

Strategic mapping of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka

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Executive summary

This report has been compiled from interviews with men and women associated with 17 organisations that have been involved in peace building work in Sri Lanka. It has also drawn from existing literature on peace work and women's activism in Sri Lanka. A draft version of this report was presented to a gathering of representatives from the organisations interviewed, long-term women activists, those involved in peace work, academics, international organisations working in this field and women representatives from trade unions. The critiques, recommendations and discussion points that came up at this meeting have also been included in this report.

The report records some of the actions taken by individuals, groups of women, and organisations to respond to the impact of conflict on women, as well as initiatives taken to promote peace at the community, district, national and international levels. These activities were selected to represent varied types of interventions, the long duration of peace activism and the spread of work geographically.

The aim of this report was to map initiatives as well as the ways in which women's activism has changed and evolved to respond to the changing socio political context. The analysis explores the underlying concepts that have influenced the assumptions about the nature of conflict, and the objectives for engaging in peace work.

What has been the conceptualisation of peace that has guided different interventions?

One of the key underlying concepts that has guided women's engagement with peace building has been the identification of violence as existing along a continuum. Women often experienced the *“connected forms of domestic and political violence that stretched from*

the home, to the street to the battlefield". (Manchanda, 2001. p. 17). This conceptualisation has provided a broader framework which has enabled us to look at women as also perpetrators of violence and to recognise that the end of conflict does not mean peace for women.

Through the interviews what emerged was that often women's work towards building peace has recognised these *connected forms* and was based on the understanding that people should live in a just society and not be subjected to socio economic marginalisation, cultural oppression, patriarchal power relations and political discrimination. Some women's groups recognised the right to self determination of minority communities, some based their work on the premise that a political settlement to the conflict was essential, some organisations had made the conceptual link that violence during conflict spread in a continuum from within the home to the community and country and their activism therefore was not limited to periods defined as conflict-times but also extended to times of ceasefires and peace processes. Some organisations' work towards peace was about the daily resistance of the militarisation of their homes and communities. Others had linked development work to peace building work and addressed issues of livelihoods, health and poverty.

This report puts forward a proposition that the theorising and documenting of *peace work* has been significantly different from the theorising and documentation of *women's movement activism* for peace.

Feminist theorising and analysis of women's peace activism has had some distinctive features. Women's peace activism has usually been conceptually placed within women's political participation in labour movements, in anti imperialist struggles and left movements (Tambiah, 2002; De Mel, 2001; Giles 2003). Therefore an important observation that is made in this report is that women's peace activism has been a part of their broader work towards addressing issues of socio economic marginalisation, cultural oppression,

patriarchal practices, labour rights, political rights and justice. Peace work has not been a separate or isolated activity, and women's engagement with these other dimensions has not been instrumental or simply as a means to bring about peace. These dimensions related to structural injustice and oppression, were seen as inherently important, and as being both inter-connected with and independent from issues of war and armed conflict.

An overview of interventions and strategies documented in this report

Type of intervention	Specific examples
Women in decision-making	Working towards including women in decision making bodies at the community level, IDP camps, district bodies
	Women standing for elections

	Lobbying with mainstream parties and providing recommendations for including women in political processes
	Women's representation within peace negotiations
	Documenting women's experiences and opinions to bring about awareness on women's voices for peace
Constitutional and legal reform based on a women's rights perspective including customary laws	Domestic Violence Bill, contributing to the drafting of the of the 1997 Draft Constitution
Justice	The Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case
Researching and conceptualising women's experiences to strategically guide work	Documenting the status of women's land rights, researching women's reproductive health concerns in conflict, analysis of militarisation
Providing humanitarian relief	Providing health care and nutrition
	Food, clothing, shelter, water, access to education
Addressing poverty and livelihood needs	Micro credit, livelihood support, training
	Vocational training and skill building
	Housing assistance, water and sanitation and improving health and nutrition
	Education and awareness raising for women

Support for violence – from domestic to political violence	Providing support to women who have experienced violence – counselling, legal support, material support
	Running shelters and safe spaces for women
	Building mutual support and solidarity among women who have experienced violence and/or loss, sometimes across ethnic divides
Public activism	Anti war demonstrations, protests, rallies, silent marches, <i>Bhavana</i> , <i>Kannalawwas</i> , vigils
	Signature campaigns
	Community level public resistance to military presence and recruitment
Awareness raising documentation	Awareness raising discussions on human rights, peace, democracy
	Discussions on how to live with emergency regulations, military actions such as cordon and search operations, arbitrary arrests, disappearances
	Documenting human rights violations
	Fact finding visits
Cross ethnic contacts	Day to day interactions and shared work between different ethnic groups such as shared income generation activities
	Sharing experiences of violence across ethnic identities

	Solidarity visits between Southern communities and communities in the North and East as well between Muslim and Tamil communities
Creating alternative discourses through media	Publications, using mainstream media, street theatre, <i>Kavi madu</i> , films, documentaries, talk shows, <i>Oppari</i>
Building skills for non violent conflict resolution at the individual, community and key stakeholder levels	
Addressing cultural barriers and patriarchal controls for women at the community level	Having discussions with mosque committees about Muslim women's right to talk about political issues in public forums, enabling local Muslim women's groups to take leadership in peace building work
Working with key stakeholder groups	Forming inter religious groups, media groups, trade union groups, political party groups
Working with young people	Changing educational curricular
	Providing spaces for youth to interact across ethnic divides
	Learning about other ethnic communities through school
	Using theatre as a means for enabling interactions between young people from different communities
Working with the government and security forces	Lobbying for respecting Geneva Conventions, support to widows of soldiers, support to families of disabled soldiers
Mobilising as movements such as Mothers' Fronts	

Networking	
International advocacy	Compiling alternative CEDAW reports, submissions to the UPR process of the UN, submissions to Special Rapporteurs
Memory, history and remembering	Commemorating loss during 1983 riots, Freedom from Fear campaign, <i>Bearing Witness</i> , Vigil Coalition etc..

There has been much comment as to why the peace movement in Sri Lanka has not mobilised as much support as the mainstream political parties. Also there has been analysis of the impact of donor funding and 'NGOisation' of social movements on weakening political activism (Orjuela, 2004; Burke and Mulakala, 2005). Indeed this report also notes the efforts made over the years by women's groups and the huge challenges they have faced in trying to mobilise women for peace. However, the aim of this report is not to compare numbers at events and public protests. As the various exemplars in this paper illustrate, women's groups have used different strategies of which public mobilising has been just one.

A key observation made by those interviewed was that though women's groups have been working over a number of years within communities, keeping alive the discussions and analysis of peace, democracy, justice and militarisation, these discussions had not been yet consolidated and effectively employed at strategic levels of intervention within the policy and political spheres. There needed to be some creative thought on how this can be achieved. One possible first step in this regard would be to carry out research and discussions using feminist research methodologies with community women, about their own day to day initiatives in responding to the conflict and local level peace making, and their suggestions on how these responses could be translated into strategic level activism.

Another area which was identified as requiring a greater and a sustained amount of work was women's political participation specially at the local levels – as peace making and peace building was seen as an inherently political process. Within this broader area of work some possible interventions identified were -

- Creating a dialogue with communities about women's political participation and representation (the local context, such as the extent of militarisation and the impunity to violence would ofcourse impact on the possibilities that women envisioned for themselves).
- The militarisation of communities specially of the youth, was seen as a serious challenge to creating spaces for representation and voice. Therefore there needed to be collective reflection and strategising on how women's groups could respond to the militarisation of their communities.
- Another area of work identified was coming up with strategies on how women's groups could engage with any future peace process or political negotiation process with a critical reflection on past experiences. This would then help guide the long and medium term work towards building a constituency of women political repretatives.

There has also been a disconnect between those organisations who focus mainly on advocacy and lobbying work and those organisations providing case by case support to specific women, children and men. The capacity and strength or women's groups to actively support individual women has to be strengthened with additional skills and resources in terms of psycho – socio- economic support, case management skills, documentation skills and supervision support.

There has also been questions raised as to whether enough effort has been made by women's groups to sustain or consolidate the empowerment, social changes and challenges to patriarchal relations that have taken place due to the conflict. Has there been adequate support systems and capacity built up to avoid local conditions reverting to oppressive past form when conflict ceases or changes?

When the draft report was presented, one of the key challenges identified by those present, was the lack of effective networks and the lack of capacity in *networking* of women's groups and organisations. Some recommendations for further action which came up were -

- A systematic reflection on current networking practices to learn from good examples and to create more affective networks which can respond to the needs of women's groups and organisations working in conflict areas and peace building.
- The need for effective networking to respond to urgent human rights violations, violence against women, and threats to women workers, in terms of practical immediate support.
- To collectively respond to state ideologies of war and militarisation through advocacy.
- To collectively work towards effective political representation of women's rights in peace building.

There was a strong feeling among women's groups that there should be strategic-level networking looking beyond mere project-level work to be able to respond to, and support field level women workers.

There are also new arenas into which women's groups maybe willing to step, such as working with the diaspora communities and

engaging with the corporate sector.

Other specific areas of intervention that were identified at the public consultation of the draft report were -

- To create a space for dialogue between Tamil and Muslim IDPs as this would enhance the work towards peace building.
- To design strategies to empower and support small forums at the local level
- To work with communities currently living under military control
- To have more programmes of gender training for the armed forces
- To provide a space for young girls and boys who are trying to understand and articulate a voice *against* violence and the conflict.
- To reflect on the different conceptual backgrounds of women's groups and organisations and develop a common ground for collective work
- To develop effective strategies to deal with the consequences of conflict such as increased drug use and alcoholism
- To lobby to make 'hate speeches' a war crime
- To lobby against the militarisation of state machineries

This report does not explore the impact or effectiveness of specific interventions. Nevertheless it is important to reflect on ways of evaluating the strategies that have been used – for example, the work towards increasing women's political participation, the work done to build networks, or the public advocacy and campaign work. It is hoped that this paper maybe useful to stimulate some future discussions about the impact of some strategies and possible future work in this field.

A follow up study to this report could be a sensitively developed research process to assess the impact of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction

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The aim of this report was to map initiatives as well as the ways in which women's activism has changed and evolved to respond to the changing socio political context. The analysis explores the underlying concepts that have influenced the assumptions about the nature of conflict, and the objectives for engaging in peace work.

The objective of this exercise was to provide a framework document which can be useful for individual women's groups and organisations to assess their own work, as well as for the women's movement and organisations involved in peace work to collectively

and critically reflect on the initiatives taken so far. This project was an effort to identify strategies, asking self reflective questions in the vein of 'what's best and what's essential as individual organizations or as collectives to work towards peace building in the current context, and 'what skills are required to carry on the work'.

Socio-political context - It is important to note at the very outset the broader socio political context within which this report has been compiled as the interview responses would be rooted in and influenced by this. During the time period of this research there were two elections that took place in the East – the Local Government Elections in Batticaloa on the 10th of March 2008, and the Provincial Council Elections for the Eastern Province on the 10th of May 2008. Though the government claimed that these elections were democratic and were not marred by violence, local communities and women's groups working in the East noted the intimidation, threats, fear and suspicion that surrounded these elections. There were also very gendered manifestations of violence during this time which were never highlighted due to the extreme fear of communities and local women's groups working in the East. For example four women were abducted and one woman was raped the week before the local government elections in Batticaloa.

Some of the organisations noted that when working across ethnic identities, sometimes it has been difficult to have a sustained involvement of different ethnic groups when the political context has been changing and volatile. It takes years to change the attitude of suspicion and mistrust across ethnic identities, specially as communities live the realities of poverty and conflict on a day to day basis. In the current context, there have been additional challenges due to the increase in disappearances and killings – sometimes ethnically motivated - to create conflict between communities. People live in extreme fear and suspicion. In this context, there has also been an increase in violence against women including rapes and criminal activities as there is absolute impunity for perpetrators.

In the current context, those interviewed had been facing intimidation and pressure from the military, from the Police and politicians, political parties such as the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Jathika Hela Urumaya as well as other Sinhala extremist groups including Buddhist monks in the border areas. Some organisations have been labelled as *tiger supporters* because they work with Muslim and Tamil communities. Staff have sometimes been taken in for questioning under the new regulations which give a lot of power to the state. In the 1980s, organisations were labelled as CIA agents, whilst in the current context they are called LTTE supporters.

During the peace talks after the 2002 ceasefire agreement was signed, there was much more space to be involved in this kind of work in some areas, but not in the current political context. Since the breakdown of the peace talks, there has been a sustained media campaign against the work of NGOs, specifically targeting organisations involved in human rights work and there has been more publicity and voice given to extremist groups in decision making bodies including the parliament.

At the community level, people were believing the misinformation about the current political context given in the media and are also very suspicious about NGO activities. People were also expressing a strong support to the war effort of the state, so women's groups stated that working in this context has been very difficult. Even among women workers, it was becoming harder to get support for a negotiated settlement as feelings of nationalism were high.

The report is divided into three sections. First, this report engages with concepts of conflict and peace building from existing literature, particularly focusing on feminist conceptualisations of war, militarism, violence and peace building. An exploration into peace activism in Sri Lanka cannot be discussed in isolation as mere activities, without frameworks that enable us to place this work within the larger socio political context and women's movement activism in Sri Lanka.

Second this report will trace the history of women's movement activism, activism within social movements and within civil society organisations again drawing on existing literature.

Finally this report will describe the different types of activities that have been used by women's groups and organisations, based on their particular assumptions about the causes and the nature of conflict. We hope that this analysis will help in strategising how UN resolution 1325 can be effectively used in the Sri Lanka context.

2. Conceptual frameworks for analysing conflict and peace

Many scholars have argued that the link between women and peace building is not an intrinsic one, that women are 'naturally' peace loving as they are 'creators' and 'nurturers' of life, but that they often do find it easy to understand and identify structural inequalities, power relations and oppression as they experience injustice and structural oppression and control in everyday life whether there is a overt conflict or not (Manchanda, 2001; Coomaraswamy & Fonseka, 2004).

There have been arguments made to move away from conceptualising women merely as victims and men simply as perpetrators of violence. Coomaraswamy & Fonseka (2004) suggest that this sort of one dimensional analysis is not helpful to understand women's agency, women's call for participation in peace building processes as active citizens or to recognise women's involvement in horrific violent acts in conflict contexts.

Therefore, one of the key underlying concepts that has guided women's engagement with peace building has been the identification of

violence as existing along a continuum. Women often experience the “*connected forms of domestic and political violence that stretches from the home, to the street to the battlefield*”. (Manchanda, 2001. p. 17). This conceptualisation provides a broader framework which enables us to look at women as also perpetrators of violence and also to recognise that the end of conflict does not always mean peace for women.

In fact, feminist researchers have noted that during peace negotiations or post conflict contexts, the violence against women increases. Jane Barry, who analysed the impact of conflict on women in Kosovo, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and Sri Lanka, argued that this was because in post conflict contexts the number of groups who pose a threat to women increases with national armed forces, armed militant groups, international military interventions, demobilised men returning to communities but often with access to arms, she also points to the rise in mercenary gangs and criminal gangs at such times. Secondly particular types of violence increase, such as human trafficking, prostitution and backlash against women who have stepped into public space. Thirdly, there is the prevailing sense of impunity (as well as certain impunity clauses that become part of 'peace deals') which lead to the lack of any investigation or justice into incidents of violence. She notes that when there are ceasefire agreements or peace negotiations in progress, the international actors involved consider the violence occurring at that time as not related to the conflict - as 'the war is now over'. The incidents are seen as isolated, sporadic or private (Barry, 2005).

In the discussions with older women's groups in the South, what became clear was that they didn't engage in peace work because they felt they had an intrinsic desire for peace as they were women, but because they felt that while working for the rights of their own communities, (i.e. women workers or women farmers) they also had to respond to the injustice, discrimination and violence against women from the minority communities living in the North and East and sometimes in their own towns and villages; that they felt this was their responsibility.

This report advances a proposition that the theorising and documenting of *peace work* is significantly different from the theorising and documentation of *women's movement activism* for peace. For example, Orjuela (2004) who has documented civil society peace work in Sri Lanka though critical of the limitations of theoretical frameworks of conflict resolution and peace building, nevertheless draws on these frameworks for her own analysis. Here the centre of focus is on the violence/conflict/war. From that point of reference, these frameworks explore social, economic, political structures and cultural suppression and deprivation that need to be addressed as root causes in order to bring about an end to the conflict. Orjuela (2004) makes a distinction between those interventions that work towards ending violence and those that work towards transforming society and bringing about social justice and argues that sometimes within peace work these two goals are conflicting. However, the assumption in her analysis is that these two lines of work are both *instrumental* means of bringing about an end to the conflict. Therefore, she notes that peace work could be work done to prevent violent conflict, reduce violence, promote negotiations and settlements (p.45). Orjuela's framework can be said to roughly represent the conceptual frameworks of many professed peace-building organisations in Sri Lanka and also represent the frameworks used for research done in the field of peace building (see also Goodhand & Klem, 2005).

However, feminist theorising and analysis of women's peace activism is different. Women's peace activism has usually been conceptually placed within women's political participation in labour movements, in anti imperialist struggles and left movements (Tambiah, 2002; De Mel, 2001; Giles 2003). Economic and political rights for women were very much part of active debates and discussions within these movements at the time. The rapid progress achieved in the post independent Sri Lanka in terms of women's access to education, health and employment enabled women to mobilise around action to secure their socio-economic rights in the 1970s and 1980s.

Tambiah (2002) notes how rural women's group such as Wilpotha Kantha Ithurum Parishramaya and the Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Network (STRWN) were challenging unequal power relations within the home and the community and addressing issues of poverty and injustice. These very same organisations have also been working on issues of peace and justice since the 1980s. For example in April 1999 the STRWN contested the provincial council elections as an independent all women's party because they felt that the government and political parties were not responding to the demands of the poor rural women they worked with. The 18 women who contested were from varied ethnic and religious backgrounds and they were challenging not only the gender bias but also class and ethnic biases (Tambiah, 2002). This was not done as peace work per se, but with a recognition of structural inequalities and the right to political representation.

While tracing histories of women's movement activism what becomes clear is that women's groups have often addressed issues of socio political and economic injustice and have over the years attempted to identify violence against women and political violence within this context. De Mel (2001) notes that organisations such as the Women's Development Foundation and the Uva Wellassa Govi Kantha Sanvidanaya worked with plantation Tamil labourer women, women from the North and East and disadvantaged farmer women from the South-east practising a transversal politics challenged restrictive structures and re-imagined the nation in a far more pluralistic way.

“ Women have, therefore, been amongst the harshest critics of the dominant nationalisms that hold up a community and/or the nation-state, for they had to engage with the fact of their difference within the nation. Their difference from men as citizens, as well as members of ethnic, religious, class and caste groups whose affiliations they have to symbolically bear”. (De Mel, 2001, p21)

Therefore an important observation that is made in this report is that women's peace activism has been a part of their broader work

towards addressing issues of socio economic marginalisation, cultural oppression, patriarchal practices, labour rights political rights and justice. Peace work is not a separate or isolated activity, and women's engagement with these other dimensions was not instrumental or simply as a means to bring about peace. These dimensions related to structural injustice and oppression were seen as inherently important, and as being both inter-connected with and independent from issues of war and armed conflict.

The woman demanding the cost of rice, bread and milk powder to be brought down stood next to the woman asking for justice for those missing in the conflict when demonstrating in public. They supported each other's causes. "A feminist peace politics thus connects with the struggle against racial, ethnic and class oppression" (Manchanda, 2001, p.17).

3. History of women's movement and civil society activism in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka's history, women were very active in anti imperialist struggles. For example in 1933 women launched the *Suriyamal* movement against the Armistice Day or Poppy Day where poppies were sold to raise funds for the British Soldiers. The funds raised through the *Suriyamal* movement were used for educating low caste girls (De Mel, 2001). De Mel notes the establishment of the Girls Friendly Society and the Ceylon Women's Union in 1904, The Tamil Women's Union in 1909, The Mallika Kulangana Samitiya in 1925, the Women's Franchise Union in 1927 as some the early organisations that spoke of women's rights in terms of education and

health and spoke in particular on the women's right to vote, which led to Sri Lanka enjoying universal franchise in 1931.

Women were also very active in trade union politics and the left politics of the LSSP. Two of the women's organisations that emerged prior to independence were the Eksath Kantha Peramuna, a women's political organisation affiliated to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), and the Lanka Mahila Samithi, which worked closely with the United National Party (UNP). Though the women's organisations had little recognition within mainstream politics and within their own parties, women were still voicing out against war along with their other demands for social and economic rights. Two key figures that De Mel describes from this period were Vivienne Goonewardena and Selina Perera, who were members of the LSSP. Recalling Vivienne Goonewardena's work, De Mel notes that she was elected a Municipal Councillor in 1950 and served as a member of parliament from 1956-60, 1964-5 and 1970-7. Goonewardena was very vocal against certain international conflicts and aggressions in the 1960s and the early 1970s.

“Vivienne was vocal in her protests against US aggression in Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique, and Zionist aggression in Palestine....She asked that the Sri Lankan government disallow Pakistani air force use of Sri Lankan airports as a fuelling point in its strikes against Bangladesh in the 1971 war of independence.” (De Mel, 2001 p 29).

Some of the organisations working on peace today also emerged in the 1950s. For example the Sarvodaya Movement had a socialist ideology of working to empower marginalized groups across ethnic lines for example working with Tamil plantation workers and Sinhala rural agricultural workers. This work was conceptualised as a part of the 'struggles' against oppression and not as peace work per se (Orjuela, 2004).

The 1970s saw the emergence of organisations working specifically against state aggression such as the Civil Rights Movement which

was created after the JVP insurrection and its aftermath in 1971, The Citizen's Committee for National Harmony after the communal violence in 1977, the Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) in 1979, and the Marga Institute. These organisations were involved in campaigns to release political prisoners, constitutional reform, documenting violence against minorities, and creating spaces for dialogue between communities in the North and the South (Orjuela, 2004). In 1978, a multi ethnic socialist women's collective was formed called the Voice of Women which at the time was the only openly feminist organisation (De Alwis 2003). There were also church-linked groups which started raising concerns of violence and conflict in the 1970s, such as Satyodaya, Devasaranaramaya, Centre for Society and Religion, Socio Economic Development Centre, The Student Christian Movement and the National Christian Council (Samuel, 2006). Samuel notes that there were very active women in all these movements and some of them later became active in women's organisations.

In the early 1980s, De Mel (2001) notes that some of the key campaigns that women's groups were involved in related to equal pay for women in the plantations, the elimination of night work for women in the Free Trade Zones, campaigns for maternity benefits, criminalising domestic violence, women's media representation, women's reproductive health and other strategic gender interests. However with the mounting state violence and war, women's groups started taking on issues related to violence and conflict as well.

4. Analysing women's peace activism

This section of the report draws from the interviews from 17 organisations, documented accounts of women's activism and work in relation to responding to conflict and promoting peace. The following table has been drawn up by combining the categories that have been put forward by Jane Barry (2005) and by Camilla Orjuela (2004). This table provides a snapshot view of the activities which have been often used in responding to conflict and promoting peace. However, the following section will also analyse the assumptions, linkages, and politics behind these activities for a better understanding of women's peace work.

TABLE 1 – TYPE OF WORK

Resisting conflict	Protection work	Service provision - humanitarian	Legal reform	Political activism	Transitions	Informal diplomacy and cross ethnic contacts
Anti war demonstrations, Protests, Rallies,	Support to survivors of violence, tracing	Health, shelter, food water, access to education	Constitutional reforms	Contesting elections	Demobilisation and reintegration	Women sharing experiences of violence against

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silent vigils	and reunification, legal advice and case support, counselling, safe houses					women across different ethnic groups
Awareness raising peace education and information sharing	Counselling for war widows	Health service providers to help in violence against women cases through women's health committees	Reforming personal laws	Engagement in ceasefire and peace negotiations		Solidarity visits including ' <i>peace trains</i> '
Human rights monitoring, documentation and reporting	Mutual support and solidarity groups for women whose family members have disappeared.	Providing food supplements for pregnant mothers and lactating mothers in IDP camps		Drawing up recommendations for peace processes and negotiations		International Women's Mission recommendations to the government
Signature campaigns		Micro finance and credit for women's empowerment		Drawing up recommendations for women's		

				political participation		
Fact finding visits		Livelihood support and marketing support and business training, linking with government units				
		Providing housing assistance for women				
		Vocational training and skills training for women				

TABLE 2 – ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED

Name of organisation	Location	Year of establishment	Reasons for starting work
Centre for Performing Arts	Jaffna/	1965/1999	To create a family of artists and use art as a means of

	Colombo		building relationships across ethnic difference.
Centre for Women and Development	Jaffna	1988	Providing humanitarian services to individual women and families affected by the conflict but later moved to addressing human rights issues in conflict
Community Trust Fund	Puttalam	1990	To deal with the realities of large populations of displaced persons
Diriya Shakthi Women's Organisation	Polonnaruwa	2000	Their communities were directly affected by the conflict and extreme poverty, and was getting rapidly militarised
Galle Human Rights Protection Organisation (Mother's Front)	Galle	1987	We started working on peace because we believe that the communities we work with are directly affected by the conflict, because we believe in a political settlement to the conflict and we believe that violence against women extends from the home to the country.
Mothers and Daughters of Lanka	Network	1989	Came together to fight against political violence by both state and non state actors. It was set up on the principles of respect right to life, build solidarity among different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, promote women's rights
Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum	Kalmunai/ Colombo	1990	To build ethnic coexistence and harmony among different ethnic communities

National Peace Council	Colombo	1995	
Association for War Affected Women	Kandy	2001	Started by campaigning for information of loved ones missing from the security forces.
Praja Diriya Padanama	Puttalam	2002	To respond to the needs of vulnerable communities living in 168 IDP camps
Samadanam	Kandy	1993	To build a society that supports justice, equality and a non-violent life style by using non violent communication skills
Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Organisation	Trincomalee	1988/2003 in Kantale	Attempting to provide relief to those who were displaced due to the conflict and to protect and promote communal harmony in the hill country.
Suriya Women's Development Centre	Batticaloa	1991	To respond to women's practical needs in the displaced camps but then progressed to working for principles of democracy, peace and women's rights
Uva Wellassa Farmer Women's Organisation	Monaragala	1978	Organising farmer women to demand for their rights
Women's Centre	Ekala	1982	Working for rights of women workers
Women and Media Collective	Colombo	1984	To create a society that respects feminist principles, principles of democracy and human rights, in which every individual is treated with dignity and their right to

			self determination is respected.
Women for Peace	Network	1984 - 1999	Women's network established to call for a political settlement to the conflict

Profile of target groups

The following table provides a rough outline of where the majority of work has been taking place. These categories are not independent and also different organisations identified their target groups using different descriptive terms. However it is still interesting to note that there has been a lot of work done at the community level working with women affected by conflict. There has been less work done targeting decision-makers, leaders at community and district levels, national policy making bodies, media and political parties.

TABLE 3 – AREAS OF WORK

Target groups	Frequency									
Children	x	x	x	x	x					
Youth	x	x								
Displaced women	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Women headed households	x	x							
Young women	x	x	x						
Women in border villages	x								
Low caste women	x								
Women planning to enter mainstream political processes	x								
Women workers in formal and informal sectors (sex workers, fisher women, farmer women, migrant workers)	x	x	x	x					
widows	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Other CBOs	x	x	x	x					
Women facing special problems including violence	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
All ethnic communities	x	x	x	x					
Women from all ethnic communities	x	x	x	x					
Other NGOs	x	x							
Regional and International organisations	x								
Village and district level leaders	x	x	x	x					
Religious leaders	x	x	x						
Media	x	x							
District networks	x								

Government and political parties	x								
Trade unions	x								

5. Women's peace activism in the 1980s – Linking peace work with socio-economic rights

One trend that became apparent through this mapping is that women's peace activism took place along side their activism for social and economic change.

The Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Organisation, a membership based organisation, was originally set up to respond to the displacement of families due to the conflict then later started working on community development, micro credit, health and nutrition, sexual and reproductive rights, environment and peace.

“In its involvement in the politics of everyday life, STRWN has taken on issues as diverse as the import of potatoes, construction of a new hydro power plant and the rise of identity politics in the district (Tambiah, 2002 p.460)”.

As discussed earlier, the STRWN attempted to contest local government elections as a women-only political party in 1999. However, what was clear was that their work on socio-economic empowerment of communities was closely linked with addressing issues of violence and conflict. For example, from 2005 onwards their programmes combined working with widows and women headed households, families affected by the tsunami disaster and families living in poverty along with having language classes, sharing of experiences across communities, trainings and awareness raising programmes on the ethnic conflict and peace.

De Mel (2001) documents the work of the Women's Development Foundation, which grew out of the Progressive Women's Front which started in 1982. The Progressive Women's Front began organising farmer women in the Monaragala District to campaign against the water tax and also provide preschool facilities for women working in the sugar plantations. However they also started discussing issues of oppression, violence against women and the conflict and started visiting women political prisoners in the Anuradhapura Prison. After the 1983 riots the women worked on rebuilding relationships between the Sinhala and Tamil communities in their area.

The Women's Development Foundation published a monthly journal *Athwela* which regularly carried articles by women calling for the end to the ethnic conflict and the need for a negotiated political settlement. They also highlighted the experiences of women living in the conflict areas. The Progressive Women's Front used cultural exchange through street theatre especially between 1984 and 1985, as a means of discussing issues of oppression, discrimination and ethnic bias (De Mel, 2001).

The Uva Wellassa Farmer Women's Organisation also primarily worked with women farmers in the Monaragala District. Poverty was common in the district and was considered to be one of the most underdeveloped districts in the country. Poverty had pushed many young men in the district to join the military and be sent to fight. There had also been attacks on villages living in the border areas with the Eastern district where the LTTE had been active (De Mel, 2001). The organisation had close links with MIRJE, and therefore was a part of the peace campaigns that was organised by MIRJE. They were involved in supporting families who were displaced due to the 1983 riots and also the many families who were affected by the violence during 1987-89 due to the JVP insurrection and counter insurgency measures used by the government. Some of the farmer women had their fathers killed and sons disappeared during this time, and these experiences had led them into public activism (Barry, 2004). In 2003 UWFOW was involved in discussions with

another five women's organisations from Jaffna, Akkaraipattu, Batticaloa and Monaragala, where there was a sharing of experiences, a discussion on strategies for peace activism and exploration of strategies for enhancing women's contribution to peace processes.

The Women's Centre in Ekala focused mainly on rights of women workers in the factories. However, apart from their work in promoting rights of women workers, they also recognised the importance of assisting women who have been affected by the conflict. After the ethnic riots in 1983, The Women's Centre assisted 10 families by rebuilding their homes that were burnt during the riots. They also provided shelter and security to two Tamil families during the riots.

They engaged in awareness raising and discussions on the ethnic conflict because they also felt that all women workers should be aware of the conflict. The Women's Centre has networked and built links with women workers in factories in the East and in the Estate sector. As women workers they have also used street theatre as a medium through which they can discuss problems of women workers and problems related to the conflict.

6. Movement politics and identity politics

“If civil society is the space, or context, in which people can organise to promote peace, the concepts of social movement..... describe the forms for such organisation.....A social movement can be defined as organisations, groups of people and individuals who act together to bring about transformation in society (Kaldor, 2003: 82 in Orjuela, 2004, p.59)

One of the first women's coalitions to be formed around the 'national question' was the Women's Action Committee (WAC). This coalition comprised of women from trade unions, women from plantation women's groups, Women's Education Circle in Jaffna,

church based groups, women writers and academics, farmer women and women from fisher communities. Originally they came together to show solidarity to the women from the Polytex Garments who were on strike demanding trade union membership, a higher wage and a Christmas bonus. However, they later had public demonstrations demanding the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1979, the release of Nirmala Nithiyandanan the first Tamil woman political prisoner and equal wages and citizenship rights for Tamil plantation workers. At the national level, the coalition engaged in public activities centred around International Women's Day, International Human Rights Day and International Labour Day. At the community level the different groups had discussions, awareness raising and inter ethnic interactions (Samuel, 2006; De Mel, 2001).

The WAC provided a space for discussion on political issues such as national liberation, women's liberation and feminism. Also as Samuel (2006), noted the conceptual underpinnings behind the work of WAC linked the ethnic conflict and politics of violence to the deterioration of democracy and its consequences for all communities. The WAC was committed to the right of self determination for minorities and was against the establishment of non democratic structures and the abuse of state power. In other words, the nature and objective of peace work of WAC was strongly political.

“It was, therefore, one of the most broad-based groups of the time. It organised several workshops, campaigns and lobbying strategies linking women's rights to human rights, with the ultimate goal of establishing a far-reaching democratic culture within Sri Lanka.”
(De Mel, 2001, p.237)

However, the political base of the work of WAC meant that it faced much hostility and attacks as well. For example, WAC welcomed the attempt to a negotiated solution to the ethnic conflict through the Indo-Lanka peace accord in 1987. This meant that many of the women were then targeted by the JVP and had to go into hiding and leave their villages as the JVP was very apposed to the Indian

intervention in Sri Lanka (Samuel, 2006; De Mel 2001).

Motherhood identity politics - *“Mobilising outside conventional political forums to challenge the state”* (Tambiah, 2002, p.21)

In Sri Lanka's recent history, women have mobilised to respond to political violence that have directly affected them. This was most powerfully seen in the mobilisation of mothers in Jaffna in 1984 when over 800 Tamil youth were rounded up in Velvettiturai and transported to the South (Samuel, 2003). Samuel notes that this was the first time that motherhood had been invoked to demand accountability and protection against violence from the state. The common experience of the men in their families being taken away and their moral authority to voice their anger as mothers allowed for these women to come together across different political views and class.

The Southern Mothers' Front was formed in 1990 in Matara, again by women who had had family members disappeared by the state and JVP. The Southern Mother's Front had leadership from women like Dr. Manorani Saravanamuttu whose son Richard de Zoza was assassinated during this time. She tried to keep the focus of the Mother's Front to be peace seeking and non partisan.

“Make no mistake, our aim is peace, our method is peaceful. We have wept alone and come together for comfort. From this has arisen our desire to collectively seek peace in our country”

words of Dr. Saravanamuttu at a public gathering (Samuel, 2003, p. 170).

The Southern Mother's Front was very powerful and had a broad based membership of families who were affected by the 1987-89 brutal violence in the South. Key politicians were also associated with the movement. For example, Chandrika Bandaranaike

Kumaratunga, Mahinda Rajapaksa, Vasudeva Nanayakkara and Mangala Samaweera were all key champions of human rights and supporters of the mothers of the disappeared at the time (De Mel 2001, Samuel 2003). The women not only used mainstream political activism with statements and political meetings but also used unconventional means such as appealing to the gods (*Kannalawwas*), collectively cursing perpetrators at temples and going on *Padayatras*.

Movements such as the Southern Mother's Front led to the election of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge as President, who came to power promising peace and the establishment of disappearances commissions to investigate the violations during the *bheeshana samaya*. Families received compensation but there was no substantive justice in terms of prosecutions of the perpetrators.

Women have also taken on political activism after their sons and husbands went missing while working for the security forces in the current conflict. Again, their identity as mothers and wives of soldiers empowered them to step into public space and into activism. When the ceasefire agreement was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE in 2002, these women lobbied for the release of prisoners of war hoping to find their loved ones. The Association of War Affected Women was formed at this time. The quest for finding their loved ones or information about what happened to them was intertwined with calls for the end of war, pushing for a negotiated settlement and the respect of the Geneva Conventions (Barry, 2005, Orjuela 2004.) The current work of the AWAW focuses on promoting the participation and involvement of women in a negotiated settlement. They have engaged directly with the government, the security forces, the LTTE and the Norwegian facilitators. They have also made links with mothers from Jaffna who had their children disappeared due to the conflict.

7. Dealing with the everyday realities of conflict

When interviewing Diriya Shakthi Women's Organisation the interviewer asked the question 'why is it important for your organisation to work on peace'. They replied with many examples of their day to day battles to prevent their communities and homes being militarised. They had also made the conceptual link that the increased militarisation in their communities had led to the increase in domestic violence within their homes, and sexualised violence in their communities.

They were able to stop a militant group from recruiting 5 young boys from their village. They had been going from house to house and having small meetings with parents groups to create awareness about the dangers of sending young children to join armed groups and the home guard. They protested as a village when the security forces in the area demanded that two persons from each home should come for guard duty to their camps.

The women from this organisation noted the increase in child marriages – sometimes girls as young as thirteen were marrying young men from the home guard. There was an increase in sex work - for example there were two sex workers in 2005 but in 2007 there were eight women working as sex workers in that village. The use of pornographic films by the security forces and home guards have also led to the sexual abuse of women and young girls in the villages. They noted the increase in poverty, the fact that young women were abandoned with children, the lack of access to proper health care and education facilities as contributing factors to women's vulnerability. Due to these realities they were working to prevent the militarisation of their homes and communities and voicing their resistance to war.

When living in conflict contexts, women's groups have had to use innovative means to address the consequences of war. Suriya Women's Development Centre, for example, has been working with women's groups at the community level in promoting their local

livelihoods as a means of creating a space for the women to come together and share experiences and create awareness about socio political concerns including responding to domestic violence, articulating women's concerns about peace, and helping women who have had family members disappeared or killed to access help and legal assistance.

Though Suriya Women's Development Centre started by meeting the very practical relief needs of displaced women and have continued to do this again and again when communities have been displaced due to conflict and the tsunami disaster, Suriya has also been clear about articulating strategic concerns and rights along side this work. For example, calling for the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies at the local and district level, calling for the recognition of women as co-heads of households and calling for the recognition of women's right to land in resettlement processes. In the early 1990s, many of the humanitarian interventions in the Batticaloa District conceptualised women as 'destitute', 'down trodden', 'victims', 'poor'. Interventions took a very welfarist approach. Suriya, at the time had many discussions and raised awareness at the community and district level about the importance of not looking at women as only victims but as individuals with rights and agency.

Organisations such as Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum have been working from within the Muslim communities and Islamic principles to promote peace, respect and women's empowerment. For example, they supported women to come forward to talk about their experiences of conflict and demand for an end to the war. Initially, the men from these communities were opposed to women speaking in public (to men) about political topics such as the need for peace. There was much opposition from the mosque committees. MWRAF worked with the mosque committees creating gender awareness and awareness raising as to why women have the legitimacy to talk about peace in their communities. They also influenced the curricula taught at *madrasas* and included sections about learning about other communities.

MWRAF have supported the creation of Hindu cultural societies, Buddhist societies and Christian societies and formed an inter religious group in Ampara in 2007. They work with school children where they support the local Maulavi to go and speak about Islamic culture and religion in the Tamil schools and vice versa. They also run a pre school in the border of a Muslim and Tamil village so that children from both communities attend this school and this enables the children to be friends with each other and the parents from the different communities also to interact.

Linking peace work with development work - The Centre from Women and Development working in Jaffna also has a holistic conceptualisation of peace work. Their work supports women who have experienced violence in the home by providing legal assistance and they have livelihood support programmes for families living in poverty and those who have been displaced; and through these programmes they work towards peace. Their aim has been to link peace work to poverty alleviation work in Jaffna.

Similarly Praja Diriya Padanama and Community Trust Fund, which both work in Puttalam, carry out development work such as constructing public buildings, providing housing and livelihood assistance along with forming village level peace committees to build co-existence between Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities in the area. Praja Diriya Padanama also works on environmental concerns as the realities of displacement and large IDP camps has had a toll on the host communities, their environment and resources. Their work with displaced communities has been from a rights perspective and not merely as welfarist relief work.

De Mel (2001) documents the changing power relations and patriarchal controls on women when conflict destabilises existing social systems. Though conflict has caused immense suffering, it has also provided spaces for women to take on leadership roles in the community, become heads of households, have increased mobility and become economically independent. She calls these spaces as transformative, and identifies the challenge for the women's movement to build on what has been empowering for these women.

Skill building in non violent conflict resolution and conflict handling - Samadanam which started working in 1993 aims to build the capacities of community groups to resolve disputes and conflicts in a non violent manner through discussions in a neutral space. They have been training religious leaders, media personnel, government officers, students and women leaders to be able to facilitate non violent conflict resolution at the community level and form networks of non violent facilitators across communities.

8. Addressing issues of justice

“As gendered violence in the Sri Lankan war became one of its marked features with the 1996 rapes and murders of schoolgirl Krishanthi Kumaraswamy and 22-year-old Rajani Velauthapillai at the Chemmani and Kondavil military checkpoints in Jaffna respectively; of Ida Carmelita in 1999, and the custodial rapes and torture of two women in Mannar in 2001, women's groups joined forces as a 'vigil coalition', issued statements of protest and demanded swift justice (Kois 2005 Options 2001:17 in De Mel, 2007 p.278).

The Vigil Coalition had regular silent demonstrations in Colombo asking for a speedy investigation and justice for the Krishanthi Kumaraswamy case,. There was a signature campaign and lobbying with international human rights organisations and Foreign Governments. The cumulative impact of the lobbying and public demonstrations was that the five soldiers and policemen accused in the case were found guilty of rape and murder (Samuel, 2006). However, this was a rare occasion on which there has been any legal justice for crimes again women in conflict in Sri Lanka. Other organisations have also been involved in providing support for women

who have faced sexual violence in conflict contexts. They have provided safe houses, counselling, material support, medical help and legal help. For example Women in Need was established in 1987 to provide shelter, psychosocial support and legal help for women who have experienced violence, and Women for Peace which worked with political prisoners, facilitating legal assistance, family visits, shelter and transport for families was also very active in the Vigil Coalition; the Suriya Women's Development Centre also provides legal, material and psychosocial support to women who have experienced violence in conflict.

Legal and constitutional work - *“In 1996, the Women and Media Collective coordinated a consultation with Coomaraswamy on legislation that would lead to a domestic violence bill in Sri Lanka (Options 1999: 17-18 in De Mel, 2007).* National organisations such as the Women and Media Collective have been involved in legal reform processes such as the above mentioned domestic violence bill as well as participating in the drafting of the 1997 draft constitution advocating for women's rights and a chapter on socio-economic rights. Women and Media Collective was involved with the Sub Committee on Gender Issues which was a part of the peace negotiations that started after the signing of the ceasefire agreement of 2002 and made submissions on gender concerns to the peace negotiation process.

9. Creating alternative discourses and spaces through cultural mediums and mainstream media

Many of the organisations and women's groups used theatre, street theatre, *Kavi madu*, radio programmes, community radio, main stream media, film and songs to create alternative spaces and discourses to discuss the realities of conflict. Some organisations that work at the national level such as the National Peace Council and Women and Media Collective directly work with national level media outlets sponsoring talk shows, having advertising campaigns, sending statements to the newspapers, participating in talk shows

and news programmes.

Organisations also publish their own newsletters and journals as well, for example *Samakali* published by Women for Peace, *Shakthi*, *Dharini*, *Madya Nirikshaka*, *Options*, *Eya*, *Sol* published by the Women and Media Collective, *Penn* published by Suriya Women's Development Centre. These publications provide an alternative space to raise women's voices and critically challenge socio-political developments and cultural practices.

Women and Media Collective produced Sinhala productions of political plays such as *Death of a Maiden*, *Mother Courage* and *Trojan Women*. Organisations such as the Suriya Women's Development Centre had their own women's theatre group who produced street theatre such as *Mattanagar Kannakikal* and *Wind as Witness* which discussed the impact of war on women and also discussed the continuum of violence where even when there were talks between the conflicting parties violence against women and communities continued with abductions, killings and recruitment of children. These plays also discussed the social stigma on women who have experienced violence or who were widowed and called for the change in social attitudes and cultural practices that impinged on women's rights.

The Centre for Performing Arts work with young people from different ethnic groups and use theatre as a medium for interactions between Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim young people. The theatre groups from different towns visit each other and live in each others homes. They also have theatre camps for children and young people from different ethnic groups and focus on training women actors to take on leadership roles. For example, CPA organised an exhibition and demonstration *Women Towards a New Age* in Panadura which focussed on the work and achievements of woman actors who have been a part of CPA.

10. Networking

Almost all the organisations interviewed were part of broader networks both nationally and internationally. The following table traces some of these networks.

Name of organisation	Location	Year of establishment	Networks local/ national	Networks International
Association for War Affected Women	Kandy	2001	Women's Peace Alliance	Women Waging Peace, Women Thrive World Wide, WISCOMP, SAFHR, ICRC
Centre for Performing Arts	Jaffna/ Colombo	1965/1999	Sarvodaya, SEDEC, Caritas Sri Lanka, Ceylon Bible Society, Workshop Players, HUDEC, UNICEF	AVI Aussie Volunteers International, York University Canada
Centre for Women and Development	Jaffna	1988	CHA, Women's Peace Alliance, National Peace Council	South Asia Peace SAARC committee
Community Trust Fund	Puttalam	1990	CHA Puttalam, Vanni Cultural Foundation, National Christian Council,	Aman Asia Thailand, AMDA Intenrational

			Jamaith thul Ulama, Aman Sri Lanka, NPC, CPA, INFORM, LST	Japan, Committee for Asian Women Thailand. Forum Asia, Global Peace Mission – Malaysia, Japan Centre for Conflict Prevention, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, South Asia for Human Rights – Pakistan
Diriya Shakthi Women's Organisation	Polonnaruwa	2000	Sarvodaya District network, ZOA, Sri Lankan Women for Peace and Democracy, World Solidarity Organisation, Collective for Building Cooperation between Ethnic Groups	
Galle Human Rights Protection Organisation (Mother's Front)	Galle	1987	Movement to Protect Democratic Rights Galle Human Rights Network	

Mothers and Daughters of Lanka	Network	1989	Has a membership of 36 organisations, Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy, Anti War Front, Movement to Protect Democratic Rights
Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum	Akaraipattu	1990	Network for Sustainable Community Development (43 organisations in the East)
National Peace Council	Colombo	1995	District networks (18), People's Forum (12) Media network, politicians network, youth network, religious network, trade union network
Praja Diriya Padanama	Puttalam	2002	CHA Puttalam, GA office, Government and NGO organisations Puttalam, Wilpotha Women's Savings Centre, community Development Service – Colombo, Women and Media Collective, Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, INFORM, FLICT, CHA

			Colombo, WSG Colombo, IMADR Colombo, IOM, CEPA	
Samadanam	Kandy	1993	National Peace Council	Asian Peace and Human Rights Working Group, Global Organisation for Non Violence
Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Organisation	Trincomalee	1988/2003 in Kantale	CBO networks and district network of STRWN	
Suriya Women's Development Centre	Batticaloa	1991	Women's Coalition for Disaster Management Batticaloa, Women and Media Collective, We Women, SLWNGOF, INFORM, CPA	Sangat, APWLD
Uva Wellassa Farmer Women's Organisation	Monaragala	1978	Uva Network for Peace and Development, NTT	
Women and Media Collective	Colombo	1984	Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy, SLWNGOF, MFRAF,	North East Network India, South Asians for Human Rights, IWRAW

			Polonnaruwa District Women's Committee, We Women	International Women's Rights Action Watch, Peace Women across the Globe, International Alert, International Women's Tribune Centre, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, DAWN South Asia
Women for Peace	Network	1984 - 1999	MIRJE	
Women's Centre	Ekala	1982	Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, Women for Peace, Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy	Committee for Asian Women, Tie Asia, Human Rights Council – Geneva

Networking has been a key strategy that has been used by women's groups and organisations to make their work more effective and strategic. Being a part of a network also provides protection for individual organisations and individual men and women when raising human rights concerns and issues of violence during the war. Networks have also provided opportunities for organisations and

individuals to access information, have exposure to different experiences nationally and internationally and learn about other strategies and to build capacity to respond to situations of conflict and peace building. For example, in 2003 and 2004, The Mothers and Daughters of Lanka worked at district levels to create awareness among women about the importance of getting involved in national level political processes, in particular within the on going peace process.

Some of the national organisations have been facilitating networks for many years. For examples, the Women and Media Collective has been involved in WAC, Women for Peace, Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy, and the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum. The National Peace Council has sector wide networks for media, religious leaders, politicians, youth and trade unions.

11. International advocacy and lobbying

Another strategy used by some of the organisations was international level lobbying and advocacy. This work was done through international networks that women's groups were a part of (see above table). Some other examples are facilitating an International Women's Mission with prominent international women's rights actors to document the situation and provide recommendations for the Sri Lankan government, making submissions to the Universal Periodic Review Process of the UN, on women's concerns on peace building, and doing the alternative reports for the CEDAW committee meetings and incorporating a section on women and conflict in the alternative report to CEDAW. The Women and Media Collective has also visited Sri Lankan refugees in Chennai in 2006 to document and lobby for Tamil refugee concerns in the peace process.

12. Research and theorising

Women's groups and individual feminists have also been involved in key research work that has guided peace building work in Sri Lanka. This report does not provide a review of the academic contributions to the field, though it has drawn on feminist conceptualisations for its analysis. However, to provide some examples, there has been very important theorising and knowledge generation done on the connections of gender, poverty and conflict; women's reproductive health in conflict contexts; women's land rights, on gender based violence in Muslim communities; on militarisation; female headed households; empowerment and agency during conflict.

13. Memories and history

One of the most important aspects of peace work that has been done by the women's movement in Sri Lanka, that has been rarely done by other organisations, has been keeping memories and histories alive. For example in 1993 women's organisations took a leadership role within MIRJE to organise the *Freedom from Fear* campaign which was in memory of the loss of life of Rajini Thiranagama and Richard de Zozya and many other deaths and killings due to violence, and the challenges against democratic principles. Also in 1999 several events were held to commemorate the 10th death anniversary of Rajini Thiranagama. This event was organised by a coalition which included the Women and Media Collective, Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, UTHR, Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights and the National Christian Council. There was participation of South Asian feminists at this event (De Mel 2001).

“Human rights activists braved heavy military presence and Emergency Rule to both commemorate and vindicate the assassinations of Rajini Thiranagama in Jaffna and Richard de Zozya in Colombo and used the symbolism of their lives, their struggles for justice

and democracy and their brutal killings to launch the Campaign or Freedom from Fear with a march and rally commencing from the beach at Mt. Lavinia where Richard's body was found. This was one of the first such struggles launched by the human rights community linking state and non state violence and violations of human rights. It was launched to link the demand for democracy with that of peace. Women mobilised in large numbers to support and participate in this campaign (Samuel, 2006, p.25)."

Neloufer De Mel has conceptualised the importance of memory and testimony for feminist peace building work in her book *Militarising Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict* (2007). Though this report does not explore in detail her theoretical contributions, it draws on some aspects of her discussions, for example, that testimony is important to remember those who did not survive violence and also to give voice to experiences of women whose lives have been hidden from official accounts of history. She talks of the video archiving of stories from 54 women which she was involved in as a way of not forgetting people and events that have taken place.

These are the well documented examples, but there are many such commemorative events, publications and small ceremonies which have been held in quiet ways by women's groups over the years to remember and mourn massacres, the 1983 riots, disappearances, rapes and killings, and abductions of children.

14. Working from within – involvement with government initiatives

Most of the national level peace work of the women's groups and NGOs discussed in the paper has been from outside the mainstream political and governing processes. However, it is important to note here that at a local and district level women's groups and

organisations have been working with decision-making bodies to respond to the realities of conflict, displacement and violence.

In analysing the literature of mainstream peace building, there are two instances documented where human rights and women's rights groups attempted to work with the government in its efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict. One was the work done by the *Sudu Nelum* movement and the peace caravan in 1997-1999, and the second, was the participation in the Sub Committee on Gender Issues in 2002.

The *Sudu Nelum* movement was initiated under the Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga government to create awareness about the unity of Sri Lanka and its people, the recognition that there was an ethnic conflict that needed to be solved, and the need for the devolution of power. There was also the National Integration Programme Unit of the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration. Though many human rights activists, including women's groups got involved in this process, there was a move away from working with the government by 1998-1999 as the government was launching a major 'war for peace' at the same time.

Similarly, though women's groups initially got involved in the peace negotiations of the UNP government with the LTTE post 2002, the falling-through of the negotiations and the change in government in parliament meant that this was a fruitless endeavour.

There have also been state welfare initiatives to provide support to widows of soldiers who have died or were missing in action in the conflict. Two studies by Pathirana and Dissanayake (2004) and Wickremasinghe (2003) documents the work of Seva Vanitha, Ranawiru Sevana Authority (RSA) and Family Services Centre in providing counselling support and welfare to the widows. The RSA has also worked in collaboration with Sarvodaya in providing livelihood support for widows.

Dealing with the pressures of the LTTE and the state – Orjuela (2004) documents the challenges and negotiations that NGOs have had to go through with the changing political contexts where there have been moments of increased pressure from the LTTE on NGOs to join their development and political work. The LTTE backed Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation controlled many of the local NGOs working in the areas controlled by them in terms of funding and type of work that was done. The LTTE exerted control over district NGO consortia through which all local NGOs had to report their work and their financial reports to the LTTE. Orjuela (2004) notes that during the ceasefire period there was non violent popular mobilisations in the North and East which were spearheaded by the LTTE such as *hartals* and sit ins usually around security interests of the LTTE such as military violence and the removal of the High Security Zones, and cultural events such as *Pongu Tamil* which mobilised students and community people in a large scale. When organisations refused to participate, they were threatened.

Some of the organisations interviewed spoke of the difficulties in maintaining an independent focus when faced with the increased pressure of the LTTE, especially during the ceasefire period after 2002. For example in 2003 there was much pressure that all activities for the International Women's Day had to come under the activities of the LTTE and it was not possible to hold any independent events.

Similarly the state has also put enormous pressure including using violence to curtail the work of NGOs when there has been increasing criticism of the state and its human rights record. Orjuela (2004) documents the state control of NGO work in the 1977-1994 period where there was a push for increased control of NGO funding and activities by the state, a sustained campaign to create suspicion of NGO activities as promoting western imperialism, and personal threats against NGO workers including the head of Sarvodaya in the early 1990s. The same phenomenon can be seen happening in the current context with a deliberate and strategic

attack against NGOs but this time including the UN and its systems, control of visas and registration processes, Defence Ministry clearances for working in particular areas and personal threats, abductions and killings of NGO workers.

15. Threats and challenges

In this concluding section, this paper will draw on the interviews and literature to identify challenges for women's peace activism and put forward some reflections on the impact of certain types of work and what future strategising is required. Some of the challenges mentioned have been already discussed in the introduction as they refer specifically to the current socio-political context.

Mobility and resources

Some of the challenges identified by organisations were very practical ones when working in conflict areas, such as the lack of resources, inability to travel due to security restrictions (such as in Jaffna) and the risks involved for Tamil staff to travel outside the North and East especially for young men. Even for organisations working in the South who had established close links and friendships

with communities in the North and East, it has become very difficult to travel to the North and East.

Cultural barriers

Some of the barriers identified were cultural restrictions which did not allow for women and men to be involved in public activities and especially activities which were seen to be political. For example, The Centre for Performing Arts noted that within the Muslim communities it was a challenge to get young men and women involved in theatre and performances. It was also difficult for Muslim women to be involved in peace work in public space due to gendered restrictions and control of women's mobility.

Funding

Also in the current context, organisations have been facing problems raising funds and were financially weak to carry out their work. This was also a result of the lack of capacities to write proposals and have access to alternative funding sources. These difficulties are also a result of funding organisations moving away from funding this kind of work due to government attacks and controls on foreign donors. Funding organisations have also left the country due to government pressure.

Funding also works through personal contacts and those organisations and individuals who do not have these contacts find it difficult to sustain their work. Also within the peace building/conflict resolution field often funding is given to organisations run by men and its hard to get funding for women's organisations.

One organisation stated that in the post tsunami context, funding shifted away from peace work to tsunami related work and there was difficulty to continue working.

Issue based difficulties

It has also been difficult to sustain single issue work – such as disappearances – across class and ethnic groups over a period of time and translate this activism into other strategic areas.

Pressure from militant groups

There has also been pressure by the LTTE and intimidation of organisations that were working independently of their structures and objectives. This was most keenly felt during the time that the ceasefire agreement was in force as the LTTE had much more legitimacy and control of work done in the North and East. This also raises major concerns in the current political context where the TMVP has been given blanket approval and legitimacy by the state and they have been also using the same mechanisms that were used by the LTTE in controlling the work of NGOs.

Networking

Even within the organisations working on peace building, solidarity is weak and trying to work on a common agenda with a common voice is very difficult.

Conclusions

There has been much comment as to why the peace movement in Sri Lanka cannot mobilise as much support as the mainstream political parties. Also there has been analysis of the impact of donor funding and 'NGOisation' of social movements on weakening political activism (Orjuela, 2004; Burke and Mulakala, 2005). Indeed this report also notes the efforts made over the years by women's groups and the huge challenges they have faced in trying to mobilise women for peace. However, the aim of this report is not to compare numbers at events and public protests. As the various exemplars in this paper illustrate, women's groups have used different strategies of which public mobilising has been just one.

To place the analysis of this paper in relation to the women's movement activism we quote De Mel (2001) -

“Feminist scholars have drawn attention to the fact that measuring the success of women's movements needs different yardsticks because their composition and strategies are not necessarily orthodox. A women' movement comprises a range of women's organisations and networks encompassing women's wings of political parties, NGO coalitions, trade unions, academics and professional women's networks. They stand, at times in coalition, at times alone, for a diverse array of goals and strategies. They incorporate both middle class and working class groups. Some of them chose to work with the state while others do not. Their goals have not only been those of raising awareness, equal opportunities and gender justice, but also of employment generation, health, education, legal aid, community and slum development, consumer protection for women and cultural production. Thus, yardsticks

such as membership numbers of the success of orthodox “tactics of disorder” such as public protests and demonstrations are not always the best gauge by which women's movements can be judged. Many women's organisations opt for working privately, away from public view. They do not keep written records of meetings, and in certain cultures depend more on informal networks and kinship groups rather than organised party or association membership.(p12)”

Given the history of women's movement activism and the work of organisations documented above – with its small but significant gains and enormous challenges - if the question is asked why is it still important for NGOs to be involved in this work we can find some powerful reasons in Tambiah's work (2002). She notes that NGOs provide a space for women to cultivate political awareness and challenge various forms of discrimination from outside party-dominated spaces. NGOs can provide opportunities for women to take on leadership roles and develop leadership capabilities which they can then use in their communities. Also women's movement politics provide alternative discourses and discursive spaces to articulate feminist visions and understand socio-political realities in a more complex way. NGOs also play a key role in supporting women who have decided to enter mainstream political arenas in terms of raising issues from a gendered perspective and voicing alternatives to the hegemonic agendas of the state and extremist groups.

A key observation of those interviewed was that though women's groups have been working over a number of years within communities, keeping alive the discussions and analysis of peace, democracy, justice and militarisation, these discussions have not been yet consolidated and effectively employed at strategic levels of intervention within the policy and political spheres. There needs to be some creative thought on how this can be achieved. One possible first step in this regard would be to carry out research and discussions using feminist research methodologies with community women about their own day to day initiatives in responding to the conflict and local level peace making, and their suggestions on how these responses could be translated into strategic level activism.

Another area which was identified as requiring a greater and a sustained amount of work was women's political participation specially at the local levels – as peace making and peace building was seen as an inherently political process. Within this broader area of work some possible interventions identified were -

- Creating a dialogue with communities about women's political participation and representation (the local context, such as the extent of militarisation and the impunity to violence would ofcourse impact on the possibilities that women envisioned for themselves).
- The militarisation of communities specially of the youth, was seen as a serious challenge to creating spaces for representation and voice. Therefore there needed to be collective reflection and strategising on how women's groups could respond to the militarisation of their communities.
- Another area of work identified was coming up with strategies on how women's groups could engage with any future peace process or political negotiation process with a critical reflection on past experiences. This would then help guide the long and medium term work towards building a constituency of women political repretatives.

A disconnect was identified between those organisations who focus mainly on advocacy and lobbying work and those organisations providing case-by-case support to women, children and men. The capacity and strength or women's groups to actively support individual women has to be strengthened with additional skills and resources in terms of psycho – socio- economic support, case management, documentation and supervision suppoty.

There have also been questions raised as to whether enough effort has been made by women's groups to sustain or consolidate the empowerment, social changes and challenges to patriarchal relations that have taken place due to the conflict. Have there been

adequate support systems and capacity built up to avoid local conditions reverting to oppressive past form when conflict ceases or changes?

When the draft report was presented, another key challenge identified by those present, was the lack of effective networks and the lack of capacity in *networking* of women's groups and organisations. Some recommendations for further action which came up were -

- A systematic reflection on current networking practices to learn from good examples and to create more affective networks which can respond to the needs of women's groups and organisations working in conflict areas and peace building.
- The need for effective networking to respond to urgent human rights violations, violence against women, and threats to women workers, in terms of practical immediate support.
- To collectively respond to state ideologies of war and militarisation through advocacy.
- To collectively work towards effective political representation of women's rights in peace building.

There was a strong feeling that women's groups and organisations need to work on strategic-level networking looking beyond mere project level-work to be able to respond to and support field level women workers.

There are also new arenas into which women's groups maybe willing to step, such as working with the diaspora communities and engaging with the corporate sector.

Other specific areas of interventions that were identified at the public consultation of the draft report were -

- To create a space for dialogue between Tamil and Muslim IDPs as this would enhance the work towards peace building.
- To design strategies to empower and support small forums at the local level
- To work with communities currently living under military control
- To have more programmes of gender training for the armed forces
- To provide a space for young girls and boys who are trying to understand and articulate a voice against violence and the conflict
- To reflect on the different conceptual backgrounds of women's groups and organisations and develop a common ground for collective work
- To develop effective strategies to deal with the consequences of conflict such as increased drug use and alcoholism
- To lobby to make 'hate speeches' a war crime
- To lobby against the militarisation of state machinaries

This report does not explore the impact or effectiveness of specific interventions. Nevertheless it is important to reflect on ways of evaluating the strategies that have been used – for example, the work towards increasing women's political participation, the work done to build networks, or the public advocacy and campaign work. It is hoped that this paper may be useful to stimulate some future discussions about the impact of some strategies and possible future work in this field. Therefore a follow up study to this report could be a sensitively developed research process to assess the impact of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka.

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Annex 1 Questionnaire

<p style="text-align: center;">STRATEGIC MAPPING OF WOMEN'S PEACE INITIATIVES IN SRI LANKA Questionnaire</p>
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Date:/...../2008

Name of interviewer:

Name of interviewee:

Name of the organization:

Place:

1. What is the vision, mission and the objectives of your organization?

Vision:

Mission:

Objectives:

1.1. When did the Organization start?

2. What are your main target groups?

3. How many people work in your organization?

Total staff:

No of women staff:

No. of Male staff:

No of Staff working on peace: full time..... part time:.....

No of women staff working on peace (ethnic representation?)

4. Why do you think its important for your organization to work engage with peace issues?

Select appropriate

€ Because the people we work with are directly affected by the conflict.

€ Because we believe there has to be peace in our country.

€ Because we feel that a negotiated political settlement is necessary.

€ Because our funders requested us to

€ Other

€

€

€

€

€

5. What are the peace related networks your organization is affiliated to? (Local /regional/ international)

6. What are the peace related programs / projects your organization has implemented in post 2002?

Strategic mapping of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka

7.

Year	Name of the project	Aim of the project	Activities	Target groups	Geographical Areas worked in	Partners	Ethnic groups you work with

Strategic mapping of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka

8. What are the peace related programs / projects your organization has implemented in pre 2002?

Year	Name of the project	Aim of the project	Activities	Target groups	Geographical Areas worked in	Partners	Ethnic groups you work with

9. What are the main strategies your organization uses in your peace work?
 Advocacy, Awareness raising, Trainings, Meetings , Research, Mobilization , other

Advocacy	Awareness raising			

9. What are the main public events that your organization has participated in?

National	Regional (South Asian/South East Asia)	International

10. What are the main challenges your organization face in doing peace work?

Please categories according to challenge and period noted below

CHALLENGES	Pre 2002	Post ceasefire agreement and peace talks (2002 - 2003)	Post break down of peace talks (2004-2007)	Now (2008)
Negative response about NGOs in the media				
Hostile attitudes among people in the location/s where we work				
Change in funders' priorities away from supporting peace				
Agitational campaigns by extremist groups				
Other....				

Strategic mapping of women's peace activism in Sri Lanka