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Livelihoods under protracted conflict

A case study of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Populations affected by violent conflicts often withstand threats to their security as well as threats to their livelihoods. Their response to the former threat nontrivially affects their response to the latter, *vice versa*. This paper identifies and assesses the effectiveness of certain such responses used in a protracted conflict setting by households in Medawachchiya DSD of the Anuradhapura district in Sri Lanka. The field work for this study involved a sample of 82 households and was conducted during January-April 2008.¹

We find evidence that protection and livelihood strategies of households affected by protracted conflict are often interlaced. We also find that Sinhalese and Muslim households had largely responded to the protracted conflict in ways that are unique to their ethnic group. This is evidently because certain vulnerabilities which impinge upon protection as well as certain opportunities that support livelihoods are ethnically biased. The differences in responses meant that the final outcome of these responses, mainly the income, also tended to differ across ethnicities.

Keywords: Civil war; Sri Lanka; Livelihoods, Protection; Livelihood Strategies; Vulnerability; Ethnicity

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1 Introduction

Violent conflicts have progressively threatened the protection of civilians more than the combatants. By the 1990s, for example, nearly 90 percent of victims of armed conflicts were civilian (Cairns 1997). Going beyond these immediate life threats, conflicts also pose other security threats to at-risk populations including displacement, destitution, rape, mutilation, etc.² Their responses to these threats—protection strategies—are now known to have significant feedback effects vis-à-vis their livelihood strategies (Jaspars et al. 2007; Narbeth and McLean 2003). Neither the livelihoods literature, a branch of development studies literature, nor the protection literature, a branch of conflict studies literature, has paid adequate attention to the interlinks between them, particularly from the household angle. This underscores the significance of the present study focusing as it does mainly on the interplay between protection strategies and livelihood strategies of populations in protracted conflict settings. The Sri Lankan context within which this is done is also significant: since the end of the country's war in May 2009 protection and livelihood of the affected have taken centre stage.

We have in this work documented certain strategies and their function in shoring-up protection and livelihoods to survive protracted conflicts. This fits within the wider literature of how households strategize in response to natural or human made disasters (Benjamin 2000; Corbett 1988; Curtis 1995). However, “In contrast to natural disasters, the strategies that people use during conflict are relatively under-researched” (Jaspars et al. 2007: 8). The main constraint in doing research in conflict affected regions is the availability of data (Muggah 2008: 139). The problem is more pronounced for data on protection as it is sensitive and politicized. This is why approaching these sensitive issues through a livelihoods approach is useful in conflict settings. Collinson (2003: 4) in reference to the livelihoods approach states:

It also has the advantage of providing a comparatively safe way of investigating sensitive issues in insecure environments, since these are only tackled indirectly through exploring how people live.

Chambers and Conway (1991) define livelihoods as constituting capabilities of people, tangible assets, intangible assets and activities undertaken to make a living. This framework is also known as the DfID framework due to the prominent role played by the Department for International Development (DfID) in developing it. The DfID framework identifies assets, strategies, outcomes and policies, institutions and processes as key elements of livelihoods and stresses that these elements constantly interact with each other (DfID 1999). A major criticism of the framework was that it had not captured the effect of power and politics in livelihoods (Baumann 2000). It follows that though the framework works fine when applied for normal livelihoods, it fares poorly when applied for conflict affected livelihoods. This is because in the latter politics and power relations become crucial. Inter alia Jacobsen (2002), Collinson (2003), Korf (2003a) and Lautze and

² See Jaspars *et al.* (2007) for a more comprehensive list of protection threats faced by conflict affected populations.

Raven-Roberts (2006) have offered adaptations of the DfID framework for complex emergencies including protracted conflicts. These adaptations add political assets into the framework and underscore the impact of vulnerabilities upon all elements of the framework.

Strategies used by at-risk populations have been subjected to academic scrutiny at both theoretical and empirical levels. Though strategy typologies used in these works seem to differ much in their details, at a broader level there is agreement that strategies are either short-term or long-term (adaptive) (DfID 1999; Jaspars et al. 2007; Korf 2003a; Korf 2003b; Pain and Lautze 2002). Short-term strategies, also known as coping strategies, are further divided according to whether they are in response to violence or not (Jaspars et al. 2007). If they are, such strategies are generally known as protection strategies (Bonwick 2006). Going further into the analysis of protection strategies, Bonwick argues that these can be used to avoid, contain or confront security threats. A critical fallout of this typology is that perhaps the so called victims are more resilient than is generally suggested by humanitarian actors (Korf 2003a). The empirical evidence forwarded in the present paper also supports this view.

The present work is unique in five ways. Firstly this provides a rare empirical insight into the very new literature on the interplay between protection strategies and livelihood strategies of households living in protracted conflict settings. It was explained earlier that these two areas of research were until recently isolated.

Secondly, though a limited number of works have explored the above interplay, most of them address the issue from the humanitarian agency point of view, possibly because information on strategies at the agency level is more accessible. In the present work we use the more challenging bottom-up approach which looks at these issues from the household angle. We have been able to do this by overcoming difficult data collection challenges imposed by the geographic proximity of our sample to an active war front.³ The militarized field atmosphere made it difficult to access data, particularly on protection. By overcoming the data collection challenges our work has led to a significant and a unique improvement in the quality of data used in the relevant literature. It must be added that in addition to the quantitative results that have been presented using this data, we have also validated the results through narratives and other qualitative information.

Thirdly, no attempt had previously been made to analyse protection and livelihood threats in a setting with moderate vulnerability. For instance work by Korf (2003a), and even Nigel (2009), is similar to ours but is conducted in highly vulnerable and 'grey' areas.⁴ Our sample in contrast comes from an area which is considered to be relatively safe by the residents themselves (interviews of households from Medawachchiya). It must be noted that when vulnerability is not as acute as in Korf's sample the impact of the conflict on strategies becomes harder to trace which adds to the value of the present work.

³ During the time of data collection the fighting in the Northern Province was at a peak.

⁴ A grey area in the Sri Lankan context, before May 2009, was an area claimed by both LTTE and the GoSL.

Fourthly this work, as a comparative study of who is most vulnerable, is a rare empirical analysis of protection. An analysis of who is most vulnerable, according to Jaspars et al. (2007: 17), "...is often done by disaggregating the population into different 'risk' groups, for example according to age, gender, *ethnic group*, social status and religion" (emphasis added). This work is rare because of the two risk groups compared (Sinhalese and Muslims) and also because of the way economic tools are introduced for the purpose.

Fifthly, the present work brings us closer to a nexus between two opposing explanations of causes of the Sri Lankan conflict. The first explains the conflict as an ethno-religious identity struggle (Nissan and Stirrat 1990; Uyangoda 2001) while the second explains it as resulting from competition for scarce resources such as land, educational opportunities and employment, in short, broadly defined livelihoods (Abeyratne 2004; Shastri 1990). Though the present work is not about the causes of the conflict, it provides evidence of why the ethnic polarity might widen with the protraction of the conflict. An important element of our evidence is the ethnicity-livelihoods interlink. One could argue that the lessons learnt are limited by the ethnicities looked into in this work, i.e. Sinhalese and Muslims, because the Sri Lankan conflict is an issue between Sinhalese and Tamils. However, it has been shown that to condense the Sri Lankan conflict in this manner is misleading and wrong and that the Muslims are an important element (Ali 1997).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines the Sri Lankan experience of protracted conflict. Section 3 is a description of the specific area of our field research, Medawachchiya. This is followed by an explanation of the process of gathering data and the methodology used in our study. In Section 5 we perform a cross sectional analysis of the complete sample in order to identify differences in livelihood outcomes across ethnicities and explain these differences using a strategy framework. Section 6 provides an in-depth analysis of strategies using four case studies. Finally, Section 7 provides some concluding remarks.

2 The protracted conflict in Sri Lanka and interlinks between protection and livelihood

According to the 1981 census the ethnic composition of the country was: Sinhalese 74%, Tamil (Sri Lankan Tamils plus Indian Tamils) 19%, and Muslim 7%.⁵ The country has a long history of communal politics operated along ethnic divides. Since 1915, Sri Lanka has experienced several incidents of violence among these ethnicities (Ali 1997). The worst happened in 1983, resulting in the deaths of nearly 1,000 civilians of Tamil origin. After 1983 the ethnic violence escalated into a civil war waged between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which ended with

⁵ A more recent census dated 2001 is available. However its enumeration was not complete for Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. Most of these are Tamil dominated districts. (Source: DSC, 2009, Table 2.4).

all major combat operations ceasing in May 2009 after the military defeat of the LTTE. The civil war was fought mainly in the Eastern and Northern Provinces of Sri Lanka while LTTE-orchestrated violence created havoc in the rest of the country.

The conflict attracted many headlines for violations of human security and civilian protection. Inter alia Lang and Knudsen (2008), UNHCR (2009), Jaspars (2009) raise these concerns. People belonging to all ethnicities suffered during the long years of the civil war; many continue to suffer its longer term impacts at the time of writing. Security threats such as killings, abductions, conscription, mental and physical trauma, displacement, and even forced return and relocation, were seen constantly interacting with people's livelihoods, leading to impoverishment (de Mel 2007). The academic or journalistic pieces on the Sri Lankan conflict which discuss these horrendous impacts on people are often accused of missing the Muslim angle to the problem (Ali 1997: Note 1). This allegation is important as this study deals with some aspects of the Muslim plight. There are other empirical works which include samples from this community (Brun 2003a; 2003b; Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004; Shukla 2009).

Table 1: Sector contributions to GDP and employment percentages

Sector	As a share of GDP		Employment (as a percentage of total employment)	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Agriculture	11.9	15.1	31.3	32.7
Manufacturing	28.5	28.3	26.6	26.3
Services	59.6	56.6	41.2	41

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka Annual reports, 2007 and 2008

The populations in areas made vulnerable by the Sri Lankan conflict have used various strategies in response to security threats. Some of these responses by civilian populations (Amirthalingam and Lakshman 2009a; 2009b; Jaspars 2009; Korf 2004) and also by humanitarian agencies on the field (Lang and Knudsen 2008) have been documented. Civilian responses documented as being used in Sri Lanka include leaving place of residence, vacating houses and fleeing to jungles at night, sending women through checkpoints, and doing voluntary work for the military. The literature also suggests that some of the vulnerabilities as well as the responses to them are ethnically biased (Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004).

The security threats encountered by Sri Lankans have livelihood implications, visible even at the macro level. Table 1 provides a recent snapshot of the sectoral composition of livelihoods in Sri Lanka which highlights the dominance of the service sector. One of the key contributors in that sector is defence expenditure which has accounted for around 4%-5% of GDP in recent times.⁶ As a result the defence expenditure in the island, in per capita terms, is ranked highest in South Asia. The figures do not include massive sums of money which the LTTE poured into the conflict. Though much of this expenditure was

⁶ The defence expenditure figure used here includes expenses incurred on public administration including law enforcement.

spent on expensive weaponry the rest was income or livelihoods for personnel. For instance more than half of the defence expenditure of the GoSL was on payment of salaries. However, these livelihood benefits come at the risk of life or limb (Bhatt and Mistry 2006). For instance between 2002 and 2010 when the war ended, 5,250 security force personnel had died (<http://www.satp.org/>). This can be interpreted as macro level evidence of one aspect of the link between protection and livelihoods during the protracted conflict. Though not specifically linked to the protection issue, other work attempts to quantify the cost of war in Sri Lanka including livelihood losses (Abeyratne 2004; Amirthalingam and Lakshman 2009a; Arunatilake et al. 2001; Bandara 1997; Siluvaithasan and Stokke 2006).

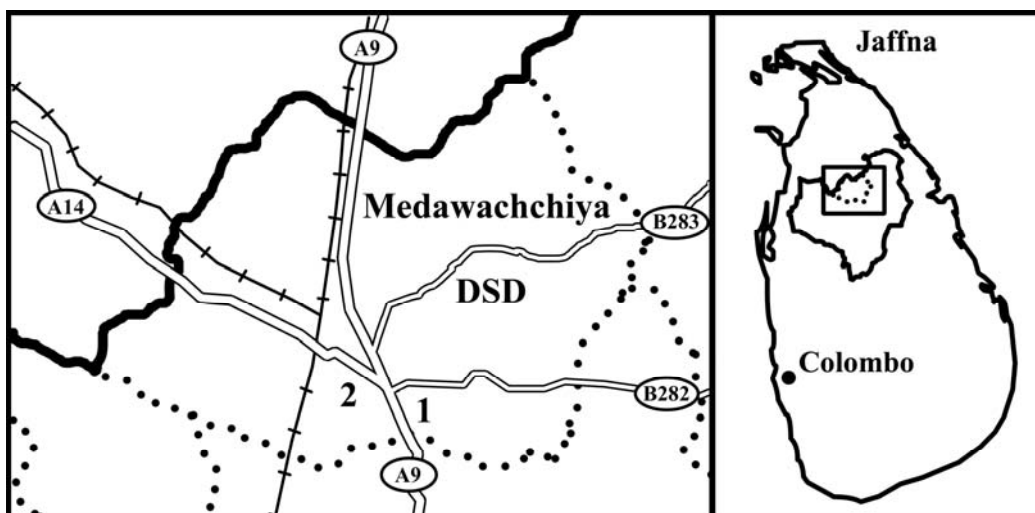
The protraction of conflict necessitated state sponsored welfare programs to safeguard the vulnerable groups from impoverishment and pauperization. For example IDPs are provided with assistance while they are encamped. In the protracted setting to encourage them to move out of camps, the GoSL also distribute out-ration allowances to those IDPs living outside of welfare centres. To qualify for this however one needs to be in the 'IDP list' of the GN officers who are responsible for the distribution of these assistance to the IDPs. Apart from such conflict induced allowances there are other government social net programs, such as Samurdhi program which targets low income households, also provide sustenance and livelihoods to these conflict impacted groups.

3 Life in Medawachchiya

Medawachchiya is one of the seventeen divisional secretariat divisions (DSDs) in Anuradhapura district. Figure 1 maps the location of the DSD. The 37 Grama Niladari (GN) divisions within the DSD broadly represent the war-affected rural economy of Sri Lanka.⁷ Though there has been very little direct violence in this DSD, it too has been impacted by the omnipresent effect of the protracted conflict.

In Medawachchiya DSD, 93.1% of the population are Sinhalese while the rest are mainly Muslims, also known as Sri Lankan moor (DCS 2001). These ethnic groups are not evenly distributed in the DSD. For instance Muslims were clustered in GNs such as Ikirigollawa and Katuwala. The vast majority of these Muslims are IDPs who were displaced by the LTTE from the Northern Province in October 1990. They were formerly living in welfare centres for IDPs.

⁷ GNs are the lowest level (at the village level) of regional administration in Sri Lanka. Several GNs together comprise a DSD, which is the next highest level of regional administration, followed by the district, made up of several DSDs.



Source: Based on Survey Department, and Road Development Authority, GoSL

Figure 1: The area map of Medawachchiya DSD. In both main and inset maps Anuradhapura district boundary is identified with a solid line and Medawachchiya DSD with a perforated line. The numbers 1 and 2 locate Sangilikanadarawa and Katuwala respectively. The main map also traces road (A9 leads northwards to Jaffna and southward to Kandy, A14 to Mannar, B282 to Trincomalee via Horowpothan, B283 to Kebithigollawa) as well as railway networks in the area, to illustrate that both have a major junction situated within Medawachchiya DSD.

Medawachchiya has military significance due to its location on the main supply routes to Jaffna, along the renowned A9 highway, and to Mannara, along the A14 (see Figure 1).⁸ The presence of several encamped military garrisons in Poonawa and Medawachchiya townships within the DSD proves this. Due to this military significance the GoSL has maintained a major security checkpoint at Medawachchiya since April 2007. Goods, services and civilians crossing this point were subjected to a thorough check. While the checkpoint was critical for the protection of the wider community it has had a significant impact on the livelihoods of the people who were compelled to cross it on a daily basis.

For protection reasons no vehicles, under normal circumstances, were allowed through the checkpoint. This made it necessary that passenger and goods transportation along the A9 required two vehicles as goods and merchandise duly security cleared at the checkpoint had to be transferred to another vehicle on the other side of the checkpoint. This effectively prevented banned items from being transported across the checkpoint concealed inside vehicles. The residents of Medawachchiya, however, were treated differently. They could, after due clearance, obtain a special permit from Medawachchiya Police station to take their vehicles across the checkpoint. These vehicles were allowed to cross but only after the vehicles were thoroughly checked. All these measures, while elevating protection levels, did result in enormous delays and costs, with significant livelihood implications for those who crossed this checkpoint. Jeganathan (2004) and Hyndman and de Alwis (2005) provide in-depth analyses of checkpoints and their implications on society.

⁸ Before services to the north were disrupted due to the conflict, Medawachchiya was also a major junction of the railway network. Jaffna and Mannar were linked via this junction to the rest of the country. Figure 1 plots the railway tracks within the DSD.

4 Data and Methodology

The data for this work was obtained by interviewing a group of households randomly selected from Medawachchiya DSD.⁹ A structured questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data. Interviews with relevant GN officers were also important sources of information. Where relevant, we used such information to triangulate the information furnished by the households. One research team, consisting of four members and headed by the first author, was intermittently present in the field during November 2007 to January 2008.

The research was conducted in two of the 37 GNs in Medawachchiya DSD, selected randomly. The sampling unit was the household. A total of 82 cases were considered for this study: 43 from 568 households in Katuwala, and 39 from 345 households in Sangilikanadarawa. The population in Katuwala was of two types: 431 household were registered as permanent residents and 137 were temporary dwellers.¹⁰ We extracted a random sample from an amalgamated household list comprising both these groups. The first group's information was taken from the 'voter registration list' and the second group's from the 'IDP list', both of which were maintained by the Katuwala GN officer. As there were no temporary dwellers in Sangilikanadarawa we used the voter registration list. The sample consisted of 79.3% Sinhalese households; the rest were Muslims. The average household size was four members.

Battles waging in Mannar during the data collection period posed severe problems for this research. This was right after the battles in the East had resulted in victory for the GoSL, and the operational focus was the North. It meant that the military significance of Medawachchiya junction was at the highest level during this time. In terms of field level methodology we had to inform the police at various levels of authority to obtain clearance to do research in this area. This clearance usefully smoothened the research process and helped at various checkpoints en-route to, and within, the villages we visited. As explained in the introduction we believe that the decision to focus primarily on livelihoods, and to use that information to explore more politically sensitive protection issues, was also useful to avoid complications on the field.

⁹ This data was first collected for the work related to the Master in Economics (MEcon) thesis of the first author submitted to the Department of Economics, University of Colombo, in 2008.

¹⁰ The notion of 'temporary' in this context is not time bound and is an administrative categorization only.

5 Livelihood outcomes and livelihood strategies in Medawachchiya: the sample survey results

This section analyses the total sample of 82 households. Sectoral composition of livelihoods of the households in the sample may be summarized as 27 percent in agriculture, 11 percent in manufacturing, and 62 percent in services. These numbers resemble the country sectoral composition in Table 1. All of these sectors, as livelihood providers, have been affected by the war. When asked whether the war had an impact on their current livelihood, 42 households (51 percent) responded with an affirmative. The reported impacts varied across households and included market disruptions, insufficient demand, soaring input prices and other costs. These hardships had resulted in various spontaneous and calculated responses on the part of households. The extended DfID framework predicts that such responses would determine livelihood outcomes including household income. In this section we use household income (earned and non-earned) to approximate the livelihood outcomes of households. Our aim here is to explain the observed patterns of livelihood outcomes using a strategy framework.

Livelihood outcomes

To achieve the above, first, we separated households in the sample into four categories along lines of ethnicity and on whether they had claimed that the conflict had impacted them. The distribution of household income across these four categories is as follows: Sinhalese with self proclaimed conflict impacts accounted for 48 percent of aggregate household income; Sinhalese with no conflict impacts 31 percent; Muslims with conflict impact 15 percent; and Muslims with no conflict impact 6 percent. It follows that households (both Sinhalese and Muslim) which reported conflict impacts, whether positive or negative, numbering 42, accounted for 63 percent of the income of all households. The remaining 40 households, which claimed no conflict impacts, enjoyed only a 37 percent share of income. Ironically it suggests that the income distribution was biased in favour of the conflict impacted households.

Figure 2 analyses the above effect further by illustrating how the ethnicity and war impacts are featured in household income quintiles. In the figure each quintile is separated into the four categories mentioned earlier. For instance, within the first or the richest quintile, 50% are Sinhalese who had experienced conflict impacts. The remaining 50% of income in the first quintile is shared by Sinhalese without conflict impacts and Muslims with or without conflict impacts. The figure illustrates that the percentage of Sinhalese reporting war impacts drops from the first through to the fifth quintile. In contrast, the percentage of Muslims reporting conflict impacts grew with the quintiles. Interestingly this dichotomy across ethnicities is reversed for the group which did not report conflict impacts: the proportion of Sinhalese grew with the quintiles while the proportion of Muslims dropped with the quintiles. It follows that the earlier assertion that income was distributed in favour of the conflict impacted households holds true only for Sinhalese households; it is turned on its head for Muslims.

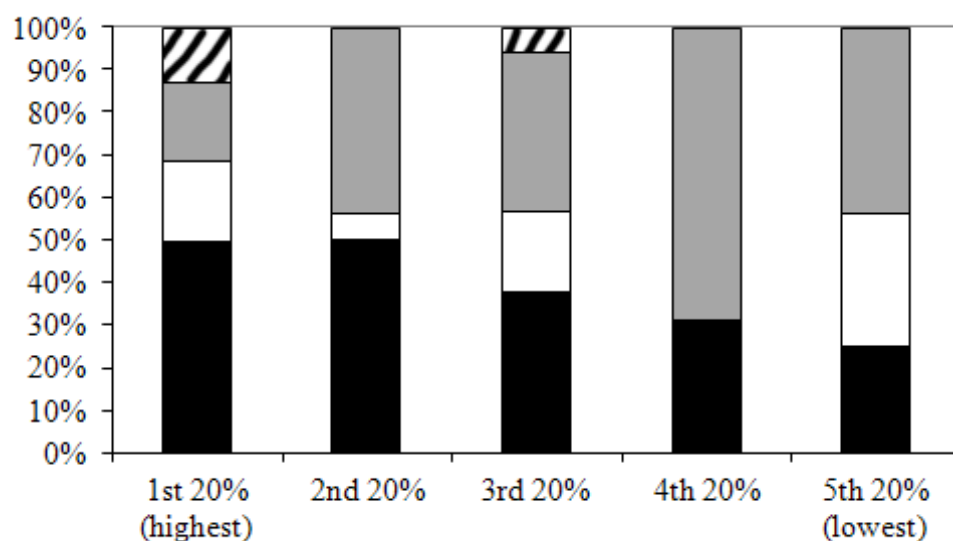
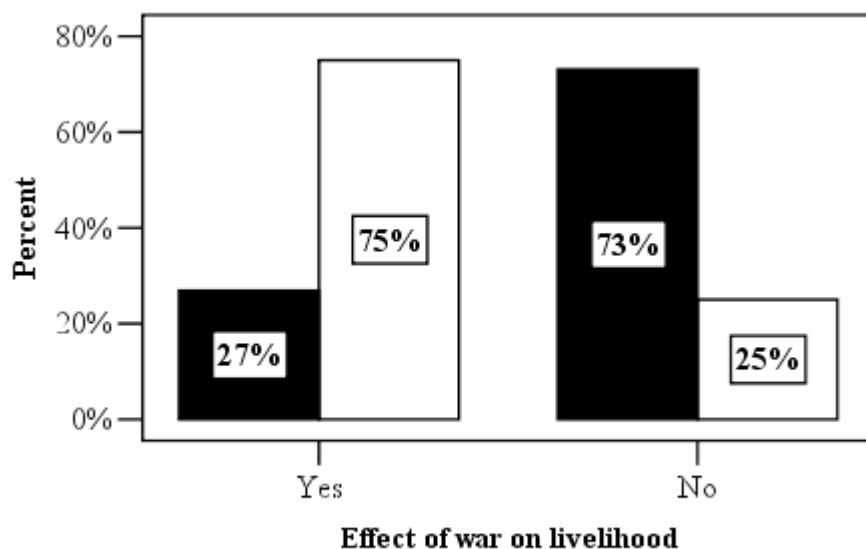


Figure 2: Relative income distribution according to ethnicity and war impact. The stacked bars identify the relative income share of the income quintiles: Sinhalese with war impact (black bars), Muslims with war impact (white bars), Sinhalese without war impact (grey bars), and Muslims without war impact (striped bars).

To shed more light on the above finding we look at how ethnicity and conflict impact information is featured in the poorest stock in the sample. For this purpose we filtered out the poorest stock using the official poverty line (OPL), which for the survey period was Rs.2,567 per person per month (<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/>). Figure 3 illustrates that 75 percent of the Muslim households below the OPL had reported that they were impacted by the conflict. In contrast 73 percent of the poorest Sinhalese reported no conflict impacts. It follows that the presence of conflict impacts is working in opposite directions for the two ethnicities: while Muslims are pushed below poverty by conflict impacts, the Sinhalese are pulled out of poverty.

In what follows we try to understand whether this pattern is coincidental or whether it reflects an underlying causal link between ethnicity and household income. This we do by appealing to the DfID framework. The framework states that the livelihood outcomes are the result of strategies. Thus to establish a causal link between ethnicity and income we need just to show that the household strategies are ethnically biased. It is with this aim that we next examine the livelihood strategies (adaptive and coping) and the protection strategies of the households in the sample.



Source: Sample data from Madawachchiya.

Figure 3: Percentage of households below poverty line by war impact. Black bars show the percentage of Sinhalese households below poverty and white bars the Muslims.

Livelihood and protection strategies

Enlistment is a common livelihood strategy in Medawachchiya. For instance 8.5 percent of the households in our sample had a member who had enlisted. Interestingly none of these were Muslims. The high prevalence of enlistment speaks of two ground realities: (1) that there is a general lack of livelihood opportunities in this locality, and (2) that returns (mainly income) from enlistment, in the eyes of the villagers, more than compensate the personal risks involved. Many of those who joined the military were farmers or youth who had been unemployed. The benefits from employment in the military were visible on the field, in the sense that the assets of households with members employed in the military generally spoke of a level of wealth and prosperity that was not seen with other households. The wages of these enlistees, however, were in the lowest bracket of military wages as most of them were non-commissioned defence personnel. In spite of that the households with enlistees had an average monthly income of Rs.19,666, significantly above the average income of the remaining households (Rs.15,598).¹¹

The benefits of enlistment extend beyond the income it generates. Military personnel are entitled to various other economic as well as non-economic benefits. Economic benefits include low interest housing loans which significantly improve their livelihoods. Another important economic benefit from military service was the development of skills. Some in our sample after retiring from military service were seen employed as electricians, motor mechanics, and drivers, all of which skills were developed during their time in the military.¹² This meant that the ex-service personnel in the sample had access to a dual

¹¹ Income figures recalled by defence personnel in the sample survey are most likely to be understated as they were only able to give an income figure after the deduction of loan payments and other salary deductions.

¹² Retirement from the Sri Lankan army is possible after either 12 years or 22 years for non-commissioned personnel.

cash flow: one a transfer (pension) and the other an earned income. The non-economic benefits mostly involved upward social mobility.

Enlistment was not the only livelihood strategy linked to the military. Some households in the sample (7.1 percent) reported that the military presented a new market for their goods and services. The protracted nature of the conflict meant that these households had no doubt that these incomes would sustain them in future. This livelihood strategy was also used by the Sinhalese. Though clear information was not forthcoming during the interviews, we inferred that social and political assets, including who you knew, mattered in securing contracts to supply the military. Sinhalese, especially the affluent, were seen using their links with local politicians to secure contracts/tenders to supply goods and services to the military as well as to other government institutions. In the sample Muslims were not seen doing this even if they were wealthy.

The movement of people and goods is hampered in situations of conflict. This leads to market failures caused by accessibility problems or by increases in transport costs. Mobility restrictions were cited as a livelihood impediment by 12% of the Sinhalese and 6% of Muslims in the sample. Households, when confronted with such restrictions, abandon their traditional markets for inputs and outputs and link with new ones with more potential. We see this as a migration of livelihoods which may or may not come in tandem with the migration of the household. The households in the sample were seen doing either or both of two things to find new markets: (1) relying on their own experience or external trade links, which are forms of social capital assets, and (2) relying on political assets (connections to the military and local politicians). The second of these gave them access to privileged markets. However, the lack of political assets meant that Muslim households were not able to do this. The availability of the first, however, meant that some of the Muslims in the sample were able to seek out new markets when the old ones became out of bounds or too costly to access.

Medawachchiya, as explained in an earlier section, has been an important host area for conflict displaced migrants mainly from the Northern Province. Our sample too recorded that 52 households (63 percent), both Sinhalese and Muslim, had in-migrated. It is, however, difficult to categorize migration as strictly a protection strategy as some had migrated for livelihood reasons too. From among the Muslim in-migrants 92 percent reported that they migrated seeking protection. In comparison only 31 percent of the Sinhalese in-migrants did so in fear of conflict. This is evidence that there is a strong ethnic bias in the use of in-migration as protection strategy within our sample.

An important strategy that interlaces with the migration strategy is choosing to perpetuate one's identity as an IDP. This strategy also displays an ethnicity bias which may be highlighted using the length of stay information provided by the migrant households. The Muslim in-migrants had on average lived in Medawachchiya DSD for 18 years, 9 years longer than their Sinhalese counterparts. Though they had migrated a long time ago these Muslim in-migrants in the sample were more likely to persist with their IDP identity than the Sinhalese. The 'IDP list' maintained by the GN officer in Katuwala

is proof of this. The IDP status usefully qualifies households for the state and non-state allowances available. The livelihood benefits aside, the need to protect claims to lands they were evicted from also motivates the Muslim households to continue to uphold the IDP identity. It is not uncommon for “communities facing conflict and displacement [to]... pursue goals necessary for their survival and possible return” (Jacobsen 2002: 99). Our evidence for the Muslim community corroborates Brun’s (2003b) work which looks at the Muslim IDPs in Puttalam, in North Western Province of Sri Lanka.

Table 2: Strategy sets by ethnicity

Strategy	Ethnicity		Total
	Sinhalese	Muslim	
Enlistment	20.7%	0%	14.3%
Gains from links with the military (new markets)	10.3%	0%	7.1%
Defence pensions	10.3%	0%	7.1%
In-migration and enlistment	6.9%	0%	4.8%
In-migration and IDP benefits	3.5%	46.2%	16.7%
Seeking new markets	27.6%	7.6%	21.4%
In-migration	20.7%	46.2%	28.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

At the time of data collection with the heightening of conflict and with the increase in the number of attacks by the LTTE against civilian targets, security conditions around Medawachchiya had been a concern for many who lived there. Hence, especially in Katuwala (which is closer to the main checkpoint), there was a renewed concern for security and households were seen to take collaborative actions in helping the defence forces to maintain vigilance in the area. This interest in security was observed on the field in two situations: (1) formation of a civil security committee to maintain vigilance in Katuwala; (2) conducting a project using community labour (shramadane) to clear shrubs along the A9 highway as these have been used regularly to hide roadside bombs. The civil security committee in Katuwala received the support of both Sinhalese and the Muslim communities. However, the majority of the members were Sinhalese and they seemed to be the more active as well. These protection strategies were primarily supported by the social assets at the disposal of the community.

Table 2 summarizes livelihood and protection strategies adopted by conflict affected households in the sample. Enlistment, migration, trade with the military, conflict related

transfers, and seeking out new markets were some of the strategies adopted by the households to face conflict vulnerabilities. Some households used these strategies in combinations which we accounted for separately. For instance, the strategy of enlistment, the strategy of in-migration, and the combination of these two were listed as three separate strategies. That way the numbers in the table can be interpreted as percentages of households in each ethnicity which brought out the significance of each strategy within a given ethnicity.

It is difficult to divide strategies in Table 2 into livelihood strategies and protection strategies, as elements of both are present in any given strategy. However, using polarities like long-term/short-term or violence/non-violence, we can achieve this to some extent.¹³ For instance, enlistment is clearly a livelihood strategy, so is engaging in trade with the military. Similarly, in-migration or flight is clearly a protection strategy. In contrast seeking new markets as old ones are too dangerous has protection elements as well as livelihood elements. In such ambiguous situations our experiences in Medawachchiya helped.¹⁴ For instance in the Medawachchiya setting we were justified in determining that seeking new markets is essentially a livelihoods strategy. This analysis of strategies reveals an interesting pattern: the proportion of Sinhalese employing livelihood strategies is much higher than the proportion of Muslims. To put it differently, the majority of Muslims seem to employ protection strategies. It is clear that the Sinhalese had fewer protection concerns and had more conflict induced livelihood opportunities than the Muslims who had more protection concerns and far fewer, almost nonexistent livelihood opportunities from the conflict.

6 Interplay between protection and livelihood strategies: case studies

In this section we pursue the discussion on protection and livelihood strategies, putting particular emphasis on how they interact/clash with each other in the formulation of livelihood outcomes. This interplay was hinted at in the previous section; for instance when we talk about the how enlistment supports livelihoods but could potentially jeopardize protection. However, the finer nuances of these relationships cannot be reached within the cross sectional method, which is why in this section we use the case study method based primarily on narratives.

In what follows, we select a stratified random sample of four households from among the conflict-impacted 42 households. As we focus only on strategies used to counter conflict impacts, the households that claimed to have had no conflict impacts cannot be considered in this section of the paper. Two strata, namely ethnicity and migration status,

¹³ These polarities, though helpful, must be used sparingly as they miss the middle ground which many strategies will fall into.

¹⁴ These experiences will be laid out in detail in the next section.

are considered in selecting the four households from the conflict impacted group. By migration status we mean whether a particular household had migrated into Medawachchiya or was permanently resident there. The four selected households can therefore, be described as Sinhalese-migrant, Sinhalese-resident, Muslim-migrant, and Muslim-resident. Table 3 summarizes livelihood and protection strategies as well as incomes of the four households.

Household 1 in Table 3 is Sinhalese. The four members of the household, the parents and the two children aged 11 and 4, had migrated from Kabithigollawa to Medawachchiya in March 2006. Kabithigollawa has endured several LTTE attacks during the course of the conflict. However, the immediate reason for Household 1 to leave Kabithigollawa was shock from the death of a close relative in a roadside claymore attack in 2006. The respondent, the wife of the household head, clearly identified fear as the main reason for them migrating and migrating in a hurry. When they migrated, the cost of buying new land and building a house had been partly borne by the respondent's brother. While other relatives and friends had also helped them. Household 1 did not mention any state support towards this.

Table 3: Household livelihood/protection strategies and the resulting monthly incomes Monetary values in Sri Lankan rupees (1 US\$ = Rs. 116)

	Household 1	Household 2	Household 3	Household 4
Location	Sangilikanadarawa	Sangilikanadarawa	Katuwala	Katuwala
Respondent	Acting head of the household (Wife of household head)	Household head	Household head	Household head
Ethnicity	Sinhala	Sinhala	Muslim	Muslim
War impact	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. members	4	4	3	10
Main livelihood	Army soldier	Baker	Daily wage worker	Wholesaler
Other Strategies	This household's previous place of residence was Kabithigollawa in the district of Anuradhapura. Their migration into Medawachchiya can be seen as a forced migration triggered by fear of attacks on civilians. The household head was an Army soldier and was stationed at an operational area. His livelihood involves significant risk to life.	This household has traditional residence of Medawachchiya. Faces subsistence/livelihood hardships due to war. The baker faces mobility restrictions as a result of the fear to travel. This had prompted him to seek alternative markets and demand bases. Cost of production of bakery products had increased as a result of the travel distances between alternative markets, general price hikes of the economy, and security related cost in terms of delays and damage to goods.	Migrated from Andiapuliyankulama in the district of Vauniya. This household's migration was due to the forced expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province by the LTTE. The decision to remain in Katuwala is also linked with fear of protection. The household still maintains their displacement identity in hope of qualifying for displacement benefits and also with hope of laying claim to lost land assets they had been expelled from.	This household has traditional residence of Medawachchiya. They did face threats arising from the general insecurity felt in the area. But faces subsistence or livelihood hardships due to war. The household head had overcome conflict related difficulties of mobility restrictions through trade related networking. These included maintaining stocks of goods in places like Anuradhapura and collecting them to be sold in Madawchchiya at a time of convenience.

Migration, for Household 1, entails negative livelihood implications which primarily arise out of loss of claim to a plot of land in Kabithigollawa. The one acre of teak, coconut and banana which they had shared with a relative had earned them a monthly income of around Rs.5,000 to Rs.8,000. To recuperate from this loss the household head, after moving to Medawachchiya, had enlisted in the Sri Lankan Army (SLA). The fact that he had educated himself up to grade 11 had helped him. This strategy is justified from a livelihood point of view: his salary of Rs.24,000 per month far exceeds the average monthly income in the village. However, the security threats inherent to this strategy are substantial, even though they are not as easily quantified as the benefits. At the time of data collection, Walioya, where the household head was serving, was a forward defence area. Therefore he faced grave risks of being disabled, being killed or being captured by the LTTE. These risks are monetized and risk allowances are paid for those who serve in battle fronts, like the household head in question. Compensation and pension is available for families of soldiers injured or killed in action.

The experiences of Household 1 suggest that their decision to enlist has been driven mostly by economic concerns. This is supported by the work of Gamburd (2004) and Liyanage (2004) who argue that enlistment is mostly an economic decision. Liyanage (2004) notes that once enlisted, the households will describe the status before enlistment as “poor” and the status after as above poverty. As long as returns from armed services far exceed returns from other available work (e.g. farming), it is difficult to describe the former as a containment strategy. Rather in our assessment enlistment better fits the description of an adaptive livelihood strategy. This is an important way which distinguished the household decision of military enlistment from that of joining the militias. Bonwick (2006) describes the latter, in Afghanistan, as constituting primarily a containment strategy.

Household 2 is also Sinhalese but, unlike Household 1, the members of this household are traditional inhabitants of Medawachchiya. The household head, the husband, is an experienced baker who runs his own bakery with the help of his wife and two sons. The household head himself delivers the produce using a small van and a motorbike. Using the lull in the fighting during 2002-2003 peace treaty they expanded their customer base to areas north of Medawachchiya; to places like Vauniya, Kabithigollawa and even to parts of Mannar district. But after 2004, with the war intensifying, travelling in these areas became more risky. As a result the household had gradually withdrawn from these established markets and had sought to replace them with others, which are safer to travel to.

The household head used friendships and trader networks to identify and establish links with his new customers who were mainly wholesale traders. Though the baker’s personal safety was increased by this move, he had to travel more to reach these markets with the effect that his transportation costs had increased. On the other hand the switch from retail to wholesale customers had affected his prices. It follows that the protection strategy had affected the baker’s margin by reducing the revenue and increasing the cost. Such strategies of risk avoidance are commonly used in other conflict regions of Africa and

Asia (Longley and Maxwell 2003). These protection strategies ensure that local markets function despite the protraction of conflict and prevent major disruptions to livelihoods, of course at a cost.

Household 2's experience with the checkpoints and mobility restrictions is worth examination. The baker is clear that the time spent at various checkpoints during his delivery rounds are costly to his business. In addition, many a time the delicate bakery products had got damaged in the process of checking. However, he also appreciates that these checks increase the general security in the area which is good for his business in the long run. The increasing price of inputs, especially coconut oil and flour, is another problem that affects his margins. This can be attributed to general price hikes which are linked to the cost of war. Despite these difficulties in the form of livelihood and security threats the baker makes a monthly profit of Rs.30,000.

Household 3 is a Muslim household with three members that had been forced to migrate to Katuwala from Andiapuliyankulam (also known as Andiapulam) in the district of Vauniya. The household was among the nearly 75,000 Muslims expelled by the LTTE in October 1990. Later their belongings were looted and their house demolished for building material by the LTTE.¹⁵ After this, for several years, they had lived in numerous welfare camps in Anuradhapura before finally coming to Katuwala in 2001. The abruptness of the decision to leave, the degree of force involved, the prolonged encampment, etc. would undoubtedly place the cost and pain of their displacement several notches above that of Household 1. However the head of Household 3 had, most of the time, been able to find limited work wherever the household was displaced to. This finding is in agreement with previous evidence on the resilience of human capital based livelihoods to displacement impacts (Amirthalingam and Lakshman 2009a).

There had been several state sponsored return programmes for residents in Andiapuliyankulam in the late 1990s. Household 3 refrained from using these opportunities to return for fear of their son's safety which was at risk due both to LTTE conscription and to frequent search and detention at the hands of the military. The latter threat was common in former LTTE held areas such as Andiapuliyankulam. Therefore, the decision not to move to Andiapuliyankulam and remain in Medawachchiya was for protection. Before being displaced Household 3 owned two acres of paddy land in Andiapuliyankulam. In contrast in Katuwala they do not own land, cultivatable or otherwise. Currently they share a plot of land with a relative (sister-in-law).

The IDP status has been used by Household 3 mainly as a livelihood strategy. As IDPs they qualify for displacement related government subsidy which is clearly a livelihood benefit. Though in conflict settings humanitarian assistance is viewed as a coping strategy (Le Billon 2001), in protracted conflict like in Sri Lanka such assistance can become a livelihood strategy. We feel that there is room to draw parallels between our work and

¹⁵ Household 3 obtained information about the fate of their house from relatives who had returned to the village.

Justino's (2008) work which argue that benefits from violent conflict may be substantial depending on households' capacity to adapt to changing situations of economic, social and political circumstances.

In addition to livelihood support the IDP status helps ascribe a transient nature to their life in Medawachchiya both legally and psychologically, which supports and maintains the notion that some day they could go back and claim their rights to land and other assets they left behind in Andiapuliyankulam. It seems therefore that this particular strategy has a protection element also—protection of property rights. However we felt that the livelihood element of the strategy was more dominant and more relevant at the time of data collection. As an IDP household, Household 3 received a monthly goods ration valued at Rs.1,250. In addition to this the household has three other sources of income: (1) from casual labour of the household head, (2) from the few chickens belonging to his wife, and (3) the son's income as a day wage worker in a communication centre in Medawachchiya town. The total monthly income of the household is Rs.13,000 which is the lowest among the four households studied here.

Household 4, unlike in the other three, did not face specific security threats. Their problems arise from conflict related livelihood threats. The ten members of this Muslim household are traditional residents of Katuwala. Barring the prevailing general insecurity, the household faces no specific security threats. In fact about the time we collected data, the LTTE terrorist activities targeting the civilian population were stepped up leading to a level of general insecurity much higher than was seen earlier. The checkpoints which came up as a result, had a direct bearing on Household 4's livelihood which depended completely upon wholesale trade—in building materials and in electronic and electrical items. For instance, before the establishment of the Medawachchiya checkpoint, Household 4 had a clientele extending to areas north of Medawachchiya. After the checkpoint was set up this market was segmented and the customer base was reduced. In addition, about this time the manufacturers or the importers of goods stopped delivering to Medawachchiya. The end of the line for them was Anuradhapura, which is about 20 km south of Medawachchiya. It was considered too costly to transport merchandise all the way to Medawachchiya due to mobility restrictions. Thus, Household 4 had to incur additional costs to transport the merchandise onwards from Anuradhapura. Surprisingly, in spite of all these negatives Household 4 and its business seem to be thriving. There are three possible reasons for this: (1) high and inelastic demand for building material (partly created by new immigrants to Medawachchiya), (2) the merchant's monopoly in Medawachchiya, and (3) the general price hike that prevailed during the time of research.

7 Livelihoods, protection and ethnicity: some conclusions

The households in this study had adopted various strategies, sometimes in combinations, to counter the livelihood and security threats of the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka. There was clear evidence that strategies directed at mitigating security concerns (such as flight to escape conflict) invariably caused livelihood failures. The more severe the security concern they were meant to address the more acute this trade-off. Similarly we were able to show that livelihood strategies were also demonstrating a trade-off effect vis-à-vis the protection goals. Enlistment was perhaps the most poignant example of this. How the households balanced or negotiated this trade-off was documented at length here. This proves that there is noticeable resilience to the conflict, but with varying success.

The paper clearly establishes the relationship between the strategies and the incomes of households. It was clear that livelihood strategies increased the incomes whereas protection strategies reduced them. Going beyond this 'obvious' result we were able to uncover that the usage of these two-fold strategies was unevenly distributed between Sinhalese and Muslims, leading to a strong regime of horizontal inequality between the two ethnic groups. This horizontal manifestation of economic inequality brings out the socio-political dimension of ground realities. Thus, by using the DfID framework we argue that differences in asset endowments must be responsible for these economic inequalities. Importantly, in this government held area the political assets are predominantly held by the Sinhalese, who have in fact enjoyed the 'economic rent' (arising from enlistment, and trade with military creating better economic opportunities as war prolongs) of the civil conflict, compared to the Muslims. In this we see that the unequal distribution of political assets seems to be the main reason why Muslims, most of the time, were only exercising protection strategies while the Sinhalese, by contrast, were able to obtain a war induced 'economic rent' by manipulating political assets and converting them into income. The paper should finally be looked upon as evidence that horizontal inequalities can be perpetuated by protracted conflicts, and that resilience to conflict, even with varying success, can determine better household outcomes and uninterrupted livelihoods.

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