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# THE INTERNATIONAL POST-CONFLICT INDUSTRY: MYTHS, RITUALS, MARKET IMPERFECTIONS AND THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM<sup>1</sup>

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*“Men are caught in webs of meaning that they themselves have spun”*

Clifford Geertz

Ritual and symbolic analysis are a good way to understand the series of high profile international pledging conferences for Sri Lanka (Oslo-Washington-Tokyo), and Multilateral Agencies Needs Assessments that have taken place in recent times. Repetition of the same donor conference, albeit with different chairpersons in different world capitals appeared to constitute a coming out party of sorts—a series of debutante balls for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and a celebration of a growing relationship with the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). The pledging conference in Tokyo without the LTTE was however, the ball without the debutante. By refusing to be present in Tokyo the organization signaled that it would not be bought off by international rituals, pleasures, or false dawns since post-conflict reconstruction and development has been intangible in the north and east in the year of peace. But the international arrangements for the post-conflict reconstruction party in Sri Lanka had developed their own momentum, structure and ‘logic of practice’ as symbolic anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu would have said.

The Multilateral Needs Assessment prodigiously prepared by the UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, FAO), World Bank and Asian Development Bank over the last six months, the third such needs assessment in the past four years, had to be launched in Tokyo. The Needs Assessment (available at [www.peaceinsrilanka.com](http://www.peaceinsrilanka.com)) represents the international bill for peace in the island. Repeated needs assessments constitutes a ritual of the multilateral agencies that increasingly seek to control the post-conflict industry in war torn countries in the global south. In Sri Lanka the post-conflict industry is also visible in the networks of Euro-American technical experts ubiquitous in other war zones of the world, recently arrived from South Africa, Eritrea, Rwanda etc. as the neo-liberal peace dawns on the horizon of paradise lost.

Rituals, even secular ones like donor pledging conferences and needs assessments however have non-economic costs. While attention was focused on Multilateral Agencies’ needs and donor time frames, very little was done locally on the ground for those affected by war and the LTTE withdrawal from the Track one process. Though the beleaguered Norwegian mediators play a crucial and remarkably professional role at the Track one level,

the LTTE still learning the ropes about the international post-conflict industry blames the GoSL for the various delays and the inefficiency of the Sub-committee on Humanitarian Needs and the World Bank’s North East Reconstruction Fund (NERF). Thus the international post-conflict industry run by the Multilateral Agencies feeds into Sri Lanka’s current ‘no war no peace impasse,’ albeit at drastically reduced levels of violence. Simultaneously people in the north and east conflict-affected regions of the island complain about the numbers of experts visiting while nothing changes despite the promises of international aid. Core issues pertaining to human security and the return of displaced people remain un-addressed.

## Regaining the Peace Process

What the current impasse reflects is an over internationalization of the peace and post-conflict reconstruction process, that is increasingly driven by donors and multilateral agencies. It is in this context that the withdrawal of the LTTE from the negotiating table without recourse to armed violence provides pause for analysis of what has been achieved and what left undone to re-orient the peace process. The current impasse appears to be structured and contoured by three juggernauts: hard line interests within the LTTE, hard line positions and inefficiency within the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), and the agendas and inefficiency of the international post-conflict reconstruction industry increasingly managed by the World Bank and UN system that now tend to work in concert at the policy level to advance a neo-liberal, post-conflict agenda.

There are of course several reasons for the impasse in the peace process including the failure of the GoSL to develop a broad-based and bi-partisan peace process in the south, as well as endemic knowledge and information asymmetries in the post-conflict industry. While the interests and constraints on the GoSL and LTTE that structure the impasse have been extensively analyzed, the interests of the international post-conflict industry in Sri Lanka (as in other conflict-torn countries in Africa and Asia), are less well understood. This essay therefore focuses on the role, practice and impacts of the international post-conflict reconstruction industry in Sri Lanka. These observations draw on eight years of ethnographic study of the conflict and experience as a consultant for a number of multilateral agencies and humanitarian and development NGOs and extensive interviews with local and international academics and consultants. Comments are also based

on participant observation in meetings on rehabilitation; reconstruction and reconciliation in the northeast and in Colombo and at the “Multilateral Agencies Needs Assessment Validation Workshop” held in Killinochchi, March 2003.

The international presence has played an important humanitarian, stabilizing and bridging role in the conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE, even as it sustained and subsidized the conflict dynamically during the second decade of the war, and more recently the peace and post-conflict reconstruction effort. Moreover, it is clear that an international presence will be necessary for the peace and post-conflict reconstruction process to continue. What are not clear is what sort of post-conflict reconstruction would bring about a sustainable peace in the island and what role the international presence may best take. Indeed a serious evaluation including a costs-benefit analysis of the international post-conflict industry and its impact on the peace process in Sri Lanka appears to be necessary as the peace process approaches a tipping point.

### Media Hype, Ritual Pledging, and Cycles of War

Aside from the LTTE, the collective approach to peace in Sri Lanka appears premised on the idea that promises of funds from international donors accompanied by sufficient media hype would buy time for peace to develop momentum and blunt extremist demands on both sides. While the laissez-faire approach paid high dividends in the short term (the first year of the process), it has led to the medium term impasse. It is increasingly clear that the current neo-liberal post-conflict reconstruction approach cannot have any significant or sustainable impact without some of the core political and social issues (e.g. fiscal and administrative devolution), being addressed alongside the immediate humanitarian issues that pertain to the return of the displaced and reconstruction of their livelihoods, including de-mining.

In this context it is worth noting that of the \$70 million pledge at the Oslo donor meeting in March, 20 percent of “aid” was in the form of grants while 80 percent is in the form of loans—payable by the GoSL and the people of Sri Lanka collectively. One does not have to be a Cassandra to recognize that this may be a recipe for long-term indebtedness, impoverishment, and a new cycle of conflict (cf. Rajasingham: 2003). Of course, it is not at all obvious that the pledges made in Oslo and anticipated from Tokyo would actually materialize. The \$70 million pledged at Oslo have now been revised to \$ 40 million and will be probably revised down again. This is not a surprise. In Afghanistan, there was a significant discrepancy between what was pledged and what was actually received for post-conflict reconstruction. This year the Bush regime forgot Afghanistan in its budget. The oversight was only recognized and rectified after a senate democrat pointed it out. At the Tokyo meeting Sri Lanka was promised as much as Afghanistan was. It remains to be seen how much of these funds would actually materialize. As such what is worth asking is who would ultimately benefit from the funds? Is it the people and regions of the country that have suffered the wages of war, the networks of local and

international firms bidding for large infra-structure projects and contracts for the neo-liberal post-conflict reconstruction program favored by the Multilateral Agencies, or the international post-conflict reconstruction industry staff and technical experts that descend on the war zones of the global south, creating new inequalities and mounting debt for impoverished war-torn societies? The answer is probably a combination of all three. It is the proportionality of benefit that is in question, and the size of the peace debt that the country would have to bear. In Afghanistan it is well known that less than 15% of the “aid” actually reached those it was supposed to benefit.

A sense of perspective regarding the inflated dollar figures quoted for post-conflict reconstruction and the (dis)proportionality of the benefits may be apparent from a brief comparison. One displaced family in the northeast would be paid 100,000 rupees (approximately \$ 1,000 per family) to rebuild their homes and restart their livelihoods of the \$3 billion sought. On the other hand, a UN, World Bank or Aus Aid consultant in the post-conflict industry is paid approximately the same amount for less than 2 days of work. UNHCR that handled the assessment for resettlement of displaced persons has quoted a sum of \$332 million in the Multilateral Needs Assessment where no budget assumption or breakdowns of operation and program costs are provided, despite repeated requests from civil societies and NGOs in Sri Lanka. Whither equity and participation of civil society, not to mention transparency and accountability of the Multilateral agencies?

Many countries in the global south suffer from the syndrome of repeated cycles of war and peace. Of the 38 peace processes that occurred during the decade 1989-1999, 31 returned to war within three years as research by John Darby of the US Institute for Peace shows. A number of analysts of peace processes and cycles of war in African contexts have also noted that international intervention, particularly humanitarian aid and post conflict reconstruction, has its own institutional behavior and logic of practice that may both ameliorate and feed into violent conflicts in the global south. It is also recognized that the practice and legitimacy of humanitarian and post-conflict reconstruction is in crisis, particularly after the US awarded contracts to US firms for Iraq’s post-conflict reconstruction before the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In the context, the delays and inefficacy of SIHRN that partly explains the withdrawal of the LTTE from the Track one process, are not unrelated to the requirements of the international aid industry, including the setting up of North East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) by the World Bank, the need for yet another Multilateral Needs Assessment of the war zone, and the donor conference timetable. Given that the war-affected populations in the northeast complain of the numbers of UN, World Bank and ADB consultants surveying them while nothing changes, and given that previous studies, national expertise, and critical analysis have been marginalized in the current Multilateral Need Assessment isn’t there a question about the international post-conflict industry and its impact on the peace process to be raised? Is the Sri Lankan peace

process also hostage to the inefficient rituals and time frames of the international post-conflict industry? To understand why this may be the case and why a paradigm shift may be required in the global post-conflict industry we need to grasp its political economy.

## Multilateral Needs and Validation Rituals

It is increasingly recognizable that the demise of violent conflict constitutes a moment opportune for drastic structural adjustment of economies and societies. Not surprisingly, since the end of the Cold War and the proliferation of violent conflicts in post Soviet states, post-conflict reconstruction has emerged as a growth sector in the world development industry led by the Bretton Woods institutions. The international post-conflict industry is estimated to be worth \$20 billion and rising, with Iraq the latest addition to the list of war-torn countries in the global south, whose resource wars continue to bolster the economies of the global north.

The increased role of the Bank has meant the triumph of the neo-liberal approach in post-conflict reconstruction and the simultaneous closing of other possible models of development, such as, mixed economy models or those that advocate protection of key sectors like agriculture and fisheries also for food security in situations where access to markets may be limited and market imperfections obvious. Broadly, the international post-conflict tool-kit approach consists of neo-liberal institutions, constitution and social capital building. The private sector, the market and structural and sector adjustments promoted by the Washington Consensus (World Bank and IMF) are the mantra for development and peace building. The international post-conflict tool-kit then entails application of a universal set of technical formulas transported from one conflict zone to another. Based on the assumption that conflicts are generically similar, the approach produces a-historical, poorly theorized, a-political and culturally insensitive strategies, many of them failing to effect sustainable solutions.

The international tool kit approach was manifest in the work process and output of the current Multilateral Needs Assessment presented in Tokyo, a document that does not establish any developmental priorities. Though the current Multilateral Needs Assessment is the third such assessment of the war affected region in the past four years in Sri Lanka, mention is made of the assessments conducted by the North East Provincial Council and local GA and Kachcheries.

The current UN led Multilateral Needs Assessment is on a grander scale than in past years, with more international agencies and technical experts participating than in the previous World Bank led study of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation (RRR Framework study that consulted all stakeholders including the LTTE), or the UN rapid needs assessment. However, no reference is made to previous work in the current document, which ideally should have built on previous work rather than duplicating

it. As it is, the current Needs Assessment reproduces the same information lacuna and appears to be a checklist, without clear local priorities and focus for implementation of post-conflict reconstruction that assists the track one process.<sup>2</sup> This is largely due to the marginalization of local and national expertise and the fact that the majority of the international experts preparing the Need Assessment lack a basic understanding of Sri Lanka's history, society and conflict, and local priorities.

Given that so many assessments already exist, it is arguable that priority should have been given to developing a poverty and vulnerability reduction strategy (PVRSP) for the north and east to enable proper targeting of assistance to those who most need it, along with a micro-meso-macro analysis of how to develop the two key sectors of the north east economy – the agriculture and fisheries sectors which constitute 80% of livelihoods in the north and east. Such an approach would have enabled commencement of reconstruction projects sooner and spending funds on already identified projects in the first year of peace.

The current needs assessment gives prominence to large-scale infrastructure projects where big contracts are involved, and thus to the business sector, and multinational interests. This emphasis is accompanied by a thin safety net of humanitarian assistance for the displaced and poor in the conflict areas to rebuild their livelihoods. As such, it gives priority to the interests and development agendas of the international agencies, rather than to the communities most affected by the conflict. This is reflected in an urban and large infrastructure projects bias, though 80% of the northeast economy is agriculture and fisheries based.

At the Validation workshop in Killinochchi in March 2003, the Secretary for the North-East Provincial Council, the LTTE representatives, and various members of the public rejected the fisheries sector report in a packed meeting. Community members pointed out that less infrastructure and more emphasis on agriculture and fisheries was needed since these were the “eyes” of the north east economy. In the context, it is unclear that the serious concerns that were raised have been addressed or indeed that the needs assessment has been validated. Indeed this raises the issue of the undemocratic work process of the Needs Assessment and the manner in which the Multilateral Agencies steam role over local opinion and dissenting voices like grand juggernauts. The miss-fit in priorities of the Multi-lateral and the local communities could no doubt become a cause of renewed conflict a few years later, when poor communities realize they have been marginalized again.

Cumulatively, the Multilateral Assessment appears poorly acquainted with the priorities of people most affected by war and the needs of a country struggling to own and manage its own post-conflict, development and reconciliation process. It is however elementary that proper prioritizing and targeting of needs would reduce the bill for post-conflict reconstruction. Rather, it is claimed that the Needs Assessment is a technical exercise and not a policy



document. On the other hand, it is clear that during the marginalization of local expertise also limits it. It is widely recognized that the two decades-long armed conflict in Sri Lanka, real and perceived ethnic grievances were fed by a number of local micro-conflicts over scarce resources arising from poverty and caste based social exclusion. A number of studies have noted that for successful conflict transformation it will be crucial to better recognize and analyze the various links and dimensions of conflict at the local or micro, meso, and national levels, and thus move beyond narrowly technical or ethnicity-based solutions in the post-conflict reconstruction phase.

## The Post-Conflict Tool-kit and Neo-Liberal Agenda

**T**he Multilateral Needs assessment exemplifies the international tool kit approach to post-conflict reconstruction and its problems including mismatched local and international development priorities. In the context, the GoSL and the LTTE need to ask whether the country actually needs or can absorb the international funds that are mostly in the form of loans? The current absorption rate of international development “aid” stands at between 17-35 % for various reasons including administrative inefficiency. While it is obviously correct that the north east of the country that has been all but destroyed would require a major fund for reconstruction, particularly for infra-structure, a number of displaced people noted at “Multilateral Need Assessment Validation Workshop” in Killinochchi in March 2003, that what they need is not hand outs and vast amounts of assistance from donors, but rather an improved security situation to enable them to return and get on with their livelihoods.

It is of course elementary that proper targeting and setting of priorities would enable cost cutting and a far less extravagant bill for peace. The Needs Assessment appears premised on the notion that business and the free market will take care of the economics of peace. Issues of corporate corruption and crony capitalism that are endemic in pos-war economies that exacerbate economic inequalities and distort markets is overlooked. Such policies in other conflict-affected parts of the world have demonstrably fuelled inequality and cycles of social violence and conflict. There is clearly a need for a more balanced approach in the international post-conflict reconstruction agenda, where the benefits as well as the shortcomings of globalization and the neo-liberal emphasis on privatization, structural reform and growth are recognized. In many parts of the global south globalization has become a race to the bottom as poor countries compete to lower already low wage rates in order to attract often speculative foreign capital, and education systems are restructured to provide cheap labor at the lower end of the global economy, rather than to generate knowledge and research.

Finally, the intellectual underpinnings of the neo-liberal approach to post conflict reconstruction is theoretically and empirically impoverished. Though business is seen as a catalyst, no mention is made of a fact well known social scientists in Sri Lanka that

small businessmen and Mudalalis often used ethnic disturbances to destroy business competitors from the other community. The tool kit approach derives from an erasure of cultural, historical difference and a trivialization of social analysis, whereby social analysis is reduced to the presence or absence of “social capital”. Thus cultural and political difference between nations, people and histories and appropriate development paths are seen as irrelevant. As Alex de Waal has noted speaking of the politics of international disaster relief industry “the expertise stops where politics begin and the gap between knowledge of technical measures and action that bridges them is not addressed as little attention is paid to the political dimensions of conflict and reconstruction.”

## Information Asymmetries and Knowledge Practices

**A**t the higher end, the new global economy is an information and knowledge economy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the international post-conflict consultancy market that is characterized by global-local knowledge hierarchies, endemic information asymmetries and market imperfections. The ensuing knowledge gaps have significant and often negative impacts for locally sustainable post-conflict reconstruction and development. Within this global-local knowledge dynamic, the multilateral institutions have their own logic of practice. Marginalization of local knowledge is partly the reason post-conflict reconstruction policies have often exacerbated real and perceive regional and income inequalities leading to new cycles of war and violence usually articulated in the form of ethnic or identity conflicts.

At two recent seminars in Colombo organized by the Social Scientists’ Association and Social Science Research Council (New York), and the National Science Foundation several leading social scientists’ noted that the academic and research community have been marginalized from reconstruction and development policy making. Although lip service is frequently paid to consultation with “stakeholders” by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and UN agencies, local knowledge, critical analysis and national experts are routinely marginalized and mainly called in to rubber stamp or “validate” studies and needs assessment that have been pre-formulated.

A number of local academics and consultants that I interviewed for this research project complained that they were rarely involved in defining the parameters, priorities, substance and ToRs of the studies being conducted. Indeed, a frequent comment was that national experts are more often than not treated as research assistants and have little say in defining the frame and orientation of the research question or study. At other times, consultations with local expertise by the multilateral agencies appear to be a matter of ex-post facto rubber-stamping. The result is poor quality reports and poor policy formulations that perpetuate the myth of the absence of local capacity. The post-conflict knowledge and policy industry is characterized by over emphasis on international technical knowledge and undervaluing of local knowledge and social and political analysis.

## Local Capacity, Sustainable Myths and New forms of Colonialism

The international agencies and their staff sometimes cooperate with, but largely compete among themselves and with local institutions to advertise their work, publicize their deeds, and secure contracts and control of particular sectors and projects. This competition sets up its own dynamic the most obvious being the exclusion of local priorities and approaches that depart from the neo-liberal orthodoxy. The tendency to marginalize local knowledge and the failure to come to grips with the political dimensions of conflicts is often a bi-product of competition between the various agencies. Substantive analysis and solutions and policies adequately prioritized to meet the needs of conflict transformation and de-escalation is the victim of this state of affairs in the post-conflict industry.

There are also various myths about the war zones of the world that sustain the global post-conflict industry. Although it is generally recognized by academics that the 20-year old armed-conflict in Sri Lanka is one of the most highly researched and written wars in the world, there is a pervasive myth in the post-conflict industry that there is very little local capacity, and that “social capital” has been destroyed. This myth of the absence of “local capacity” and “social capital” is curiously reminiscent of colonial constructions of the lands of non-European “others” as terra nueva and tabular rasa, to be both colonized and civilized as per the white man’s burden. Elsewhere I have traced the similarities and breaks in the reproduction of the colonial imagination of conflicts in Africa and Asia in the social imaginary and mythology about the “war zone” that constitutes an embedded culture of those who inhabit the international post-conflict reconstruction industry mission.

While there has been a brain-drain from the north and east of the island this is less the case of the south where throughout the war years a number of citizens’ organizations, NGOs, practitioners, scholars, and academics worked tirelessly to foster peace, build bridges, between the combatant groups, and critically analyze the complex dynamics of the war in Sri Lanka. Moreover, academics and practitioners from the northeast have also moved to other parts of the island and live and work in a range of institutions, governmental and NGO. In the north and east a number of diaspora members have returned. In short, the absence of local capacity is by no means uniform and is itself a perception that marginalizes issues and approaches outside a preconceived frame. It means that the large amount of research and analysis that has already been done on the conflict and the good analysis that exists in Sri Lanka, and the local institutions are systematically and often deliberately elided. Thus despite the multiplicity of studies and needs assessments the same information gaps are reproduced in the industry because institutional memory is short, like the ahistorical time frames of the international consultants. The lack of institutional memory and local knowledge is particularly acute in the humanitarian agencies like UNHCR and UNICEF, given that long-

term local staff have a relatively marginal voice compared to the international staff who determine policy.

Those who do not conform to the neo-liberal approach, which is most of the critical intellectual community in the global south, are forgotten or ignored via the myth of the absence of local capacity and social capital that is endemic in the industry. It is presumed that the people who do not agree with neo-liberal orthodoxy do so because they “lack capacity,” and not because they may disagree fundamentally with the prescribed model of development. Finally, the neo-liberal approach to peace and post conflict reconstruction is based on the absence of history and substantive conflict analysis, and results in the imposition of policies that demonstrably increase social inequality with a high potential for a new cycle of conflict.

A second myth that one encounters in the international post-conflict industry in Sri Lanka is that there are no citizens or nationals who are capable of non-partisan, de-ethnicized analysis, hence external ‘experts’ are needed who can act in an impartial manner. It is also a common belief among external experts that the conflict in Sri Lanka is a more or less primordial ethnic one, rather than a complex modern war about poverty, exclusion from development, and political representation. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the narrowly ethnic reading of the war actually reproduces and mimics the conflict dynamic. For current interests, the ethnic reading of the conflict and the local population’s perceptions also justifies importing experts who have very little local knowledge and ability to engage in substantive analysis for sustainable interventions, but who are perceived to be objective vis-à-vis ethnic hatreds and jealousies. The use of the term ‘ethnic conflict’ to speak of the twenty year old war between the GoSL and LTTE has obscured the extent to which the conflict (like other wars in the global south), was prolonged, sustained and may be resolved by configurations of external and internal political and economic interests.

In the context, guidelines need to be formulated for better work practices and report writing processes for the Multilaterals. Local institutions and experts should be consulted at the outset and actively involved in such process.

Moreover, the emerging political economy of the post-conflict industry in Sri Lanka appears to be leading to an erosion of already existing local capacities, and institutions that have worked for many years on de-escalating the war and for peace, as funding is increasingly withdrawn and diverted elsewhere and for technical experts. Indeed some local institutions and NGOs that have done valuable work in the years of conflict have noted the reduction of funds for low-profile sustainable projects in the context of the emphasis on quick impact capital intensive peace projects. Of course, it is also the case that there is a re-arranging of the equilibrium in the post-conflict phase and that some will gain and others lose. However, what is clear is that in sectors where there are lacuna, there appears to be little effort to build local capacity

and work with local institutions, and for internationals to have a clear exit strategy. Instead there is a scenario of competition emerging between the local agencies and the internationals.

Given the logic of the operation of the international agencies, and the concern with the security of their personnel and international staff, programs and local communities often become a secondary matter. The bulk of the funds for post-conflict reconstruction go for administrative charges, salaries and maintenance and protection of internationals whose lives appear to be more highly valued than the natives that they are supposed to protect and develop. This is often reflected in disproportionate budget allocations for administrative charges and maintenance of internationals that work in the industry over actual programs and local staff. Indeed, a sort of institutionalized apartheid that distorts the value of lives and labour appears to exist in the humanitarian institutions that operate the post-conflict industry where market imperfections and information asymmetries are glaring.

### **A New Paradigm for Post-conflict Reconstruction? Right to Information Accountability and Transparency of Multilateral Agencies**

**A**t a recent conference organized by the Social Scientists' Association and the SSRC several leading social scientists noted the systematic exclusion of institutions of higher education and national expertise from the increasingly donor and consultant driven policy-making process in Sri Lanka. Key policy documents such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and 'Regaining Sri Lanka' along with the Multilateral Assessments are primarily formulated and drafted by international technical experts who know very little about the country, its politics, society or culture. What the various technical experts tend to have in common is the belief the neoliberal orthodoxy of the Washington Consensus. Thus issues such as food security for conflict prone areas where market access is limited, or how restructuring and privatization of the agricultural and fisheries sectors along with basic resources like water may lead to social conflict and a new cycle of violence, is overlooked.

Ironically, the global post-conflict industry and its technical experts may be one of the main impediments to building locally owned sustainable peace processes in conflict torn societies in the global south. Though listening to the "Voices of the Poor" or IDPs by ADB and World Bank consultants has become fashionable and institutionalized in the post-conflict and development industry, at the policy level, local and national stakeholders are not consulted. Multilateral Agencies like the Bank and UN like donors cannot be assumed a-priori to be disinterested given that they and their staff form part of an international post-conflict reconstruction industry that mainly benefits the economies and industries of the Euro-American world while exacerbating global and national inequality. International post-conflict and humanitarian agencies and interventions aimed at settlement are not always detached,

disinterested, well meaning, and hence inherently effective. Indeed at a policy level, these agencies do not appear to be accountable nor do they have the operational flexibility and necessary expertise to be accountable in a broader sense to the citizens of the country they work in. Hence the need for Validation workshops of needs assessments that constitute local rubber stamps and lip service to civil society!

There is a need for a paradigm shift in the policy frames and operational procedures of these agencies to enable policy-making that is appropriate for the needs of a country rather than international capital. At a policy level these agencies tend to act as if they are only responsible to their respective funders and the interests of multinational corporations, rather than to the people of the country where they work. There are several ways in which the aid industry may have a negative impact on the peace process.

1. The industry's delays are seen by the LTTE as caused by the GoSL and the conflictive relationship between the two parties is exacerbated by donor timetables and lack of access to information and analysis.
2. The industry's programmatic priorities (infrastructure projects) are not that of the people most in need of assistance (fisheries and agriculture sector development). This mis-fit in orientation may lead to war down the road.
3. The undervaluing of social analysis and local knowledge often makes for inadequate policy and projects and programs that are locally unsustainable in the long run.
4. International contractors, administration and technical experts and bureaucracy often on a far larger scale than local government administrators and bureaucrats consume the funds.

One important implication of this situation is that research and intervention in the field of conflict and peace building must be premised on a more sophisticated critique of international political economy, and of the relationship between local and global economic interests and embedded knowledge hierarchies in post-conflict reconstruction and peace processes. The local – global knowledge and information gap in the post-conflict industry is partly an effect of the fact that research and intervention aimed at conflict settlement is often initiated, funded, and carried out by external parties.

The role, value and exit strategies of international actors in the post-conflict reconstruction process needs to be constantly evaluated, monitored and assessed. Indeed the GoSL and the LTTE must co-operate on this issue, if Sri Lanka is to regain the peace process and chart its own post-conflict development policy. This is necessary if the post-conflict process is to benefit the people who have been affected by the war rather than the global post-conflict industry, and if aid is not to become cause for a new cycle of war. The issue of accountability, transparency and responsibility of donors and the multilateral agencies has to be placed up front and center. Likewise for bi-lateral donors.



## Recommendations towards regaining the reconstruction process

1. A conflict impact assessment of macro-economic policies including structural and sector adjustment programs (particularly in key sectors such as fisheries and agriculture), focused on increasing inequality, that renders societies and regions vulnerable to conflict and violence. Currently I/NGOs and donors conduct conflict impact assessments of particular projects but there is little attempt to analyse macro-economic policies and their conflict implications.

2. Capacity building for policy making and ownership: priority must be given to local capacity and institution building at the research development and policy-making level as well as at the grass roots level. International experts must be required to work with national experts particularly in framing questions and identification of priorities. Cooperation should be fully consultative rather than a matter of lip service to "local stake-holders." This is especially so if the people of Sri Lanka are to own the post-conflict agenda and process and benefit from it. The effort should be to knowledge transfer and training of local persons and institutions to take on responsibilities of technical nature (e.g. de-mining, mine risk education), with clear time frames and exit strategies for internationals.

3. Rationalizing the industry and elimination of knowledge hierarchies: Compile a roster of local institutions, social scientists and technical expertise and organize a dialogue on donor responsibility, accountability and transparency in partnership with

national academic institutions and policy NGOs. There is a need to rationalize consultancy fees and to eliminate gross disparities in remuneration and undervaluing of national and local knowledge in the interests of international expertise and technical knowledge. Guidelines for payments for consultants need to be jointly formulated in a manner that rationalizes and eliminates glaring information asymmetries that result in dramatic market imperfections, with priority given to national expertise. Consultant hiring processes and tender processes to be made transparent. True humanitarians with skills often work at local rates with local NGOs and community based organizations.

4. Budgets of the multilateral agencies and of the current Needs Assessment should be clear about budget assumptions and have clear program and administrative costs breakdowns.

### Notes

1 This paper is part of a study undertaken with the Fulbright New Century Fellows 2003 Working Group on Mapping Peace Processes and the Global Post-Conflict industry.

2 The Multilateral Agencies Needs Assessment is of a technical nature and its focus and priorities appear to be of a different order than the needs of the communities of the north and east, and more in keeping with the developmental focus and emphasis of these agencies. This is reflected in an urban bias and a focus on big business and large-scale infra-structure projects. For instance though fisheries and agriculture constitute the backbone or eyes of the economy, the fisheries sector is given little emphasis. ■



## lines

*lines* is a magazine that engages with the political spaces of Sri Lanka. We seek to provide a forum that inspires and challenges us to critically scrutinize the terms of received debates, and enable alternative political imaginaries.

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