

Reconstruction for peace

While war in the North and East of Sri Lanka has ended, peace, especially sustainable peace, is not so easily forthcoming.

Here at the University the work of the Disaster Resilience Centre (DRC), focuses on many vital areas in the post disaster process, and now to add to their portfolio of projects they have been successful in gaining a further award, this time from the British High Commission in Colombo, for a project entitled 'Conflict Prevention through Infrastructure Reconstruction'. Led by Dr Richard Haigh from DRC, Reconstruction for Peace is a one year programme of research and capacity building that seeks to explore the interaction between youth and infrastructure reconstruction programmes in the North and East of Sri Lanka as a means to prevent future conflict in the region.

The Salford team (Dr Richard Haigh, Professor Dilanthi Amarantunga & Professor Martin Hall) will work with colleagues from Sri Lankan Universities (Colombo, Jaffna, and Eastern University) on the project examining: how reconstruction programmes engage, employ, connect and divide youth in the region; the extent to which inequality in access to infrastructure affects social cohesion among youth and the factors of infrastructure reconstruction programmes that are most sensitive to impacting conflict prevention. The evidence gained from the study will be used to inform policy development and build the capacities of the Universities in the North and East of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan construction industry (including SMEs) and local government engaged in reconstruction projects within the region.

Conflict to peace through the rebuilding of the socio economic framework of the affected society

Richard said: "Post conflict reconstruction supports the transition from conflict to peace through the rebuilding of the socio economic framework of the affected society. However, there is a need to pay special attention to conflict dynamics that may arise through the development work".

Right: Damaged homes in war torn Sri-Lanka

Interest in helping to support a lasting resolution to the Sri Lanka conflict has led some to focus efforts on strengthening incentives for peace and reconciliation, including encouraging conflict sensitive approaches and supporting post conflict recovery and reconstruction. Physical infrastructure, broadly defined to include services that are essential ingredients to the quality of life and economic activity, has the potential to connect or divide communities. Reconstructing the physical infrastructure after a war can help in the peace building process through restoring dignity, providing a much needed employment opportunity and promoting conflict sensitive approaches Dilanthi added: "Any physical reconstruction needs to be tailored to the needs of the affected people, including diverse ethnic groups.

Precautions need to be taken to avoid repeating mistakes that occurred during post tsunami reconstruction efforts e.g. a lack of consideration of ethnic co existence. Conflict also tends to deepen gender discrimination and disadvantages faced by women. Similarly youth, who have been born into and often participated in the war, must overcome persisting inequalities and differential access to opportunities, while the elderly face challenging economic constraints and often require special care".

There is growing recognition that reconstruction requires interdisciplinarity solutions and that those professions traditionally involved in the reconstruction of infrastructure must understand the sensitive environment in which they will be operating. Understanding the needs of those living in the region will be vital if reconstruction is to help prevent future conflict.

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