***Sri Lanka***

**Abstract**

After the civil war in 2009 came to an end with the government forces defeating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Sri Lanka decided to reintegrate former LTTE combatants back into the communities. The government set up 24 PARCs across the country where over 10,000 fighters have been reintegrated since 2009. The Sri Lankan Model is considered one of the most successful approaches to reintegration, because there has been no resurgence of violence since the conflict. However, the lack of strong transitional justice measure remains a reason for criticism and is still a polarizing topic in Sri Lanka and globally. Other parts of the reintegration program, however, can be considered useful examples, namely the community-based approach, the relevance of recreational and social activities as well as the active participation of private companies in the training efforts for ex-combatants. When it comes to the reintegration of Boko Haram combatants, Sri Lanka does offer some parallels to the conflict, as the LTTE also recruited child soldiers, kidnapped members of the local communities in the North East and committed suicide attacks. On top of that, the Sri Lankan government faced the issue of few financial means to fund the reintegration program. Still, the Sri Lankan civil war ended with the defeat of the LTTE combatants, which constitutes a significantly different power balance between the parties as a basis for a reintegration program.

**Model Name**

National Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka

**Country**

Sri Lanka

**Time Period**

The Sri Lankan Civil War lasted over 25 years and officially ended in May 2009. The government of Sri Lanka began the process of designing their national plan for the reintegration of ex-combatants in March 2009 and was completed within five months by the end of July 2009. The time period of how long reintegration and reinsertion efforts should take, is defined by the framework as up to one year, but preferably between 10-12 months[[1]](#footnote-0). The reintegration program officially started in October of 2009 with the first ex-combatants coming to the Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs) set up by the government.

**Insurgency Description**

The LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fought for the independence of North-Eastern Sri Lanka to establish their own Tamil state. Their insurgency was a reaction to the increasing discrimination of the Tamil minority by the Sinhalan majority in the 1950s through 70s. The insurgency comprised around 10,000 fighters in the 1980s and 1990s. They participated both, in armed conflicts with the Sri Lankan army that clearly outnumbered them, but were also known for their suicide attacks. The LTTE suicide bombing force is widely acknowledged to have invented the suicide jacket and carried out several hundred suicide attacks. The Sri Lankan civil war is considered an ethnic conflict rather than a religious conflict, though there is disagreement on the relevance of religion in the hostilities.

**Civilian Agency Involvement**

The National Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka was developed by a committee that counted participants from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, the Ministry of Defence Public Security, Law and Order, the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and National Integration and the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare. The International Labour Organization lent both technical and financial support to the framework development process. On top of that previous efforts to develop rehabilitation strategies by the ILO and the Sub-Committee on Livelihoods of the Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA) and the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the ILO as well as the Ministry of Employment and Labour were also taken into account when developing the framework in 2009.

**Military Involvement**

The military had recently defeated the LTTE. However, the role of military in the reintegration process was mainly limited to disarmament efforts, including the collection and destruction of weapons in order to increase public safety and security. Even in the economic reintegration in terms of employment, combatants were not planned to find employment in the military.

On top of that security forces also were to contribute to reconstruction and development in the war-struck areas. The Lessons Learnt Commission found later, however, that security forces continued to be involved in industries such as private businesses and agriculture, that were not part of their mandate.

Part of the reason for the low involvement of the military could be that the Sri Lankan military was accused of several human rights abuses during the civil war, especially in the final months of the war.

**International Agency/Expert Involvement**

The International Labour Organization lent their technical and financial assistance to the framework development process. On top of that, the framework stated to have considered international best practices from various different countries. Several UN agencies also participated in the reintegration process.

Two key models that were considered were the Saudi-Arabian and the Singaporean model. Several experts from Singapore weighed in and high-level functionaries travelled to Singapore to learn from the program. One of the fundamental parts of the model are the six modes of rehabilitation that Sri Lanka adopted and then adapted to their local circumstances.[[2]](#footnote-1)

**NGO Involvement**

NGOs were initially only part of the government’s agenda on a rather limited basis. One of the reasons for this decision could be, that NGOs did not enjoy the ful trust of the people during the conflict and that people had only little confidence in the NGOs’ abilities to effect positive change and actually stay in the village communities on a long-term basis. In addition to that, NGOs were often perceived as partisan during the conflict and considered allies of the LTTE, which lead to even more distrust by the Sinhalese and Muslim population.[[3]](#footnote-2)

International agencies were restricted from participation and access, which was criticized widely[[4]](#footnote-3) and may have contributed to lower funding for the government’s program.

**Impetus for Reintegration**

The reintegration program in Sri Lanka was initiated towards the end of the civil war between the LTTE insurgency and the Sri Lankan government (and their security forces). Sri Lanka claimed victory and the LTTE declared defeat in May 2009, after which several thousands of ex-combatants were captured and “surrendered”. On top of that, several other paramilitary groups had developed over the 25 years of the civil war. These groups were also considered in the reintegration and rehabilitation efforts of the Sri Lankan government.

**Criteria for Reintegration**

The reintegration efforts in Sri Lanka targeted both combatants that were captured as well as those who surrendered. Even though the program did differentiate between the two groups and recognized that each group needs different program designs, captives and those who had surrendered were granted the same rights to participate in the reintegration program. While the program primarily targeted ex-LTTE-combatants who were the largest group of people that were to be reintegrated, the program also targeted other paramilitary groups in the region that had emerged during the civil war. The program emphasized that there should not be the perception

**Prosecution/Punitive Component**

Transitional justice and punitive aspects of the reintegration process of LTTE combatants and other paramilitary groups has been a major object of criticism over the past seven years. While the framework itself gave the gave the responsibility of designing a transitional justice process that would be tailored to the Sri Lankan experience, the framework already stated that “It has to be highlighted that, except in cases where a failure to prosecute violates a treaty obligation, the granting of amnesties in appropriate cases to perpetrators of egregious human rights violations is most likely not precluded by international law“. This already signalled that the Sri Lankan government was not likely to prosecute human rights abuses of the Sri Lankan military. Up until today no credible process has been initiated. President Rajapaksa, who was president from 1995 through 2005 neither allowed that those responsible for alleged crimes were prosecuted or punished nor that an independent investigation was initiated, disappointing the expectations he had raised with his promises[[5]](#footnote-4).

**Community Engagement**

Community Engagement played a significant role in the reintegration program in Sri Lanka. Due to the need to save costs, the community received a relevant role not only to make reintegration more effective, but also out of necessity. A variety of private companies have participated, particularly in the economic reintegration efforts.

**Reconciliation, Social & Political Elements**

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee initiated by the government in 2010 and that released its report one year later, has by many been deemed a

**Psychological Elements**

Ex-combatants were profiled before beginning their reintegration program. They were evaluated and classified based on their crimes and their roles in the organizations and had to undergo psychological counselling upon profiling. The ex-combatants were assessed again at the end of the program.

**Education, skills, and job training**

Upon arrival at one of the 24 PARCs that the government installed in the Northern and North-Eastern part of Sri Lanka, the ex-combatants were profiled psychologically and socio-economically. Based on their profiles, they were put into different groups that then focused on vocational training and skill development as well as spiritual and moral classes that would further advance the social reintegration. In a way this also constituted the de-radicalisation efforts of the program.

In general terms, the government found that rural areas would offer better environments for the reintegration and reinsertion of ex-combatants due to better employment perspectives there compared to the cities. The framework emphasized that ex-combatants should have the freedom to choose which type of training they wanted to pursue. These choices included the option to found their own businesses and receive micro-loans.

The main employment opportunities for direct employment of ex-combatants identified by the framework were agriculture and livestock development, rural industrial development, fisheries, tourism, construction activities, micro-businesses, foreign employment and “green jobs” – meaning agricultural and manufacturing jobs.

The training within the PARCs allowed ex-combatants to get both, vocational training as well as higher education. They also received language courses to make them more attractive for the labour market. Once ready for reinsertion into society, the beneficiaries were equipped with basic needs kits that held a variety of non-cash resources, like household items, hygiene product, clothing etc. On top of that cash payments were also made to the beneficiaries so that they would not return home empty-handed and that they would have some freedom of choice.

**Incentives**

Beneficiaries of the reintegration program received cash payments for the rehabilitation period on a similar level as IDPs and resettled communities received cash grants. On top of that, the assumption that ex-combatants might have extra costs due to disabilities was taken into account as well when calculating the amount paid to ex-combatants. There is no further financial given to ex-combatants after the rehabilitation program[[6]](#footnote-5).

**Follow-up**

Does the program have mechanisms for monitoring following reintegration? How is failed reintegration dealt with?

**Cost Estimate**

According to statistics published by the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation (BCGR), the program accumulated costs of USD 9,136,370 between January 2009 and September 2012 in order to manage and run the rehabilitation centres in Sri Lanka. The annual cost fluctuated depending on the number of ex-combatants in the rehabilitation program.[[7]](#footnote-6)

**Financing**

Due to the fact that the government was lacking resources in order to finance a resource-intense program like the rehabilitation program, collaboration with the private sector was fundamental for the government. The BCGR closed over 40 partnerships with private companies in Sri Lanka that helped with custodial rehabilitation and community reintegration. A variety of companies offered vocational training programs for LTTE ex-combatants. The funding issues that the government was facing actually led to a stronger involvement of the community in the reintegration program and to a program with lower cost.[[8]](#footnote-7)

**Results/Metrics**

The Lessons Learnt Commission’s report was released in 2011 and showed that there were still several areas of concern regarding the execution of the rehabilitation programs. One issue that had already been anticipated to cause problems, was the lack of teachers that were able to provide the necessary training in the PARCs. On top of that the demand for permanent shelter and the availability of it[[9]](#footnote-8). The education in the camps is not perfectly tailored to the background of the ex-combatants.

Regarding the role of security forces the report found that security forces still intervened with civilians’ private and public life, even during the reconstruction after the war.

Kulatunga (2015) surveyed a range of ex-combatants in order to determine the success of the reintegration efforts by the Sri Lankan government. Using the sample of the northern cities Jaffna and Kilinochchi, Kulatunga found that 90% of the ex-combatants felt that they were being well-recognized in the villages. In the villages the rate of ex-combatants was at most 25%[[10]](#footnote-9).

Furthermore, Kulatunga found that males integrated well back into society and while some faced problems finding permanent employment, this was mainly due to external factors. The unemployment and low level of income of ex-combatants is still an area of concern. However, this is merely due to the environmental economic situation. Women on the other hand, faced bigger challenges to reintegrate into society.

Kulatunga’s work also showed that leisure, free time and social events were highly relevant factors to make the reintegration process successful. The beneficiaries of the program attended a variety of social events.

**Lessons Learned**

A considerable area of improvement is the transitional justice process in Sri Lanka and the prosecution of those responsible for human rights abuses during the civil war. The new president that was elected in 2015 still faces pressures to actually implement a credible process.

Security has greatly increased in Sri Lanka, where there has been a high level of post-war stability with no act of terrorism since the end of the civil war in 2009[[11]](#footnote-10).

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