

Mitigating the risk of insurgency through youth integration and development

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Abstract - One of the key groups that are influenced by an armed conflict is young generation of any country. Thirty year armed conflict made a huge impact on the young generation in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Sri Lanka's rapidly aging population poses serious challenges on several fronts. Statistics show that Sri Lanka would have elderly population of about 3.6 million by 2021, which is 16.7% of the total population and by 2041, one-quarter of the population would be elderly. Hence, current youth population is the most precious resource of our nation. In this paper the projected socio-economic challenges of this demographic transition are highlighted and calling the attention of policy makers to secure current and future young population from the threat future insurgency. Though seven years have already passed from the outright military victory over the LTTE, still shadows of misunderstanding and discrimination among youth can be visible. Absence of conflict could not be defined as peace and it is a challenge to cooperate two separated ethnic groups nearly three decades. One of the main objectives of post war peace building and reconciliation process is to integrate and develop younger generation of the nation for peace and harmony. Currently, Sri Lanka has been facing several challenges such as aging population, high brain drain, slowness of youth integration and development process. Hence, the first aspect of this research is to study the existing process of youth integration and development in Sri Lanka. The second aspect is to build a conceptual framework to develop national policy in youth integration and development. This is to mitigate the risk of future insurgency which could occur due to the lack of socio-economic development, trust, harmony and a sense of belongingness. This study is to analyse the macro environment factors and peace triangle while using quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse primary and secondary data were collected.

Keywords: insurgency, youth integration, peace building

I. INTRODUCTION

Since Independence Sri Lankan had three significant insurgencies by the youth. Suppression created by the lack of opportunities, unemployment and dissatisfaction towards political back ground led to the insurgencies in 1971, 1988-89 in the South. While three decade long civil conflict extended via dissatisfaction and less opportunity for youth in the North and East. From the dependence, minority was depressed due to several policies implemented by the policy makers. Specially, the policy that came to be known as "standardization" which was meant to balance the imbalance in educational levels between various districts created the worst impact on the young population in the North and East. They felt discriminated against and thought they were being groomed in schools only to remain unemployed Swamy (2003). On the other hand, due to the mismatched between the educational system and national job market requirement has increased the depression of the southern youth too. Sri Lankan youth who have grown up over past 30 years are experiencing life without war for the first time during past seven years. During childhood they have been exposed to ideologies such as mistrustfulness and fearfulness towards other ethnicities. They have been separated politically and culturally for the last three decades due to the conflict in North and East. Majority Sinhala youth do not have a proper idea about the minority Tamil youth and vice versa. This is due to the doubt caused by the ethnic conflict.

II. OBJECTIVES

- i. Mitigate the risk of future insurgency by understanding the expectations of Sri Lankan youth in the modern era.
- ii. Examine how to align the existing youth integration and development process with the economic and social development of the country.
- iii. Verify factors affecting to suppression among youth in the current context and suggest how to face national challenges such as brain drain and aging population.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A. Aging population

The National Youth Policy of Sri Lanka defines youth as people within the age group of 15 to 29 taking into consideration the nature of the transition from dependent child to independent adult in the Sri Lankan context. According to the predictions, Sri Lanka is aging rapidly. Sri Lanka's rapidly aging population poses serious challenges on several fronts. Statistics show that Sri Lanka would have elderly population of about 3.6 million by 2021, which is 16.7% of the total population and by 2041, one-quarter of the population would be elderly De Silva (2007). These statistics indicate that, Sri Lanka would be lacking young blood to build the nation in the near future and will have to obtain optimum contribution of the current young generation to meet national goals. While having less young generation compare to other South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Sri Lanka would face several challenges in socio economic development in near future. Hence, existing young generation who were victimized by the prolonged civil conflict should be integrated and developed to meet the future challenges of the nation.

B. Brain drain (labour migration)

On the other hand, the retention of younger generation within the country is a huge challenge in the post conflict era as they are making continuous effort to migrate legally or illegally for a better future. Especially youth from North and East make their effort to migrate to developed countries by boats for better prospect. Unfortunately, some of them has to sacrifice their lives during the fatal sea journey. Since, job opportunities are mainly centralized to western province, rural youth population is frustrated. As a result of this, rural young generation look for jobs in abroad with higher remunerations. Majority of the Sri Lankan youth seek opportunities especially in Middle East as skilled or unskilled workers while professionals seek opportunities in Australia and Europe. Hence, brain drain is a significant challenge of post conflict reconciliation process to meet future national goals.

C. Vulnerability among youth in post conflict scenario

The recent incident in the University of Jaffna among two young ethnic groups stressed that, still Sri Lankan youth behave with the suspicion, distrust and mentality of separation. A Tamil student has opposed a Sinhala cultural activity within the university which led to a conflicting situation between Sinhala and Tamil students in the university. University has been closed for some

days till the situation came to normalcy. Due to bad experience they faced, several southern students were reluctant to go back even after the university reopened. Any post conflict situation, the likelihood of going back to violence is extremely high. To mitigate this risk through a strategic approach is a great responsibility of the government, policy makers, intellectuals and other interested parties such as NGOs and INGOs. Since, the majority of the young generation was severely affected by the thirty year armed conflict, still they live with uncertainty and fearfulness. They have lost their relatives, properties, education and better employment opportunities.

The young generation from both sides was victimized in various ways directly or indirectly. Youth from the South joined armed forces to protect the territorial integrity of the country, while youth from the North and East had to join LTTE willingly or unwillingly in order to obtain self determination. Both sides felt about insecurity and suspicion each other. Create a bridge to integrate youth in North and South in post conflict scenario is a process which would be accomplished strategically and systematically.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Promoting a national policy for integration and development of youth in the post conflict context should be aligned with the socio-political and economic development to address common grievances of youth in the post independent era. The young generation is having dream of an economically developed nation with adequate opportunities for personal and career development. More specifically, young people in the post conflict scenario have the following needs: rehabilitation, reintegration, education, leisure, employment, recognition, and empowerment despite demographic differences.

Transaction from conflict to peace is a complex process for any nation which has been separated for several decades. Separation between two ethnics or two cultures makes a huge impact for both societies while integration after ruthless conflict is also not an easy effort. Sustainability of peace building and youth reintegration to mitigate the risk of future insurgency is based on several socio economic and psychological factors which is illustrated as follows:

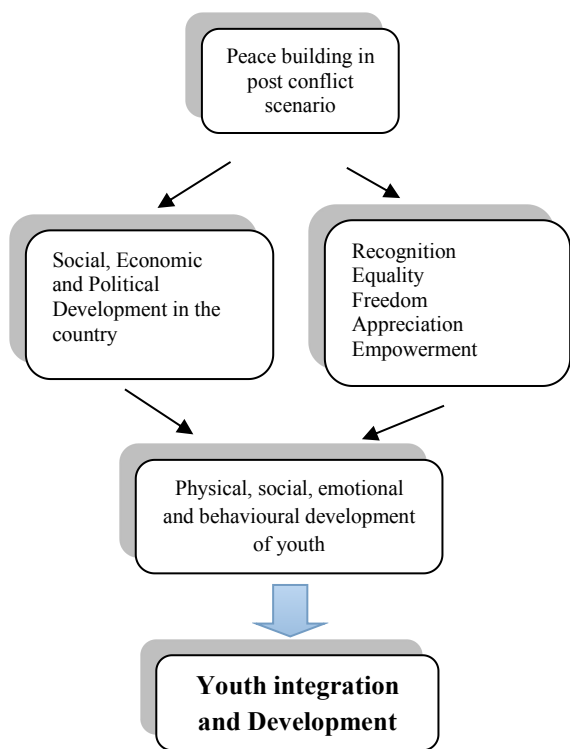


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for sustainability of integration of youth in post conflict scenario.

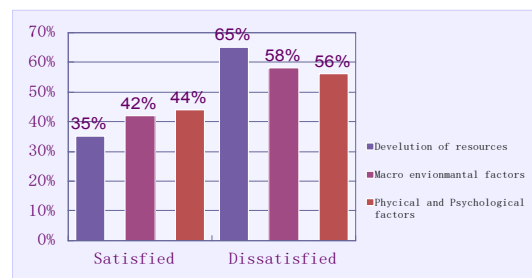
Source: Author

IV. FINDINGS

200 university students participated for the survey and it was extensively concentrated and tested following three areas. Basically, following areas are leading to youth depression which might create root cause to future insurgency.

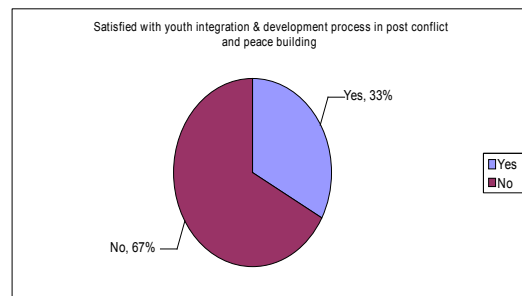
- I. Macro environmental factors of national development. (Economy, Political background and social development).
- II. Physical and Psychological factors of interpersonal development such as sports, culture, health, recognition, harmony, trust, empowerment, opportunities, etc.
- III. Devolution of resources (Infrastructure development)

Finding-1



Graph 1: Responses to the survey
Source: Field survey, 2016

Finding-2



Graph2: Satisfaction about the youth integration process
Source: Field survey, 2016

V. CHALLENGES OF YOUTH INTEGRATION IN THE POST CONFLICT SCENARIO

According to the survey, it was revealed that, there are several obstacles which indicate that predicted uncertainty, depression and vulnerability among youth. They have not much confidence and still live with doubtfulness due to socio-political and economic environment and interpersonal issues such as doubtfulness, depression, anger, pessimistic behaviour, etc. Hence, it is obvious that, there are several significant challenges of post conflict peace building reconciliation and youth integration in Sri Lanka. Reconciliation is the ultimate goal of peace building. It occurs when both parties develop new harmony, willingness to apologize, forgiveness, justice and trust. It brings people together, enabling them to grow beyond the past to re-establish a normalized, peaceful, and trusting relationship in the present. To integrate youth via reconciliation process have several obstacles which would be addressed by the relevant authorities. To treat the issues at the national level, solid foundation with national agenda is needed. Substantial funds with proper guidance would be the key for success. Lack of intellectuals or role models who can obtain the recognition of youth from all ethnic and religious bodies is a huge challenge for integration of youth in current

context. So called intellectuals and people with political back up are not trusted by modern youth.

Thinking pattern of current young generation is commonly influenced by information technology and social media. They are totally opened to the world. Majority of youth have a virtual networks. Rapid spreading of favourable or unfavourable ideas via virtual networks might create contradictory situation between youth groups on any sensitive issue such as national security, religion etc. If responsible parties do not make genuine effort to integrate young generation with systematic approaches, they may be further away from the reconciliation process. Hence, it is challenge to deal with youth in modern era with the trust and accuracy since they are more knowledgeable.

Economic development is playing a vital role to upgrading the living standards of the people. Sri Lanka is a low middle income country with a per- capita income of USD 3,912 in 2015. Sri Lankan economy transformed from agriculture based economy to more urbanized economy driven by service by 2015 (World Bank, 2016). After 2009, a new airport, cricket stadiums, harbours and highways were established in South and rapid development of infrastructure was visible. Main objective of said development is to create new job opportunities through tourism, foreign investments and developing Sri Lanka as a economic hub. Floor of development from south to north was not much visible and lack of opportunities for North remained unchanged. Concentrating on of equal economic development for the entire island to win the heart of young generation through better life standard is another challenge which would be properly addressed by the government.

If a youth have a good education and career opportunities which fit to his/her education, they are willingly work to build the nation. It minimize youth depression and uncertainty. Then they psychologically join hands with other ethnic groups as all are having same opportunities based on competencies and academic qualifications. When they feel that everybody has a similar opportunities despite demographic factors, existing depression would be minimized. This leads to mitigate the risk of insurgency while initiating integration via harmony, empowerment, trust, sense of recognition and equality. Cultivating sense of belongingness among youth with scattered childhood due to conflict is a challenge which would be handled sensitively.

Social deployment can be defined as a mechanism of prioritize human needs in growth and progression. Basically, social deployment opportunities are centralized to western province while southern province also rapidly developed during last ten years. Hardly, any new industries commenced in the war effected areas and other rural areas. Even self-employment is not promoted systematically in the rural areas of the country to minimize un-employment while strengthening life standard of a family unit. As a result of that, poverty, vulnerability and less opportunities in rural areas remain unchanged. Due to financial difficulties, young people face issues relating to education, vocational training, entertainment and physical development. Parents could not afford for extra curricula activities which lead to the physical and psychological well-being of their children. Once again poor youth are isolated within the own country as they are unable to reach their expectations. Hence, low income disturb proper youth integration process as majority from conflict affected areas are still suffering from poverty. Media to exchange information is limited among the current youth generation since they have undergone primary and secondary education in their mother tongue. Majority Sinhalese youth could not speak Tamil while majority Tamil youth could not speak Sinhala. Majority of both parties could not speak English either. This language barrier create a distance between younger generations in Sri Lanka. This is another challenge of integration process.

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

I. Design a sustainable national youth policy integrate

Sri Lanka designed a National Youth Policy in 2014 and it was a great step to integrate and develop the existing young generation in Sri Lanka. However, it is important to make sure the sustainability of it without alternating or abandoning it from time to time based on political agendas. Basically, through national policy, following areas should be orientated extensively:

- a. Education: The proper implementation of a language policy and ensuring Tri-language (Sinhala, Tamil and English) fluency of future younger generation. This process would lead to understand each other without any boundaries.
- b. Sports: Youth can be influence through games as working as a team would positively impact their behaviour, attitudes, thinking pattern and help to release stress. Upgrade existing youth clubs in the

island with proper guidance and funds to attract youth for sports in extensive way.

c. Culture: Cultural activities would be organized at the provincial level to disclose their identity. Youth would learn how to respect each other and identify similarities of young generation. Healthy cultural relationship would minimize demographic differences.

d. Young Entrepreneurship: Encouraging youth to become entrepreneur by providing capital, guidance, training and market to minimize unemployment while contributing to national economy.

e. Extra income sources: Government authorities should organize awareness programs in rural areas to educate youth about income sources such as equity and debt trading (Stock Market), micro finance, web related income generated opportunities, etc to minimize unemployment related issues.

2. Devolution of socio economic development from southern to north.

a. Expansion of Trincomalee harbour with industrial/IT Park to create more job opportunities directly and indirectly.

b. Speed up Kandy -Jaffna high way project to link north and south

c. Attract investors to initiate industries in North and give reasonable percentage of job opportunities to youth from South to meet organizational goals and objectives together.

d. Increase the composition of Tamil student in southern universities.

3. Empowerment of provincial councils:

The Responsibility of central government to grant sufficient fund provincial council to develop youth within their territory. Then identical characters can be extracted and develop at the national level without considering ethnicity or religion. More opportunities within their geographical surrounding enable them to get it developed without moving to capital with the satisfaction.

4. Implement of LLRC recommendations

The LLRC commission hoped that its recommendations would provide guide line to post conflict reconciliation process in Sri Lanka. Some of important areas of reconciliation process were governance, devolution, human rights, international humanitarian law, socio economic development, livelihood issues, issues affecting hearts and minds, leadership issues etc. The proper implementation of recommendation would clear the path of integration of youth via building trust, accountability and harmony between.

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