

CBMS as a Measure for Peace-Building and Conflict Transformation: Suggestions from Case Studies in Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Through case studies in conflict zones of Batticaloa, Eastern Sri Lanka, this paper examines how a community-based monitoring system can become an integral component of local conflict transformation efforts. In particular, it sets out to evaluate how CBMS can contribute to local level planning under a specific context of latent violent conflict and how it can capacitate communities to deal with development challenges in a peaceful and constructive way. The methods tested out during the pilot study were a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodology that produced a multi-faceted data basis for poverty analysis. The conclusion reflects upon the ramifications of initiating a CBMS in a relatively uncertain political environment of conflict transition and recommends taking into account a wide range of external and internal risks as well as strategies that are adapted to the specific political and socio-cultural set-up.

Rationale for piloting CBMS in conflict-affected areas

Community-based monitoring system (CBMS) challenges conventional approaches toward poverty-related data acquisition and management organized and conducted by central government offices.

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Centrally acquired statistical data are without doubt crucial to monitor a broad variety of social and economic trends. However, they are frequently inaccessible and irrelevant to community-based organizations and individuals dealing with processes of local-level change in rural areas. Data inaccessibility is often both a physical and cognitive problem. National statistical data sets are mostly one-dimensional and fail in explaining local level poverty dynamics and the many social, economic, environmental and political factors that impinge on rural households and local-level decisionmaking processes. The processing and publication of centrally administered data is also usually geared toward scientists, policymakers and highly specialized staff of the private sector, which may pose a cognitive barrier to data use for communities with limited access to education.

These shortcomings apply in particular to areas affected by prolonged violent conflict and civil war. In north eastern Sri Lanka, for example, a prolonged conflict between the state and armed rebel groups have left the rural areas in ruins, with an estimated number of 60,000 people killed in over 20 years of conflict, and hundreds of thousands displaced either within the country or abroad. The structural consequences of such prolonged phases of armed conflict are visible throughout the region: dilapidated infrastructure, inoperable local level institutions, and a lack of local-level planning capacities, to name but a few.

The aims of investigating options for a CBMS in eastern Sri Lanka therefore were twofold: The first was anticipated to explore if and to what extent CBMS can offer alternatives for community-level data collection in the specific context of latent violent conflict and thus fulfill a basic prerequisite for any local level planning initiative. With its distinct approach, CBMS anticipates bridging the gap between the 'sample' and the 'user' of socio-economic data. It provides an opportunity for gathering, managing and using poverty related data directly at the community level with community members, administrative officers and external researchers cooperating. CBMS data can subsequently be used by community-based organizations

for displaying and explaining their livelihood, identifying development goals and obstacles to government authorities, non-governmental organizations and other local decisionmakers. This can in turn lead to a more informed cooperation between communities and external organizations, and a more proactive role of communities in the process of project planning and implementation. The outcomes of the CBMS pilot study carried out in Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka, will be assessed against this major objective.

The second objective takes CBMS a step further and aims at integrating it into existing local-level efforts of transforming a society that has suffered from prolonged conflict and developing its capacity to deal with local development challenges in a peaceful, constructive way. This is commonly understood as conflict transformation (Lederach, 1995; Rupesinghe, 1995; Miall, 2001). As the discussion will show, a CBMS that is also designed as an initiative for promoting participatory and more equitable local-level decisionmaking can offer several entry points for long-term conflict transformation. The example of a conflict assessment training program that was carried out in Batticaloa for governmental and non-governmental decisionmakers acting on the community level revealed important benefits of including decisionmaking bodies and individuals in a CBMS process. It also highlighted opportunities of such outreach for conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

Pilot study on CBMS in a conflict zone: alternatives for local-level planning

Goals of the Batticaloa case study

The CBMS case study in Batticaloa District focused on evaluating possible causes for an increase or decrease of marginalization of communities or individuals, i.e., the dynamics and relational aspects of poverty. Here, a special focus lay on the consequences of the violent conflict and changes during the peace process. Beyond that, the pilot study also aimed at investigating the characteristics of desired life-chances and aspirations of specific target groups (gender-, caste-,

class-, and age-related) in a heavily conflict-affected area. A further study goal was developing adequate methodologies for CBMS and local-level planning in a conflict- / post-conflict context, based on experimental empirical studies as well as investigating options for the institutionalization of CBMS in an area affected by prolonged violent conflict.

Methodology

The CBMS pilot study was carried out simultaneously in two villages in Batticaloa District (Iyankerny in Eravur Divisional Secretariat (D.S.) division and Mavilangathurai in Manmunai Pattu D.S. division), over a period of five months in 2003 and 2004. While investigations on the community-level formed the main part of the study, key informant interviews were also held with government officials outside the communities. In order to identify and analyze the various effects of violent conflict and provide alternatives for local level planning, a variety of assessment and planning methods were tested and evaluated with regard to their suitability for the purposes of CBMS. The methods tested out during the pilot study were drawn from general quantitative and qualitative social science research methodology (Berg, 1989; Bloor, Frankland et al., 2001; Bernard, 2002), from participatory assessment methodology (Mukherjee, 1993; Chambers, 1994), and from experiences with specific methods with conflict-related social research (Fisher, Abdi et al., 2000; Austin, Fischer et. al., 2003; Ross, 2003). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the applied methods in greater detail, Table 1 provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the different methods tested during the pilot study.

The experience during the Batticaloa case study showed that linking up individual respondent information with the outcomes of group-based activities was a very useful way of obtaining valid and informed poverty-related data. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology produced a multifaceted data basis for a poverty analysis that also enables the exploration of dynamic social processes instead of merely assessing a household's social status

Table 1. Overview of data collection methods tested during CBMS pilot study in Batticaloa

| Tools/Methods | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Problem identification and ranking (<i>group exercise</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify major obstacles to community development • straightforward implementation: not much time needed for preparation and explanation • can facilitate vivid discussion among participants (warm-up) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some participants often dominate the ranking and the discussion • several exercises with different gender / age groups necessary to obtain a unbiased picture |
| 2. Mobility map (<i>group exercise</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful to analyze social networks in and outside the village • provides insights into cultural / gender mobility differences between communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • same as above¹ |
| 3. Impact diagram (<i>group exercise</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can trigger or boost causal problem analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may lead to simplistic explanations of the causes for specific problems • forces participants into a 'western academic' way of thinking (cause – effect) |
| 4. Social & resource mapping (<i>group exercise</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful to get an overview of the village's natural assets, population distribution, and housing condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |
| 5. Wealth ranking (<i>group exercise</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can provide an idea of the relative distribution of wealth in the village • helps understanding the local perception of 'wealth' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying and assigning assets raises suspicion (welfare, taxes) |

¹ The limitations given for the 'problem identification and ranking' exercise apply to all PRA-type group exercises.

Table 1. Cont'd.

| Tools/Methods | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|--|
| 6. Informal poverty dynamics interview (<i>individual</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● fast and casual way of obtaining an first overview on the development of financial and physical assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● eclectic, does not give a holistic idea of poverty dynamics |
| 7. Standardised questionnaire survey (<i>individual</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generates comparable socio-economic data on a wide range of livelihood issues ● generates detailed, individual accounts of HH livelihood dynamics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● can only partly grasp causes and dynamic processes of livelihood changes ● imbalanced relationship interviewer - respondent |
| 8. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (<i>individual</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ideal way to learn about coping strategies ● respondent can decide what to talk about for how long | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lengthy process, requires a lot of time ● difficult to analyze and compare |
| 9. Life histories & family trees (<i>household members</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● creates an understanding of the HH members background & social networks ● addresses inter-generational poverty dynamics ● easy to compare different HHs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lengthy process ● very inquisitive, need to have established good rapport |
| 10. Resource use histories (<i>individual</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● creates an understanding of a HH's changing resource dependency & environmental changes | ---- |
| 11. Group discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● useful to verify outcomes from individual interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● see 1 above |

and its attributes. With regard to highly sensitive topics such as the socio-economic consequences of conflict, quantitative assessments (e.g., using a structured questionnaire) were found to be difficult in two ways: first, the respondents did not seem confident nor comfortable in providing quantitative information that was recorded on a standardized sheet of paper due to fear of political consequences of providing such data. Consequently, the quantitative data collected was found to be very unreliable and extremely difficult to analyze. This process of 'forcing' people into a standardized set of questions and answers was found to be extremely critical from an ethical point of view. Second, within its inflexible structure, the quantitative survey could not 'dig deep' enough into understanding the complexities of the socio-political changes that had occurred since the beginning of the violent conflict in Batticaloa. While some important issues were touched upon, understanding the linkages between different aspects of conflict impact could only be achieved in separately held semi-structured interviews.

Individual in-depth interviews with household members and problem-ranking exercises were discovered to be most informative for the analysis of *relational* aspects of poverty. While individual interviews may reveal more sensitive information, e.g., on conflict impacts, income and community politics, etc., group discussions held during participatory appraisal session, e.g., problem ranking, can point out some major structural issues that prevent people from improving their livelihoods according to their aspirations and ideas. Likewise, other participatory methods such as mobility maps were also found useful for meeting local planning needs. With all participatory assessments, however, it is crucial to take account of the frequently dissimilar needs and aspirations of different social strata (particularly of age and gender) within one community. Like conducting interviews with different individuals will reveal different opinions, conducting participatory planning sessions on a specific topic with different social groups is likely to reveal differing views. Therefore, reliability of the data can only be achieved by working separately with several groups

and subsequently discussing the outcomes of various group sessions with all participants.

Understanding conflict-related obstacles to community empowerment and planning

Drawing from the village case studies, the relational aspects that affect rural livelihood security are manifold. While most of them seem to be rooted in well-known structural problems rural communities are facing in various parts of Sri Lanka (and in other developing countries), many of the identified issues are evidently linked to the legacies of prolonged violent conflict.

Two major facets of the conflict seem to impinge on rural livelihoods in the two villages under investigation: first, the political-level conflict, as being negotiated and challenged by political leaders in Colombo and Kilinochchi, and second, the community-level conflicts among the different ethnic groups. While the respondents expressed that they were powerless with regard to the higher-level political struggles and afraid that the peace process may not succeed, they spoke of many positive changes the politically-negotiated peace process has brought about in their day-to-day life interaction with other ethnic groups at the community level. As a result, some community members were actively involved in renewing contact with the other ethnic. The overall perception was that at the village level, only little open resentment toward other ethnic groups remained. Despite that, the deep and often hidden psychology of conflict was still perceptible. For example, some members of the Muslim community expressed that they were still afraid of going to Tamil areas that are now largely under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

While ethnic violence restricted many economic activities for several years, the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 2002 brought considerable relief and freedom to the residents in the selected villages, in particular for resource-dependent occupational groups such as fishermen. Displaced families were able to come back to their houses,

which were found destroyed and plundered. Freedom of movement without fear was seen as the most significant improvement. Despite these positive developments, the residents of the two villages raised grave concerns over the fact that they still had no certainty about the future of the peace process and therefore have to be extremely cautious with regard to capital investments. Many households were also more vulnerable than before the conflict started because they had lost major physical assets. For fishermen, the loss of fishing canoes was the main setback. A number of people also said that the physical and (to a lesser extent) psychological stress they experienced during the war was still impinging on their ability to work hard in earning an income. Therefore, many families adopted alternative mid-term coping strategies such as temporary labor migration.

Recommendations: institutionalizing CBMS in a conflict zone

Initiating CBMS in a relatively uncertain political environment of conflict transition needs to take into account a range of external and internal risks as well as consider strategies for institutionalization that are adapted to the specific political and socio-cultural setup. When the different authorities and government officials were contacted to inform them on the purpose of the pilot study and the CBMS project at large, the feedback was generally positive and supportive. All three District Secretaries (DS) contacted were – in principle – supportive of CBMS. However, some difficulties were encountered in clarifying intended local-level benefits of CBMS. Some officials did not think community members were able to collect poverty-related data while others did not see a necessity for it. This resentment toward new projects seems to stem from an overload of NGOs working in Batticaloa district. Due to the complex political situation and a high number of non-state actors in the area, NGOs do not necessarily have a positive image in the rural communities.

As of this date, the coordination of development interventions remains a largely unresolved challenge, leading to duplication of efforts, institutional overlap, and confusion about the various goals

of different organizations. The DS in Eravur pointed out to the confusion that had been created when different NGOs working in Eravur Town division conducted similar community assessments in the same locations. Such logistical problems on the implementation level had obviously created considerable resentment toward the community-level work of NGOs in the area.

The Divisional Secretaries (D.S.) in all three areas recommended channeling the project through the G.S. of the respective village – an approach that was then adopted during the pilot study. Thus, the G.S. officers played a key role in facilitating community liaison and participation. Due to the complex political structures in the Batticaloa area, the support and commitment for a long-term institutionalization of CBMS, would at least in the mid-term perspective, largely be dependent on some key players who were willing to take on ownership of the project. At the end of the pilot study, the enthusiasm for implementing the second phase of CBMS was vested in a limited number of individuals who seemed to be truly supportive of the project's aims while others supported the researchers in their daily work without interest though in the overall proliferation of the approach. These experiences call for a careful selection of local partners for the second phase of CBMS, considering political, ethnic and religious affiliation as well as personal commitment of officials.

However, if CBMS is vested in a few key stakeholders, there is a high risk of bias and politicization of the whole project, which may lead to unintended negative effects in the communities and poor quality of data. In view of these risks, clear-cut delineation of responsibilities for those involved in the project is necessary in order to sustain its long-term implementation, especially if data collection is intended to be implemented on a regular (annual) basis. A special institutional mechanism, e.g., having one person at the D.S. level in charge as 'task-manager' can help ensure the timely administration and implementation of the CBMS annual update.

Another problematic issue is that any local resident that were to collect household data is charged with certain social and political

attributes and is accordingly treated with suspicion by the respondents. Therefore, from the experiences gained during the pilot study, it seems unavoidable to include outsiders in data collection, particularly with regard to qualitative data on sensitive topics such as conflict impacts, political and social networks. A clearly defined cooperation with a local university could be a practical solution. After initial training, final year B.A. students could collect the data, feed them back to the communities and analyze them as part of their final theses. This would provide them with a practical experience in social research and can further qualify them for finding employment. However, due to the high level of politicization of universities, and depending on the future developments of the local-level conflict between Muslims and Tamils, the students will have to be chosen very carefully. They would also need sound training in social science research, particularly in the PRA-type field methods discussed above, before exposing them to the real-life situation in the villages. Thus, the capacities for such training would need to be assessed in the relevant institutions, and, if necessary, improved.

Building capacities for community-level monitoring and conflict-sensitive planning

Due to the political conditions in Batticaloa and the abovementioned obstacles to an entirely 'bottom-up' approach to CBMS, the need for working on the administrative and decision-making levels became apparent during the pilot study. The options toward a 'hybrid' approach to CBMS that integrates community-level monitoring efforts with conflict-sensitive planning were investigated during a capacity-building program on local conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive planning carried out in Batticaloa in 2004 and 2005. Apart from meeting the specific planning needs of rural communities in a conflict-affected area, this Conflict Assessment Training (CAT) program also aimed at promoting local-level mechanisms for conflict transformation.

CBMS and conflict assessment training

Conflict Assessment Training (CAT) stands for an experimental development of a training schedule for including conflict sensitivity and analysis at the planning level. It was initiated in September 2004 by a small interdisciplinary team of young researchers and development practitioners at the Improving Capacities for Poverty and Social Policy (IMCAP) Program at the University of Colombo in cooperation with the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka. CAT was developed on the basis of existing experiences with various approaches to working in conflict (Goodhand 2001) documented in the academic and 'grey' literature and by drawing on the working group's grassroots experiences of local-level conflict assessments in Sri Lanka's northeast. The first CAT training was conducted for mid-level staff of governmental and non-governmental organizations working in rural development in the highly conflict-affected Eastern province of Sri Lanka. With respect to the implementation of CBMS, the overall goal was to foster lasting institutional support for CBMS by integrating a capacity-building program (CAT) for conflict-sensitive planning that helps bridging the gap between community-level action and decisionmaking levels in Batticaloa.

Goals of CAT

Conceptually, CAT focused on avoiding conflict risks by analyzing acute and structural conflicts at the local level using the Do-No-Harm approach (Anderson, 1999). It also provided insights into existing potentials for proactive peacebuilding (i.e., also trying to 'do some good'). The aim was to integrate existing experiences from other countries and conflict scenarios (e.g. the results of the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCCP, Anderson, 1999)) into a coherent concept for training key decisionmakers at the lower administrative levels of government and non-governmental organizations in conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive project planning, using Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) as a guiding approach.

The methodological aim of developing CAT was to provide the necessary methodological guidance and supervision for flexible application of assessment methods, according to the particular needs of the local situation. With basic theoretical and conceptual foundations on hand, as well as with practical testing of field assessment methods, trainees should be able to decide on the assessment methodology themselves and compile an assessment sequence according to the needs of a particular situation. The underlying assumption was that in practice, local planning should be a mix of, on the one hand, existing experiences and basic guiding planning concepts, and on the other hand, a flexible set of planning and assessment methods that can be adapted and extended where possible, depending on the hypotheses developed during the planning stages. With a strong focus on planning, such an approach stresses the need for hypothesizing on conflict risks and selecting appropriate tools for conflict analysis based on assumptions that need to be verified in the field.

Sequencing of the CAT program

The training was geared toward the practical implementation of conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive project planning. It consisted of theory and methodology inputs as well as a supervised application in the field. The target groups were mid-level development practitioners from governmental and non-governmental organizations, e.g., program planning officers and field extension coordinators, among others. The training inputs were given during a series of workshops of two to four days held in Colombo and Batticaloa (Table 2) as a continuous and supervised learning process over a period of 5 months².

During the first workshop, theoretical input was provided and applied to local context in exercises and discussions. Topics such as

² Due to the tsunami disaster of Dec. 26th 2004 and the following reconstruction activities, the final workshop of the CAT program had to be postponed from January to March 2005.

Table 2. Sequencing of CAT workshops

| | | |
|------------|--|------------------------------|
| Workshop 1 | Theory and Concepts of Conflict Sensitive Planning and PCIA | 29.-30.9.2004, Colombo |
| Workshop 2 | Methodology of Conflict Sensitive Planning | 8.-10.11.2004, Batticaloa |
| Workshop 3 | Field Exercise <i>Unit 1: Conflict Analysis</i> <i>Unit 2: Assessment of Conflict Risks and Peacebuilding Potentials</i> | 29.11.-2.12.2004, Batticaloa |
| Workshop 4 | Outcomes and Analysis | 21.-22.3.2005, Batticaloa |

the foundations of conflict theory and conflict resolution, awareness creation on the objectives and expected outcomes of mainstreamed conflict sensitivity, and research skills necessary for gathering information on conflict-related topics were discussed.

The second workshop focused entirely on developing assessment and planning skills. It combined awareness creation and training in basic social research skills such as interviewing skills and the development of short semi-structured questionnaires, with applied training in a selected number of common techniques for field assessment and desk-based conflict analysis. The techniques rely on common PRA methodology and had been tested in peace and conflict assessments in other countries and within Sri Lanka. Fisher et al. (2000) provide a detailed overview on the relevance of the selected methods and their implementation. The tools were tested out in group and plenary work, using concrete examples from Batticaloa district as points of reference.

The third workshop consisted of a practical field exercise in several locations in the Batticaloa district where local-level planning methods were tested out in the project areas of the trainees' organizations. A state-of-the-art assessment of conflict risks and peacebuilding potentials was planned and undertaken in selected field locations in groups of 4-6 trainees.

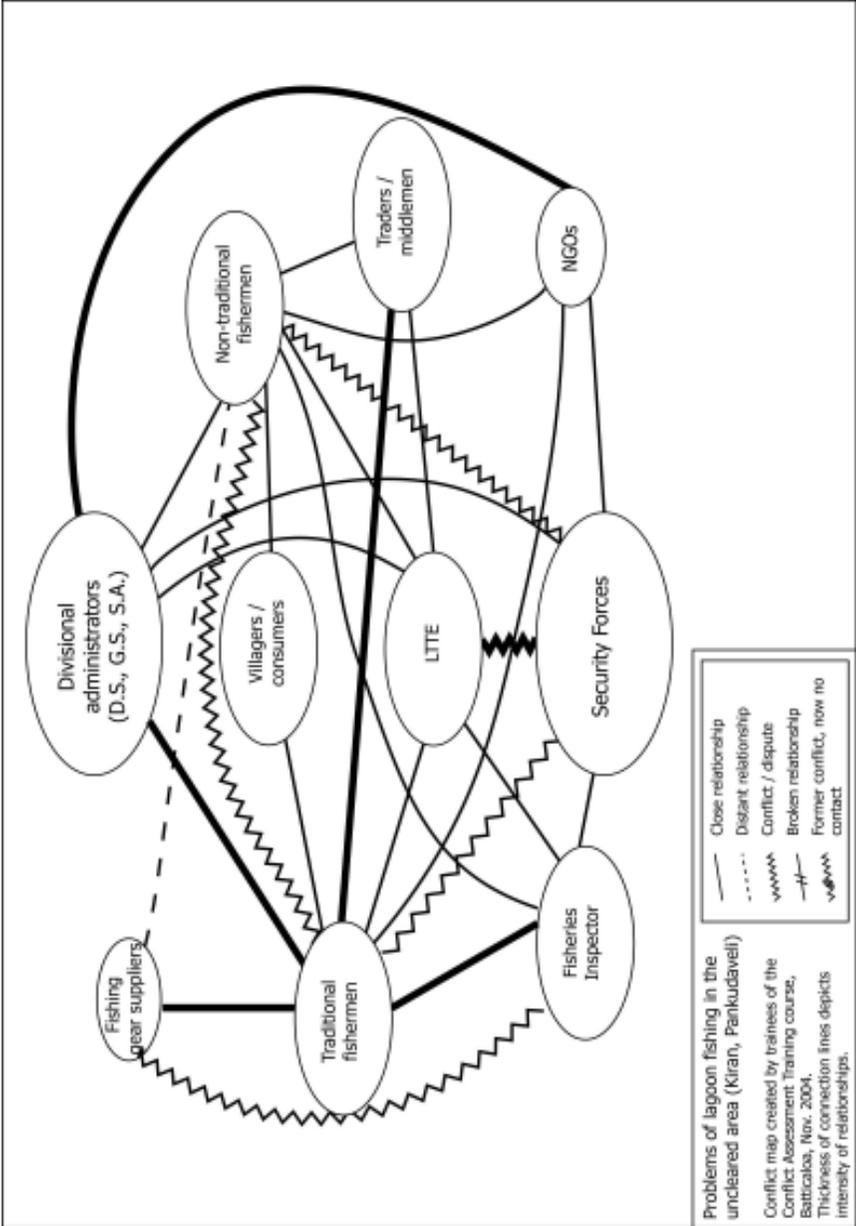
The next section presents a case study on the assessment of the implications of prolonged conflict on local-level planning. The case study is the outcome of the field assessment exercise that formed part of the CAT. For the purpose of critically assessing the conflict analysis and local planning potential of CAT, no additional primary or secondary information sources were used for the presentation of the case study; the problem analysis is solely based on the outcomes of the field appraisal, the observations of trainees and facilitators³, and the analytical discussions held within the assessment team before and after the field visit.

Case study analysis: problems of lagoon resource use in Pankudaveli
Pankudaveli is a lagoon fishing village in Batticaloa District. It is located in the area controlled by the LTTE also referred to as the 'uncleared area'. Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 2002 and the security improvements in the area, an increasing number of fishermen on the lagoon have aggravated ecosystem degradation, especially in the area controlled by the Sri Lankan armed forces ('cleared area'). The objective of the assessment was to investigate conflict-related obstacles to sustainable resource use of lagoon fishermen in the 'uncleared area', and to explore which planning steps are needed to ensure sustainable and equitable use of the lagoon's resources.

Based on existing information on the area, the assessment team had expected disputes between traditional and non-traditional fishermen in the area with regard to access and usage of the lagoon and tank fishing resources (Figure 1). The expected disputes between traditional and non-traditional fishermen, however, were not confirmed during the field assessment. In fact, there seemed to be no

³ In this report, *trainers* or *facilitators* refers to the IMCAP supervisory staff, *trainees* refers to the group of development workers who participated in the CAT, whereas the persons (village residents, government officials, etc.) met during the field appraisals are addressed as *participants*.

Figure 1. Hypothetical conflict map created by CAT trainees prior to the field assessment in Pankudavelli



sign of such conflict among the fishermen as the lagoon area where Pankudaveli fishermen go fishing is large enough to accommodate all local fishermen.

Still, a latent dispute between Pankudaveli and the neighboring village Narippulluthoattam came to light during the assessment. Here, the problem is an inflow to the lagoon from a nearby tank, which is obstructed by metal nets in order to stop fish from moving in and out of the lagoon. For the fishermen of Pankudaveli this inflow used to be a lucrative fishing spot but had been lost because of the obstruction.

The decrease of lagoon fish abundance—a well-known issue throughout the lagoon—is also negatively affecting fishing activities and thus income generation. Major causes of this decline are, according to the Pankudaveli fishermen, the increasing number of fishermen, on the one hand, and the use of illegal fishing gear, e.g., nets with small mesh size, on the other hand. The latter partly seems to be a result of growing competition over limited resources. The Pankudaveli case study, though not revealing a situation of acute conflict, shows the need for integrated local planning and a resource management system for Batticaloa lagoon.

Initiating such planning processes, however, has to bear in mind the complex political setup in the area. First, there is a latent risk for increasing resource-based conflict among fishermen in the area due to a mutually reinforcing process of declining fish population and increasing competition among fishermen. All fishermen seem to engage in unsustainable fishing practices. There is an urgent need for management and control of the fishery resources through government authorities, e.g., the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. A development management system for the entire lagoon would need to tackle these issues of deteriorating ecosystem by introducing a zoning system based on consultations with fishermen and other primary and secondary stakeholders (e.g., paddy farmers, fish traders, etc.). Alternative options for income generation would, likewise, need to be established in the long run.

Second, since having such dialogue runs the risk of disputes over resource access and use among different stakeholders groups, there is also some potential risk for political instrumentalization. Resource disputes can easily be used by political actors from different areas and ethnicity to highlight differences among identity groups. This may have a polarizing effect on fishermen groups from different areas and ethnic or religious background (e.g., Muslims and Tamils).

The local fishermen seem to be very accommodating of the problems of resource users from other areas and accept that they are not the only ones who use illegal fishing methods. Even though they complained about other fishermen, they nonetheless do not want to spoil the good relationship with them. One step in fighting illegal fishing methods, they noted, would be to take legal action against the traders who sell illegal fishing equipment. This relative unity of the fisherfolk seems to have a good potential for a constructive solution to the increasing environmental and social problems related to lagoon fishing. A joint initiative for sound lagoon management would need to be supported by different political stakeholders and should include representatives of the fishing community from both sides of the lagoon ('cleared' and 'uncleared area'). Such an effort holds great potential for a truly positive progress in rural development by focusing on mutually agreeable non-political development goals, e.g., the conservation of the lagoon as a fishery resource.

While such initiatives would need to be agreed upon at the political level, their planning and implementation would have to be based on broad participation of the local fisher folk but would also include experts from the government, academic and NGO sectors. Development organizations can play a supportive role in this process. Such an initiative can create considerable positive spin-off effects for conflict transformation since considerable interaction, mutual planning and, to some extent, compromise will be necessary to avoid further deterioration of the ecosystem. The lagoon, as a matter of mutual interest, could thus become a pilot case for positive conflict transformation.

Outlook

As the two different approaches to investigating options for CBMS as a means to local conflict transformation and planning have shown, CBMS is a promising alternative to provide communities and local decisionmakers with the capacity to assess rural livelihood systems in areas where micro-level data are chronically deficient and where the political climate is still dominated by instability and violent conflict.

Several limitations have been identified, particularly with regard to finding lasting institutional support for CBMS, since the institutional setup in conflict-affected areas is weakened or entirely inoperable. Community-level planning and decisionmaking is often overshadowed by factional politics that filter down from the macro- and meso-levels. This makes it hard for village residents to voice their needs and interests openly. This challenges the methodology for community-based assessments which needs to be more conflict-sensitive in its approach. Including external facilitators and focusing on capacity building seems a viable approach to tackle these highly sensitive issues of local politics in a context of latent conflict. Applied capacity building programs such as CAT can help re-establish a link between the rural population and micro- and meso-level decisionmakers by exposing the latter directly to the needs of rural residents. It can also help create ownership among the decisionmakers themselves for a more community-oriented approach towards local planning.

Such an approach, however, necessarily has to take on a mid- to long-term perspective. It aims to change people's attitudes and ways of relating to each other as part of a process of structural conflict transformation. The Batticaloa case studies have revealed some key aspects of approaching CBMS. More pilot projects are needed to build up knowledge on how CBMS can become an integral component of local conflict transformation efforts.

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Comments

- The questionnaire should be pilot tested first.
- Provide information if further steps have been done to convince the officials other than CAT.
- If the locals replace the researchers in conducting the 11 methodologies, provide information on how much training it would take. Conducting and processing these methodologies might be unsuitable for locals.
- Provide information on whether community members have any say or not in the decision to take up CBMS. Any initiative on their part is important.
- Conflict is related to displaced and traumatized people. So there will be problems of data continuity in CBMS if the villagers are displaced. Moreover, since outside people (not locals) are conducting the CBMS, there is the danger of them not telling the truth due to fear of backlash, etc.
- Possibility of biased response due to the overload of NGOs.
- It would be quite hard to make it sustainable since locals could not do it (there is conflict going on).
- The authors point out that the universities are not neutral. So they could not be relied upon. Other parties therefore should take control of CBMS if it is to be institutionalized.
- Look into the amount of time needed to conduct the same research in every village in the district. Since the locals are not the ones doing it, then the research could not be conducted at the same time.
- Conducting CBMS in conflict areas is difficult; as such, this study has taken the important first step.

- The researchers leave no stones unturned in terms of the research methodology used. They basically use every methodology available!
- CAT for officials seems to be very important and could be replicated in other conflict areas.
- Institutionalizing CAT first is probably a good way to go before institutionalizing CBMS. Thus, CAT participants can be the key persons in CBMS as long as they are neutral.
- Monitoring system has to keep into consideration the potential in divisions of an average situation and a conflict-affected situation.
- This kind of a study can be done in the Philippines too. In fact, an effort has already been made in the Philippines in a local level development plan linking top most local people and the top level commanders of a rebel group.
- Provide information on whether the CBMS is going to challenge or complement the national level initiatives
- Provide details on whether data show different effects between males and females or not.