

**DIASPORA CIRCULATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE
IN THE POST CONFLICT ZONES OF
SRI LANKA***

By R. Cheran,

**Department of Sociology and Centre for Refugee Studies,
York University, Toronto, Canada
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Summary

Two decades ago, people moving from home countries to other countries would not have had the opportunity to remain actively engaged or even adequately informed of events in their home countries. Policy makers and scholars had a somewhat limited understanding of diasporic communities and their importance. Today, with the diminished saliency of the nation-state, the impact of globalization and the growing number of transnational migrants, this has changed. Diasporic groups, capable of maintaining and investing in social, economic and political networks that span the globe, are of increasing relevance and interest to policy makers in home countries as well as host countries. This paper critically approaches the question of diaspora and outlines possibilities for policy makers in addressing the issues posed by the diaspora in the Sri Lankan context.

Based on extensive fieldwork in Canada, France and Sri Lanka the concept of “diaspora circulation” is proposed as an effective tool for engaging the diaspora in a meaningful way in the reconstruction and development of war-torn areas in Sri Lanka. It is also suggested that the host countries as well as the home countries need to reformulate citizenship, migration, and development policies in order to facilitate the constructive involvement of diaspora.

I. Introduction

The emergence of the study of diaspora is fairly recent. In most scholarly discussions of ethnicity, nationalism and immigration very little attention has been devoted to diaspora. Research on diaspora is currently conducted from numerous perspectives including anthropology, sociology, human geography, international migration, postcolonialism, political economy and communications.

The term diaspora is derived from the Greek *diaspeirein*, meaning “dispersal or scattering of seeds”. A typical example of diaspora is given by the New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus of English language: “the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian Captivity; their dispersion” (*New Webster’s Dictionary*, 1993:264). However, the terms diaspora and diasporic communities, today, are increasingly being used as a metaphoric definition for expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities. The term diaspora has also been used to describe the experience of movement / displacement and to analyze the social, cultural and political formations that result from this movement / displacement.

How to define diaspora has been the subject of ongoing debate. While some scholars have argued in favor of identifying a closed set of attributes and have been only minimally concerned with the actual conditions of diasporic existence (Cohen 1997), others have preferred to use the term in the broader sense of human dispersal. For example, Safran (1991) maintains that diaspora is "that segment of people living outside the home land." Docker (2001: vii), defines diaspora as " a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, to more than one past and future". Brah's work on diaspora locates "diaspora space" in the "intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychological process" (1996).

The term diaspora is often conceptualized as being limited to powerless dispersed ethnic communities. However, the contemporary experience of several diasporas suggest otherwise. The rapid expansion of telecommunication technologies on a mass scale and the arrival of the internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s have created powerful opportunities for developing new forms of transnational relationships and communications. Increasingly, the term transnational community is also used as a synonym of diaspora and the two terms / concepts frequently collapse into one. Hence, the term diaspora became the catchword for the condition, experiences and the communities that were caught up in this web of transnational relations.

Clearly, a working definition of diaspora is in order. The broader definitions do not help us to understand the specific social, historical and political contexts within which diasporas have emerged. In addition, the traditional naming and meaning of diasporas can be expanded to include several communities that express new identities and cultural practices as the result of displacement. For example, Gilroy (1993) uses the concept diaspora to argue against ethnic absolutism and unitary ethnic culture. Stuart Hall (1990) uses diaspora to emphasize the hybrid identity formation and the processes, experiences and practices that result from displacements and cultural shifts. While recognizing that diasporas can eventually evolve into powerful transnational communities, conceptual and theoretical clarity is needed for a better understanding of diaspora and "transnational community".

II. What are Diasporas?

There are two key dimensions that assist us in differentiating transnationalism and diaspora :

1. All diasporas are transnational but *not* all transnationals are diasporas. In other words, If transnationalism is a condition of **living**, diaspora is about a condition of **leaving**. Diasporas are the result of forced migration whereas transnational communities are the result of voluntary migration.

2. There are communities that are simultaneously constructed as transnational and diasporic.

If diaspora can be mapped by looking at the conditions of leaving, we can identify the following as characteristics of a diaspora:

Forced migration: members of the diaspora or their ancestors have been forced to leave their homelands to several countries/places.

Collective memory / memory loss: members retain a collective memory-often a memory of pain, dispossession and trauma. From their collective memory they create/ articulate a vision of and for their homeland. These visions are not singular. Simultaneously, there is and will be memory loss down the generations. The generational and cultural tensions that can emerge in remembering and forgetting will be an important dimension in diasporic identities.

Alienation and insulation: members believe that they cannot be fully absorbed /accepted by host countries and therefore feel partly alienated and partly insulated. This means that they can never be in a dominant position in the host country.

De-territorialization /re-territorialization: This alienation is also an alienation from their nation. This is mainly the result of de-territorialization. De-territorialization becomes a re/source of new imagination for diasporic nations. The concept of nation has long been linked to a singular state and territory. The formation of Diasporas has clearly challenged the mono - dimensional and territorially bound ideas of nation. De-

territorialization and re-territorialization could create an exaggerated form of attachment and / or intensified sense of criticism. For example, both aspects are evident in the Tamil diaspora. I have argued elsewhere (Cheran, 2002), that landscapes not “territory”, infused with meanings and metaphors have played a central role in the formation of Tamil identities.

Projects of investment: Members believe that they should collectively be committed to the maintenance, preservation and / or restoration of their homelands. The Tamil community in the conflict zones is actively engaged in development and relief work. The funding comes mainly from the Tamil diaspora.

Diasporic consciousness: Members continue to relate personally to that homeland and maintain a unique ethno-national or ethno-cultural consciousness, which can be termed as diasporic consciousness. How this consciousness changes, transforms or mutates across generations, across genders, across caste is an important element in the study of diasporic identities, gender and class.

The concept of and desire to return: Segments of the diasporic population sustain hope of returning to the homeland once peace returns.

There are a number of critical responses to the concept of diaspora, Floya Anthias (1998) for example, argues that however much its aim is to capture difference and change, at some point it inevitably relies on some notion of origin and that such origins are somehow the foundation of identities. She also points out that a class and gender analysis has not been satisfactorily incorporated in the study of diasporas. Diaspora cannot stand alone as an epistemological category of analysis, separate and distinct from the intersectionality of “race”, class, gender and sexuality.

Sri Lankan Tamils certainly constitute a diaspora and have become a popular subject of study and research by various scholars (Fuglerut 1999, McDowell 1999, Daniel, 1995, Wayland 2003, and Cheran 2001, 2002). The Sinhalese community has not been studied as a diasporic community. However, in the context of Sri Lanka, they too are a powerful transnational community with major epicenters in Italy, Canada and the UK.

III. Diasporas and Transnationalism

The emergence of diasporas in the past several centuries was largely the result of colonialism, slavery and other forms of forced migration. In this regard there are two basic propositions I would like to make:

1. Nomadism versus Sedentarism:

Human beings have two modalities or mechanisms to negotiate / demarcate space. There has always been a structural conflict between those who have chosen or have been forced to choose the nomadic life and those who have chosen the sedentary life style. For sedentary life cultivation and territory are important. The emergence of the state is designed to meet the necessities of the sedentary people. States always view the diaspora / transnational with suspicion. This contradictory and tense relationship still permeates state policies.

2. National versus Transnational:

The social sciences originated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as part of the project of creating modern nation-states. Terms like government, organization, citizenship and rights, carry with them an embedded nationalist assumption that impairs our capacity to see and understand transnational processes and movements.

We need new analytic lenses to understand the social and political processes that transcend boundaries. Paradigmatic changes are necessary. I would like to suggest that "Homeland-Hostland" has to be understood as a single "field" (Bourdieu, 1990) in the study of diaspora and transnational communities. By single field what I mean is the insistence on seeing those who leave and those who remain as a single socio-economic and political field.

Globalization and immigration have been instrumental in creating several transnational communities. One of the central forces of the modern world is the movement of people either voluntarily or involuntarily. It is estimated that 175 million people- 2.9% of the world population-currently live outside their country of birth. It is important to note that 48% of all international migrants are women (International Organization for Migration, 2003). This movement brings the laboring population into the lower-class sectors and

spaces of wealthy countries. Saskia Sassen indicates that economic links ranging from shifting production from the metropolitan centers to peripheral countries; large scale foreign investment in the so called third world that facilitates export-oriented agriculture and manufacturing industry; as well as the power of transnational corporations in the development and control of the consumer markets of the third world have often resulted in mass movements of people (Sassen, 1996). Whether this mass movement of people creates diasporas or not is debatable. The important point however is to conceptually distinguish between diasporas that are the result of forced migration and consist mainly of refugees versus other transnational groups, immigrants and economic migrants that form transnational communities.

Current discussions on diaspora tend to overlook this crucial distinction. There are vast disparities in the status, experience and power of these two diasporas. Ethnicity, gender, class, religion and caste locate people unevenly within transnationalism and diaspora. The Tamil diaspora in Canada is very different from the Tamil diaspora in France or Switzerland. The status of its members is crucial here. Whether they have citizenship or residency rights are important factors that determine the nature and the power of the diaspora.

IV. Power of Diasporas

Diasporas/ transnational communities have influenced political processes and events in significant ways. They also have a potential to influence economies and wealth creation to a much greater degree. From the banking network of the Rothschilds, originating in 18th century Europe, to the more recent Hinduja group, diaspora has been a leading player in global transactions (Markowitz 2000). At 450 billion dollars, the annual economic output in the early 1990s of the 55 million overseas Chinese was estimated to be roughly equal to that of the 1.2 billion people in China itself (Seagrave 1995).

Sri Lanka is among the top 20 developing countries that receive large amounts of remittances from its diaspora. It received \$1,056-million dollars in 2001. This amounts to 7.0 percentage of the GDP (World Bank 2003). The relatively small number of Tamils from Sri Lanka living in Canada and Europe provided substantial resources that sustained both the armed struggle for a separate Tamil state and the Tamil refugee communities that are spread across the war-torn areas in Sri Lanka. In a similar manner,

people of Jewish and Irish descent in the United States (and elsewhere) have supported/influenced the politics of Israel and Ireland.

While the political and financial influences of diasporas have come under closer scrutiny after September 11, 2001, Western governments have not formulated effective policy responses to the emergence of global diasporas. The conventional approach, applied somewhat inconsistently, has been to view diaspora communities as potentially dangerous groups bringing their “homeland conflicts” with them and therefore a perennial threat to social cohesion in host countries. Even noted human rights advocate and scholar Ignatieff has suggested that,

...Diaspora nationalism is a dangerous phenomenon because it is easier to hate from a distance: You don't have to live with the consequences – or the reprisals ... Canadians, new and old, need to think about what role diasporas play in fanning and financing the hatreds of the outside world. The disturbing possibility is that Canada is not an asylum from hatred but an incubator of hatred... ... So it is appropriate to say to newcomers: You do not have to embrace all our supposed civilities. You can and should keep the memory of the injustice you have left firmly in your heart. But the law is law. You will have to leave your murderous fantasies of revenge behind. (Michael Ignatieff, *The Globe and Mail*, 25 October 2001)

The problem with this view is that it homogenizes diaspora nationalism and new immigrants. It also conceptually fails to appreciate the distinctions between groups such as Al Qaeda on the one hand and other non state actors which may be engaged in legitimate struggles of self determination (although resorting to illegitimate tactics with greater or lesser frequency), ie. historically South Africans under the apartheid regime and currently, Kurds, Tamils, Palestinians and Kosovars. As the power of nation-states weakens as a result of rapid globalization, and as the power of diaspora communities grows, the logic of incorporating these communities into theories and practices of international law, international relations, development policy, foreign policy and civil society grows as well.

Strategies to harness the forces of global diasporas should also be at the centre of efforts by developing countries to promote alternative development. Nigeria, South Africa, Eritrea and Senegal have already launched several plans to incorporate their diaspora communities as partners and a knowledge base for development and reconstruction projects. South Africa has initiated a project to create diasporic agencies in Europe. These agencies will focus on new technologies, resource banks, research

networks and diasporic human resources. Ivory Coast has created special departments for facilitating diaspora involvement. Mali and Uganda are also engaged in similar projects.

What does this mean in the Sri Lankan context? While the Tamil migration has been a forced one, the Sinhalese migration, primarily to the Middle East, Australia, Canada, UK and Italy, is voluntary and part of a larger process of labour migration. Italy is evolving as a major center for Sinhalese transnational / diaspora activity. While my research is confined to the Tamil diaspora, it is important to map Sinhala transnationalism as well. Preliminary research shows that Sinhala transnationals are very active in “cyberspace” or virtual diaspora and much of its activity is centered on the reconstruction of Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka while supporting the Sri Lankan state against “separatists and terrorists”.

V. Tamil Diaspora

The Tamil diaspora is largely made up of refugees and former-refugees. According to UNHCR, between 1980 – 1999, 256, 307 people of Sri Lankan origin applied for asylum in Europe, one of the top ten groups of asylum seekers during this period. (UNHCR, 2001). Between 1987- 2001 Sri Lanka was among the top three source countries for refugee claimants in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003). Large numbers of Tamils have been granted some form of residence status in their host country. The acceptance rate for Tamil refugee claimants has been consistently high in Canada. This perhaps explains why Toronto has become the epicenter of Tamil diaspora.

Tamil diaspora consists of an estimated 700,000 people settled in Canada, Europe, India and Australia (Cheran, 2001, Fuglerut 1999). It is likely therefore that one in every four Sri Lankan Tamils now lives in the diaspora. There is a long tradition of Tamil migration from the Jaffna peninsula. Elite and dominant groups among the Tamils of Sri Lanka have had a long history of temporary emigration for education and employment, usually to Britain and Malaysia. However, it is in the context of civil war in Sri Lanka that the emergence of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora should be studied. Sustaining a society under stress, strain and displacement has been the most important function of the Tamil diaspora. However, the signing of the cease-fire agreement between the state and the

LTTE in January 2002 has made heavy inroads in redefining the role of the Tamil diaspora. A detailed study with regard to how this diaspora can be incorporated into current social, economic and political processes is beyond the scope of this paper. There are six macro themes worthy of further exploration:

1. **Remittances:** The major contribution of the diaspora is remittances. They are important for sustaining the society in the NorthEast as well as sustaining the nationalist struggle. The Sri Lankan government estimates that international fundraising by the LTTE approaches \$80 million a year. However Tamil leaders in the diaspora dispute these figures. They claim it is impossible that such a relatively new diaspora could raise such large sums, sums that would require an average annual contribution of more than \$100 from every Tamil living in the diaspora. The Tamil Refugees Organization (TRO) states that it collects approximately \$10,000 a month. Whatever the amount, the crucial point remains: remittances are the key.
2. **Return:** Departing from the conventional view of remittance as obligation to nation/ family/ society, I suggest that remittances should be seen as returns from investment; Often, people invest all their savings and assets to send a member of the family—mainly a male—into the diaspora. Then the one who was sent takes on the responsibility of bringing other family members, thereby setting in motion a process of chain migration. For diasporas, it is argued, that return or hope of return to the homeland is a major defining moment. However, as diaspora communities transform themselves into transnational communities and gain power and wealth, the mythical concept of return gives way to much more practical return: return from their investments. Wealthy diasporas actively contribute to projects of investment in the homeland.
3. **Political support and lobbying:** This is a major activity of the diaspora in host countries. With the increase in numbers and the change from refugee claimants to citizenship or permanent resident status, Tamil diasporas begin to be influential factors in the host country as well. The Toronto constituency of the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs has 6,000 eligible Tamil voters. Partly due to the influence of the Tamil diaspora, the minister has assumed responsibility for including the hitherto forgotten Sri Lankan civil war in Canada's foreign policy agenda. More

recently, in September 2003, the Tamil community in Ontario elected 86 Liberal party delegates supporting the leadership bid of Mr. Paul Martin from a total of 1,434 in Ontario. The Tamil delegates, drawn mainly from the Metropolitan Toronto and Markham area ridings, outnumbered the total delegates elected respectively from Prince Edward Island, Yukon, North West Territories, Nunavut and Newfoundland.

The qualitative change that takes place in the Canadian and UK Tamil diaspora is the change in leadership from the old guard to a new generation of Tamils who were born and educated in these countries.

4. **Re-imagination and re-construction of nation in the Diaspora.** Given that there are several strands of identity formations in the diaspora, the “Homeland” has different mappings and images. The plurality of diaspora / national imaginations are striking. This paves the way for the emergence of multiple identities in the context of social and political democracy in the host countries.
5. **Circulation and Alternative models of development:** Groups within the Tamil diaspora have been instrumental in building village hospitals, schools and community centers. There are 100 village and old students’ organizations / associations in Toronto supporting their villages and schools back in the Northeast of Sri Lanka. Similar organizations exist in other countries too. In the absence of state support for education, healthcare and relief in the conflict zones, diaspora is often the only mechanism for relief, reconstruction and development. For the diaspora groups, transnational networks and ties permit them to function within the national context with minimal dependence on state process, regulation or the need for concessions. Likewise their non-dependence on statist institutions has enabled these groups to be relatively immune from the coercive and hegemonizing power of the state. I argue that the transnational ease experienced by Tamil diaspora groups to function as viable entities in their own right have facilitated the proliferation of many parallel non-state structures. Their work has been effective in addressing unmet needs in the conflict zones of Sri Lanka. However, continuity between remittances and reconstruction is an important factor that would eventually determine the effectiveness of these projects.

6. **Circulation:** It is highly unlikely that the majority of members of the diaspora will return to the homeland on a permanent basis. The most probable scenario is that members of the diaspora will circulate if/when conditions in both host and home countries are conducive for such circulation.

VI. Diaspora Circulation

The idea of diaspora circulation is the key theme of this paper. The idea of circulation is not a new one in international migration. Labour migrants have historically circulated and the demand and supply of cheap labour determined the circulation. However, what is new in the current conception of circulation is that the main base of the circulating population is located in the West and the power, influence and affluence of this new population base is different from the traditional labour populations that circulated.

The global economic situation in the past several decades has given rise to the syndrome of “brain drain” from underdeveloped to developed economies as well as all forms of labour migration and movements of capital on a global scale. Brain drain does not seriously effect countries with a large professional population base. China and India, for example, lose only 1% of their professional sector to brain drain whereas smaller countries tend to lose almost 15-20% of their professional force (Carrington and Detragiache, 1999). Brain drain is also fostered – indeed aggressively promoted - by skilled worker recruitment policies of immigrant receiving states. Reversing this process is impossible. However, diaspora circulation can facilitate the circulation of “human capital”. Such circulation can play a critical role in relief, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development efforts of the homeland - particularly crucial in the Northeast of Sri Lanka.

The perception of mono dimensional Sinhala and Tamil identities is one major cause for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Recent technological changes and diasporic existence have had an immense impact on perceptions of mono dimensional identities. Diaspora produces multiple Tamil identities and hybridities such as Tamil-German, Tamil – Canadian, Tamil-Norwegian and Tamil-Dutch. There is a generation of “Tamils” who may not want to be identified solely as Tamils. During Statistics Canada’s census in 2001, several Tamil organizations initiated a campaign requesting all Tamils to identify

themselves as Tamils. Despite the powerful campaign only 96,645 people out of a possible 215,000 identified themselves as Tamils. The existence of multiple identities challenges traditional monolithic and rigidly territorially based identities. When diaspora circulates between host and home countries the political and social impact of that circulation could be healthy and constructive in the context of an ethno- national conflict. It is estimated that 25,000 – 35,000 Tamils from the diaspora circulated annually after the signing of a Cease-fire agreement (CFA) between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam . (The estimate is based on the information provided by Tamil travel agencies in Canada, France, Germany and Britain).

The first phase of the circulation is the homeland visit or “homeland tourism”. The current Cease Fire Agreement has been the most promising and the number of families visiting the NorthEast is steadily increasing. The second phase is the Return-visit, which is usually slightly longer than the first one. Part of the reason why returning members of the diaspora cannot stay longer is lack of housing. Re-building homes or selling of property takes place during the second visit. While large-scale investments have not yet emerged, a number of diaspora initiatives are beginning to take shape. There are three major areas where circulating diaspora can be involved:

1. Knowledge capital and knowledge transfer
2. Capacity building and investment
3. Peace building and strengthening civil society in the Northeast.

VII. KNOWLEDGE CAPITAL AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER:

The Northeast has been severely damaged by the war and rebuilding is a major challenge. One major difficulty is the availability of knowledge capital (experts and people with diverse skills). schools, universities, hospitals and technical institutions are under-staffed and lack qualified personnel. This is one area where the Tamil diaspora can readily play an important role. There are several individual cases of physicians, visiting Jaffna and Vanni from England, Canada and Australia doing voluntary work in the hospitals. The Medical Institute of Tamils (MIOT) and The Medical Institute of Tamils (MIOT), and TAMMED, are diaspora groups based in England, Canada and Australia respectively that systematically circulates its members between London, Jaffna and

Vanni. The Asian Medical Doctors Association (AMDA) of Japan also facilitates circulation of Tamil doctors from the diaspora. The Duration of stay varies from three weeks to three months.

Tromso Tamil Sangam in Norway in collaboration with the University of Tromso is involved in two major projects. One is the setting up faculty of medicine in the Eastern University and the other is setting up a faculty for Fisheries in Jaffna. Teachers and experts will be provided to these faculties on a rotational basis. Training of local staff members is a major component of these projects.

IT training is the major venture of *Vannitech* in Kilinochchi. Three members of the USA based diaspora are the founders of this institute. Vannitech's vision is to effectively utilize the expertise and resources available in the diaspora. Canadian computer schools such as CCBC and *Computec* are launching similar ventures. Some members from IBM in Australia have launched English Language Teaching (ELT) in remote areas in Jaffna. The project is to bring 10 – 15 young Tamils from the diaspora for a period of 2 – 3 months for ELT. The planners hope to include a Tamil as a Second Language (TSL) program for the diaspora. A pilot project will begin in September 2003 in Alaveddy (Jaffna district) and Kilinochchi.

Three scholars have already joined the University of Jaffna as faculty members. Two of them are specialists in economic policy and planning. They plan to stay for three years. Many schools in the Jaffna district have old students associations based in the diaspora. There are thirty-five old students associations in the greater Toronto area. Some of the associations have branches in Germany, Britain and Australia. Reconstruction of damaged schools is being funded by the old students' organization. In addition, nutritional programs for school children are also funded. Organizations such as HUDEC are facilitating the nutritional programs. Scholarships and bursaries are provided to selected students. The activities of old students' organization have largely focused on relief and rehabilitation. However, one can notice a shift towards reconstruction, development and training. The Old students' association of Mahajana College organized a convention for its international membership in April 2003 in Colombo. The convention pledged 43 million Sri Lankan rupees for reconstruction and development. IT training, scholarships and English Language Teaching were some of the important areas that

received attention. Several other old students' associations are planning similar conventions.

The Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR) and Tamil Refugees Organization (TRO) are active in facilitating knowledge transfer through diaspora circulation. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has short-term projects (duration three months) for diaspora. The Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) program enables members of the diaspora to work in home countries. Currently, there are three people working with the Sub Committee for Immediate Humanitarian Relief (SIHRAN) located in Kilinochchi. The potential of TOKTEN in assisting the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction (RRR) efforts in the Northeast is great. TOKTEN program provides return airfare and a monthly stipend of 1000 US dollars. This is more than adequate for any diaspora member interested in working in the Northeast for a short period. Other international institutions are getting interested too. For example, the World Bank's Representative in Sri Lanka has indicated that his institution is willing to support up to 100 people from the diaspora to work in the NorthEast.

VII. CAPACITY BUILDING AND INVESTMENT

The capacity to utilize donor funding is low in Sri Lanka. Less than 20% of the donor funding is currently being used. There are several structural and other barriers. The scope of this paper does not permit an extensive discussion but it is sufficient to point out that given the poor record of funding utilization, it is difficult to imagine that the war-torn Northeast will have any better mechanism. There are severe shortages of laborers, skilled laborers, policy planners, project and financial managers and banking facilities – all of which are necessary for reconstruction and development. This is one key area where diasporic expertise and circulation will be of immense use. The indications are clear. The three LTTE nominees for the Northeast needs assessment committee set up before the Tokyo donor conference in June 2003 were from the diaspora. One of them was a financial consultant, the other was an irrigation expert and the third one was a senior management consultant. Skill development is an important element in the Relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction (RRR) of the Northeast. There are a few organizations like TECH (The Economic Consultancy House) trying to address the problem. However,

the demand is huge and the availability of training and expertise is limited. There is a need for a comprehensive skill development and training program that is specially designed for post-war construction and rebuilding of the Northeast. The Construction industry has some attractive prospects in the war torn areas. However, only six companies, with some help from the diaspora have been registered so far. Few members from the diaspora in Australia and from the US are planning to invest in the energy sector. However, there is a new organization for consumer marketing and investment, working for the US based giant Melaleuca calling out to Toronto-based village organizations, alumni organizations and other Tamil social service organizations to invest in Canada and use the return for reconstruction. They claim that one of the old students from a Jaffna school invested in a few oil tankers in the US a hundred year ago and the return is still being used to develop the school in Jaffna. They have a membership of 600 individuals and three institutions-all Hindu temples in Toronto.(Interview with Ravi and Vishnu, 18-09-2003).

The lack of an adequate banking system is a major obstacle. Unlike other parts of Sri Lanka, the Northeast does not have a regional banking system. The existing *Sanghwardhana* Banks operate in all provinces except the Northeast. Soft loans and credit line facilities, which are crucial for reconstruction and development, are almost non-existent. The government of Sri Lanka has proposed that the recent offer from the Indian government in extending loan facilities should be channeled through the existing regional banks. It is clear the Northeast will not be a beneficiary.

The current phase of diaspora involvement indicates two major trends:

1. Professionals and experts are the dominant group of diaspora members that are involved. The Number of investors is small.
2. Vanni and Jaffna are the two regions that attract the diaspora.

IX. PEACE BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE NORTHEAST.

Meaningful dialogue and continuous communication between Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim and diaspora communities is a must for peace building. Sensitization programs that would bring all the communities in diverse social, geographical and cultural setting is necessary for better understanding.

“Strengthening the civil society” has been a key theme in almost all NGOs working in Sri Lanka. The donor community has been generous in supporting projects that facilitate and strengthen civil society in Sri Lanka. However, it is crucial to note that the civil society in Sri Lanka is a fractured and divided one, an issue that has not been adequately addressed. There are Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim civil societies with different degrees of power, articulation and resources and mobility. There is very poor communication among these various civil societies. This reality has to be taken into account if we need to go forward on the peace building front. In addition, the activities that are being promoted are heavily urban – centered and need to be widened.

The role of the media in peace building is crucial. In Sri Lanka the media (Sinhala, Tamil and English) have not been constructive in peace building. Conflict sensitive media / journalism is the way forward. However, there seems to be less interest in education and training in this regard. Strengthening independent media in Tamil and Sinhala languages is a serious project that is worthwhile supporting. In the past donor agencies from Netherlands, Norway and the UK have supported the publication of independent weekly newspapers in Tamil and Sinhala (broadcast journalism is controlled by the state and independent journalism there was not eligible for funding). These newspapers played a crucial role in documenting human rights violations, exposing corruption and reporting from the conflict zones. However, the past five years have seen a gradual decline in donor funding to independent media. There is certainly a vacuum in independent media. The media in the diaspora (Tamil and English) do not fare better. In fact, the Tamil language media- mainly weekly newspapers, 24 hour Tamil broadcasting services and Tamil TV stations- in the diaspora are not playing active roles in peace building and strengthening the Tamil civil society.

Creative post-conflict work is a significant element we need to consider as part of reconciliation process. Political and economic transformation is a fundamental necessity for reconstruction. However, psychological and cultural transformation is also equally significant. Mutual sense of victimhood has become one of the most serious psychological obstacles in Sri Lanka. Victimhood carries with it a certain degree of moral and political leverage. There are stereotypes, myths, legends, images of self and nation that are obstacles to peace building and reconciliation.

Some strands of diasporic literature and cultural production can be a useful counterweight to these obstacles and the negative impacts of victimhood. It can also contribute to the process of healing. There are many journals, small magazines and alternative publications in Tamil in the diaspora. The range and creativity of this cultural production have had a powerful impact and there is a new area of studies called Tamil diasporic literature. Tamil diasporic literature has become an important cultural and literary domain. Issues of peace and war, free expression, strengthening civil society, return or circulation, hybridity, assimilation or integration, changing gender roles and persistence of caste are some of the key themes that this literature addresses. The multiplicity and range of opinions and politics that exist in the diaspora are well represented in these cultural productions. Translation and publication of selected material in Sinhala and English would be useful in sensitizing all communities.

X. Recommendations:

How do the foregoing issues impact upon host as well as home countries? What are the policy implications? One major area where the home as well as host countries need immediate and important work is remittances. Diaspora remittances have become a major source of national income for developing countries (International Organization for Migration, 2003). Remittances are the second largest source, behind foreign direct investment, of external funding for many developing countries, surpassing inflows of official development assistance (Ratha in World Bank, 2003:157). Remittances are relatively stable sources of foreign exchange. However, significant problems exist in the financial sectors, government administration and banking systems. Collectively they increase the transaction costs. Long delays in check clearances, exchange losses, improper disclosure of transaction costs are some of the deficiencies that prohibit

diaspora from sending money through the international banking system. The average cost of transferring remittances is between 13 -20 percent (Ratha, 2003: 165). Reducing such transaction costs to 10 percent would imply an annual savings of \$ 3.5 billion to those who send. Many developing countries are without extensive banking networks in the rural areas. This is one of the reasons why money transfer through informal networks is the major mechanism. The post 9/11 crack down on informal money transfer businesses has affected remittances. The opportunity is ripe for banks to focus on money transfer and make it affordable and beneficial. Industrial countries should consider reducing the transaction cost of remittances to developing countries. The developing countries need to expand their banking services in the rural sector. One possibility is to utilize the existing post offices facilities to receive remittances.

Home Countries

1. The circulation process has to be systematized and strengthened and should be addressed in domestic policy formulation as well as in program planning and implementation. The concept of “transnation” is becoming more formalized in homeland policies. For example, the Indian government affords a legal status to non-resident Indians (NRI's) and persons of Indian origins (PIO's), thus creating limited forms of transnational citizenship and association. However, there is no policy or national agenda in Sri Lanka to deal with transnationalism and diaspora.
2. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has set up programs and projects by and for the Tamil diaspora. TRO and TEEDOR are very effective in coordinating the diaspora. It appears that they have formulated policies to involve and accommodate the diaspora. However, these policies are not explicit. As noted in the previous pages, professionals and experts are currently circulating. A large section of the diaspora that can invest in small and medium size projects are cautiously waiting. They need to be encouraged. Clear economic policies and a climate conducive for investment have to be promoted in the Northeast. The LTTE tax system is a concern for small and medium size investors.
3. A strategic remodeling/reconstitution of the Sri Lankan state is necessary to address the issues of diaspora in the long term.

4. Internet technology should be expanded to promote stronger linkages between diaspora and homeland. A Digital diaspora Network for Sri Lanka (DDNSL), should be established.
5. A skills registry and a knowledge bank should be created in the diaspora.
6. Policies that facilitate and emphasize **circulation** as in knowledge circulation / “human capital” circulation should be formulated.
7. Independent funds to facilitate knowledge networks must be allocated. Different forms of citizenship: dual citizenship / multiple citizenship / diaspora citizenship / transnational citizenship should be considered.
8. Consular services should be expanded. A separate division should be created to facilitate diaspora circulation. International money transfer using the existing banking system has been woefully inadequate. There are lessons to learn from other countries. For example, Mexican consulates have been issuing a simple identity card known as *matriculas* to Mexican citizens living in the US-both legally and illegally. The card facilitates a less expensive way of sending money home.

VII. Host Countries:

Host countries also require new perspectives and policies to deal with the emergence of transnationalism and diaspora. Historically, suspicion of transnational and diaspora communities have been the norm for Western states. Political activities on the part of diaspora communities (in support of “homeland conflicts”) have been viewed with alarm and mainly through the lens of national security by host states. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, transnational movements and the particular links between diasporas and homelands have come under ever greater scrutiny. The contradiction in the discourse on globalization, which has favored the free movement of goods and capital but generally not of people-especially those from the non-Western world – has become acute as governments move to adopt strict anti-terrorism laws and seal their national borders. In this context, the loyalty of diasporas has become increasingly suspect - transnational connections and circulation are coming under closer watch. The

multiple and mixed identities of diasporic members are under constant pressure to conform to the notion of a monolithic populace in the traditional nation-state.

Governments have the necessary task of ensuring public safety and security – of preventing terrorism on their soil and abroad. In my view, this responsibility necessarily requires governments to better understand the nature of diasporas and their transnational connections.

1. Governments need to acknowledge the inherent possibilities of transnational / diaspora communities and make them partners and incorporate them in development policy, international trade and foreign policy.

2. Citizenship policies are crucial in the incorporation of diaspora populations. Dual or transnational citizenship is one possibility. Transnational citizenship implies more than legal status with related rights and duties within multiple jurisdiction and across borders, but also the recognition of identity and meaningful participation in multiple political communities, civil societies and public spheres - some of which span state boundaries (Wong 2002; Falk, 1993). Freedom of transnational association is at the core of transnational citizenship.

3. Re-orientation of foreign aid / development aid: Here a paradigm shift is needed. The possibility of alternative development models using diaspora networks should be explored. For example, the cost of clearing a landmine in the Northeast using diaspora networks and the TRO will be much less expensive than proceeding without them. In the same way eye clinics, health clinics and relief work can be conducted with greater efficiency.

4. Transnational and diaspora consciousness has a great deal of positive potential. While these are contested sites, the positive aspects need to be harnessed. The rigidities of identity (religious, ethnic, national etc.) itself should be challenged. This has to be explored in the context of transnational citizenship.

5. We need new ways of looking at migration and immigration by taking into account the following factors:

- In the past decade the European Union has moved towards accepting immigration as a major source for labour. Unlike the US and Canada, this is an important shift in policy for the EU - not because the traditional contours of their nation-states are being challenged by diasporas, migrants and minorities, but because of the effect of this policy shift on EU refugee and asylum policy. In November 2000, the European Commission indicated that the EU should promote greater immigration.
- There will be a life long connection between diasporas and their homelands.
- Circular migration of diasporic professionals, intellectuals and development workers will be key elements in the future.

It is hoped that the foregoing recommendations will serve as a basis for governments, donor agencies, policy makers and scholars to pay more attention to the phenomenon of diaspora and diaspora circulation.

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