



Evaluation of the Post-Insurgency Rehabilitation Program in Sri Lanka

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Abstract *In the broader Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, the terms ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘reintegration’ are erroneously used as synonyms. The manifestation of these two distinct phases of a program can be seen in many affected parts of the world. Sri Lanka is one such place where the rehabilitation program was launched after an extended war against insurgency. The vigilantes constituted by the Sri Lankan armed forces, known as Civil Defense Forces (CDF) has been controversial. This paper differentiates the theory and practice and explains what could be done to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of the programs.*

Introduction

The conflict between Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) ended in 2009 that made about 30 million people Internally Displaced People (IDPs) at the end. Out of this 30 million, there were 12000 identified LTTE ex-combatants, out of which 9374 were adult males, 2032 females and 594 juveniles (Martin, 2017). This huge number of ex-combatants was a problem. Government decided to pass them through a legal process to reintegrate them into society. For this purpose Government initiated rehabilitation program.

The Sri Lankan Army that fought with these LTTE members was mandated with the responsibility of rehabilitating them. It was not only a military matter but psychological too i.e. the mind-set of the people. Sri Lankan Army that had the

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capabilities, in terms of spaces, man power, and training equipment used them together with academics that included psychologists, sociologists and economists (in-person interview, Admiral Dr. Jayanath, Islamabad, November 14, 2017). Critical insight reveals that there were appreciable norms in rehabilitation policy and program of Sri Lanka. First, they had identified the causes of the conflict precisely and tried to search remedies through rehabilitation, secondly, Sri Lanka had implemented policy framework which was specially drawn for rehabilitation program of ex-combatants. The rehabilitation program was conducted by the Sri Lankan Army within PARCs; especially constructed for rehabilitation of ex-cadres of LTTE. The 11600 ex-combatants, including 596 child-soldiers, were distributed in these PARCs. All 11600 ex-combatants were categorized on the basis of their involvement, high-risk to low-risk and age/ gender (ibid).

In March 2009, three months before the end of conflict, Sri Lankan Government enacted policy of rehabilitation of Tamil fighters with the title “Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex-combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka” (MDMHR, 2009). The policy focused on three basic goals. First, protection of human rights of the ex-Tamil fighters and to assist them in according to the constitution of Sri Lanka, second, contributing towards sustainable peace and reconciliation through reintegration of ex-combatants and third, government’s resolve for providing jobs and other economic opportunities. For achieving above goals, a few principles were also laid out i.e. safeguard to protect rights of security of the rehabilitees, equality in assistance, gender equality and protection from stigmatization (MDMHR, 2009).

Rehabilitation and Reintegration defined

The existing literature discusses rehabilitation and reintegration as synonym to one another. However, a profound study of DDR reveals that they are two distinct components of post conflict peace building. This division is necessary. It is reintegration that tells us how much a rehabilitation program is successful. In other words, reintegration is an indicator to find out success or failure of rehabilitation program. The fundamental difference between the two as rehabilitation is like schooling, training and counseling process mostly conducted inside in building/specialized centers; and on the other hand, reintegration is the outcome of what is learnt in the process and its expression in society. When we try to define rehabilitation we take it as a process through which ex-combatants are reintegrated into society. This simple definition distinguishing both the terms which reveals that one is the ‘process’ and later is the ‘outcome’. The ultimate purpose of rehabilitation program is to reintegrate the war-torn society into its original position. For further clarification it is necessary to find out how reintegration is defined and what its purposes are in the existing literature.

Majority of the literature does not discuss reintegration separately. The big data on reintegration could be found in the literature of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). DDR is the world-wide recognized strategy through which ex-combatants are assimilated into society.

In the UN approach to DDR, it is rightly stated that the DDR cannot prevent violence or resolve the conflict but it provides an environment in which other post conflict peace building initiatives can easily proceed (United Nations, 2006). While defining the reintegration within DDR, it is the process through which an ex-combatant obtains civilian status. It is a social and economic process in which ex-combatants acquire sustainable employment taking place in communities at the local level (Knight, 2012, p. 18). Anders Nilsson defined reintegration as, "...a societal process aiming at the economic, political, and social assimilation of ex-combatants and their families into civil society" (Nilsson, 2005, p. 27). It is a long process and usually the ex-combatants need long term assistance. United Nations elaborates the post conflict processes and puts the disarmament at top; followed by demobilization; then reinsertion and at last reintegration. Reinsertion is the short-term assistance given to ex-combatants during demobilization before the long-term process of reintegration which helps to "deal with the security problems by providing ex-combatants with an alternative to the ways of making a living" (United Nations, 2006).

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance (United Nations, 2006, p. 3).

By this definition it can be concluded that reintegration is an outcome which starts after rehabilitation. Reintegration is the further assistance given to the rehabilitees after graduation from rehabilitation program. The literature also reveals that both of the concepts are different but did not define them separately. This distinction is clarified in the UN integrated DDR Standards when defines reintegration, the document says in the pre-text as,

"The UN shall use the concept and abbreviation 'DDR' as a comprehensive term that includes related activities, such as repatriation, rehabilitation, reconciliation and so on, that AIM TO ACHIEVE REINTEGRATION. These activities should, therefore, be made a part of the overall concept and planning of reintegration processes, where necessary" (United Nations, 2006, p. 2).

It is quite clear from the above statement that reintegration, rehabilitation and so on are different activities conducted for peace building in post conflict environment. It also manifests that reintegration is a relatively broader concept that encompasses rehabilitation along with other concepts; i.e. reconciliation, security sector reforms, repatriation and so on.

Sri Lanka Rehabilitation Program

The basic purpose of any rehabilitation program is to win ‘hearts and minds’ of aggrieved population and this also holds good for Sri Lanka. The first paragraph of ex-combatants policy framework starts with following words;

The Government of Sri Lanka headed by HE the President who is guided by the Buddhist principles of forgiveness and compassion knowing the value of human life, thought that, as the terrorists are human beings whose minds were distorted, and hence misguided, could be reformed and could be rehabilitated to enlist their services as useful citizens of the country. For this purpose, he sought the assistance of the very Security Forces which led a humanitarian war against the terrorists (GoSL, 2013).

The Administrative Hierarchy

One of the key aspects of Sri Lanka rehabilitation and reintegration program is the administrative and management hierarchy. The whole program is under the sole authority of the president of Sri Lanka, as head of the state, and it was His Excellency who drew a national policy framework for this purpose for rehabilitation and reintegration.

At the top, Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights (MDMHR) was mandated the whole program for rehabilitation and reintegration, along with, other disasters; floods, earthquakes and human rights issues. The MDMHR established a specialized department for this purpose; Bureau of the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation (BCGR). The BCGR is fully equipped with Monitoring and Evaluation for the purpose to reach out the beneficiaries on timely and efficiently to ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration (MDMHR, 2009, p. 16). In its National Framework Policy proposal, it is agreed to give full support to BCGR in provisioning of assistance with respect to training the trainers, developing coordination with other institutions where necessary and to encourage mobile training centers as alternative to provide skills to rehabilitees.

The rehabilitation programs are carried out in Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation centers (PARCs) which are 24 in number and are built in Ambepussa, Welikanda, and Tellippalai at the North East of Sri Lanka (GoSL, 2013, p. 11). These PARCS are managed and administered by the Sri Lankan Army. The 11600 LTTE ex-cadres were distributed in those PARCS. There is no separate PARC for children or female ex-cadres but partition within the PARCs and all the cadres were categorized into three categories on the basis of their involvement, gender and age; i.e. adults, female and juveniles (in-person interview, Admiral Dr. Jayanath, Islamabad, November 14, 2017).

The financial matters were solely controlled in the state's Multi-Donor Trust Fund. The monitoring and processing of donor funds was also bound through a proper channel. This spares no room for misuse of donor funds.

The State shall establish a Multi-Donor Trust Fund to support the reintegration of ex-combatants in Sri Lanka, towards which contributions will be made from the National Budget, the Sri Lankan business community, and donor funds. If legally-binding agreements between bilateral/multilateral donors and the State do not permit direct payment to the Trust Fund, then the funds can still be channeled to the reintegration process through other means mutually agreed upon with the State (MDMHR, 2009, p. 08).

In the hierarchy, Sri Lankan Army played vital role. From disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration state security forces remained involved. The logic behind this was that the terrorists' minds could not be controlled in any civilian setup. Hence, it was Sri Lankan Army which initiated, designed, developed and implemented the rehabilitation and reintegration program (GoSL, 2013, p. 17). In the beginning, Sri Lanka too had some constraints in achieving goals of rehabilitation and reintegration in terms of skilled human resources, finance, language and monitoring mechanism (MDMHR, 2009).

Reinsertion

Reinsertion naturally includes social, economic and psychological components and if provided fairly and effectively, could strengthen social justice that ultimately contributes to the eradication of violence from the society (MDMHR, 2009, p. 18). Before going to rehabilitate the detainees of LTTE, it was necessary to provide them an immediate assistance. For this purpose government proposed a reinsertion program to assist the traumatized detainees who had lost their homes, families and jobs during conflict. The reinsertion packages were proposed; awareness about citizenship, provision information about reintegration program, provision of tool kits for both male and female separately those included clothes, hygiene products, basic households products etc. and the cash allowance that was needed at the time when ex-combatants disarmed and demobilized from their ex-group (MDMHR, 2009, p.19). Besides, other social and spiritual activities were conducted during this phase in which the religious and spiritual leaders were invited to participate. This program was done immediately as to build trust and confidence of these detainees on government and its institutions.

Rehabilitation Processes

After the end of the conflict the ex-combatants were separated from IDPs, though, was a difficult task but very well done by the Sri Lankan intelligence agencies. The ex-combatants were then divided into two categories; the hard-core and soft-core.

The hard-cores were mild and were involved in higher terrorist activities. They were dealt according to the law of the land. The soft-core were handed over to Bureau of the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation (BCGR) for rehabilitation and reintegration into the society (GoSL, 2013, p. 14). They were received as brothers and sisters by the government and not enemy of the state (Ratnayake, 2012). In the PARCs these soft-core ex-cadres were provided water, food, security, health facilities, psycho-social support, making grounds for easy contacts with their friends and families and provided them the access to all UN agencies (GoSL, 2013). Apparently, this rehabilitation program consists of 'six+1' model, keeping in view the social and cultural fundamentals (Ratnayake, 2012). The components were; Recreational, which allowed the combatants for extra-curricular activities; second, social and cultural rehabilitation; third, spiritual and religious; fourth, vocational; fifth was educational; sixth psycho-social and the seventh was community engagement (Dharmawardhane, 2013). When registered in the PARCs, these ex-cadres were first moved through the Psycho-social profiling, done with the help of intelligence agencies as well as clinical psychiatrists. The profiling included their age, previous economic condition and the intensity of their involvement in the conflict. After profiling an assessment was made by the above experts that what profession, skills, education etc. an ex-combatants has and what type of training he needed (GoSL, 2013).

Community Awareness Program

The main constrain in any post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration program is the community handling. When a rehabilitee reintegrates into society, he faces many problems; from stigmatization to the reparation of losses he did to the community during conflict. Similarly in Sri Lanka, the community was not ready to accept these ex-cadres back into the society as the community had lost their children as child soldiers to them who were brain-washed by these ex-combatants. Seeking societal revenge became norm. The Sri Lankan rehabilitation and reintegration program specially focused this component and initiated an awareness program in society with the help of clergies of religious communities; especially, in the northern and eastern provinces (GoSL, 2013).

Formal Schooling

The detainees at the centers were mostly un-educated and most of them had left their education in middle and joined the LTTE. Most of them were from poor families who could not even afford formal education. The basic purpose of rehabilitation is to educate the detainees and BCGR provided this opportunity at PARCs. At the centers, the biggest problem was of communication and was very difficult to educate them as about 25% neither understood Sinhala language nor

English. The BCGR's train the trainers program was very helpful that first provided basic communication skills to the trainers at the centers. Informal education was provided in all centers for those who wanted to read and write and acquire formal education according to the National Educational Standards. Among the detainees, who had the experiences of teaching were also engaged in teaching as it was easy for them to teach in Tamil language (Hettiarachchi, 2014).

Spiritual, Religious and Cultural Component

Admiral Jayanath responded in an interview, I should give a little credit to the Sri Lankan society also. Our society looked at the ex-combatants with sympathy. Religion also played a key role; Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity all these played their role and were used for rehabilitation. The good teachings of religions were part of the rehabilitation; for example, the meditation. It was not totally psychological rehabilitation but was a kind of spiritual too. Only Buddhism was not followed as all the cadres were not Buddhists. Majority of them were Hindus, some Christians and a few Muslims as well. These cadres had one ethnicity but multi-religions, majorly, Hinduism and Christianity. If we teach Hindus or Christians a Buddhist philosophy will not go well. Our rehabilitation program used to incorporate the good teachings of all four religions in the country. When the religion is involved this is another success (in-person interview, Admiral Dr. Jayanath, Islamabad, November 14, 2017)

All the arrangements were made to ensure a series of meditation at the PARCs. The ex-combatants were taught kindness, hope, compassion and good behavior. Festivals of all religions were observed at these centers; like, Devali, eid, charismas.

A mass marriage ceremony was also arranged in 2010 in which 53 couples vowed to marry by the consent of their parents. All the expenses of the marriages were paid by the Bureau (GoSL, 2013). The Peace Villages were established for these newly married couples and were allotted a plot of land for cultivation with vocational skills at the center. As most of the ex-combatants joined LTTE in their childhood so they were not aware of family life. They were given this relevant training too. The female ex-combatants were also taught the art of cultural shows and participated in many cultural shows with full enthusiasm (ibid, p-26). During conflict they were taught that Sinhalese do not object to a Hindu temple within their premises. To remove their this perception, they were carried to the Hindu temples at South for the purpose that they could see that there is no ban or harassment or discrimination from Sinhalese towards Tamils. Beside visits to the Hindu temples these ex-combatants also participated in many Buddhist rituals and got blessings from the monks. These activities were done for the purpose to remove the miss-perception developed in their minds by the LTTE against other communities and religions.

Social, Community and the Family Component

After receiving vocational trainings at the PARCs, job fairs were organized in different cities in which personnel from the public corporate sector were invited. The female ex-combatants were given opportunity to learn special courses; like, bridal dressing, makeup and hair dressing. Courses like tailoring, cookery and agriculture nursery management were also given to the rehabilitees.

Psychological and Creative Therapy Training

Before psychological therapy, it was necessary to train the trainers and administrators that they could better understand the rehabilitees and deal with them with passion and kindness. Special attention was given to the rehabilitees for their counseling that their minds could be adjusted in a harmonious society. A week prior to reintegrate them into society they were educated in peace building, co-existence and interrelationship in the society. There were many ex-combatants who were interested in developing skills in art and cultural activities. They were given trainings in painting, dancing, drama and singing and many events were arranged for their practical exhibition (GoSL, 2013, pp. 39-40).

Sports and Extra-curricular Activities

Most of the ex-combatants were interested in playing cricket. They were given the opportunity to play cricket at the PARCs and all the arrangements were done by the CGR. They were taken to the south to play with different sports clubs. Besides, ex-combatants were also given the opportunity to play football, volleyball and tug-of-war within and outside with different clubs in the south. About 135 ex-combatants were brought to the ministry of sports and are now national athletes.

Apart from the above, the ex-combatants were given many round trips around the south to make them participate in multiple cultural events. They also made a visit to Sri Lankan Parliament and other governmental offices, Air Port and gardens. During these trips they met with different communities and religious figures. The community warmly welcomed these ex-combatants.

Vocational Trainings

Vocational training is considered to be the backbone for any rehabilitation program. Sri Lankan rehabilitation program provided all the possible skills needed in today's world. On completion of course, the ex-combatants had been given vocational training certificates, those were recognized in local as well as international industry when they apply for any job. A computer lab was established at PARC and over 1000 ex-combatants got IT training from that lab.

Large numbers of ex-combatants were given the training of sewing machine through which they could work in different garments factories. There were 48 vocational trainings which were given to ex-combatants according to their choices; including bridal dressing, electrician, motor bike mechanic, driving, carpenter, masonry, cultivation and many more.

Female Ex-combatants

There were 2032 female Tigresses those underwent rehabilitation. The PARCs were not separated for females but the administrator. About 100 females vowed to marry with other male ex-combatants. It may be recalled that LTTE was the first militant organization that incorporated and introduced the female suicide cadre. The feminine nature of female was badly exploited by LTTE as the ladies were less suspicious and could reach to the deeper targets without checking. A large number of females were sea tigers of the LTTE wing (in-person interview, Admiral Dr. Jayanath, Islamabad, November 14, 2017). During the conflict, the females were strictly ordered that they will appear and behave like men; their hair were cut short and they were wearing clothes similar to men (Martin, 2017). Thus, bringing so much brain washed militant women back to societal life was made possible due to sheer hard work of Sri Lankan Government.

Juveniles Ex-combatants

A direct interview of the BBC correspondents from a Sri Lanka military officer at rehabilitation center found that the rehabilitees when returned to homes, they found no school, lives in tents and scarcity of food (BBC, 2010). BBC correspondent Stephen Sackur had a pessimistic opinion about the processes of rehabilitation initiated by Sri Lankan government. However, in an interview (2010) Brigadier Ranasinghe opined that the child soldiers are not ex-militants but children. He proceeded that the rehabilitation process cannot be completed in a year but will take time as the conflict was a prolonged conflict and its destructions couldn't be healed without taking time.

The official website of Bureau of Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, the intuition that over-saw the program, revealed that as of October 2014 all 594 ex-child cadres (364 male; 230 female juvenile) were rehabilitated into society. The 594 had adopted different professions; some got government employment and the rest were living with their families (461), some were even self-employed (46) and the rest had adopted different profession in private sector; including, masonry, carpentry, plumbing etc. Among them, 328 owned land and 276 owned houses while 38 among these juveniles were pursuing higher education (BCGR, 2017).

Post Rehabilitation

The ex-combatants who had returned to society were needed to be engaged to prevent recidivism. Against this question Admiral Jayanath replied that rehabilitation will not be succeeded unless one gives a livelihood to the rehabilitee. There was a program through which the rehabilitees were absorbed in government projects so that they could start a livelihood. He further said that in some cases these ex-cadres were also provided with houses through a program. (Ramakrishnan, 2016).

To prevent recidivism, a monitoring check was also needed, apart from engaging ex-combatants in services. An important issue was also resented by these ex-combatants when they complained of being followed by intelligence agencies. They felt imprisoned although they were out of prisons. They also lose trust on government and felt psychologically inferior to other citizens. In this regard the government had then adopted an interesting policing by engaging these ex-combatants in Civil Defense Force (CDF). They became guardians of their villages. This civil defense force was also used for agriculture projects as well as in some other social development projects. One objective to keep these rehabilitees in CDF was to keep a tab on them. The government was not directly monitoring them but through this way of CDF. It was an intelligent strategy through which the ex-combatants did not feel that they were under surveillance (in-person interview, Admiral Dr. Jayanath, Islamabad, November 14, 2017).

Critical Analysis

The United Nations Human Development Index ranked Sri Lanka 73 in 2017 which shows a very positive development (UNDP, 2017). In Global Terrorism Index 2017, Sri Lanka ranked 68 which earlier was 73rd in 2016. These human development and global terrorism reports reveal advancement in Sri Lanka human development and security issues which is an indicator that the rehabilitation and reintegration program was a success (Humanity, 2017). Although, analysis of independent literature reveals that there are still gaps in theory and practice in Sri Lanka rehabilitation and reintegration program. The major criticism was found in the literature on human rights and humanitarian grounds; for example, the issue of disabled ex-combatants, female reintegration, issue of stigmatization, cash payments to the ex-combatants etc.

The recruitment of women and children in the ranks of LTTE is very well known. This recruitment was done by force, or otherwise, by brainwashing with their separatists and self-determination ideology. The adult male and female cadres were born and grown in gun culture within LTTE. After rehabilitation it was very difficult for them; especially, for female to reintegrate into society (Martin, 2017). Even their own families were not ready to accept these females as they felt

ashamed of them. Women were at high ranks equal to men in LTTE but when they returned homes they felt not fit in Tamils patriarchal society (ibid).

Stigmatization for all ex-combatants was at its highest and they were looked upon like traitors of the country and community. The society in general was not ready to accept them whole-heartedly as they inflicted them harm (Puthukkudiyiruppu, 2014).

Moreover, very little financial support was given after the release of rehabilitees. Only Rs 25000 (250 \$) was given on merit basis and up till 2014, IRIN reported, only 1773 out of 12000 rehabilitees had received this amount (Puthukkudiyiruppu, 2014). The government had also initiated loan program for ex-combatants in post rehabilitation. The BCGR reveals that as of December 2017, only 1781 rehabilitees could receive this loan from different Sri Lankan Banks. The purpose of the loan was that the beneficiaries could launch small self-businesses in their post rehabilitation lives (BCGR, 2017).

Initially, only 53 couples were got married at the PARCs and some less than 100 later, which does reveals a success story. More than 1500 females were sent to homes without giving any assistance for marriages. Also, the problem of stigmatization about females in society became one of the major hurdles and no man in the society felt encouraged to marry an ex-combatant girl.

The provision in the policy framework document that ex-combatants will be assisted according to the constitution of Sri Lanka. This provision is still being criticized by the Tamil community as the constitution, they consider, is Sinhala centric.

Admiral Jayanath, who served at BCGR and had developed and implemented the rehabilitation and reintegration program, revealed that initially small arms were given to the villagers to protect their villages which later evolved into the Civil Defense Force (CDF). These CDFs were one step higher than the village committees, thus a useful contribution in terms of powering them down to town and villages levels.

It was also proposed that the Civil Defense Force may be constitutionally recognized as police; otherwise, two basic problems could arise with the establishment of this force. First, the issues of militarization and weaponization of the society those could lead to creation of war-lords in the society. These war-lords could dominate the society in terms of power and might exploit the local resources for their self-interests. Second problem associated with arming these ex-combatants and bound them to safeguard their respective villages could turn into an issue of human rights violation. How a civilian could do the job state, the security agencies? However, the problem was overcome by arrangement of societal defense concept.

Conclusion

Many issues related to reintegration are yet to be resolved by the Sri Lankan Government but there is no doubt that the rehabilitation program is a success. One of the fundamental reasons behind a successful rehabilitation is the engagement of the community as well as involvement of international humanitarian organizations. The government appeared serious about the issues of Tamil community and a reconciliation process had been started. The issue of identity remains a sore issue that is amicably addressed with the enactment of new federal constitution. Dr. Hettiarachchi expressing about Sri Lanka rehabilitation program stated that, “the beneficiary gradually begins to see the “other” as non-threatening, observing in the “other” behavior and values to emulate, thereby invalidating the distorted images propagated and maintained of the “other” by the propaganda” (Hettiarachchi, 2014).

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