Community Memorialization Project, Sri Lanka*

Search for Common Ground

Sri Lanka emerged from a twenty-six-year war in 2009 with a military victory over the Tamil separatist rebels, LTTE,[1] but is still struggling to promote national reconciliation and prevent the recurrence of violence. The long years of violent conflict created deep divisions within the country, exacerbating some grievances and creating new ones. Immediately after the end of the war, the Government at the time embarked on a process of post-war economic development with little emphasis on addressing any of the root causes of the conflict, some of which went back to the time the country gained independence in 1948. Undercurrents of tension, such as the struggle for political voice, systemic discriminatory practices and feelings of ethno-cultural superiority one group felt over others, remained buried beneath the surface.

Constructively dealing with the past is an integral element of reconciliation and moving forward beyond violence. How this can be done in Sri Lanka is still an open question, with a multiplicity of initiatives in the national/public sphere as well as the community/personal spheres, but often with little connection in-between.

Foremost of these initiatives is the state-led Transitional Justice (TJ) mechanisms introduced by the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) unity government. Based on the United Nations (UN) Resolution of October 2015, TJ is an umbrella term for efforts to promote securing truth, justice, accountability and reconciliation. As part of the TJ process, four mechanisms were identified, namely (i) Commission for

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Truth, Justice, Reconciliation, and Non-recurrence; (ii) an Office of Missing Persons (OMP); (iii) a Judicial Mechanism with a Special Counsel; and (iv) an Office for Reparations. Further, in accordance with pledges made at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the Government set up a new Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM), to "design and create mechanisms to achieve truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence" (Pannalige, 2017). The SCRM coordinates all the official bodies working on transitional justice. However, the TJ process has not delivered on its initial promise; of the four mechanism envisaged, Parliament has passed the necessary legislation to establish two, that is the OMP and the Office of Reparations, and only the OMP was functioning by the end of 2019 (Salter, 2019).[2]

The need to know and document the "truths" of the violent conflict is an important element in the Sri Lankan context because on the one hand the State has played a fluid role, shifting between that of protector and perpetrator, and on the other, external influences have sought to impose their own narratives on the country's conflict. However, the experience of Sri Lanka suggests that due to entrenched competing interests and competing narratives there may never be a single truth or a single version of history, and that availability and acceptance of unedited, multiple narratives is the greater priority (Hettiararchchi, 2018). It is possible that what matters more to victims is to be heard, that the very act of telling one's own history democratizes "truth and legitimizes one's own life-history and agency" (De Mel, 2013). In the past decade, various opportunities have been provided to victims to tell their stories, through national mechanisms such as the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), and the Office on Missing Persons (OMP). What is unclear though, is whether these initiatives have provided what the victims want: an opportunity to be heard in the spaces important to them and obtain information that they are desperately seeking, in particular about the hundreds of people still listed as missing (Salter, 2019).

At the national level, little progress has been made in relation to the right to justice or the duty of the state to hold accountable those who are responsible for human rights violation, or the right to reparations which refers to restitution, compensation or rehabilitation provided to victims of such violations. While TJ mechanisms envisaged a Judicial Mechanism with a Special Counsel to prosecute human rights violations and an Office for Reparations, neither has been effectively established. However project-

based support, offered through State, donor and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have provided practical assistance to enable the displaced to be resettled and rehoused, economic assistance to restart livelihoods and rebuild basic infrastructure. These efforts appear to be largely effective in bringing back a sense of normalcy to the war affected areas, albeit with questions about their deeper effects on society; a panel survey of resettled communities in the North and East conducted by the Centre for Poverty Analysis reveals positive changes in people's access to basic services but inadequate focus on soft infrastructure, such as community building, psychological support and human rights, may undermine the longer term conflict transformation impacts of these initiatives (Karunadasa, 2016).

To remember and to grieve our losses is an important aspect of moving beyond trauma, and in Sri Lanka there is a culture of memorialization practiced by all communities living in the country. A regional consultation on the issue suggests that Sri Lankans may be seeking memorialization of the war through a combination of physical as well as non-physical memorials (Hettiarachchi, 2017). At the consultation, participants from the North noted that while intangible practices of remembrance which the Tamil community had been practicing throughout the war years (such as days of fasting, alms-giving, ritual lighting of oil lamps) could still continue, there should also be physical memorials (such as statues, cemeteries and graveyards, bus stops, schools and pre-schools built in memory of the dead) and intangible cultural memorials (such as documentary films, songs about incidents, registers of events, posters and handbills that are from the war). Southern consultations revealed a similar desire for both physical and non-physical memorials. Some participants noted that memorialization can serve different outcomes, with non-physical memorials focusing more on spiritual elements and the process of healing, while physical memorials would ensure that memory lives on. The regional consultations highlight that while it is clear that most people believe that memorialization and remembrance is necessary, there is no consensus on the form of such memorialization. The report notes that "[g]enerally, the Tamil communities would prefer physical memorials while the Sinhala communities would prefer non-physical, religious and cultural forms of memorialization."

While the scars of the decades-long conflict with the LTTE had barely begun to heal, the country was again the target of a terrorist attack. On 21 April 2019, a series of suicide bombings killed over two hundred fifty

and injured hundreds of mainly Christian worshippers and foreign tourists. The bombings targeted three Christian churches in the western and eastern provinces, and three hotels in Colombo, and were carried out by the National Tawhid Jamaat (NTJ), a jihadist group with alleged ties to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Almost immediately after what became known as the Easter bombings, there was a sudden increase in anti-Muslim feeling and rhetoric (Keenan, 2019). In itself this was not new; nearly a week of anti-Muslim rioting by Sinhalese mobs in March 2018 was contained only after the government declared a state of emergency and deployed the army. After the Easter bombings however, Sri Lanka's Muslims began to experience an unprecedented degree of public pressure and insecurity, with Sinhalese nationalist politicians, religious leaders, mainstream and social media commentators seizing the moment to inject new energy into longstanding efforts to undermine the status and prosperity of the Muslim community.

Overall, Sri Lanka remains riven by ethnic and religious differences. It is still struggling to overcome the effects and impact of years of violence due to the conflict with LTTE as well as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP),[3] and the newest fault line, between Muslims and Sinhalese, shows signs of becoming an increasingly deep rift. Deep and unaddressed trauma as well as fear and suspicion of other communities is quite common and many issues remain buried, but simmering, under the demands of day-to-day living.

The Community Memorialization Project was introduced and implemented against this contextual background of complexity and fluidity with the overall aim of contributing towards the process of constructively dealing with the past to move forward towards a better, less violent future.

Rationale and Relevance

The Community Memorialization Project (CMP) was initially conceived as a civil-society-led, people's memorialization project, which sought to bridge the gap between official State-sponsored post-war processes and the need for ground-level initiatives to facilitate multiple truths and multiple voices to deal with Sri Lanka's past. The project prioritized public acknowledgement of multiple "subjective truths" and preservation of people's histories and remembrance. Some of the key questions that drove the development of the project were:

- How can a memory project move from an archival product to a process that uses documented narratives to contribute to justice and peace?
- How can story-telling and sharing of life histories create a sense of catharsis, empathy and compassion? And can such emotion be used towards peacebuilding and reconciliation?
- How can memory be used to understand the root causes of conflict in Sri Lanka?
- Can story-telling be used to facilitate an acceptance that there are many "truths" and that the absolute truth may not matter as much as the ability and the space to tell one's story, and to be acknowledged?
- How can we build on the spontaneous acts of memorialization and rituals of memory that exist at the grassroots level, in order to complement rather than restrict them?
- How can we make it not simply about passing on memory and experience to the next generation, but also about creating a discourse of what this means for Sri Lankans emerging from a culture of violence and conflict?

At inception, the CMP emphasized preserving historical memory and memorialization, which is due in part to the legacy of the previous HerStories Project,[4] which collected the narratives of mothers and was based on the idea that peoples' histories should be self-authored and unedited. It found that there is a fundamental human connection between mothers, from all ethnicities and across geography; the shared loss, even if the degree of suffering or experiences differ, encourages empathy for each other as mothers, and in the end, a sense of shared hope for a better future for their children. Learning from the previous project, CMP expanded to collect the narratives of both women and men, and has a greater focus on taking people's histories back to their communities, to foster community-level dialogue and engagement.

CMP aimed to preserve historical memory, but it also looked beyond archiving to promoting people-to-people engagement to deal with one's own and other's memories. This took the form of "using" memory to explore how it might impact, support and sustain a longer-term peacebuilding process. There was no definitive proof that storytelling and experience sharing could lead to meaningful dialogue for non- recurrence of violence in Sri Lanka and

as such, the theory of change devised at the very beginning of CMP was rife with assumptions. Some of the initial assumptions were:

- That ordinary people contribute to conflict by being ignorant of each other's experiences and of the root causes of conflict, which in turn makes them vulnerable to manipulation by those with vested interests;
- That a few people with skills and interest in mitigating or transcending conflict can counteract aggressive elements at a grassroots level;
- That ordinary people need to engage across ethnic and other divisions in order to first understand how to bridge gaps, in their own community groups before working towards non-recurrence of violence at a larger scale;
- That awakening memories of personal experiences can, not only create catharsis, but empathy towards others who have experienced violence at varying degrees;
- That shared "Sri Lankan" values maybe an entry point to developing resilience and agency at individual and village level. Having common values, knowing the other's experiences, and understanding root causes of conflict, and a recognition of the other's needs would appeal to the peoples' yearning to "never experience another war;" especially when faced with emerging conflicts and unrest;
- That creating awareness of experiences of violence and shared values across ethno-social groups could create connections and opportunities for future peace, especially among the next generation that might not have directly experienced violence in their lives;
- That understanding conflict may provide skills to recognize early warning signs and strengthen community resistance.

Objectives and Activities

As set out in the project proposals, the specific objectives of CMP Phases I and II were:

- To create platforms for individuals and communities, from across ethnic, political and regional divides, to share their stories and engage in community dialogue and memorializing;

- To preserve historical memory through archiving and disseminating the narratives to a wider audience; and
- To facilitate a process of common understanding on policy outlooks and programs on managing and using historical memories.
- To achieve these objectives, project activities included collecting and archiving peoples' histories, as well as using the histories through workshops, exhibitions, television and radio programs, websites and social media to create a public discourse on history, memory, violence and personal responsibilities in preventing violence by returning to a discipline of value-based living (Box 1).

Box 1: CMP Objectives and Activities in Phase I

Specific Objective	Results	Activities
1. To create platforms for individuals and communities, from across ethnic, political and regional divides, to share their stories and engage in community dialogue and memorializing	1.1 A grassroots movement for action on memory and remembrance is initiated by people across dividing lines 1.2 Community-owned public memorials are developed in three districts	- Media Campaign to elicit public response on memorialization. - Community-based Dialogue about memory and story sharing. - District-based Dialogues to engage the community in in-depth memory work through creative methods. - Inter-District Dialogues to bring people together across dividing lines around shared experiences. - Building Community Memorials by the communities, with support from artists.
2. To preserve historical memory through archiving and disseminating the narratives to a wider audience.	2.1 The importance of historical memorializing is widely communicated and accepted 2.2 People's histories are achieved and preserved for posterity as an online archive	- Developing an Online Archive for the Memory Project by translating, digitalizing, cataloguing, and collating. - Documentation of Dialogues and Memorials to be shared with policymakers and other stakeholders. - Sharing the Stories with public and school libraries accessible to community members and students, civil society organizations (CSOs), policymakers, and diaspora.
3. To facilitate a process of common understanding on policy outlooks and programs on managing, including, and using historical memories.	3.1 A white paper on managing, including, and using historical memories is consultatively developed	- Series of Meetings with Regional and National Stakeholders to discuss the importance of grassroots memorializing for peacebuilding. - Writing a White Paper with recommendations on doing memory work. - Final workshop, which will focus on advocating for policy on memory work.

Source: project proposal, 2015

As the project progressed, its approaches, content and expectations shifted and changed shape. Using Developmental Evaluation methodology,

the project was designed with flexibility and reflexivity built-in. Through constant feedback from the stakeholders (participants, non-governmental organization [NGO] workers and community leaders at the grassroots level, project partners, people's consultations), the project team reviewed, revised and dropped project activities to suit the needs of memorialization in context.

At the same time, the socio-political context within which CMP functioned remained complex and dynamic with the State's TJ mechanism evolving slowly, and structures and systems being prioritized over deliberate action on memorialization. By the end of 2017, after substantial post-activity review, feedback from the participants and partners, and internal deliberations,[5] the following adaptations and theory of change emerged as the core elements of the project presented in Boxes 2 and 3.

Box 2: Learning by doing - Some key adaptations in CMP

Issue	Tool which helped to identify this issue	Adaptations
There is no consensus within communities at the grassroots level on whether and what kind of memorials they want	After Action Review of regional consultations, team reflections	Building physical memorials replaced with more focus on building skills at the grassroot level for non-recurrence of violence
Changes in context at the national level and new initiatives introduced for reconciliation and historical memory, but less attention at grassroots level	Iterative Theory of Change, team reflections	White paper on memory work replaced by multiple practice papers. Project focus shifted from policy influence at the national level to local level, specifically by creating "champions" who can promote memory work, reconciliation between communities and prevent the recurrence of violence at the local level
Project goal is vague	Iterative Theory of Change	Goal adjusted to go beyond preserving memory to include preventing the recurrence of violence
Organic intergenerational transfer of memory happens when youth and elderly are present	After Action Review of village level dialogue workshops, team reflections	Minimum quotas introduced for participants by age and gender
Some facilitators are not following the facilitation guide	After Action Review of village level dialogue workshops, diary tool	Change of facilitators
Some workshops have a few illiterate participants	After Action Review of village level dialogue workshops	Use of video, more than written content, to share stories

Poor selection of venues	After Action Review of inter-divisional level dialogue workshops	Provision of improved guidelines relating to workshop logistics to partners
Securing the participation of Muslims in Matara	Diary tool, After Action Review tool	Various measures, such as providing transport facilities to help them get to the workshops, requesting prior confirmation of participation, changing venues and dates to suit the community
Attrition of participants, in particular Champions	Case studies, team reflections	Greater efforts to stay in touch with champions in between project activities. Greater focus on "creating" new village level champions rather than existing community leaders who already have high demands on their time.

Box 3: Project Theory of Change (Fourth Iteration)

Objectives	Main Activity Strands	Assumptions	Outcomes	Assumptions	Goal
Reduce passivity at local level during conflict • Less likely to be manipulated • More agency Create resilience and leadership at local level • Ability to understand the conflict within their community • Have the necessary values to prevent the conflict going far Preserve historical memory	Platforms for creating awareness and knowledge of the other / other's experience Building and strengthening skills for understanding conflict, value-based thinking Archiving, memory walks	*Dealing with one's own experience:* ***catharsis*** *Looking at their own experience and that of others* ***creates empathy*** *(it happened to all of us)* *Awareness of shared values shows the underlying* ***similarity*** *as well as awareness of* ***differences in needs***	Increased cultural literacy Reduced racism, mistrust Increased awareness of other's experiences (what happened to them, why, what are their needs) Increased feeling of connection between people, engagement/ collaboration	That ordinary people can reduce conflict by being able to identify emerging local conflicts, have more agency That a few people with skills can counteract the aggressive elements That we need to engage across ethnic / other divisions to have non recurrence of violence	Non -recurrence of violence

The outcomes expected were to contribute to non-recurrence of violence through the reduction of passivity, increasingly individual and community agency, providing awareness and skills in order to make community groups less malleable to manipulations by forces with vested interest in con-

flicts, re-establishing links across boundaries and a return to "core values," with the individuals and community groups with whom the project works.

(This page and opposite page) Media campaign.


සහජීවන පියස சக வாழ்வு இல்லம்
Shelter for Co-Existence
SARVODAYA
Shanthi Sena San
Search for
Common G
Let's Follow the Religious Values
Buddhism
Hinduism
Islam
Christianity
Whatever is hurtful to you, do not do to any other person
If something makes you oppressive, don't do such things on others too
Extend your loving kindness towards all living beings, then only God will treat back to you.
Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you

(Top and bottom) Village dialogues.

Youth and intergenerational dialogues.

Implementation of Phase I was a learning experience which provided nuance to the assumptions made at the design stage of CMP and highlighted many lessons for future programming, such as:

- **Dialogue should begin with homogenous groups:** The strategy of having homogenous groups at the start of the dialogue process was effective and cathartic, as people were able to express themselves and their prejudices freely which made the subsequent sessions of working through painful experiences towards non-recurrence of violence for all communities through values a more useful conver-

sation. The safe and open space created by having members of their own community present enabled deeper discussion.

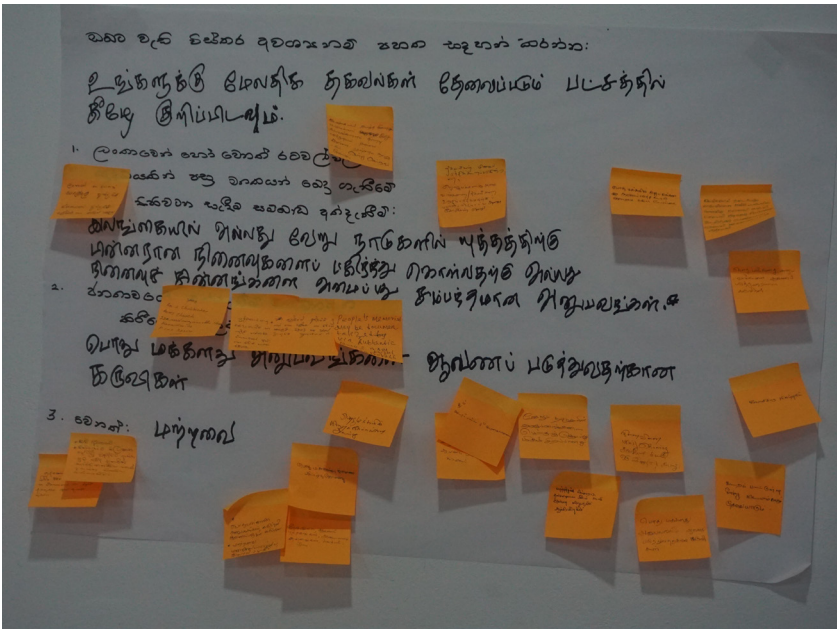
- **The logic of the dialogue workshop, which built on each session, was validated:** The dialogue process of: - a) expressing personal experiences, b) seeing others' stories, c) building on empathy felt for each other towards expressing the need for non-recurrence of violence, d) agreeing that a value-based society will help towards this and identifying simple, practical values for co-existence and peace in daily life – was validated in the responses and level of engagement from participants across the districts.
- **People who were vocal and engaged in civic activism naturally became spokespeople on the need for establishing values and morals in their communities.** The workshop content had more traction with those identified as "champions." They helped to create a more energetic and engaging dialogue at the divisional level and inter-district exchanges.
- **Promoting reconciliation required a people-centered approach:** The idea of building memorials was contested during CMP's consultations, which reinstated the need for careful consideration of this concept by civil society as well as the government. This highlighted the importance of consulting people at the local level and engaging their feedback in adjusting project activities, whenever required.
- **To generate a public discourse, the media engagement needs to be broad:** Rather than limiting the media engagement to journalists, social activists, bloggers and educators, exploring possible linkages with youth groups, media or communications staff of different entities such as faith-based organizations generated a wider hype on both traditional and new media. These efforts were helpful in creating a public discourse on the topic of non-recurrence of violence by sharing the collection of stories about the costs of war and violence which lead people to go beyond their comfort zones and expose them to engage with the "other."

CMP Phase II was designed to consolidate the achievements of Phase I. The project goal and objectives remained the same, but focus shifted to Objectives 1 and 2, consolidating and extending the project by covering new locations, adding new activities and specifically targeting young people (Box 4).

Box 4: CMP Objectives and Activities in Phase II

Specific Objective	Outcomes	Activities
1. To create platforms for individuals and communities, from across ethnic, political and regional divides, to share their stories and engage in community dialogue and memorializing.	1.1 Increased people-to-people engagement within and across communities through dialogue on non-recurrence of violence. 1.2 Increased ability and interest of participating youth to promote non-recurrence of violence through strengthened understanding of memory, transitional justice and peace building tools.	- Multilevel people-to-people dialogues around non-recurrence in existing districts - Multilevel people-to-people dialogues around non-recurrence in new districts - Intergenerational dialogue and youth-led community facilitation a. One-day intergenerational dialogues b. Peer exchange c. Facilitation Training d. Youth-led community dialogue - Small grant schemes for community led initiatives - Sharing workshops at district and national level
2. To preserve historical memory through archiving and disseminating the narratives to a wider audience.	2.1 Increased public discourse on memorialization, narratives, shared values and non-recurrence of violent conflict through diverse media platforms.	- Public exhibition on non-recurrence - Establishment and engagement with dispersed archives - Media Outreach and engagement


There is a reason I wear white.



What has been achieved? Outputs and Outcomes

Strategic Objective 1: Create platforms for individuals and communities, from across ethnic, political and regional divides, to share their stories and engage in community dialogue and memorializing

Activities Planned and Completed

Several types of platforms have been created through the CMP project for individuals and communities to share their stories and engage in commu-

nity dialogue. The most notable of these are the dialogue workshops held at village, divisional and district levels.

The objective of CMP's dialogue process was to engage diverse communities in order to ultimately create a group of "champions" or community leaders who are aware of the potential of nonviolence, have a basic understanding of conflict resolution skills and are interested in non-recurrence of violence. The "champions" should have been exposed to multiple narratives of the war, accept that war or violence is not what they want for their future, and agree about the need for a value-based society that chooses nonviolence, empathy, compassion and understanding of "the other" as a basis for future peace.[6] The dialogue workshops were held with the same communities over a period of time and the participants who attended the district dialogue workshops had also attended the village and divisional dialogue workshops previously.

Outcome: increased people-to-people engagement within and across communities through dialogue on non-recurrence of violence

CMP provided a platform for people of both genders, diverse ethnicities and ages, and from various locations, to come together and exchange their experiences of violence and hopes for the future. With the end of war between the Government and the LTTE in 2009, many physical barriers were removed and there were greater possibilities to travel and move around within the country. As a result, there is much greater interaction across ethnic and religious divides. Yet, most of these interactions do not provide an environment conducive to sharing or discussing the war or one's own experiences of the war. Data from CMP suggests that while many of those affected by violence have shared their stories and experiences within their own community, few have done so with other communities. For example, youth baseline survey data collected at the start of Phase II finds that over 60 percent of youth who attended the divisional level dialogue workshops did not know even one single person outside their own ethnic group, who had suffered directly due to ethnic violence, war or communal clashes.

The CMP provided opportunities for people to meet and share their experiences across communities. Workshops, especially at the district level, had face-to-face participation of all three ethnicities within the same space and over a two-day period. In all, six hundred twenty-eight people came

forward to formally narrate and document their stories through the CMP and many others shared their stories informally at the workshops. *Ex post* survey data at the end of Phase I show that CMP participants are twice as likely as non-participants to know many people from other ethnic groups who have suffered due to ethnic violence, war or communal clashes. Case study data further show that while participants at the dialogue workshops knew or had heard of the major incidents of the war before they came to the dialogues, what they encountered at the dialogue workshops were personal stories, shared directly by those who experienced it or documented in the form of letters, in "tree of life" format or in banners and in video format. These stories carried greater weight as they were shared in the first person, in the words and perspective of the person who experienced it. This makes the past real and not an abstract event in history and helped to change long held attitudes and prejudices.

Overwhelmingly, the response to hearing about the experience of violence is sadness and empathy. More than 98 percent of participants who responded to the *ex post* survey at the end of Phase I said they felt sadness for the other's pain and sometimes anger that people had to undergo such suffering. When they put themselves in another's position, it also helps to put their own pain and suffering in perspective. A 52-year old Tamil man from Mannar said

> we (Tamils) say we have undergone severe hardship and loss in Mullivaikkaal. Why don't we feel for the people (Muslims) who were evacuated within 48 hours, carrying all their belongings in plastic bags? Why don't we feel the sorrow they left behind? Because of their displacement they lost their properties and lands. These things happened to them.

Case study data also show how new friendship bonds have been created across divisions. During the district workshops, participants in the host district opened their homes to participants from other districts. For many participants this was a watershed experience, especially for the Sinhalese; a Sinhala man from Matara said

> I stayed in a Tamil house in Ampara. Initially when we got to Ampara and they handed us over to the host families I was little scared. But when [my host] started talking in Sinhala I had no problem. They are very nice people."

His experience suggests that friendship bonds are stronger when there is a common language and common interests.

> "We ended up speaking together a lot. We still speak on the phone regularly. I called him back first, after I got back home, and then he called. He is a very knowledgeable person, he knows a lot about politics and we talk about those things. We speak about the war, and the elections.

Participants at the Youth dialogue workshops on the other hand, stayed in a hotel or dormitory setting and this impacted the nature of friendships they may have otherwise made. While they acknowledged that there may have been parental opposition if the arrangement was to stay in a stranger's house, especially for the girls, many felt that their experience of CMP would have been richer if they were able to stay in a home and not a hotel. A Sinhala young man from Ampara said

> my mother went for the workshop (in Phase I). When she got back she told us about how she stayed with a Tamil family, how she sat on the floor and the food she ate. I was really keen to have a similar experience which is why I came.

Another young man from Moneragala said *"if we stay at a hotel we only associate with the person who is our roommate. We should go stay in the villages and stay in the homes of the people there. We need to get used to mingling with all this and win challenges no matter what, especially when one is a youth."*

The district visits also required long distance travel and participants from diverse ethnicities travelled together on long road trips; a young Sinhala man from Ampara said *"I met a Tamil boy from a neighboring village when we travelled to Matara together. It was a long bus ride and there was time to get to know each other and share our thoughts and feelings. Since that trip, we have stayed in touch. He calls me often and he is helping me to learn the Tamil language".* For several participants, these friendships made with other participants from one's own district have developed and strengthened through regular interactions after the workshop. As a Sinhala woman from Ampara noted

> I still meet the Muslim ladies I met in the Eragama dialogue all the time, when I go to town, on the road, etc. Earlier we didn't know them, but now we know them and they say hello and talk to us. I meet the Tamil sisters I met in the Eragama dialogue, when I go to Kovil. They come to the Kovil and we go there as well, and when we meet we talk. Earlier we didn't know them so we never talked.

This face-to-face engagement has helped to break down some of the mistrust between ethnicities. For example, among the youth case studies thirteen out of fourteen interviewed said it would be fine for them to live in an area where their ethnicity was not the majority (Table 1). Twelve out of fourteen said they had no problem shopping in stores owned by people of other ethnicities, thirteen said they have no problem with getting medicines from a doctor belonging to different ethnicity and all fourteen said they would be fine to work for an employer with ethnicity different from their own. However less than half felt that marriage with someone from a different ethnicity would be appropriate for themselves or their family members.

Table 1: Youth perceptions about engaging with people from other groups

No.	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Living in a neighborhood where half of your neighbors are (not own group) people	Shopping at stores owned by (not own group) people	Having to work for (not own group) people	Having a relative marry a (not own group) person	Being treated by a (not own group) doctor in an emergency situation
1	Tamil	Female	20	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine
2	Tamil	Male	21	Fine	Fine	Fine	Don't ask this question	Fine
3	Tamil	Male	30	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine

4	Sinhala	Female	24	Fine	Fine	Fine	Nobody in our family has been married that way. The only issue is that if a girl marries a Muslim man, that girl will have to face a lot of issues according to their religion. They have very strict laws and minimal respect for women and because of that reason I don't really like this.	Fine
5	Sinhala	Female	20	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine
6	Sinhala	Female	23	I wouldn't like to live in a Muslim village. No I won't like that. The women are very restricted in those communities	After the April 21 incident, people didn't go to Muslim shops. I didn't go either. There was a story that some girls who went to the Lover (a Muslim shop) were pelted with rotten eggs. I didn't want that to happen to me, so I didn't go. But now that's not there anymore, and now I go.	Fine	Parents will not like it, so I won't like it either. Youth are impulsive but the parents' generation think long term, so we should listen to them	We go to Sinhala doctors, there are no Muslim doctors around here so I haven't really considered this.

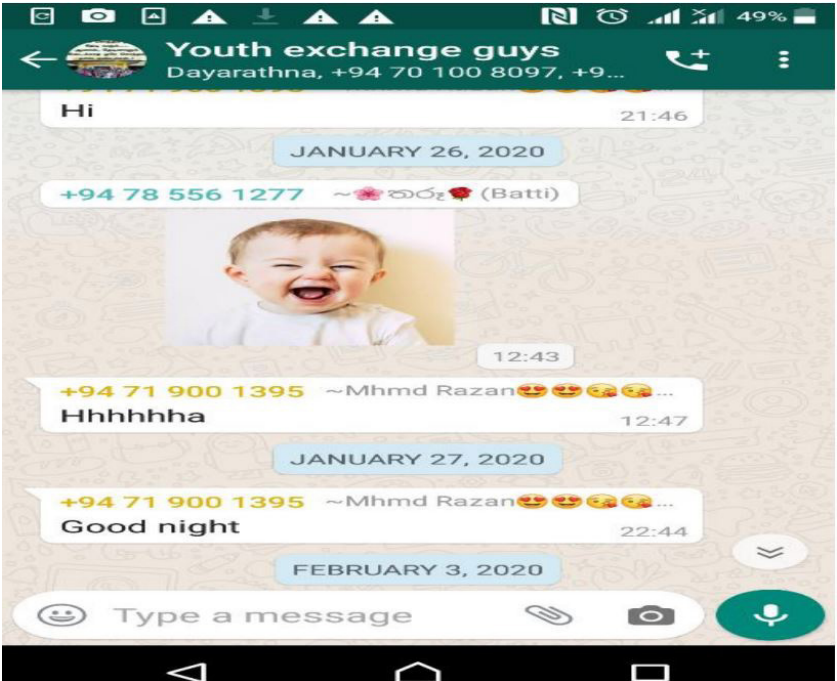
7	Sinhala	Male	27	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	I went to a Muslim doctor recently and I got sick with another illness. He was not a good doctor.
8	Sinhala	Male	22	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine
9	Sinhala	Male	17	Fine	I mostly buy from Sinhala shops though. I go to Muslim shops but not to buy clothes. I also eat from Muslim shops.	Fine	Nobody in the family has married like this. If my sister says that she wants to marry somebody like that I will have to see according to the situation, but I don't really like the idea. They do not match our Buddhist religion and their traditions are different from us.	Fine
10	Muslim	Female	23	Fine	Fine	Fine	No response	Fine
11	Muslim	Male	20	Fine	Fine	Fine	Don't ask this question	Fine
12	Muslim	Male	19	Fine	Fine	Fine	The other group person would need to convert to Islam	Fine
13	Muslim	Male	20	Fine	Fine	Fine	It's good. But if she could change into our religion and marry, it's good I think.	Fine
14	Muslim	Male	20	Fine	Fine	Fine	I personally don't mind (marrying a Sinhalese), but the people at home won't like it. Anyway, it will create a lot of problems, so maybe Sinhalese shouldn't marry Muslims.	Fine

Most new friendships and connections are with others of one's own gender. Examples abound of women creating new friendship bonds with

other women, across ethnicity and even age. But there are hardly any examples of new friendships outside of one's ethnicity as well as gender, which is probably a reflection of strict cultural norms discouraging friendships between women and men outside of family. This appears to be less of an issue among youth however, and there are many instances of friendships created across gender and ethnicity, after the CMP program.

Where participants have made no connections with participants of other ethnicities, language is often the most difficult barrier to overcome. Many Sinhalese only speak Sinhala and this has been a barrier to them to make friends, but to a large extent, this is overcome by the fact that most Muslims and increasingly more Tamils, are able to speak Sinhalese. Youth on the other hand were able to use technology to bridge the language barrier. At their own initiative the youth who participated at the inter-district youth exchange visits formed WhatsApp/Viber groups after the CMP where they manage to communicate using English text as well as through visual media (Box 5). Participation is voluntary and they keep in touch on a regular basis. While the content of the group chat is not about issues relating to reconciliation and peace, there is a constant dialogue which is more focused on keeping in touch with their friends through sending wishes, memes, jokes and so on.

Box 8: WhatsApp Group Chat of the Moneragala District Youth Visit Participants



Youth, unlike adults, have greater opportunities to engage across communities. Baseline survey data with youth who participated in the first round of workshops at the inter-division levels show that 74 percent of Sinhala youth have visited the house of someone who was not of their own ethnicity at least once in the past five years (Table 2). Among adults the comparable figure is about 46 percent.[7]

Table 2: Youth Baseline – engaging with other communities

	Many times	A few times	Once	Never
1. During the past 5 years, how often have you visited the house of someone who was not of your ethnicity?				
Muslim	29%	49%	6%	16%
Sinhala	22%	38%	14%	26%
Tamil	37%	46%	3%	5%
2. During the past 5 years, how often have you shared a meal with someone who was not of your ethnicity?				
Muslim	29%	43%	10%	18%
Sinhala	17%	40%	15%	29%
Tamil	47%	37%	3%	7%

Source: Youth Baseline Survey

This baseline data suggests that either youth who came for the CMP are generally more inclined to engage across ethnicities and/or that youth in general engage more across ethnicities. Case studies among youth suggest that it is both. A young Sinhalese woman from Anuradhapura said

> I usually go for social work and I have helped to build toilets and small bridges in and around our community. I make friends very easily and therefore I always make new friends no matter what ethnicity and I also maintain those friendships closely with them. I have Tamil friends that I met around 10 years ago. We were taken to Mannar and we met new friends there. Our temple monk took us there. I was in grade 9 then. We still keep in touch and they have helped me too. They could speak in both Sinhalese and Tamil so there was no communication issue. I can also speak a bit in Tamil now.

In all, over 3,600 people have participated in the dialogue workshops organized by the CMP in six out of the twenty-five districts in Sri Lanka. While CMP has covered less than 0.02 percent of Sri Lanka's population of twenty million people, those who have attended the workshops have experienced a change in knowledge, attitude and behavior. Such changes are most significant for those who attended the dialogue workshops at all three levels who are considered as CMP "champions." Overall CMP "champions" number around four hundred fifty people.

Outcome: increased ability and interest of participating youth to promote non-recurrence of violence through strengthened understanding of memory, transitional justice and peacebuilding tools

Among youth who participated in CMP, there was a high level of interest to understand the causes of ethnic violence. The baseline survey shows that between 84 – 88 percent of youth, from all three ethnicities felt it was important to understand why the ethnic violence, war or communal clashes occurred (Table 3).

There were also high levels of agreement on the importance of memory. As many as 78 percent of Tamil youth felt it was important to preserve the memory of what happened during ethnic violence, war or communal clashes compared to 63 percent among the Sinhalese and 64 percent among the Muslims.

Table 3: Youth Baseline – importance of Memory

	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Do you think it's important to understand why the ethnic violence, war or communal clashes occurred?			
Muslim	85%	4%	11%
Sinhala	84%	2%	12%
Tamil	88%	3%	2%
2. Do you think it's important to preserve the memory of what happened during ethnic violence, war or communal clashes?			
Muslim	64%	22%	14%
Sinhala	63%	21%	14%
Tamil	78%	14%	2%

Source: Youth Baseline Survey

While the baseline survey suggests that the youth who participated in CMP were already interested in reconciliation related activities, there is evidence of increased interest among participating youth in promoting non-recurrence of violence. Out of fourteen case studies, two youth spoke of instances where they have already had the opportunity to practice the skills they learned at the workshops to understand and rise above conflict. While one situation described involved face-to-face confrontations and the other occurred on social media platforms, in both situations they have engaged with people of their own community to de-escalate potential conflict.

When there is a group of like-minded youth, it appears to be easier to take decisive action to de-escalate conflict. A Sinhalese man who belongs to an active Youth Society in Moneragala narrated an incident after the Easter bombings: *"there was one person who was posting unwanted jokes on a WhatsApp group and we told him if you continue this, we will remove you from the group and he stopped immediately."* Others also felt that while they cannot act alone, they would be able to resolve conflict as a group: a young woman from Moneragala said *"I can talk to [people engaged in a conflict] with the support of others such as my friends. Then I will have people to discuss how solve the conflict and how to execute the plans and so on. That's the meaning of the saying 'Unity is strength'."*

There are multiple barriers and challenges which discourage youth from taking action to promote non-recurrence of violence. For example, several youth respondents spoke of being ridiculed for taking a stand against racist attitudes after the Easter bombings. A Sinhalese woman from Anuradhapura said

> I usually speak up when there is some issue like this and I get scolded for doing so and I get asked if I don't care about my own kind. Such people are difficult to deal with. Some Sinhala people think that there should only be Sinhalese Buddhists and if we associate with a Muslim we are called traitors.

Several young people spoke of the difficulties they face when they try to resolve conflicts between older adults. A young woman from Mannar said *"when the two elderly people are fighting, definitely they will say to me 'you are a child, you go to a side, your words don't matter."* A Muslim man in Kalutara felt that the older generation has not adapted to the new context and was creating problems for everyone including the youth:

> Elders have to be told by us. This is a crazy situation – usually the elders should advise the young people. But in this case we the youth have to correct the elders. I need to speak to [an elderly gentleman who was being intolerant of others], otherwise it will happen again. Now we see the mentality of these people.

While only a small number of youth have had an opportunity to use the skills they have learned through CMP successfully, the majority said that they have not had such opportunities but feel they can engage if a conflict situation arose. In particular, they felt that ability to identify the cause of the conflict, the knowledge and tools to manage a conflict and techniques to de-escalate a conflict are skills that they found useful.

In one case, the youth directly linked his newfound interest and ability to engage with conflicts around him, to the CMP project. The man, who is a Muslim from Anuradhapura, said

> … I was a person who [avoided problems and would leave] the place when a problem arises. After [CMP], little by little I started thinking about the causes of the problem. Now when I see a problem, I try to act as a mediator or a judge, trying to solve that problem as far as I can."

Another young woman said *"before* [the CMP], *we didn't know* [how to resolve a conflict], *but now I have courage as I have the knowledge."*

However, several youth pointed out that there were some conflicts they could not resolve and that there was no point in even trying. None have so far engaged in trying to resolve conflicts with people of other ethnicities or religions. A young man from Kalutara noted

> there is no point in speaking up. Sometimes people call out bad things to us when we pass by, we laugh or look down and walk on. People who do that are not the type of people who listen, so I don't go to speak with them. I didn't speak about what happened on April 21 with anyone who is not a Muslim. Sometimes, they ridicule us and joke about things like why we wear a hat. I don't like it so I don't go to speak with them.

A Sinhala man from Ampara echoed a similar sentiment when he said *"I can't speak to the people who haven't had this [CMP] experience. They won't understand."*

Strategic Objective 2: Preserve historical memory through archiving and disseminating the narratives to a wider audience

In Phase I, the first stage of the project was devoted to collecting the life histories which form the base of the memory archive created through CMP. In all, CMP was able to document three hundred fifty-four stories, which include letters, photos, village maps, children maps, video and audio stories, collected and uploaded in the digital archive, www.memorymap.lk.

During Phase I, CMP explored the possibility of extending dialogues and conversations about memory, memorialization and their connections to reconciliation and transitional justice, through traditional and new media as follows:

- **Workshops with media personnel:** These aimed to promote the use of *memorymap.lk* content in media outputs relating to peacebuilding and reconciliation. Three workshops were held for the specific groups of media professionals, that is, print journalists, electronic journalists and social media activists/bloggers, and youth (such as the curriculum development personnel for co-existence education and in religious education). As a result of the workshops, forty-seven articles on topics relating to reconciliation and non-recurrence of violence were published in three languages, eight in Sinhala, thirty-four in Tamil and five in English language.
- **Social media outreach through ROAR webzine:** Ten articles appeared in Sinhala, Tamil and English and focus on various aspects of how memorialization and stories on the *memorymap.lk* website are related to issues of transitional justice.
- **TV and Radio Talk show:** There were seven TV episodes and eleven radio talk shows produced and aired during the course of the project. The thematic areas of these talk shows were (i) civic responsibility; (ii) focus on next generation; and (iii) value-based society. The talk shows were aired through national and state radio and TV outlets.

  Statistics indicate that the media campaigns on print, radio, TV and social media reached over two million people, with thousands of them re-sharing, particularly the content that was posted on

> the Facebook pages of CMP, Searchlight and ROAR. This indicates a good start towards initiating a discussion on memory and peace-building, which needs to be sustained. In terms of reach, the TV programs had an average audience of 333,000 per episode and radio had 263,760 per program. Written articles, particularly those that appeared on the established website ROAR, generated interesting and positive discussions on topics ranging from negative peace and positive peace, to values and empathy towards the killing of three hundred people in 1958 riots. Overall, however, it was clear that in the current media context, it is difficult to engage the attention of an audience long enough to communicate complex issues such as memory, memorialization and its link to reconciliation.

This learning was used to design the media strategy in Phase II which focused on developing fifteen thirty-second video clips in Sinhala and Tamil languages which were telecast through the three private TV channels. These videos were also disseminated via social media. The clips were telecast over a period of two months and infrequently, given the costs associated, which may have undermined the effectiveness of this strategy. None of the case study respondents recall seeing these spots. The social media dissemination of the videos probably had greater reach.

The CMP website – www.memorymap.lk – hosts the stories that have been collected in the project, and serves as a memorial in and of itself. All uploaded stories are available with Sinhala, Tamil and English translations, and have been uploaded and tagged along a map of Sri Lanka. Over 15,000 people have accessed these stories so far. In addition, the CMP leaves behind the dispersed archives in six districts; these are contained in a printed A3 version of all the stories collected in Phase I of CMP and a collection of all videos and audios in a digital format, which were presented to district and divisional libraries in project areas. Similar to the website www.memory-map.lk, the dispersed archives also serve as memorials to the experience of individuals and communities during the past thirty years.

These efforts are important and relevant given the political context within Sri Lanka that does not prioritize memory or memorialization. There are few events or activities to remember past violence and most of these are focused on a community experience. In this context, the archives collected through the CMP may increase in importance over time, possibly if future

generations are interested in understanding and learning from the violence of the past three decades.

Strategic Objective 3: Facilitate a process of common understanding on policy outlooks and programs on managing, including, and using historical memories.

During the implementation of CMP Phase I, changes in the context at the national level saw the introduction of multiple new mechanisms under the Transitional Justice (TJ) process. These include mechanisms such as the Office of Reparations which covered issues of reconciliation and historical memory. At the same time, while there was a plethora of activities at the national level, there was less attention paid by the state as well as other implementers to promote reconciliation at the grassroots level. Reflecting on these context level changes using the iterative Theory of Change tool, the project team decided to replace the production of a White Paper on memory work which was planned under this objective, with multiple practice papers. This shift is also in line with the more general shift in project focus, from the national level to local level, specifically by creating "champions" who can promote memory work, reconciliation between communities and prevent the recurrence of violence at the local level.

In all, fourteen publications were issued by the CMP, of which two are discussion papers, two are practice notes, four are facilitation guides and one is a toolkit. These have been disseminated widely within the development community in the country and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that they have been used to design similar projects by other donors and other non-governmental organizations working in Sri Lanka.

What did we learn? Reflection, Lessons and Recommendations

About promoting person-to-person engagement across divisions

It is now over ten years since the end of the war and many things have changed in the country. During the war, spaces and mobility were restricted in multiple ways but now there is much greater movement of goods, people and ideas, across ethnic, religious and geographic divisions. CMP case studies show that except in a few areas in Kalutara and Moneragala, ethnicities do not live in isolation and there is engagement across ethnic and reli-

gious divisions. Communities engage with other communities when they shop, when they engage with service providers such as doctors, when they attend universities, when they go to common areas of worship and so on. However, while these connections have made people from different groups more familiar to each other and broken down some barriers, they do not often lead to deep connections of friendship. Language and lack of opportunity to meet in spaces and conditions suitable to forming such connections have acted as barriers. Exceptions can be seen in some areas in Ampara, Anuradhapura and Mannar where communities live in closer proximity to each other, language is not as much of a barrier and there are opportunities for communities to mix at social functions such as weddings and funerals.

The CMP experience shows several ways in which contact across various divisions can lead to a deeper engagement. CMP dialogue workshops were conducted under relaxed, friendly and positive conditions, there were many breaks where participants could mingle with other participants, the content focused strongly on values and eliciting the commonality of those values, and finally workshop content was activity oriented, and included many games, role plays and group work. All documents were provided in three languages and workshop facilitators were bilingual. However language remained a barrier as formal translation services were provided mainly to communicate the workshop content and rarely to promote friendship and communication between individuals. While youth found ways around this through the use of technology and social media, language was more of the barrier for adults to engage with each other as they were less likely to know a second language or the link language of English. A fifty-six-year old Sinhala woman from Kalutara said *"I did meet many Muslim and Tamil persons but there was a massive language barrier, even with the translator. Even if we get their phone numbers, how will we speak with them? So we told the translator to tell them that we are not able to communicate because of the language."*

One of the most successful methods promoting deeper engagement was having participants from outside the district staying with a participant from another community for the duration of the district visit. The project provided financial support to the hosts to defray costs, but the level of hospitality shown by the hosts suggests that they did not do it just for the money but because they genuinely wanted to do it.

Having gone through two rounds of workshops before the district visits was critical in ensuring that the hosts and guests were both of the right

mindset before staying in each other's houses. The guests recall feelings of vulnerability, because they were asked to stay, sometimes alone, with strangers, but the contrast between their fear and their host's friendliness and care, acted as a catalyst for many participants to change previously strongly held negative attitudes and prejudices. Looking back on the CMP experience, bonds of friendship which appear most likely to be sustained are those created between host families and their guests.

District visits also helped to promote deeper people-to-people engagement because participants travelled for long periods of time, sometimes as much as nine hours, to get from their district to where the workshop was being held. Many hours spent travelling together in an atmosphere of a pleasure trip helped to promote friendship bonds, especially among youth participants. Because they are from the same area and they can meet again easily, these new friendships may be sustained. As one young man from Ampara noted *"I made friends on the bus, and we sat next to each other at the workshop too. One Tamil boy from my area that I met on the bus, still calls me often. When I get to know him better I am planning to visit him at his home. At the workshop itself, there wasn't much time to make new friends."*

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To promote deeper connections, people-to-people interactions should happen over a period of time (at least several days) and be based around activities such as games, role plays, visits to places of interest and so on.
- Participants need to be encouraged to have a positive mindset about other communities before they engage with each other very closely, such as hosting a person from another community.

About using memory and values to change attitudes and behavior

The starting point for CMP was collecting individual memories of violence. During CMP Phase I, three hundred fifty-four stories, which included letters, photos, village maps, children maps, video and audio stories, were collected and uploaded in the digital archive and preserved in dispersed archives. CMP has gone beyond archiving memories to using these memories to promote reconciliation. The series of workshops with project participants began by focusing on one's own memories which acted as a catharsis to open up and feel empathy when in the next stage when other people's memories

of violence are shared. As a fifty-eight-year old Tamil woman from Ampara said *"I have shared my personal story. Personally I have a lot of worries. I released these worries through sharing my story. Later, I realized people are living with a lot of worries and problems. Compared to those issues and worries, mine are nothing (thoosu - dust)".* Awakening memories of personal experiences can create catharsis, and also empathy towards others who have experienced violence to varying degrees.

In many cases, when the participants from one community are faced with personal histories and memories of other communities, it requires them to face uncomfortable realities, that their version of "truth" may not be the only truth. For example, inter-district visits compelled them to confront the violence perpetrated on others by their own community. Sinhalese visiting the site of a grenade attack on a church by the Navy or Tamils visiting the site of the massacre of twenty-eight Buddhist monks by the LTTE were forced to revisit their black and white view of the war, with clearly identified "good" and "bad/evil" parties. This muddying of how the war is perceived breaks down some of the mental barriers and increases the openness to hear multiple truths. For many, especially in the south, it may be an important milestone in the journey towards accepting and acknowledging the suffering of others due to the war. As a sixty-eight-year old Sinhala man from Matara said *"people were able to release grievances which were deeply rooted until now. I also felt that the stories were true, and all this time we heard what the TV said, but these were heartfelt stories coming from the people themselves... I think these stories may be true."* When memories are shared in person at the location where the incident happened, there is greater receptivity to it. However, not everyone was equally open to hearing other "truths" and set a high bar to accept them. As a sixty-seven-year old Sinhala man from Moneragala said

> showing is always better than just trying to convince people through talking. When explaining what happened in our village, it was good the blood stains were still there at the house where the incident happened so these people who came from other areas could see them. We also went to another village where a man from there explained what had happened to them. To my mind, the incident he related was not very clear. They didn't have anything to show as such. We just listened to him. I think that incident was not as serious as what happened here.

CMP also uses common values as the entry point to imagine the future the participants wanted, on the basis that shared "Sri Lankan" values may be an entry point to developing resilience and agency at individual and village levels. This conversation on values generated a good response at the workshops. As the ex post survey at the end of Phase I showed, there is commonality among the three ethnicities in terms of the values they prioritize; for example, respect, patience and humanity was valued by all three ethnicities. The dialogue workshops helped to bring this commonality out and also to draw a link with preventing the recurrence of violent conflict. When survey respondents were asked *"if these values that you have identified earlier are shared across ethnic, religious, political divisions, do you think it will be easier to prevent violent conflict?"* 99 percent of Tamils, 90 percent of Sinhalese and 80 percent of Muslims said yes.

Overall, the logic of the dialogue workshops, which built on each session, was validated: The dialogue process of: - a) expressing one's own story; b) seeing others' stories; c) building on empathy felt for each other towards expressing the need for non-recurrence of violence; d) agreeing that a value-based society will help towards this and identifying simple, practical values for co-existence and peace in daily life – was validated in the responses and level of engagement from participants across the districts. Participants specifically noted that the structure and content of the workshops, helped to change their attitudes. As one young man from Moneragala noted "we need to have the first day to change our mindset. Then on the second day we went to Madugalle and Talaimannar to listen to the injustices done to a Muslim lady. In my opinion we need to listen and to see, in order to understand. Both are important."

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Sharing memories is cathartic and also provides a base to connect across divisions.
- Envisioning the future as a value-based society and what that should look like, helps to bring out the commonality across divisions.
- It is not enough only to talk about memories, or only to show places where events have occurred. Both elements are necessary in order to make the memories "real" for outsiders, which will help them to understand and change their attitudes.

About engaging with youth for non-recurrence

There is a general consensus within Sri Lanka that in order to reduce the possibility of violence recurring in the future, the lessons from past eras of violence need to be communicated to the youth. But at the same time there is a danger that bringing up past events can lead to reigniting feelings of anger and hatred against "the other" among a new generation of youth, which in turn can lead to new conflicts. As a Muslim man from Matara said

> the generation after 2009 knows war only as a history lesson. They have examples from other countries (Syria, Yemen) and they think war would have been similar in Sri Lanka. It is good that we tell them what happened, but we have to do it in such a way that we don't instigate anger in children's minds. Memory fades over time.

The CMP experience is valuable in that sense because it shows how the youth can be engaged on this issue at a deeper level, but without leading to new conflicts.

The CMP shows that there is a sizable cohort of youth interested in learning more about Sri Lanka's violent past, as well as engaging in activities to promote peace and reconciliation between communities. By and large, those who participated in the workshops tend to be those who were already interested in these topics; for example, respect, humanity, understanding, patience and coexistence were values youth prioritized at baseline, where as many as 85 percent also said that if given the opportunity they would prefer to live in mixed community neighborhood. They have also had some experience in engaging with other communities often on social work; as many as 55 percent had worked collaboratively on some activity with people belonging to other communities. However, the main attraction for youth to participate in CMP was the opportunity to meet other, like-minded, youth and make friends. They were also attracted by the prospect of a trip to another part of the country.

While youth participated in numbers at workshops, the question of what they learned through the workshops, remains. Did they learn conflict resolution skills, can they prevent conflict, did they learn to deal with hate speech especially on social media? The participating youth demonstrated a good understanding of the theoretical aspects of conflict resolution they

learned at the workshops, but only two out of fourteen case study respondents said that they had the opportunity to put this knowledge into practice. This is disappointing, given that 2019 was a year of heightened tension between communities, especially after the Easter bombings. It is possible that youth do not have the capacity to see opportunities to engage and it may be necessary for workshop capacity-building to include this element.

Overall, skills building should be more practical, more hands-on, and draw more from real life examples so that the youth can see their applicability to their own lived circumstances better.

It would also be helpful to find ways to reinforce the CMP messages once the workshops end. This could include helping to build networks of support, among participating youth as well as by connecting them to other existing networks of like-minded youth, so that youth can support and help each other engage to reduce and mitigate local level conflict, for example to push back against hate speech on social media. In CMP, it was hoped that such networks would arise organically, but the project experience suggests that a more proactive approach may be required to explore whether the networks that do arise, can become something more than forums for keeping in touch with each other.

There are barriers that youth face when attempting to engage to de-escalate or resolve conflict at the local level, which should be acknowledged and addressed in workshops. One major barrier is that cultural norms in Sri Lanka strongly act against youth getting involved in conflicts between adults. There is a distance between youth and adults which many youth find difficult to bridge. Youth trying to engage in such conflicts can inadvertently escalate a conflict and end up causing more harm than good. Workshops can provide space for youth and adults to come together to explore how to overcome these cultural barriers and norms. For example, intergenerational discussions during workshops have taken the form of passing memories from one generation to another, but it can be expanded to include an intergenerational discussion of conflict resolution. As youth have noted, most of the conflicts at the local level are between adults and if they are to engage in these conflicts they need the skills and capacity to do so.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Skills development for youth should be provided through hands-on experience of engaging with conflict, especially on social media.
- Youth should be supported to learn how to engage positively in conflicts between adults, and they should be trained in aspects of Do-No-Harm as well.
- More needs to be done after workshops end, to promote networking and developing structures of mutual support between participating youth.

About promoting reconciliation in a dynamic context

CMP raises interesting questions about engaging at the grassroots level to promote reconciliation and prevent the recurrence of violence. It shows clearly that there is still insufficient opportunity for people to engage meaningfully across ethnic and other divisions in Sri Lanka. There is greater contact between communities, but this is superficial and without much understanding and appreciation of diversity, which is dangerous and can lead to new conflicts developing. For example, a Sinhalese woman in Ampara reacted to rumors about the Muslim community by noting that many young men in her village frequent Muslim restaurants and are also childless,

> I believe that the story about the abortion pills is very true. There are many young families in this village who do not have children. There must be some truth in this story, that is the only possible explanation. This must be the reason. One of the couples has been tested and it is a problem with the husband. He, as did many of the young men in our village, used to frequent a Muslim shop to have their soup on a regular basis. This must be the reason.

Such stories were repeated by several case study respondents, which suggests that what engagement there is across divisions in Sri Lanka at present, is largely insufficient to break down deeply held mistrust or act as a buffer against rumors and other potential conflict triggers.

The CMP is also based on the idea that a few people with skills and interest in mitigating or transcending conflict can counteract aggressive elements at a grassroots level. These "champions" are the target of the CMP dialogue workshops and skill building. There is some evidence from case

studies to suggest that these champions are in fact coming forward to mitigate and de-escalate conflict but these conflicts are usually small scale and often within their own communities. A 43 year old Muslim woman from Mannar recounted an incident as follows:

> In my family, a conflict got worse. Two males were about to beat two girls. At that situation, I tried my level best to stop the violence and prevent those girls from [getting hurt by] the violence, but the men didn't listen to me. So, as my last option, I called the police.

There are incidents recounted by youth "champions" in relation to de-escalating conflicts over social media such as on WhatsApp groups. These efforts suggest that the "champions" are attempting to understand and engage with conflicts in their own community groups, and bode well for their development to working towards non-recurrence of violence at a larger scale. However, there is also a very real danger that unless they are supported with greater skills, hands-on experience and encouragement of like-minded others, these "champions" may disengage over time.

While the CMP focused on looking back and understanding conflicts in the past with a view to developing skills to recognize early warning signs of new conflicts, the dynamic nature of the country context often means new conflicts take on new forms and occur in new spaces. CMP shows that many people in Sri Lanka are ignorant of each other's experiences and the root causes of conflict, which the project helped to address albeit in a small scale. The links of friendship that have developed across ethnic and other divisions may help to spread greater awareness of how events and policies affect groups scattered across various parts of the country. For example, during the anti-Muslim reaction after the Easter bombings, some CMP "champions" have attempted to crosscheck rumors with friends they met during workshops. Through their contact with people from other communities, they are able get another perspective, which strengthens them against manipulation by outsiders. In many cases, there is progress in their attitudes; from condemning an entire ethnic or religious group, some "champions" have progressed to concluding that everyone within a given community is not the same and it is often a few extremist individuals who create the problems.

The case studies also show that people are capable of having individual friends they like and respect from another ethnic group, while at the same

time condemning that ethnic group as a community. One "champion" from Moneragala spoke about new Muslim friends she has made and with whom she is regularly in touch, and in the same conversation said *"No we will not work with Muslims. We believe that they will do damage to us. We don't have a big issue about Tamils. But about Muslims we have a feeling like they are dangerous and we feel that they cannot be trusted."* These attitudes where the community is seen as separate from individuals, undermine the extent to which creating people-to-people connections can act as buffers to reduce conflict at the national level.

As a country, the Sri Lankan context presents a complex system. There are multiples of actors and multiples of interest at stake and causes and effects are linked in multiple ways. In such a complex and dynamic system, inability of the evaluators to link the workshops and "champions" created by CMP with reconciliation and non-recurrence of violence, should not be taken to mean that such linkages are not there or will never be there. Cause and effect are rarely linear in complex systems and the knowledge, skills and connections created through the CMP can become the base of positive action in future.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- More initiatives are needed to encourage people-to-people engagement across divisions under suitable conditions, as interactions that are happening organically can lead to worsening mistrust and tensions.
- Support the "champions" to build their knowledge and conflict resolution skills by engaging with small-scale conflicts in their own communities, before engaging with large-scale conflict at the national level.
- Encourage people to use their personal contacts to cross check rumors and media stories, to avoid being manipulated by forces with other agendas.

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Endnotes

1 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

2 The Sri Lankan government officially withdrew its support from the 2015 UN resolution in February 2020 and the transitional justice framework proposed in resolution UNHCR 30/1 is currently not being implemented.

3 The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is a Marxist–Leninist party and political movement in Sri Lanka. The movement was involved in two armed uprisings against the ruling governments in 1971 and 1987–89.

4 The Herstories Project (www.herstoryarchive.org) generated a memory and oral history archive containing the histories of two hundred eighty-five women from seven districts in the North, East and South of Sri Lanka. Over the period July 2012 through March 2013, the project collected the narratives of mothers from various parts of the country, on the basis that without oral histories, the gendered perspective of war, peace and security is inadequate. A curated exhibition of seventy narratives traveled to Galle, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Colombo, London and Canada, with smaller exhibitions traveling to Kabul, New York, Sydney and New Delhi. At each location, engagement with the material was encouraged through dialogue and discussion.

5 In addition to multiple informal meetings to share analysis of feedback received, three formal review meetings were held, in March 2016, May 2016 and September 2017, to reflect on the project experience and lessons learned and revisit its Theory of Change

6 Hettiarachchi, R. *Going Beyond the Archive: Facilitated Dialogue using Public History Collections. An introduction to the Series of Facilitate Dialogue Workshops,* CMP, 2019.

7 DE team, 2018. Survey Analysis Report, Community Memorialization Project (CMP), Internal Document.

Learning from People: IDSP Experience*

Institute of Development Studies and Practices

The Institute of Development Studies and Practices in Pakistan (IDSP Pakistan) was founded in 1998 by Dr Quratulain Bakhteari after she experimented in two parallel development studies courses in Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan and Lahore, the capital city of Punjab. After earning her B.A. degree, she helped in providing access to basic health care and education of new refugees coming from Bangladesh. Dr Bakhteari worked as a volunteer, organizer, and researcher in the informal settlements in and around Karachi. She made major contributions both to public health and sanitation during this time, providing toilets to 5,000 households through community actions, effectively changing the sanitation and hygiene practices for more than 35,000 people from 1979 to 1987. She helped new refugees coming from Bangladesh by providing them with access to basic health care and education. After earning a master's degree and a Ph.D., she established with the assistance of the Provincial Government of Balochistan and rural communities 2,200 government primary schools for girls in rural Balochistan, resulting in the enrollment of 200,000 girls — a record in Pakistan's history.

Frustrated with a lack of efficacy in internationally sponsored development projects, she wrote a concept paper that became the blueprint for Institute for Development Studies and Practices (IDSP), and was subsequently funded by The Asia Foundation for three years. She formulated the curriculum, recruited and trained faculty in advance of the formal launch of IDSP in 1998.

Since then, she focused her attention towards safe spaces for young people in Pakistan, while IDSP set a major strategic goal of establishing a university in the field of community development in order to work with

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