Policy Brief

From the Margins of War:
The Post War Experience of the Palankudi Community

Executive Summary

This research project, titled *Memories from the Margin: The Voices of Coastal Indigenous Communities* was designed to extend the conversation on post-war reconciliation to include marginalised voices and thereby contribute to an intersectional understanding of peace. The project was conducted by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) and funded by the Think Tank Capacity Building (TTCB) initiative of the University of South Carolina Rule of Law Collaborative. To ensure that marginalised voices sit at the centre of the discourse on post-war reconciliation, the research project worked with two Palankudi (indigenous) communities in Trincomalee (Santhosapuram and Verugal), focusing on their history, traditions, culture, and lives during the civil war and in the post-war period.

In bringing their narrative history to the centre, this research project has relied on a participatory research methodology; adopting this methodology, ensures the research team presents the narrative that was created within and by the community. While the entirety of the research project includes policy recommendations in relation to the Palankudi communities, a social media campaign highlighting the community and their issues and a photography exhibition, this document only contains the former.

Interviews with community members and the photography exercise with the youth revealed several issues (largely structural and institutional) that the community currently face, and the policy brief is drafted with the aim of addressing these issues.

As the Palankudi have been living alongside the Tamil community for years, they have grappled with forces of assimilation (both voluntary and forced); this has led to a disappearance in self-identification as Palankudi and even of their language and culture. The erasure of identity is further reinforced structurally and institutionally, whereby documentation of identification no longer recognises the Palankudi as such, but as Sri Lankan Tamil. The forces of assimilation have also meant losing socio-cultural rights, which are significant to indigenous communities.

The Santhosapuram Palankudi community also has an inadequate supply of basic services; concerns include the lack of access to clean water, transport services, access to quality education, loss of livelihoods, and food insecurity. Inadequate water supply has compounding effects on the community as it has added to poor hygiene within the Santhosapuram community specifically and led to a poor perception and reception of the community by the others. Institutional obstacles to engaging in their ancestral livelihoods have also meant financial insecurity and reliance on agrochemicals when engaging in agriculture; this has gradually rendered the community and their livestock food insecure.

The findings also revealed that the Palankudi community has been the victim of multiple waves of internal displacement due to various reasons. The absence of agency and power has allowed the state (in extension the military), other communities, and influential persons to evict the Palankudi from their ancestral homeland, leading to land grabbing. Due to the proposed thermal power plant in Sampur, many families from the Santhosapuram Palankudi community have lost access to their homes, and other places of cultural and historical significance to their community and identity. Apart from the loss of their ancestral homelands, these communities have lost their places of worship due to militarisation and the resultant Buddhisation during the post-war period.

The policy recommendations presented through this document take into consideration the multiplicity and intersectionality of the issues faced by the Palankudi community; they are aimed at bringing these communities to the centre of the discourses of identity and post-war reconciliation.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

This Policy Brief is prepared as part of the 'Memories from the Margin' research project conducted by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) and funded by the Think Tank Capacity Building (TTCB) initiative of the University of South Carolina Rule of Law Collaborative. The project studied and documented the war time experiences and post-war context of the coastal indigenous (*Palankudi*) community based in Trincomalee. The project in its entirety focused on their displacement and resettlement experience, and their culture, traditions, and history. The aim of the research is to include voices of marginalised communities in the post-war narrative of Sri Lanka.

The narrative history of post-war Sri Lanka is dominated by perspectives of the Sinhala and Tamil communities. However, it is imperative to expand the understanding of peace and reconciliation to include voices of other marginalised groups that have been impacted by the war, in order to have an intersectional understanding of peace. Intersectionality describes "the complexity of intertwined connections between identity, socio-economic status, and systems of power that make up how we fit into the world around us".[1] In the context of peace, it refers to factoring in these competing identities and nuances to enable a more holistic and sustainable approach to peace.[2] Sri Lanka is at a critical point in its post-war timeline given the new challenges and the religious tensions that have been arising, directly attributed to the cyclical nature of violent conflicts. In this context, it is imperative that the discourse on peace and reconciliation is intersectional and factors in the various nuances of the wartime narrative from all stakeholders, especially the marginalised communities, in order to facilitate a more sustainable and 'positive peace'.[3] Existing literature on the Palankudi community has been limited, therefore, this study can be considered a first attempt at including this marginalised group in the post-war narrative of the country.

To this end, this policy brief will focus on one particular community – the Palankudi Community – which has largely been left out of the mainstream post war narrative, and present the key issues faced by them as a result of their displacement during the war. Recommendations that can be implemented to address these issues will also be presented in this brief. Although the Palankudi community has been living alongside nature for generations, rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and displacement due to the civil war have threatened and continue to threaten the indigenous ways of life. Although some groups within the Palankudi community have managed to adapt to these changes, many other Palankudi individuals continue to struggle with the forces of change and have been at the receiving end of discrimination, marginalisation, and personal and state mandated processes of debt and land grabbing. This has had far reaching consequences for the Palankudi community in terms of loss of livelihoods and restricted access to basic services. This policy brief and its accompanying recommendations, are therefore, even more pertinent in the current context (Economic Crisis 2022) as the entire country is faces an economic crisis.

[1] Farooqi, A. & Slenter, F. (2018). *Implementing an Intersectional Approach in the Peace-Building Field*. Global Policy Journal. https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/13/09/2018/implementing-intersectional-approach-peace-building-field
[2] Ibid.
[3] Whilst Sri Lanka can be considered in a state of 'Negative Peace' meaning the absence of violence, 'positive peace' reflects the presence of social justice (Galtung, J. 1969. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191).

2. APPROACH/ METHODOLOGY

Two field visits were conducted for data collection. The first visit was a scoping visit where the research team spent about one week with the community in Santhosapuram and Verugal, to establish trust and learn about their history and culture. The second visit consisted of a participatory research workshop over three days with youth from both villages to capacitate them to conduct the research and present their findings. Thus, the findings in this brief are derived from two methods of data collection:

1. Interviews with community leaders,

2. Participatory research using photography with the youth of the community.

2.1 Interviews with Community Leaders

Interviews were conducted with the community leaders from the Santhosapuram and Verugal Communities during the first field visit. These were based on a semi-structured interview format and covered areas ranging from the history of the community to their war time experiences and contemporary issues faced as a result of the war. The data from these interviews have informed the issues and recommendations presented in this brief.

2.2 Participatory Research

This component of data collection is based on the foundations of participatory research, a methodology that is based on the premise of conducting research in partnership with people whose "life-world and meaningful actions are under study"[4].

Participatory research has been generally used when studying marginalised groups whose views are rarely sought, and whose voices are seldom heard. Thus, the aim of this project is to reconstruct the knowledge and ability of the co-researchers in this "process of understanding and empowerment."[5] Through this process the co-researchers were empowered to bring "their everyday knowledge and experiences and their unique ability into the research process, and thereby gain new perspectives and insights" [6] of their own histories and experiences.

The data was collected by involving community members throughout the research process to produce data that has meaning, is appropriate, and is authentic to their community experience.[7] Youth from the community were invited to be co-researchers of the project and were trained in collecting data using photography. The co-researchers were involved in the analysis by presenting their perceptions of the images and stories behind it. These were then collected, recorded and transcribed. Therefore, the issues that have been highlighted in this policy brief have been derived from the narratives that accompanied the photographs.

[4] Bergold, J. & Thomas, S. (2012). Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 37(4 (142), 191–222. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41756482
[5] Ibid
[6] Russo, J. (2012). Survivor-Controlled Research: A New Foundation for Thinking About Psychiatry and Mental Health. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung /Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(1).
[7]Hergenrather, K.C., Rhodes, S.D., Cowan, C., Bardhoshi, G. & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as community-based participatory research: a qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behaviour*, 33(6), 686-98 .

3. NARRATIVE HISTORY OF THE PALANKUDI COMMUNITY

The first documented research on the indigenous community of Sri Lanka can be traced back to the publication titled "The Veddas" by Seligmann, C. G. and Seligmann, Z. (1911).[8] Seligmann and Seligmann document encounters with 12 "vedda colonies" of which the "coastal veddas" are one. While the community remains a critically under-researched area in scholarship, conservation efforts have been made both in a public and private capacity to contribute to the existing body of literature and document the indigenous community. In 2012, Dilmah Conservation commissioned a study titled "Indigenous Communities of Sri Lanka: The Veddas",[9] which documents specific accounts on the sects of the community in coastal villages of Trincomalee, Kunjankalkulam and Kalkudah. Since then, the coastal indigenous community has been featured in a few studies relating to Sri Lankan indigenous communities in general. Issues such as the nature of social organisation, nature of the economic and cultural life of "veddas", regional vedda culture and their interactions with mainstream community,[10] the impact of the civil war on their lives, implications of modernisation on indigenous ways of life,[11] and a study analysing the existing legal structure pertaining to the indigenous community both in terms of domestic law and international law and covenants[12] have been covered. However, there is no focused, in depth study on the coastal indigenous community and the challenges they face in the post-war era as a result of structural violence and marginalisation. Thus, this study has also had limitations in filling certain knowledge gaps in the absence of comprehensive records on the coastal indigenous community. This study can, therefore, be considered a first attempt at including this marginalised group in the post-war narrative of the country.

It should also be noted at the outset that whilst most preceding studies refer to the indigenous community as 'veder' or 'vadda', or 'veduar', the community studied through this research has indicated that they preferred not to be identified by those terms as they associate negative experiences and connotations to it. Therefore, the term Palankudi will be used henceforth in this policy brief when referring to the coastal indigenous communities in keeping with the terminology used by the majority of the community in self identifying.

The coastal indigenous communities of the East are a specific group of people with their own distinctive way of life which is closely tied to nature and the environment surrounding them. The areas surrounding Uppooral, Mutur, Sampur, Mawadiyutru, Gopalapura Patnam, and Thoppur in coastal Trincomalee and some areas in Batticaloa are considered to be the ancestral homelands of these indigenous communities. The Palankudi community has made use of forests, creeks, rivers, and the ocean for their livelihoods, which are often considered to be traditional livelihoods. These livelihoods include hunting, honey collecting, collecting firewood, chena cultivation (slash and burn), lagoon fishing, and foraging. The Palankudi community from two villages were involved in the research; the first community, Santhosapuram was situated in Sampur, Trincomalee and situated closer in proximity to the forest than the sea. The second community in Illangai Thuraimugam in Verugal, Trincomalee was situated closer to the sea and thus mainly identified as a fishing community.

[8] See Seligmann, C. G. & Seligmann, Z. (1911). *The Veddas*. Cambridge University Press.
[9] See Gankanda, N. & Abayakoon, A. (2012). *Indigenous Communities of Sri Lanka: The Veddahs*. Dilmah Conservation.
[10] See Punchihewa, A. & De Silva, P. (2014). *Socio Anthropological Research Project on Vedda Community in Sri Lanka*. Ministry of Culture and The Arts, Government of Sri Lanka.
[11] See Arunagirinathan, T. (2017, October 12). 'Spotlight – Sri Lanka's Lesser Known Minorities Veddas: The first people of Sri Lanka'. *Roar*. https://roar.media/english/life/culture-identities/veddas-the-first-people-of-sri-lanka
[12] Uthayakumar, P. (2015). The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Sri Lanka. *ESCR* E-Newsletter, 16.

NARRATIVE HISTORY OF THE PALANKUDI COMMUNITY

In similarity with the indigenous communities living in the South-West of the country, the indigenous communities of the East Coast are also considered the descendants of the historic Queen Kuveni. This is evident even in the name of the Palankudi organisation formed in Santhosapuram which reads as "Kuveni Native People Welfare Society". Although this lineage has given much importance to the Southern indigenous communities of the country (due to its cultural and historical significance in relation to the origin of Sri Lanka as society knows it), the same is yet to be seen with regard to the Palankudi. The literature on the Palankudi community (mainly colonial anthropological studies) has hypothesised that these communities, originally relatives of the Southern indigenous communities, became separated from their original tribes, at some point in history, due to social and geographical reasons, resulting in the Palankudi forming their own unique culture and identity.

After grappling with internal displacement, the civil war, discrimination, marginalisation, and assimilation (all of which will be further explored in the coming sections), these communities' processes of self-identification have changed too; during the initial scoping visit, the community leader of Verugal claimed that the indigenous individuals in the village preferred to identify themselves as *Aadhikudi* (translated as first people of society in the Tamil language) instead of *Palankudi* (translated as oldest people of society in Tamil language). However, as the research team continued to converse with the rest of the community who were significantly less influential both socially and economically, it was evident that they also preferred to be called Palankudi. There could be an element of class and socio-economic status influencing processes of self-identification which unfortunately could not be explored extensively within the scope of this research.

4. RESULTS/ KEY ISSUES

4.1 Margins of Culture: Assimilation and Erasure of Identity, History and Culture

The perception of identity is different in both communities; contrasting lived realities have contributed to the creation of distinctively different identities within the two communities, mostly along the lines of their assimilation to dominant cultural identities prevalent in the region. Although the Palankudi community has its own unique history and culture, over the decades they have assimilated to Tamil culture to the point that most Palankudi people in Verugal self-identify as Tamils. This assimilation can be attributed to multiple factors. Firstly, by living in a majority Tamil area they have had to learn the Tamil language in order to interact with other communities, therefore, over the years the use of the indigenous language has been limited and is now not practised at all. Only a very few people of the older generation, mainly from the Mutur area, speak the language. Secondly, the Palankudi community has, generally, been marginalised by Tamils as they are perceived to be low caste within Tamil communities. The term 'Veduvar' used in Tamil language to identify the indigenous community is considered derogatory as it reflects the community as 'low caste' and 'unclean', thus, they self-identify as 'Palankudi' or 'Adhikudi' which protects the dignity of the indigenous identity.

Moreover, the erasure of their identity is also attributed to the period when the Tamil militancy controlled the areas that they lived in, as the community leader narrated how they were asked to adopt the Tamil identity by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Inter-community marriages have also made the assimilation possible as this has led to younger generations identifying as Tamil rather than Palankudi if one parent is Tamil. In some cases, this was found especially in Verugal, certain co-researchers themselves did not realise they were Palankudi until they raised it with their parents during data collection.

The lack of institutional recognition has also enabled the erasure of the Palankudi identity. For example, the state did not recognise the Palankudi identity when producing birth certificates and national identity cards (NIC). As one community leader recalled, in the past their birth certificates indicated their identity as 'Palankudi'; however, the NIC identifies them as 'Sri Lankan Tamil'. The birth certificates of the younger generation do not identify them as Palankudi but as Sri Lankan Tamil. This can also be attributed to the fact that the community were not educated about their own rights to request this identification in their birth certificates and NICs.

The erasure of the Palankudi identity is also explained by the manner in which some of the community stopped practising their unique cultural events because they did not want to distinguish themselves from the Tamil community. Those in Santhosapuram being more insular in nature still openly practise their unique religious and cultural traditions and rituals. This level of assimilation and erasure of identity has also meant that their rightful place at Hindu religious festivals has been taken away from them. For example, during the Urvalam festival, where the Palankudi community plays an integral role in carrying the statue of the God in procession, the Verugal Palankudi community has been barred from playing this role by the Tamil community. Whilst the Tamil community has resumed this tradition, they invite the Palankudi community from Paalsenai and Vakarai areas to play this role instead.

RESULTS/ KEY ISSUES

4.2 Margins of Poverty

4.2.1 Lack of Access to Basic Services

As a result of displacement during the war, the loss of access to basic services, specifically lack of access to running water and electricity are two of the major concerns, specifically for the community in Santhoshapuram. Although there is some provision of water to Santhosapuram, the community cannot afford to get new pipelines to their houses even though they are eligible for government subsidies such as *Samurdhi* (welfare) benefits. Therefore, the Palankudi community in Santhoshapuram has to rely on wells in the neighbourhood, kovils, and schools, although that too is deemed off-limits at times for them by other communities. According to the community leader, this adds to the perpetuated notion that "because we smell bad, we are not clean", which is often touted as reason to discriminate the Palankudi community in Sampur.

Moreover, having been accustomed to natural spring water before the war, they believe that the water they have access to now is not pure because it has been purified with chlorine. They also explained how the lack of access to clean natural water can be attributed to the rise in urine and kidney diseases amongst the community – specially in Santhosapuram where the lack of access to water is a prevalent issue. Similarly, the lack of access to hospital and health services was an issue raised by the community, as they believe people from other communities who are more educated and/or wealthy prevent them from accessing such services. Additionally, public transport is limited, with no direct bus route from the village to the nearest town, leaving most people to commute by foot or bicycle. However, this is not conducive for accessing basic services such as healthcare or education, compounding on the issues along the margins of poverty.

4.2.2 Lack of Access to Quality Education

This forced or voluntary assimilation may also have some positive results. There is a contrast between the Santhoshapuram Palankudi community and Verugal Palankudi community in terms of levels of education. The Santhoshapuram community generally had a lower level of education. Since the community is more insular and holds on to their Palankudi roots, the Santhoshapuram children are treated differently when they go to secondary school with other communities. For example, children have purposefully not been selected to participate in sports, arts, and cultural activities. They are also bullied by other children and sometimes not allowed to use the common water well because they are perceived to be 'unclean'. Since a primary school is allocated for the Santhoshapuram village, the children do not face the same issues in primary school as they do in secondary school. There is also a cyclical effect because the lack of access to water has meant that the community is forced to live with lower hygiene levels, cited as the reason for the children being treated differently in schools, and which eventually compels them to drop out of school without completing their education. The nearest secondary school is located a long distance away from the Santhosapuram village; this too leads to more school drop-outs due to the difficulty of getting to school. The community articulated that this has a disproportionate impact on the girlchild; due to these compounding issues girls are not motivated to complete school and are more likely to marry and have children at an adolescent age.

On the other hand, the community in Verugal does not seem to face the same issues in relation to completing their education. Some are even completing university education, albeit a very small percentage. This could be attributed to the fact they are more assimilated with the Tamil community in contrast to the Santhoshapuram community. Therefore, they are able to climb the social ladder and integrate faster; linking to how assimilation could at times be perceived to have positive effects.

4.2.3 Loss of Livelihoods and Food Insecurity

Land grabbing and the loss of ancestral lands have meant the community is now unable to engage in agricultural activities on their farmlands. This has limited income generation to traditional livelihoods and daily-wage manual labour outside of Trincomalee. Relying on traditional livelihoods, according to the community leader, is becoming increasingly difficult. For example, they are prohibited from engaging in honey extraction, a traditional form of livelihood, and face arrest by the police for causing deforestation. The same treatment, however, is not meted out to other communities engaging in this activity. The community is also not allowed to collect firewood from their ancestral lands without permission from the 'new' owners. Thus, whilst there is ignorance of the traditional livelihoods of the indigenous communities on the part of law enforcement, there seems to be blatant discrimination against the indigenous peoples as well.

The state not giving due institutional support and recognition to indigenous agricultural practices that are inherently sustainable has forced these communities to assimilate to modern agricultural practices that are dependent on chemical fertilisers and other agrochemicals. However, the overnight ban[13] on the importation of chemical fertiliser and agrochemicals and the resultant issues have affected the farmers further, leading to severe food insecurity. Given that the community has been below the margins of poverty preceding the current economic crisis, it is expected that they may experience the fallout of the economic and food crises disproportionately in the short term and exacerbate the divide along the fault lines in the longer term.

4.3 Margins of War

4.3.1 Forced Eviction and Internal Displacement

The Palankudi community experienced displacement during the civil war as a result of war and also as a result of natural disasters such as the tsunami. The Palankudi individuals living in Mutur and surrounding areas were internally displaced thrice during the war before they could return to their own lands. This resulted in the other issues, presented above, that the community continues to grapple with even in the post-war period. Similarly, the Verugal community was also displaced as a result of the tsunami in 2004. Therefore, the ancestral lands where the civilization began were deserted and the community was afraid to resettle near the ocean due to the tsunami.

Forced eviction from their ancestral lands meant that they had to get accustomed to a lifestyle that was different from the indigenous way of life that was closely tethered to nature. Some examples are changes in the sources of water, ability to cultivate etc. The Santhosapuram community was moved further inland due to the LTTE occupation of their village during the war. This meant that they were moved away from natural water sources etc. In 2002, a government housing project built about 100 houses for the Palankudi community which did not have adequate shelter due to displacement. However, this led to a change in their lifestyles which is not something the older generation in the community appreciates because their lifestyles were closely linked to nature.

---

[13] In April 2021 Sri Lanka completely banned the importation of chemical feriliser and agrochemicals. The ban went into effect on 26 April 2021 and was revoked in November 2021. However, the impact on the yields continue.

4.3.2 Land Grabbing

An issue that preceded the civil war and was exacerbated by the hostilities and internal displacement is the loss of the Palankudi ancestral lands in Mutur. A deceptive process of goods distribution to the Palankudi community in Mutur in 1976 was used as leverage to label the community as debtors to the benefactors and eventually used as an excuse to force the community to give up their land. The lands they resettled in were then forcibly taken away during the civil war by the LTTE, farmers, and wealthier persons from the majority ethnic communities in the region. Although they returned to their village after the war, about 75-80 acres of land belonging to the Santhosapuram Palankudi community was earmarked for a thermal power plant project by state authorities in 2010/2011. Therefore, lands identified by the community as ancestral lands were not accessible to them and affected their self-sustainability by reducing agriculture activities and impeding access to clean drinking water. The prohibited land demarcated as a 'high-security zone' includes a temple that cannot be accessed. Land grabbing and debts forcibly placed on the Mutur Palankudi community have consequences that reach further than the loss of property as it has also trapped the community in poverty.

4.3.3 Forceful Conscription and Enforced Disappearances

The practice of recruiting child soldiers in the area during the war had an impact on the community as the youth were enlisted at a considerably young age. Whilst some were forcefully conscripted, some joined voluntarily due to the lack of education opportunities or any means of earning an income. Many did not return after the war and were believed to be either missing, disappeared or dead.

Despite having a mechanism to look into disappearances and help families of the missing and disappeared, the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) was either not accessible or was perceived as not helpful.

4.3.4 Militarisation and Buddhisation

An issue that has been prevalent in the North and East during the past few years is the high militarisation even in the post-war era which has led not only to high surveillance and land grabbing but also the 'Buddhisation'[14] of the North and East. The community in Verugal too narrated the loss of the Palankudi religious site due to Buddhisation. This was the significant space considered holy by the Palankudi community and preserved to venerate the Goddess *Malaimeni Amman,* who the Palankudi community in Verugal believed had miraculously saved them from the tsunami in 2004. In 2006, the temple was destroyed by an air strike, and in 2008 the holy space was taken over by the army and replaced with a buddha statue. The *Malaimeni Amman* is now placed in a hut at the side of the road, which reduces the importance of this holy figure that is greatly significant to the Palankudi community in Verugal.

---

[14] *Buddhisation* refers to the structural process by which the Buddhist nature and values are forcibly imposed upon society and its functioning; in this scenario, *Buddhisation* refers to the state-sponsored, militarised erasure of Palankudi culture and religion in favour of imposing Buddhism and Buddhist values in the region

5. CONCLUSIONS

- The circumstances surrounding war time governance and lack of institutional recognition in a post-war context has led to the community assimilating to the dominant culture of the region, resultantly blurring and in some instances erasing unique elements from the Palankudi identity. On the one hand, such assimilation may have negative effects such as loss of culture, language, and traditions, and stripping away of identities that are linked to ancient civilisations. On the other hand, there may be some benefits to the community as the example of the Verugal community has proven, and has led to better opportunities in terms of education and upward social and economic mobility.

- The lack of indigenous identity which is facilitated and reinforced by the lack of institutional recognition for the community has resulted in abject poverty, lack of recognition of their fundamental rights and the curbing of access to basic services. For example, the community in Santhosapuram has limited access to clean water which has led to a cyclical effect resulting in children dropping out of school due to being treated differently because of their inability to maintain 'proper' hygiene standards. The lack of educational attainment has led to the community being trapped in poverty and not having the knowledge to advocate for their indigenous rights.

- The community also faces severe food insecurity due to their traditional forms of livelihoods being compromised because of land grabbing, deforestation prohibitions and modernisation of agricultural methods. This links overall to the lack of institutional recognition for their rights as indigenous communities.

- Both communities studied have been internally displaced due to the civil war and the tsunami of 2004. This caused issues such as land grabbing and forced eviction which compounded on multiple other issues (discussed above) and which further trapped the community in poverty.

- The community was also directly victimised by both sides of the civil war; their youth were forcefully conscripted by the LTTE and faced enforced disappearances by the state. However, there has been no justice for these communities, and accessing post-war justice mechanisms such as the OMP have been difficult, revealing the nature and efficiency of the state institutions implemented to aid the process of post-war reconciliation.

- Militarisation is still prevalent in the North and East and directly impacts the Palankudi community. Apart from high surveillance the community also has to face buddhisation of their religious sites.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research identifies that most of the problems faced by the community are precipitated or compounded by the overreaching problem of the lack of institutional recognition for the indigenous identity and rights. Therefore, most recommendations are presented in close relation to the need for institutional recognition for the Palankudi community.

- Give institutional recognition for the Palankudi identity as an indigenous community with recognition for their rights. This includes including the identity as part of the citizenship documentation (Birth Certificate/National Identity Cards).

- In the absence of prior records of the community stemming from the lack of institutional recognition, conduct mapping of original Palankudi settlements, internal migration patterns and conduct a census of the Palankudi community on the East Coast of Sri Lanka.

- Introduce a legal framework to domestic law espousing the protections outlined in the Declaration of Indigenous People's Rights (2007) including clauses pertaining to Land Rights.

- Ensuring access to basic services such as access to clean water sources; regular transport (including regular bus routes); access to healthcare facilities or mobile clinics to visit the villages regularly; access to quality education or provision of transport for students to commute to schools that are located at a distance from the village.

- Inclusion of community representatives in the local level development forums so as to promote localised solutions that are relevant to the indigenous community.

- Mainstream knowledge about the Palankudi community by including it in the education system and raising awareness and inclusion through the national television and broadcasting networks.

- The state imposed ban on chemical fertiliser was revoked as a result of public pressure and expert advise. However, the state continues its commitment to shifting towards more sustainable forms of framing, systematically and gradually transitioning to organic farming. The indigenous knowledge in organic farming could be instrumental in achieving this long-term goal. In this respect, measures should be taken to conserve, study and facilitate the practice of indigenous practices of sustainable farming.

- Ensure the Palankudi community is included in post-war mechanisms set up for transitional justice and reconciliation, and actively educate the community on their rights in accessing these mechanisms.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement all recommendations and national action plans pertaining to reconciliation, including and not limited to the demilitarisation of the Northern and Eastern Province, which will have direct and indirect impacts on the Palankudi community who were at the margins of war.

- Preserve and archive the Palankudi history and language in the national museum, national archives, archaeological department, and other institutions tasked with preserving the history of the country.

Authors:

Natasha Palansuriya *is a Senior Research Professional at CEPA. She leads the thematic area of Social Cohesion and Reconciliation, and also contributes to the thematic area of Diasporas and Development. Concurrently, she is completing her PhD at City, University of London, where her research focuses on the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas transnational engagement in the transitional justice process of Sri Lanka. Natasha, also, has a master's in International Politics and Human Rights from City, University of London where her dissertation explored the post-war reconciliation process of Sri Lanka. Her areas of expertise include, transitional justice, post-war reconciliation, governance and democracy, diaspora engagement and transnational civil society.*

Thamindri Aluvihare *is a Senior Research Profesisonal at CEPA and works on the thematic Social Cohesion and Reconciliation. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in International Studies at Monash University while majoring in Economics, Mass Communications and International Relations. She obtained her Master's Degree on Arts in International Relations from the University of Colombo with a focus on Political Communications exploring the evolution of (digital) media and its impact on foreign policy formulation and dissemination. Her previous work experience is in civil society in both local and international NGOs and subsequently in public service. She is primarily interested in studying the nexus between digital media transformation and social cohesion.*

Shaneendra Amarasinge *is Junior Research Professional working on the thematic of Social Cohesion and Reconciliation. He holds a BSc Honours Degree in International Relations from the University of London and a BA Honours Degree in English (Special) from the University of Colombo. His areas of interest include Security Studies, Climate Crisis and Sustainable Development, Public Policy, "Global South" and Development, Language and Cultural Studies, Queer and Feminist Studies.*

Rule of Law Collaborative
University of South Carolina