

**RIGHTS, SHARES AND CLAIMS :  
REALISING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA**

**WORKING PAPER: RESOURCE MAPPING FOR  
WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS WORK IN SRI LANKA**

**2011-2012**

**SOUTH ASIA  
WOMEN'S FUND**

**SAWF**

**About South Asia Women's Fund(SAWF):**

SAWF is a regional women's Fund, committed to supporting women-led interventions to enhance and strengthen access to women's human rights and countering violations thereof. It has worked closely with partners to support human rights in the context of conflict, identity, socio-economic deprivations and in relation to violence against women. In its present phase, it is committed to supporting the emergence of a regional human rights movement, which would address national and regional concerns. Its work is focused on developing a regional mandate that is informed by national realities, and is responsive to the rights and needs of the individual woman. The organisation, currently works in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

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***Please note that the details of the study's participants are confidential.***



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WOMEN'S FUND



**RIGHTS, SHARES, AND CLAIMS: REALISING  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADB</b>	:	Asian Development Bank
<b>BPfA</b>	:	Beijing Platform for Action
<b>CEDAW</b>	:	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
<b>CSR</b>	:	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DAC</b>	:	Development Assistance Committee
<b>DIIS</b>	:	Danish Institute for International Studies
<b>EC</b>	:	European Commission
<b>GIZ</b>	:	German Development Corporation
<b>INGO</b>	:	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>LGBTI</b>	:	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex
<b>LTTE</b>	:	Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam
<b>OCHA</b>	:	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>ODA</b>	:	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RBA</b>	:	Rights Based Approach
<b>SLFUW</b>	:	Sri Lankan Federation of University Women
<b>SLWNGOF</b>	:	Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum
<b>UNDP</b>	:	United Nations Development Programme
<b>USAID</b>	:	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USGAO</b>	:	US Government Accountability Office
<b>VAW</b>	:	Violence Against Women

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## 1. SRILANKA: GROWING ECONOMY, EMERGING DONOR TRENDS

### Situating the Study in Post-conflict Sri Lanka

In their new listing released on 11 January 2010, the International Monetary Fund recognised the tiny island nation of Sri Lanka as a 'Middle Income Emerging Market', graduating out of the list of countries eligible for help under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust. The country's central bank has forecast a growth rate of about 9 per cent for 2012. The growth rate in 2010 had peaked at 8 per cent, the highest level it has achieved in thirty two years.<sup>1</sup> While the new listing and optimistic forecast was a major source for cheer in the upwardly-mobile and political classes of Sri Lanka, the new gradation was yet another leap change for the country in under a year.

The new listing and optimism over economic growth coincided with the re-election of Sri Lanka President, Mahinda Rajapakse with over 57.8% of votes nationally. His presidential re-election was seen as a mandate by the country for his role in ending of the nearly three-decade long internal ethnic conflict in May 2009. Despite fierce resistance from several international forums and countries, the nation's armed forces had employed its military might to crush the three-decade long insurgency led by Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam<sup>2</sup> that enjoyed control and local support predominantly in the north and north-east. Most reports emerging out of Sri Lanka since the end of the internal conflict chronicle the return of peace with efforts made towards reconciliation. A massive thrust is also evident on accelerating economic growth and rebuilding of the war-ravaged economy. While there are widespread concerns expressed by the international community over the conduct of the war and widespread human rights violation during the final phase of the conflict in 2009, Sri Lanka chose to contest the allegations and constitute a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee<sup>3</sup> to work towards re-integration of the Tamil and Muslim minorities into the mainstream.

Since 2009, Sri Lanka has been battling international criticism over how it had crushed the conflict and the human rights violations reported in its wake. There is complex societal

<sup>1</sup> ShiharAneez says "Sri Lanka Cenbank Forecasts 2012 Growth at 9.0 Pct," Reuters, April 11, 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/04/11/srilanka-economy-forecast-idINL3E7FB16U20110411>.

<sup>2</sup> LTTE was a separatist militant organization founded in May 1976 by VelupillaiPrabhakaran that sought the creation of an independant state for the Tamils in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The struggle for a separate homeland that began in 1983 continued till 2009 when the Sri Lankan military crushed the resistance.

<sup>3</sup> The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee was an inquiry appointed by Sri Lankan government in May 2010 to look into the conduct of the Sri Lankan Civil War against the LTTE and provide recommendations for reconciliation and peace building. The commission tabled its report on 15 November 2011 largely absolving the government of human rights violations and wrongful conduct in the final months of the conflict.

distress that has built up in the heavily militarised and centralised systems of control in the north and the east that not only exclude most residents, but affects especially the women. The government has been accused of largely ignoring the vulnerabilities of the population, especially the women from minority communities living in the conflict-affected northern and eastern provinces. Women are said to be facing a desperate lack of security, especially of the economic kind, in the aftermath of the long civil war. Reports by non-governmental organisations and media from the post-conflict zone suggest that with limited physical mobility, the ability to access assistance and seek out reliable institutions to approach are severely lacking. Moreover, three decades of civil war has resulted in emergence of tens of thousands of female-headed households that have experienced numerous waves of conflict, displacement and militarisation.

The Sri Lankan government appears to have largely ignored the vulnerabilities of women and constrained access for international humanitarian organisations and even more so for local civil society, leading to a severe deficit of human security.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the lack of adequate female civilian officers and few programmes nominally directed at women within a largely male dominated Sinhalese military structure increases the magnitude of the challenge.

Bilateral and Multilateral development agencies are among the principal vehicles through which states make financial and other resources available to implementation and fulfil their development commitments, including commitments on gender equality and women rights.<sup>5</sup> An OECD-DAC report expressed key concerns over donors channelling resources through government systems, creating a risk that civil society organisations lose funding for their advocacy and service delivery roles. Several women organisations that participated in SAWF's mapping survey echoed this concern and also cautioned that such approach would adversely affect works on women issues as national development priorities often overlooked gender equality concerns.

Bi-lateral and multilateral aid has been flowing into Sri Lanka since the formation of the Colombo Plan of 1950<sup>6</sup> for cooperative economic development. While concessional aid from external sources - both bilateral and multilateral funded large public investment programmes, the donors and the quantum of funds flowing in for Sri Lanka's development changed during

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<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group, Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East - International Crisis Group, Asia Report (Colombo/Brussels, December 20, 2011), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/217-sri-lanka-womens-insecurity-in-the-north-and-east.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> Lydia Alpizar et al., Trends in Bilateral and Multilateral Funding, FundHer Research Update Brief Series (AWID, March 19, 2010), <http://www.awid.org/About-AWID/AWID-News/Brief-1-FundHer-Research-Update-Brief-Series>.

<sup>6</sup> The Colombo Plan of 1950 provides a framework within which international cooperation efforts are promoted to raise the standard of living of people in the region. In 1980, it was extended indefinitely.

the years of the LTTE conflict. Uncertainty in the political atmosphere and the military offensives in the north and the east reflected on the donor patterns too. However, the aid flow changed course following the devastation wrecked by the Asian Tsunami of 2004. Despite the escalation of conflict between the government and the LTTE, aid the tune of \$1.81 bn flowed into Sri Lanka, with China and Japan proving to be the biggest bi-lateral contributors with significant contributions by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), contributing towards post-tsunami rehabilitation and supporting the displaced. In fact, the immediate aid provided was limited compared to the funds earmarked to be spent over longer periods. For instance, the summary of progress released by the US Government Accountability Office (USGAO) in 2007 suggested that only 20 per cent of the tsunami-relief funds allocated by the US for Sri Lanka had been used by the end of two years after the disaster in 2006.<sup>7</sup>

Sri Lanka's growth story has been punctuated by a few epochal moments that have altered the trajectory of the nation's development. Mapping the aid flowing into Sri Lanka would require the breaking down of the country's past into at least four distinct phases and time ranges viz. post-independence nation-building that began around 1950, the years of internal strife between the ethnic Tamils and the Sinhalas between 1983 and 2009, the reconstruction and rebuilding phase post Asian Tsunami of 2004 and finally the post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding from 2009 onwards.

By 2009, when the final assault against the LTTE had been launched by the government, multilateral aid for Sri Lanka had once again peaked to the highest ever level. The political and economic climate has witnessed a steady improvement in over two years since the conflict ended in Sri Lanka and the focus of the operational environment shows a shift from humanitarian relief to early recovery and development, with the trends expected to hold strong through 2012 too.<sup>8</sup>

### **SAWF's Resource Mapping Exercise**

SAWF study attempts to map the aid flowing in and the patterns of donor funding for organisations working with women or on issues of women's rights across Sri Lanka. In the first phase of data collection, the endeavour was to identify organisations spread across the country that worked directly or indirectly with women's groups or on issues pertaining to women and for this information was collected from several organisations working on women issues. With further cleaning of data, information from 54 organisations was used for further analysis and out of these, 10 organisations were interviewed in detail on issues related to

<sup>7</sup> Country Partnership Strategy Sri Lanka- 2009-2011 (Asian Development Bank, October 2008).

<sup>8</sup> "UNHCR - Sri Lanka", 2012, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4878e6.html>.

resource generation and funding pattern. These organisations have been working in the following areas:

- Women affected by conflict
- Representation of women in the political arena
- Leadership building, economic and social empowerment of rural women
- Post-tsunami rehabilitation
- Violence against Women- intervention, prevention and advocacy.
- Working on women issues in the plantation sector
- Reproductive health
- Advancement of human rights including those of LGBTBI
- Peace building, strengthening democracy and preserving human rights in Sri Lanka
- Health care and counselling services for war affected
- Gender, including creating awareness on gender issues,
- Confronting violations of women's rights as human rights
- Promoting research, training, lobbying, advocacy

Nearly 79.6% of the organisations that were a part of the SAWF donor mapping report, said that their work was not centred around women alone, but had a more holistic focus that incorporated all genders. Amongst these 20% of organisation's focus was largely on women and 5.5% were focussing on both women and children. Only about 20% of the organisations surveyed worked only with women.

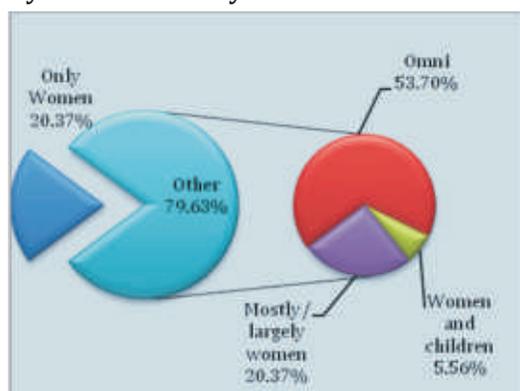


Figure 1: Organisational Focus

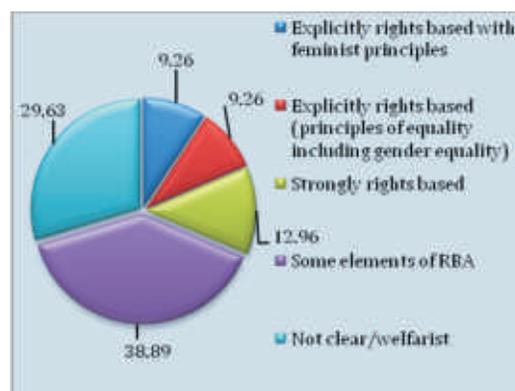


Figure 2 : Approach taken by the Organisations

The said study also explored the approach taken by organisations that participated in the survey. The approach of nearly 39% of the respondents had elements of right-based approach, while only 9% were explicitly rights based with feminist principles.<sup>9</sup> The approach adopted by nearly 30% of the respondents appeared unclear, largely veering towards the welfarist approach, as was confirmed by a few Key Informants too.

<sup>9</sup> Please refer to Annexure I for definitions of these categorizations.

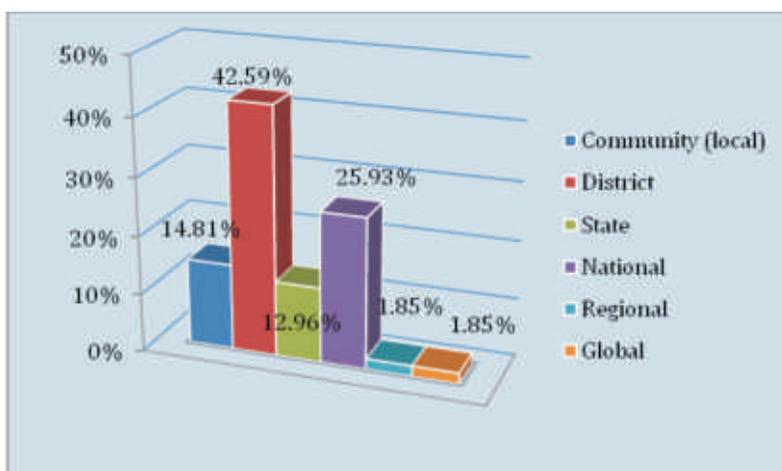


Figure 3: Operational area of the Organisations

The groups that participated in the survey were largely those that operated at the district and community level, with 42 and 15% respectively.

Out of the total respondents, 48% were operating in Conflict affected areas.

To maintain the balance and objectivity of the mapping, in-depth interviews were also

conducted with donors - both international and national. The study also used the help of Key Informants (KIs) to understand the processes and patterns of applying and securing aid, its disbursement and finally, its effective utilisation at the grass-root level. Secondary literature available on multilateral and bilateral donor aid as well as reports on general donor trends in post-conflict Sri Lanka have been used to contextualise the findings of the study and enhance the analysis.

**Challenges/Limitations of data collection:** A few among those that were approached were also reticent to openly participate in the donor-mapping exercise. Another key concern was authentication of the information delivered by Sinhala and Tamil organisations to the survey questionnaires distributed. Interpretation of comments and responses, that remained culturally and contextually appropriate and sensitive to prevailing sentiments was a tough task. SAWF used its Sri Lankan resources to ensure that the translations are as close as possible to the original comments in the vernacular languages. However, the availability of secondary literature has, to a considerable extent helped bridge the gap between raw data collection and analysis in this report.

### Women's Rights Activism in Sri Lanka:

In a statement to the UN in March 2010, Sri Lanka admitted that one of the major challenges ahead for the government was the economic empowerment of women. 32% of the women are employed in the informal sector as unpaid family workers in agriculture or as small vendors, while 40 % are employed in the formal sector. Most organisations working with women are small in size - 50 % with annual incomes of less than \$50,000, as well as in human resources (25% working without any full time staff).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Alpizar *et al.*, Trends in Bilateral and Multilateral Funding.

Similarly, in the field of education, while women do have access to higher education, there are fewer women in professional jobs. Bilateral Donors GIZ (German Development Corporation) that works in tandem with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education illustrate this by pointing out that while 70% of law students are women, 80% of lawyers across the country are men. Similarly, while a majority of primary school teachers are women, few graduate to the position of Principals, which is a male-dominated bastion. GIZ summarises that the cultural orientation of the Sri Lankan society makes it challenging for organisations to attempt to change the role of women while keeping it culturally acceptable. Most government departments are also found to maintain a very traditional outlook with fixed ideas of roles of men and women.

Politics remains a male-dominated field and women's political participation is highly limited. Women comprise only 5% of the members of Parliament and 3 of the members of the local administration. In fact, an appeal on a network of Sri Lanka's NGOs that work on women's issues suggested that there were only 35 candidates nominated by the three major parties of Sri Lanka in the elections held in 2010. However, women's groups have been working on increasing political participation of women in the country. For example, UN Women's latest report<sup>11</sup> shows that significant support is being given to women's organisations for strategic advocacy interventions to encourage women's participation in local politics. Already, two political parties have agreed to boost the number of women candidates from two percent to 20 percent. Apart from promoting political participation, the United Nations Country Team of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, ILO, UNV have been mandated to spearhead the joint UN programme on prevention of and response to gender-based violence in Sri Lanka with grants allocated to the tune of \$969,588.

Sri Lanka has seen the emergence of several women-centric initiatives through the conflict-ridden years of the 90s and the first decade of the 21st century. For instance, the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum (SLWNGOF) established in 1993 is a network whose work with the sixty odd organisations that are a part of it, helps understand the level of activism and efforts happening on the ground towards improving the cause of Lankan women. The forum works in tandem with several other South Asian countries through UNESCAP to promote the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)<sup>12</sup> and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>13</sup> SLWNGOF also coordinates with government bodies in planning national level strategies as well as drafting

<sup>11</sup> UN Women, Annual Report 2010-2011, June 2011, [http://www.unwomen.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/06/UNwomen\\_AnnualReport\\_2010-2011\\_en.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/06/UNwomen_AnnualReport_2010-2011_en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> The Beijing Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment that aims at accelerating the implementation of strategies for the advancement of women and removing obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

new policies to recognise and protect women's rights in the country. It has representation from all ethnic communities across Sri Lanka and also represents the geographical and economic diversity of the nation, including organisations from the restive north and the north-east.

Organisations working out of Sri Lanka admit that there is considerable donor driven work on economic empowerment of women, prevention of violence against women and towards their increased political representation. The other key issues receiving funding are microfinance and livelihood. As identified during the discussions, funding for post-tsunami work continues to be one of the bigger areas of donor interest along with work amongst women in the plantation industry. Donors that began work in Sri Lanka post Asian Tsunami have tried to diversify the activities they fund. While the number of organisations they supported had been reduced from 21 to 14, a significant number of them - eleven - are in the North East, while the other three are in the relatively stable south. Out of the fourteen, eight are organisations that focus their work on women's rights, with three organisations headed by women.

There are a few CSR initiatives that are intended to benefit women working in the apparel industry. Similarly telecommunications major, Etisalat runs an income generation scheme called Project Sondurudiriya for rural housewives that recycles marketing waste into grocery bags, with a part of the proceeds of the sale being redirected to the women. Some groups like MJF Charitable Foundation run by the Dilmah Tea Group also fund work with the underprivileged and have a range of activities, including small grants for their Small Entrepreneurship Programme. They contribute to building a Resource and Training Centre for the Sri Lankan Federation of University Women (SLFUW) which will provide vocational training as well as other community activities for young women graduate and undergraduate students in Colombo.

One of Sri Lanka's bigger bilateral partners USAID is working on a public-private partnership programme aimed at expanding the garment manufacturing operation of a large company of Sri Lanka to the north to generate job opportunities for at least 750 full-time staff, with an emphasis on supporting widows, single mothers and families with disabled members. A USAID factsheet also reveals that efforts were on to mobilise about \$65 mn<sup>14</sup> in investments from Sri Lankan companies across various fields.

*There are hardly any National donors on Sri Lanka - after nearly three decades of civil war, Sri Lanka is in a post-war phase - but the conflict has yet not ended. There is a lot of emphasis on rehabilitation, peace building and strengthening the economy.*

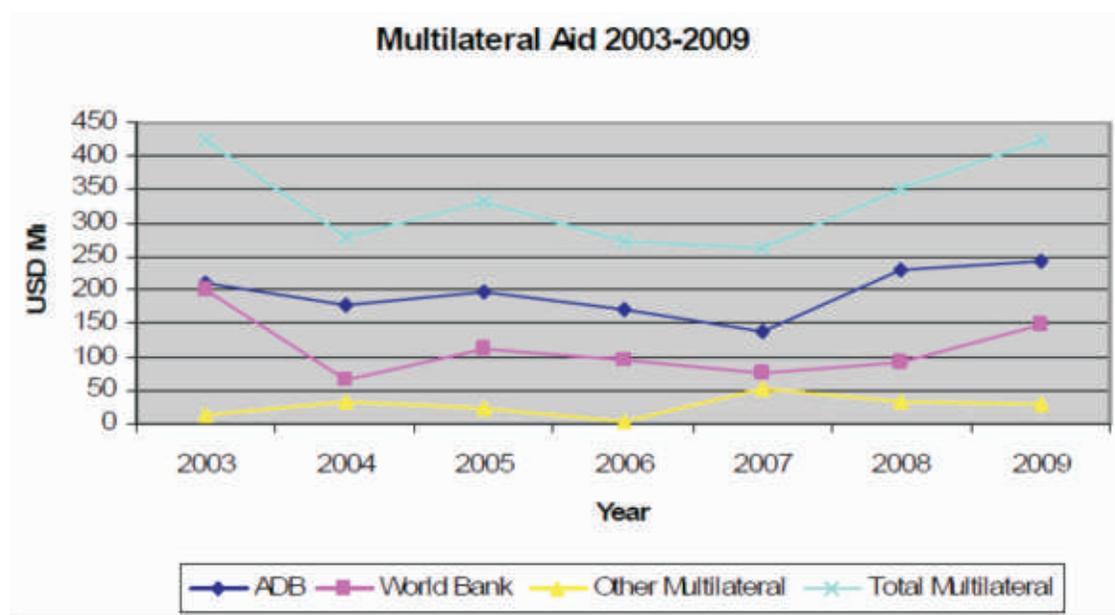
*-A national women-based organisation*

<sup>14</sup> USAID, "Supporting a Sustainable Economy in Northern Sri Lanka", August 9, 2010, <http://www.usaid.gov/press/factsheets/2010/fs100809.html>.

## 2. CHANGING DONOR TRENDS

The majority of Sri Lanka's aid, to the tune of roughly 80% has been in the form of either bilateral or multilateral aid, with the major donors being Japan, ADB and the World Bank. A look at the figures of multilateral aid flowing into the country (see diagram) between 2003-2009 shows a significant dip in 2004, when violence was peaking in the LTTE conflict and unrest had spread across the country. After see-sawing through the final years of the conflict, aid flow picked up again by 2007, bringing it back to pre-2003 figures of over four hundred - four hundred and fifty million US dollars.<sup>15</sup>

By 2005, there were at least thirty international agencies supporting microfinance in Sri Lanka, with a commitment aggregating nearly \$200mn. Microfinance began playing a bigger role in the financial sector, especially in organising assistance post-tsunami. However, there was also criticism that aid effectiveness was suffering due to the lack of local expertise among aid agencies offering micro finance or proper monitoring and evaluation tools. The system of over reliance on the government to provide financial services and lack of operation coordination among donors created a sort of crisis. The aid scenario post-tsunami was further exacerbated by the ill-advised practice of mixing grants with debts, imposing interest rate ceilings that made operations unsustainable for MFIs.<sup>16</sup>

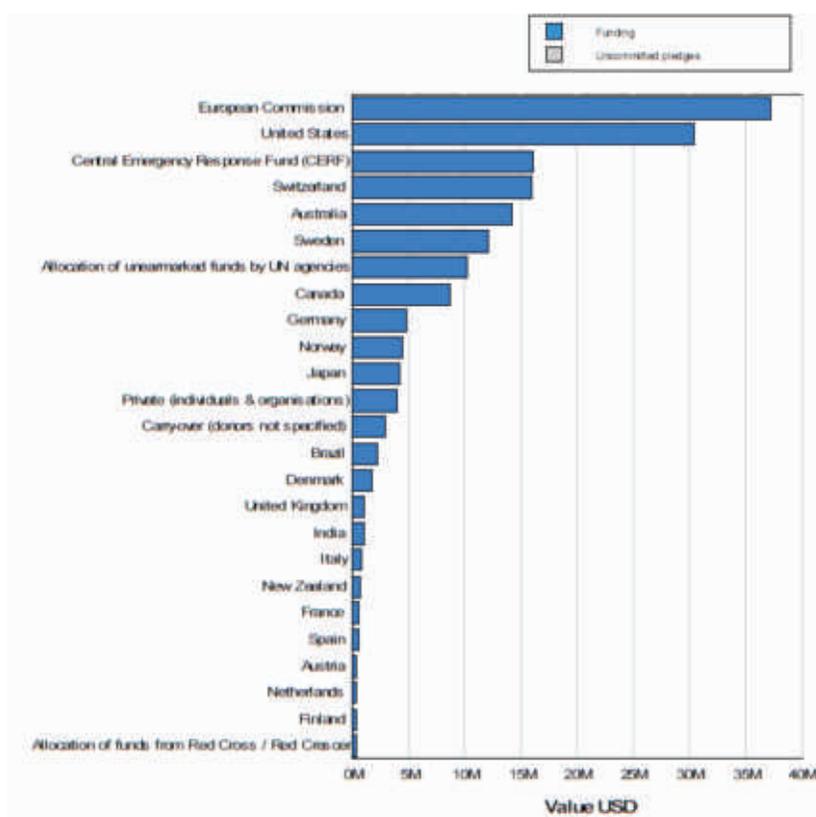


Source: Institute of Policy Studies

<sup>15</sup> Deshal de Mel and Anneka de Silva, "Aid Effectiveness in Sri Lanka" (Colombo: Institute of Policy Studies, Sri Lanka, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> UNDP, Sri Lanka, "Donors and Other Partners", n.d., [http://www.undp.lk/about\\_us/Pages/Donors And Other Partners.aspx](http://www.undp.lk/about_us/Pages/Donors%20And%20Other%20Partners.aspx).

According to figures compiled by OCHA on the basis of information provided by donors and appealing organisations, by 2011 the biggest donor to Sri Lanka was the European Commission that contributes roughly 21.2% of the total humanitarian aid flow to the country pegged at \$37.3million followed by the United States that contributes \$30.4mn, which is about 17.3% of the total aid. Bilateral aid is also flowing in from most of the European nations like Switzerland, Germany, Norway, UK and Sweden, apart from Australia and Canada. OCHA figures show that the flow of funds to Sri Lanka in the form of humanitarian aid totals to \$1.76bn.<sup>17</sup>



Source: UNOCHA

Sri Lanka's elevation as a middle income country has raised fears that it would limit the nation's eligibility for 'concessional aid'. For instance, the figures released by UNDP Sri Lanka show that in the period between 2008- 2011 aid raised by them peaked in 2009 at \$26.24mn before falling drastically to \$9.03mn, following the end of the LTTE conflict. The funding figures did pick up in 2011 to \$14.54 mn<sup>18</sup>, but several bilateral funding programmes were

<sup>17</sup> "Sri Lanka Emergencies for 2011 - Total Humanitarian Funding Per Donor in 2011" (Fts UNOCHA, n.d.), [http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha\\_R24c\\_C196\\_Y2011\\_asof\\_\\_1203120204.pdf](http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24c_C196_Y2011_asof__1203120204.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> UNDP Sri Lanka, "Donors and Other Partners."

discontinued from 2010 onwards. However, there is a scope for optimism on the multi-lateral funding front with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank turning key funders for Sri Lanka. The World Bank has doubled its investment in Sri Lanka after upgrading it to be eligible for loans with interest or IBRE loans.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Japan International Cooperation Agency is also working in infrastructure development, especially in health sector.

However, several UN organisations too severely cut down aid offered to Sri Lanka. The possibility of limited aid also raises the need to ensure that aid is managed and delivered where it is needed, in a better fashion. Sri Lanka based organisations agree across board that there is little funding to be solicited nationally. Most funds are the result of bilateral or multilateral funding or international donor organisations working in niche areas of development.

There is limited philanthropic and Corporate Social Responsibility<sup>20</sup> funding available in Sri Lanka, due to the protracted years of conflict blighting private enterprise, unlike in countries like India, where private donors constitute a significant donor group. Sri Lanka as yet, has no law on CSR, but the government has begun incentivising working in certain regions or activities. For instance, investments in the north and east get special incentives including a 10-20 years tax holiday. The focus currently is on the special role of CSR in a post conflict zone (or CSR+ as international organisations, International Alerts, call it): companies have programmes specifically aiming at aiding the recovery process, supporting internally displaced persons, or services for 'war heroes' or those injured during the war. However, unlike their Colombo-based counterparts, most NGOs working in the Northern territories and the east are compelled to approach government bodies or through a military task force for access to funding.

Several organisations SAWF interacted with said that there were few public-private initiatives to improve the chances for funding for post-conflict development work. There however, appear to be fledgling attempts to foster such business alliances by the USAID mission in Sri Lanka through a Public/Private Alliance (PPA) Program with Sri Lankan companies that aim to help young adults in this very fragile, post-conflict environment, build a set of basic, local skills that will encourage large Sri Lankan companies based in the south and east to invest in

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<sup>19</sup>Through the years till 2010, SL was eligible for the IDA loans, i.e. interest free loans with a 30-40 year grace period and grants. Now SL per capita income is USD 2000 and more and hence it's been upgraded. So money available for SL from this year will be doubled.

<sup>20</sup> CSR policy functions as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism that helps businesses to monitor and ensure its active compliance with the spirit of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. CSR attempts to embrace responsibility for the company's actions and encourage a positive impact through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees and communities.

the north. These partnerships aim to create around 10,000 full-time jobs in northern Sri Lanka.

The Danish Institute of International Studies conducted an evaluation in 2008 for their government to assess the aid flow, what works and what does not in Sri Lanka based on the Paris Declaration.<sup>21</sup> The study concluded that with respect to Official Development Assistance (ODA), there was a high level of aid disbursement for the government sector at nearly 89%, of which 77.6% was channelled through the government budget, 65% of disbursements effected using Sri Lanka's public financial management systems. For instance, 95% of investment in the health sector is done by the government, while only the remaining 5% are donor funds, thus only playing the role of a key support in this sector. Nearly all services in the health sector, including preventive health services as well as out-patient care are delivered through the government. 85-90% of hospitals too belong to the government, which means that the private sector involvement is very small. Moreover, with the private players and NGOs being really small, with little scope for scaling up, the public-private partnerships could be highly unlikely in vital sectors like these.

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<sup>21</sup> The Paris Declaration of February 2005 sets out a monitorable framework of commitments and actions for improving aid effectiveness and was signed by more than 100 signatories that included donors, multilateral and bi-lateral donor agencies, international organisations, governments of developing countries and regional development banks.

### 3. GAPS IN FUNDING

Women's organisations underline the importance of policy makers and donors being more keyed in to ground realities. They say that the policy makers shirk away from addressing critical issues and hardly consider them as work relevant enough to warrant focus and funding.

In the health sector, while HIV and AIDS receive a massive portion of donor aid, women's sexuality and related issues appear to be a taboo. Abortion rights, legalising or decriminalising abortion remain underfunded work.

Societal issues like incest are rarely on the discussion table or considered for funding just as marital rape is not criminalised. While there appears to be funding for work on violence against women, marital violence is largely off the agenda. Organisations say that sexual abuse of boys and girls also remain largely neglected.

With Sri Lanka keen to portray itself as a peaceful, progressive country, senior women's rights activists say that post-war funding is drying up earlier than the mandate of work that needs to be completed. Democratisation is still under-funded and there is heavy military presence across northern regions of the country. The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission set up by the Sri Lankan government to understand and address the aspirations and demands of the minority Tamils of the Northern provinces are learnt to have recommended that much more work needs to be done in the developmentally backward northern regions.

There is a huge disparity between the patterns of development and growth in the largely peaceful southern regions of the island and the so far restive northern and eastern regions. As a result, the per capita income and lifestyle across the regions too vary massively, creating huge inequalities. Moreover, there are severe accountability issues in the post-war scenario, with quality level inputs required for addressing VAW. Organisations admit that there is not only a gap in intervention, but also in the lack of accountability systems after the war. They say that there has been no accountability after the war; histories need to be recorded.

Gender mainstreaming, the much discussed and highly contested strategy, was prioritised to contribute to a gradual reassessment of the traditional gender based-societal norms. While detailing the Sri Lanka experience on putting gender mainstreaming into practice, researchers noted that 'it is salutary to underscore a caveat that gender mainstreaming is not gender 'male streaming' or incorporating women in national development

programmes that perpetuate gender inequalities. The conceptual framework for gender mainstreaming has to be the recognition of women's rights as human rights, the equitable gender division of labour, the promotion of equal access of women and men to assets, resources and services and the control of these resources, to ensure the empowerment of women.<sup>122</sup>

One of the factors could be the rise of migrant labour as the biggest foreign exchange earner, with remittances from Sri Lankans working abroad replacing earnings from garment manufacturing and export and tourism at the top of the list.<sup>23</sup> Women form about 60-80% of the migrant work-force and therefore, are the major contributors to the economy. There is however, ambivalence over the resources devoted to gender mainstreaming, as it has proved to fail its goals of achieving gender equality. This is not only because of differential conceptual understanding, but also due to lack of political and administrative will that also reflects the patriarchal societal set-up.

The conservatism within the society appears to be a major stumbling block with a huge gap emerging between the positioning of women and their ideological representation. Women's organisations report that evidence-based advocacy, championing for women's rights in the economy, better social safety nets and equality in wages are areas that need to be addressed soon.

There is a need to contextualise the socio-economic and political positioning of men and women in the modern, post-conflict Sri Lankan society. With the changing social norms between men and women enforced by migration, displacement and conflict, the direct long-term impact is on the status of women. Organisations say that there are few funders willing to invest in long-term work; most are keen to fund only one-off projects. Within post-conflict work too, there are fewer advocacy projects for decent and fair wages for women and support for safe migration. Very little focus has so far been placed on the plight of the returnee migrants or on adequate support systems for them.

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<sup>22</sup> Swarna Jayaweera, "Gender Mainstreaming and Non-governmental Organisations: The Sri Lanka Experience," in *Putting Gender Mainstreaming Into Practice* (UNESCAP, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Bankok Post, "Sri Lanka's Migrant Labour Keeps Economy Afloat," RemittancesGateway.org, January 31, 2012, <http://www.remittancesgateway.org/index.php/press-clippings/economic-news/1090-sri-lankas-migrant-labour-keeps-economy-afloat>.

## 4. THE FUND RAISING CONUNDRUM

The survey conducted by SAWF among Sri Lankan organisations revealed that over 46% of the respondents believed that the biggest hurdle in the way of raising funds was the perception among donors that the women's rights work for which aid was sought, was not important enough - concentration as there on peace-building efforts and Tsunami rehabilitation efforts. They report that donor fatigue is setting in with a number of big European donors like HIVOS, *Canadian International Development Agency* and *Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency* that have been active in Sri Lanka for years, slowly withdrawing much of their aid.

There was widespread consensus across the board that funding opportunities were largely limited for smaller regional organisations, unless they present joint proposals with bigger national NGOs. In such a situation, the bigger organisations often end up dictating policy and strategy for drafting proposals and attracting donors. Other groups said that those working at the regional level rarely get to know of sizeable international funding that is available. Most of the grass-root level organisations also face problems of networking and are forced to rely on external academics and consultants who are considered to be more knowledgeable about funding processes. These organisations say that such a situation leads to the academics/consultants dictating the agenda and taking away the credit and recognition, while the hard work is done by the smaller organisations.

The DIIS study<sup>24</sup> suggests a few major concerns with regard to donor capacity in Sri Lanka, like the absence of a joint development partner country assistance strategy, lack of options for flexibility in operating norms and procedures laid down to make it better adaptable to local situations, lack of connect among field staff of national and international NGOs to understand and escalate local contexts and issues.

Moreover, with recent changes in the aid architecture, several multilateral funders have indicated preference to work either through the government or a consortium of organisations that make it difficult for funds to trickle down to smaller organisations with limited focus and ambit of operations. For instance, a big European donor explained how the Sri Lankan ministry it works with requisitions their national government with their demand for fund allocations for projects that are in the pipeline, which are then approved and allotted and disseminated through government channels.

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<sup>24</sup> Danish Institute for International Studies, The Paris Declaration - Evaluation of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration| Case Study Country Level Evaluations|Sri Lanka, May 2008  
[http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Subweb/paris\\_evaluation\\_web/files/pdf/original/sl\\_pd\\_final\\_may.pdf](http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Subweb/paris_evaluation_web/files/pdf/original/sl_pd_final_may.pdf).

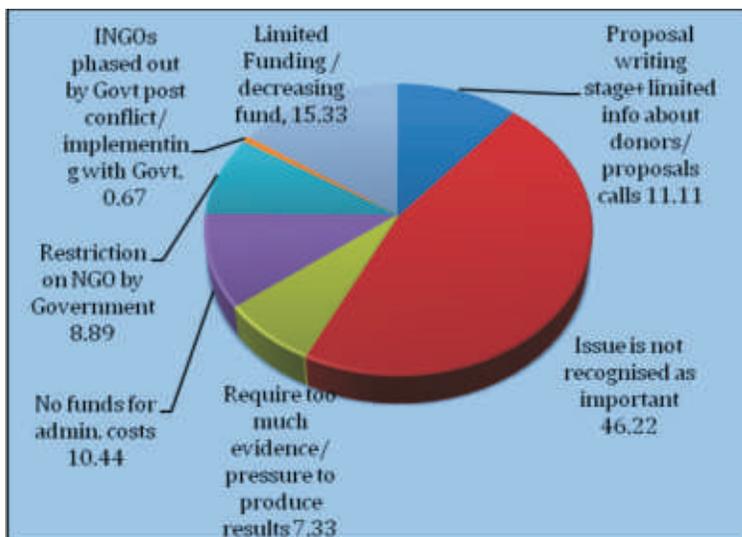
The government control and scrutiny over aid flow into the post-conflict areas of the north too poses concerns for organisations working there. The government's motives are reported to be to regulate flow of funds from the Tamil diaspora spread far and wide in the West. Tamil financial support comes under rigorous scrutiny to dissuade the possible pooling of money and resources for fears of security and the resurgence of the Tamil agitation. This has led to a debate over the politics of aid and the vested interests involved in funding flowing in for post-conflict work. Also the climate of distrust has reportedly crept in between the government and the NGOs, thereby affecting the sources of funding for them. This situation has also impacted work among the war-affected and displaced.

*There is a lot of distrust of INGOs here – and a lot of pressure on them to open up and they are constantly accused of being corrupt – so they are being pushed out of the country.*

– Multilateral Donor

Several international organisations and donors that arrived in Sri Lanka to participate in the post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation process also pumped in a lot of international aid to the country. However, in the chaos that ensued in the early months of 2005, the Sri Lanka government imposed stricter measures to regulate money flow and accountability of organisations involved in developmental work when led to severe restrictions imposed on foreign NGOs and donor organisations. Several of them that wanted to continue working in Sri Lanka even after the completion of their projects, found it untenable to remain in the country, resulting in loss of funding for several smaller organisations.

The rigidity of mainstream funders in their willingness to fund for particular issues/ causes,



was one of the main hurdles in the way of smaller organisations working on limited projects for securing funds. For instance, funding in health that was earmarked for HIV/AIDS would not be extended to projects that work with the health of sex workers. Therefore, organisations said that they were forced to re-package the issues they support vis-à-vis the requirements stated by the funders in their 'calls for proposals'. The

Figure 4 : Reasons for difficulty in fund raising

way the funding package is formulated - log frame, online applications, the level of English

required- both technical and stylization that is alien to vernacular groups, complex monitoring and evaluation formats- are a tall ask for smaller organisations. Therefore, only big organisations end up with access to funds. As reflected in the given graph (figure 4), 11% of the organisations identified that the difficulties faced by them lied at the initial stages (like proposal writing, lack of information about donors, poor access to internet etc.). Those organisations that were situated outside Colombo expressed difficulty in completing the processes involved in drafting proposals. One organisation mentioned how it took them about six months to draft a proposal for EU funding, while another USAID funding proposal consumed over three months. Despite the time devoted, the funding was rejected citing a minor technicality. Lack of affiliation to bigger international NGOs often becomes a major handicap that chokes funding to the grass-root level organisations. Another organisation mentioned how hiring consultants to draft proposals was an expensive proposition with no guarantee of securing funding, leaving cash-strapped NGOs with added overheads that are not reimbursed.

Another key issue raised by respondents was the lack of fund allocations for administrative costs. Over 10% of the respondents mentioned that their high overheads incurred during the various stages of seeking funding are rarely ever incorporated into the allotted funding. A smaller but crucial factor in terms of human resources is the poor pay often offered to staff members of smaller organisations that is often proportional to the rate of attrition is also a worrying factor. Not only attracting and retaining capable and efficient staff proves difficult, but also retaining them becomes a bigger challenge.

In the present context, there is little to almost no funding available within Sri Lanka for NGOs. With no state-sponsored support or an active private sector funding domestically, the NGOs have traditionally relied on foreign donors to prop up their activities. Availability of funds has become critical. Women's rights activists analyse that as against the decades of the 1980s and the 90s, when the availability of money for women-oriented issues led to the mushrooming of women's organisations, by around 2000, the context underwent a radical change, with most organisations struggling to find funds. As highlighted during the discussions with NGOs and interviews with senior activists, funds appear to be drying up faster for rights-based approach for women or resistance and activism-based programmes.

A public perception study commissioned by the Asia Foundation summed up the differences spewed forth by the three decade long civil war across the island nation, proving that it is difficult to generalise the political and humanitarian situation across Sri Lanka as the relationship between the government and the people. The differences that

emerged across the regions surveyed was stark. While 94% of the Sinhala dominated South said they felt free to express their political opinions, the percentage in the Tamil-dominated North was just 36.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the primary reasons provided for the inability to express political opinions emerged to be the fear for their safety and the governments disapproval for freedom of political opinions.

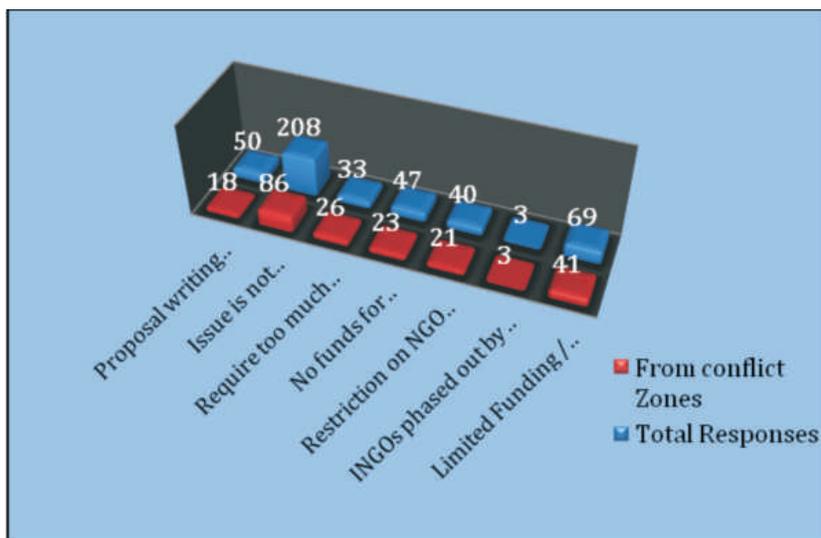


Figure 5 : Difficulties in raising fund - responses from conflict zone

Also in the areas of the north and the east still going through the post-conflict phase, the heavy presence of military means there is a lot of control over the work that happens in the region. Similar views were resonated in the mapping survey, wherein all the responses highlighted that there were too much evidences required to show results of their work. Of

these 79% were from the organisations working in the conflict area. Similarly, 59% of the responses on limited and decreasing funding were from the conflict affected region.

The mandate for peace building, which was among the most funded activities across Sri Lanka till the Lankan military snuffed out the LTTE conflict in 2009, could be one of the casualties of reduced aid. Sri Lanka's attempt to rewrite its chequered record during the conflict with surging economic growth is also considered as a crucial factor for the shift in donor strategies towards a drastic slashing in the budgets.

The World Giving Index collated by The Charities Aid Foundation ranks Sri Lanka at an enviable 8th position worldwide, behind the countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand.<sup>26</sup> While research shows that giving patterns in most leading Western countries are dictated by economic concerns or inspired by tax exemptions, in Sri Lanka, it was found to be largely inspired by religious beliefs. However, the donor pattern followed in philanthropic

<sup>25</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development and Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness, Report on Asia Consultation on Gender and Development Effectiveness, April 2011.

<sup>26</sup> "New Horizons of International Development," Charity Philanthropy Development, n.d., <http://www.charityphilanthropydevelopment.org/charity-philanthropy--development.html>.

giving largely appears to be traditional philanthropy and not social philanthropy. This view was echoed by several women's organisations of Sri Lanka that said that few philanthropic charities donated money towards work for women's rights. Donations to charity remains largely confined to the work done by religious organisations and institutions.

Healthcare is a sector that is prioritised for funding by the Sri Lankan government. While primary, outpatient and tertiary care are primarily funded by the government, the funding that is available from private donors is largely allocated to HIV/AIDS related work. Organisations working in the field of healthcare and sexuality among women find few donors willing to fund them for work that is unrelated to HIV awareness or AIDS prevention. Moreover, there is also a geographical preference placed on aid flowing to the north-east, though with riders on the kind of work that can be supported and funded. While rebuilding destroyed infrastructure figures on funding lists, awareness programmes done under women's rights comes under close scrutiny of the government and other monitoring agencies that are suspicious of the work undertaken.

Most organisations agree that there is inadequate commonality or in lay terms, few standardised norms that donors adhere to at different levels of aid engagement. DIIS found that most donors rely on their own assessments, formats, procedures and strategies. Donors were also extremely careful as to what programmes they were funding, as most NGOs are carefully monitored by the government, with all the reports, accounts and work plans required to be routed through the NGO Secretariat of the government.

Also, since most donors rely on their own procedures and yardsticks for deciding on organisations to fund, few go with supporting issues and areas of work that are being recommended/suggested from different international platforms/forums. For instance issues raised in alternate reports to UN Committees and their Concluding Observations (particularly those from CEDAW Committee) could be a good reference point for identification of issues to be supported/promoted. However, the fact that there are only a select few that ensure adhering to such processes, impinges on effectiveness of aid. There was also the disturbing trend of issues that required funding, being couched under different heads to be presented as a 'very-project-focussed work' to secure funding.

*We have a big issue because they (funders) do not ask what the problem is unless you decide somewhere this is where the money is and if they do ask a proposal it has to be according to their specification.*

*-Woman's organisation working with the war-affected in the North*

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Sri Lanka appears to be a study in contrast, with a calculated exercise undertaken by the government to present an optimistic, resurgent façade to the world, while there appears to be several indicators that hint at a not-so-rosy picture. There are few debates about the economic growth that Sri Lanka currently enjoys. However, the disparity in growth and development across the country is evident.

Respondents to the SAWF survey also underlined the need for discreetness while working in the North or among Tamil population, as most NGO works - national and international, are closely scrutinised by various government departments. One respondent mentioned how following a workshop that they had organised in Colombo, a few participating groups from the North had been visited by government officials to inquire about the workshop and the activities undertaken.

Though a democracy, the influence of the military and their continued influence over the daily lives of Sri Lankans of the north and the east demonstrate the need for strengthening of the democratisation projects with special emphasis placed on women empowerment and supporting to stabilise their lives. Following the end of the conflict, the number of households with women as the primary breadwinner as well as the provider, has increased dramatically. This makes women empowerment, their increased participation in the political processes and their socio-economic demands for better living conditions, as primary concerns that need to be effectively addressed.

There is the need for sensitisation of the government, the multilateral and bilateral donors as well as for the INGOs/bigger NGOs to engage more rigorously with the demands and needs of women at the grassroot levels. The work of many smaller organisations goes unrepresented or unlauded resulting in little funding going their way as well. There are several women's rights organisations that are working with communities or on issues that are not considered mainstream and therefore, go unnoticed and unfunded. These groups need to be provided assistance in networking in the relevant regional, national and international circles, as well as helped to create fund pitches and evolving processes to utilise funds allotted in a manner that is in line with approved accounting systems. This in turn also assures transparency and accountability, improving the track record of the organisation and the chances to continue receiving further grants and aid.

Capacity building interventions through workshops, handholding support, training or other innovative ways can help smaller organisations working at the district level in documentation

(including drafting proposals), skills for better resource management and developing linkages and networking with organisations working at the national and international level, could be a solution to address the growing pressure for accessing (already shrinking) resources. Larger advocacy interventions are needed to surface the restrictions placed on the work of NGOs - national and international, especially those focussing on the North and how that needs to be relaxed to allow for social development to happen in tandem with the infrastructure development. The latter appears to be the current focus of the government with bilateral and multilateral donor aid being diverted into rebuilding the strife-torn areas of the north and the east. However, the convoluted processes of acquiring permissions to work in the conflict zones of the past, makes it tough for NGOs to raise funds or work amongst the affected population of the region.

Funds can be raised through creating new Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. Presently, there are a few initiatives reported in Sri Lanka with regards to services provided specifically to women employees by private companies and corporate based in or expanding to Sri Lanka. There is a potential for fund-raising from among corporate for work on rights based work among women groups that are currently only being used for providing services to women's groups. With target and intensive advocacy diaspora funding could also be another possible source of future funding for women rights. Currently women's rights and human rights are areas that the government does not actively encourage fund raising in, instead seeking assistance for livelihood based and welfare oriented initiatives. The thrust needs to be reassessed and higher participation of women in decision-making roles, in socio-economic and both political spheres must be actively encouraged.

Several organisations raised concerns over how the long-term future of their projects was in jeopardy in the event of withdrawal of funds, following the end of the period currently sanctioned. In the event of the bigger donors withdrawing their attention from Sri Lanka, the mandate falls on smaller donors to support the largely unsupported but highly important work undertaken by grass-root level organisations and community-based organisations across the country. Moreover, if donors promote flexibility in disbursement and usage of funds, several projects could sustain their work over a longer period of time.

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## ANNEXURE I

In order to ensure parity and consistency in analysis of qualitative data, common definitions and sets of parameters were developed - for instance while analysing the approaches being undertaken by the groups, the following definitions were referred to by all the researchers:

**Category 1:** *Explicitly rights based (with principles of equality including gender equality):* it brings together gender, participation, and empowerment into a coherent framework which is rooted in the norms and principles of international human rights standards and values. Focuses on, (i) Participation - inclusive, people-centred; (ii) Empowerment - leading to social transformation, for the marginalised and oppressed communities; (iii) Accountability: Identification of claim-holders and corresponding duty-holders (state and non-state); (iv) Equality and Non-discrimination- as defined by international human rights law; and (v) Justice-based on universal standards and norms; just distribution of resources and power, ensuring claims of violations.

**Category 2:** *Explicitly rights based (with feminist principles):* Along with elements of category 1, clear articulation of feminist principles - critiquing unequal power relations, analysing gender inequality and protecting and promoting women's rights and issues

**Category 3:** *Strongly rights based:* Groups that reflect a rights based approach in their praxis- which means their activities, demonstrate adoption of a rights based approach even while the articulation may be missing (responses on objectives, strategies, activities and changes in women lives include elements of RBA - participation, empowerment etc. but not seen within the framework on quality and non-discrimination. No direct reference to human rights standards, inclusion or social transformation)

**Category 4:** *Some elements of rights based:* Groups that refer to rights based approach, and there is some level of understanding within the organisations, however, the activities or strategies do not reflect the same.

**Category 5:** *RBA not clearly articulated/welfarist:* Focusing on the needs and not on rights of the communities; addressing immediate causes of problems. Programmes are entirely around the needs of the community, and there is little or no linkage between one programme line and another, as no attempt has been made to synchronise programme plan or strategic understanding. No reference to elements of RBA.



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