all ex-LTTE child combatants had followed a special English language course and also Girl Guide and Boy Scout programmes as auxiliary programmes.\(^9\) The rehabilitated child combatants were handed over to their parents as normal persons, expected to lead normal lives in the country in the future.

**4. Rehabilitation and reintegration**

As mentioned above, the LTTE cadres were highly brainwashed by their organization and alienated from the civil society. Therefore, it is an important and challenging task to re-educate and rehabilitate the ex-cadres in order to reintegrate them into the society. According to the findings of this study, the government was able to fulfil that task to a certain extent.


\(^7\)Interview with Mr. S.D.Divarathna, the Secretary to the PTF, 7 February 2014 at Colombo.

\(^8\)Interview with Mr. Divarathna, the Secretary to the PTF, on 7 January 2014 at Colombo.

According to Hettiarachchi (2012) the rehabilitation programme in Sri Lanka can be characterized as a globally developed rehabilitation programme.

“Global rehabilitation programmes can be characterized as developed, developing and defunct programmes. The most developed programmes are operated in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. The developing programmes are in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Colombia. Defunct programmes are in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya.” (Hettiarachchi, 2012: 106)

The rehabilitation programme conducted in Sri Lanka can be seen as quite reliable and successful in its content and process. It consisted of six modes of rehabilitation and community engagements. How did this rehabilitation programme benefit the ex-LTTE cadres? Was the government able to achieve its goal successfully? The following analysis will provide the answers to these questions.

As mentioned earlier, rehabilitation is about changing the thinking and behaviour of offenders. The beneficiaries appear to be satisfied about the programme and they have changed their attitudes. A beneficiary who was 40 years old expressed his feelings at a press interview as follows:

“We know the pain of war. We will not allow our children to experience the same pain. If possible, we will work towards peace and unity.”

A rehabilitated beneficiary of around 33 years who was with the LTTE for five years expressed his views briefly:

“I regret what happened in the past. Now I have understood well what peace is. I am now involved in my farming activities and want to look after my family well. My future ambition is to live in the society peacefully.”

These feelings of the rehabilitated persons show that their minds are changed and they are now looking to lead peaceful lives even though they fought for the LTTE a few years ago using arms and ammunitions against the Sri Lankan security forces. Furthermore, during the period of PARC, the authorities granted facilities to some young persons who were committed to their education to continue it, with the help of the Education Ministry. The Bureau, together with the Education department, conducted an accelerated catch up education programme for those who opted to appear in national exams. Two centres were established for this purpose, for males and females (Hapuarachchi, 2011). Many students who sat for the national examinations passed with flying colours, and were selected for higher education. For example Out of 361 students who sat for the Advanced level examinations, 222 qualified to enter the University, and out of this number 12 will join the Medical Faculty, one will be entering the Engineering Faculty and about 30 will be joining the Commerce and Arts fields in the Universities (Hapuarachchi, 2011).

So, taking steps to prepare those students to sit for the advanced level examinations is a worthy deed. Those students who were qualified to pursue higher studies were enrolled to follow their chosen courses in the Universities (Wejethilaka, 2014). In the ordinary level examinations, out of 166 students, 91 students were

\[10^{th}, p.106\]
\[11^{th}, "Business Today". 28 November 2011\]
\[12^{th}, Interview with a ex LTTE rehabilitated person in the Northern province Sri Lanka on 08 June 2014\]
qualified to proceed to Advanced Level (Wejethilake, 2014). As mentioned above the rest of the rehabilitated cadres went on to undergo vocational trainings, and later completed their courses successfully. The aim of these vocational trainings was to reintegrate those persons into the society. All these trainees were encouraged to start self-employment projects, according to their trainings. A vocational trainee expressed his views as follows:

“I surrendered to the security forces on 16th May, 2009 in Omannthai. I was later transferred to the ‘Boossa’ camp. From there I was sent to the rehabilitation centre where I underwent the vocational training programme, specializing in masonry. I am still single, and once I go back home to my mother, I plan to make use of the skills I have learnt and developed during my rehabilitation programme. I am going home to meet my family after being in various detention centres for three years and eight months. I am anxiously waiting to finally lead a normal life in a peaceful Sri Lanka.” (Nathaniel, 2013)

Even though these people underwent vocational training, finding a job in the Northern Province proved quite a difficult task in the post-war situation, especially for rehabilitated cadres. It is noteworthy and so must be mentioned here that the government was ready to assist the trainees who were willing to establish their own self-employment projects by providing financial assistance through bank loans. According to the government loan scheme, 1,773 ex-cadres were given loans and many more applications were being evaluated. (Wejethilake, 2014). The percentage of rehabilitated ex-cadres who received the bank loan is 18%. However, in the technical context this did not prove to be a successful exercise. Those people who applied for loans had to face many difficulties in settling the loan. Therefore, the other trainees who were aware of this problem were discouraged from applying for loans. This is why the number of applicants for loans was so small.

The rehabilitated persons face some problems and difficulties in connection with their livelihood matters. It is worth to mention here unemployment is a major issue for these rehabilitated persons. Disabled people particularly, who were injured during the war, faced a lot of difficulties in finding a job. Finding employment is a very difficult proposition for ex-LTTE cadres in Northern Sri Lanka, due to two reasons. One is conflict related disabilities suffered by these ex-cadres and the other is the persistent stigma attached to former LTTE cadres. According to statistics, around 10,000 to 20,000 people out of the total population of the Northern Province are affected by war related disabilities. A majority of them are reported to be former LTTE cadres. In Northern province Sri Lanka, some disabled persons were engaged in their daily routine as usual, but many people do not like to give work to persons with certain disabilities as they are not efficient. The second issue affects the ex-LTTE cadres directly, because some people dislike interacting with them due to their history. A villager in the Northern province Sri Lanka said that some people dislike to give them jobs in their fields or business since the people do not still trust them.

However, some ex-LTTE cadres are also bothered about their history. The above two reasons affect their employment prospects.

However, the Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation points out that they are giving attention to monitoring their livelihoods and exploring employment opportunities.

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13 Sri Lanka Foundation for the rehabilitation of the disabled, www.slfrd.org
14 Field observations in Northern Province Sri Lanka.
“We have designed a mechanism to monitor the progress of those who have reintegrated into the society. We plan to monitor them post rehabilitation, to restore their livelihoods and explore employment opportunities. This is to ensure that once they are released, they lead normal lives as useful citizens and make their contribution towards the development of the country” (Sriyananda, 2012).

The Commissioner General of the Rehabilitation Bureau said that besides providing bank loans for projects the government also sought to provide employment opportunities in foreign countries to the rehabilitated persons. So far, the Bureau has got a positive reply from a construction company in Singapore expressing their interest in recruiting 40 rehabilitees who have received vocational training (Wejethilake, 2014). According to the Commissioner-General, they have planned another project to give ‘three wheelers’ to the rehabilitated persons without down payments, so they can re-pay the instalments while earning. (Sriyananda, 2012) Further, the government has recruited a large number of reintegrated beneficiaries to the ‘civil defence forces’ and those rehabilitees will be assigned to various development and agricultural projects in the country. (Nathaniel, 2013). For example some rehabilitated ex LTTE cadres were participated to renovate some irrigation projects in Kilinochchi districts. The Rehabilitation Bureau has made an arrangement to train and develop 50 beneficiaries into professional counsellors with a plan to recruit them into the social services sector (Hapuarachchi, 2011).

Although an economic foundation is a vital necessity for re-integrated cadres, social acceptance too plays a remarkable role in re-integrating rehabilitated persons into the civil society. To address that task during the period of rehabilitation the government arranged friendship tours in order to build harmony with other communities. In particular, this programme aimed to establish cordial relationships with the Sinhalese in the South. The “Friendship Tour from North to South” was organised from 6th to 9th June, 2014. This friendship tour aimed to engage the rehabilitees and get them to interact with civil society and to experience some contact with different communities to increase mutual understanding. During this tour, rehabilitees joined with the Sinhalese in several mutual activities such as games, religious activities and also they visited important places during the tour. It is very important to organize programmes such as these to integrate the ex-cadres into the society. Further, the Rehabilitation Bureau conducted an art exhibition known as, “Reflection of Transformation through Art” in April, 2011 (Hapuarachchi, 2011). This can be considered as another valuable opportunity for rehabilitees to express their feelings. The rehabilitees are encouraged to re-integrate into the social milieu in many ways. The Bureau granted approval to the ex-combatants to get married during the rehabilitation period. For instance, 53 couples got married and all their ceremonies were organised by rehabilitation centres according to the religious customs of the community (Hapuarachchi, 2011). They were also given a house and a plot of land for each family for cultivation in the camp premises, during the rehabilitation period. The Commissioner-General of Rehabilitation said that they looked at many aspects to provide them facilities for meditation, sports, educational and vocational trainings during the period of rehabilitation. He was interviewed by a leading newspaper in Sri Lanka and mentioned that,

“While educating them on theoretical aspects, they will be motivated to mingle with society, to be kind to people and respect and accommodate the ideas of other people. We held a special counselling programme for them with a view to changing their destructive ideology and mind-set which they had

acquired due to being brainwashed by the LTTE. Instead of taking revenge, we taught them to respect the people and to co-exist with them peacefully.” (Sriyananda, 2012)

In that sense the government’s perspectives on rehabilitation of ex-LTTE cadres was good because it helped to facilitate their reintegration into the civil society. The most important matter in this connection was the government’s decision to grant amnesty to these rehabilitees. In 2009, a Presidential Amnesty was granted to the surrendered LTTE cadres who were later rehabilitated. The Director-General for Rehabilitation pointed out that only five or six complaints had been received so far against the rehabilitated cadres. They were all minor personal matters often found in any society (Selvakumar, 2012). In 2012 the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka stressed that the government of Sri Lanka had made good progress in the rehabilitation of ex-LTTE combatants. This is a very good testament to the success of the rehabilitation programme carried out for the former LTTE cadres.

5. Conclusion

The process of rehabilitation of ex-LTTE cadres is still continuing. It is clear that consideration should be given to the livelihood of rehabilitated ex-LTTE cadres, because they need sustained support to re-build their lives. The theory of post-conflict peacebuilding addresses the issue of rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants as a necessary reform required by the security sector, as that would minimise future threats and relieve society from a fear of future war. Although the government did not follow a comprehensive process of DDR as proposed in the theory, it had made the effort to rehabilitate the surrendered ex-LTTE child soldiers and combatants in terms of transforming them from an aggressive society into a peaceful society. Although, there are still some issues regarding their livelihood matters and some negative perceptions by society, the government process can be seen as a valuable and fruitful one to the beneficiaries as it helps to divert their minds from violence to peace.

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