

'RECONCILING' Sri Lanka: What the **WOMEN** Say

THIRTY CASE STUDIES



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The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not represent those of FOKUS.

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FOREWORD

What is reconciliation? Is there a link between reconciliation and peace building, between reconciliation and religion and reconciliation and transitional justice? More importantly, what do women from the different communities say about these processes? Is there a space to voice their opinions and for their opinions to be taken into account by policy makers?

This report arose out of a need to fill a gap in the current discourse on reconciliation. Although many use the term 'reconciliation' in different contexts, we rarely hear what women have to say.

The thirty women in the case studies were selected randomly, based on their ethnicity, age, educational background and occupation. An attempt was made to include a diverse range of women's voices so as to be inclusive and representative. Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and mixed race women were interviewed. The sample included activists, academics, a university student, politicians, a representative from an international organization, government officials, a representative from the corporate sector, a female ex combatant and military widows.

FOKUS WOMEN commissioned young women activists who conducted in depth one on one interviews with these women. The identity of the respondent was kept confidential where such a request was made. FOKUS WOMEN would like to thank the following:

- Thulasi Muttulingam for writing the analysis of the thirty case studies:
- the thirty women who readily agreed to share their opinions on what reconciliation means to them:
- Anushani Alagarajah, Hyshyama Hamin, Madara Ranmuthugala, Nivedha Jeyaseelan, and Thulasi Muttulingam who conducted the interviews.

FOKUS WOMEN hopes that this report will influence the ongoing reconciliation process and bring the voices of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim women in Sri Lanka into the foreground.

Shyamala Gomez
Country Director
FOKUS WOMEN

December 2016

** The interviews in this case study compilation were carried out between May and September 2016*

‘RECONCILING’ Sri Lanka: What the **WOMEN** Say

Thirty Case Studies

In Sri Lanka’s current post-war development, there has been much discussion on the role that reconciliation can play in uniting the country. How do people, especially women, understand this term in the post-war context? FOKUS WOMEN attempted to find out, through case studies documenting the thoughts of women across different districts, ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic situations.

Women from all walks of life were interviewed: women’s rights activists, academics, war-affected female heads of households, ex-combatants, students, government officials, military widows, politicians, women from the corporate sector, journalists et al., representing Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher/mixed heritage women from all districts of Sri Lanka. The interviewees were selected randomly, and the case studies attempt to capture their perspectives, in order to include their views on reconciliation in the current discourse.

The women collectively offer a comprehensive snapshot of how women across the demographic view their place in society, and their views on reconciliation as a whole. This is significant as men still remain the decision makers and policy makers across all levels of society, from a rural village all the way up to parliament, and women tend to get sidelined in community processes.

What role then do women get to play? How can they get their voices to be heard? What do they really think of the reconciliation process, and what impact has it had on them so far? Captured in these thirty case studies is an attempt to gain an insight to their views.



What the WOMEN Say:

Views on Reconciliation

We are often told that Sri Lanka as a country is diverse, and so are the opinions, views and experiences of its people. If there is one thing this study reinforced even within its limited purview, it is the range of diversity across our people.

The interviewees' opinions on the reconciliation process captured herein run the gamut from positive and hopeful, to negative and sceptical. Many of them stressed that they have high hopes of the present government in its work towards reconciliation. Yet they have also observed numerous setbacks over the years, which cause them to temper their optimism with watchful wariness. Captured below are a few of their thoughts:

“In the present Sri Lankan context, Reconciliation means the strengthening of relationships between races. Secondly, it is also a healing process that restores normality or a state of affairs prior to conflict.”

Juwairiya Mohideen, Development Practitioner, Muslim, Puttalam

In contrast, here is another view of a woman development professional from the East:

Reconciliation is a term that I am uncomfortable with, especially in this post-war context in Sri Lanka. Given the historical context of structural inequalities for decades on certain communities of people, I am sceptical about how that terminology is being utilized. The term seems to be telling the affected people to forgive, to reconcile, to move on. yet where is the justice and the accountability for all that has happened in the past, to go with it?

Sarala Emmanuel, Development Practitioner, Batticaloa

Many of the other interviewees either concurred or demurred, with their views falling somewhere within this spectrum.

Of the 30 interviewees, it could be observed that the Sinhalese in general held out more positive hopes for reconciliation, while the Tamils and Burghers tended to be rather wary and skeptical.

The Muslims tended to be cautiously optimistic but also pointed out that the reconciliation process often centered around Sinhala – Tamil relations, thus sidelining the Muslim community who too have suffered during the war (and post-war as in the Aluthgama / Beruwala incidents).

“I perceive that my duty is to help students unpack their own understanding of reconciliation, rather than define it for them. Defining it for them will be contrary to my critique that the state is quick to mainstream definitions for reconciliation, something very personal.”

A Lecturer, Tamil, Colombo

“As a woman born to the Muslim community in the North, reconciliation personally for me is about returning to our identity as a Tamil-speaking northerner. Our identity was stripped from us in 1990 when we were evicted at gun point by the LTTE. Currently we are identified only by our religion and IDP status, not by our ethnicity or where we belong. For me, acknowledging my community’s ethnicity, roots and heritage are important for reconciliation”.

Shreen Saroor, Activist, Muslim, Mannar

Women's Reasons for Optimism on Reconciliation

- **A pro-reconciliation Government:** Many of the interviewees expressed relief that the current government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena is working towards reconciliation. There had been apprehensions about the previous government pitting one community against the other, which they say has come to a halt now, allowing for reconciliation work to progress.
- **Similarity of cultures:** It was also often observed that the communities living in Sri Lanka have similar cultures and have no problem getting along with each other if left to their own devices.
- **Relief that the war is over, and the wish to promote peace across communities:** The long drawn out civil war affected everyone within the country, majority and minority communities, privileged or poor, alike, although admittedly some suffered far more than others. There is a widespread yearning across the country therefore to preserve peace and foster goodwill among the communities.

Women's Reasons for Scepticism on Reconciliation

- **Lack of Transparency and Trackability:** A fair number of the women interviewed, themselves development professionals or community leaders co-opted by the Government to work towards reconciliation, brought up the matter of how they had no idea what strategies the government was employing overall towards the reconciliation process, what it was doing with all the data and documentation gathered thus far,

and what the follow-up was going to be on the work they had already done. A quote from Vasuki Jeyashankar, activist from Batticaloa, illustrates this: *“As a district level women’s group leader with access to counterparts in Colombo, I am still not aware of what it is the government is doing – how they are going about reconciliation work, what it is they are planning to achieve etc. This is not ideal. The government must develop a transparent mechanism in which the people are consulted and can also track the process as it moves along.”*

- **Political Manoeuvring:** Although as already noted, many of the interviewees viewed the current government as being pro-reconciliation, instances were also noted, especially of the previous government’s attempts, to pit one community against the other. Nearly all the respondents attributed the origin of ethnic conflict in the country to political manoeuvring rather than innate problems between the communities themselves. And thus many appear to have been alarmed when this was not brought to a halt, even after war officially ended in 2009. It was also noted that it was not the majority ethnic politicians alone who indulged in such manoeuvring. Politicians across all ethnicities were found to be guilty of this – and the potential for this to continue is something that many of the respondents remain anxious about.
- **Lack of Meaningful Engagement – with women, minorities, and people at the grassroots:** As repeatedly pointed out by the women, their gender represents 52% of the population in Sri Lanka currently. Yet it is mostly men, all the way from local village councils up to parliament, who represent the country as a whole, and take policy decisions affecting the population as a whole. In a country where gender sensitivity is still not mainstream, and where many of the men are known to be gender-blind when it comes to understanding women’s issues, this is not ideal.
- It was also sometimes perceived that the onus of reconciliation appeared to be more on the minorities rather than the majority community, with very little attempt made at engaging members of the majority community, to help them understand the others’ reality and to reach out to them.
- A repeated stress was also placed on the fact that policy and decision makers in Colombo very often did not know or understand the daily-lived realities in rural areas. Yet not enough effort was being made to gain bottom-up information from the people at the grassroots, on policies and decisions affecting them.
- All these collectively have led to some scepticism on how serious the policy makers are on achieving meaningful reconciliation.

Every group has a narrative and we have to ask whether we as a nation have ever given importance to these diverse narratives. A process of reconciliation must consider narratives of all the communities.

“In order to start a process of reconciliation we need to prepare a national narrative. It should be prepared by a few people with good heads and open hearts, who are committed to addressing the root causes and understand the importance of bringing the communities together; not because somebody is funding them, but because it is genuinely needed in the country”.

Ferial Ashraff, Politician, Muslim, Ampara

- **Inadequate Law, Public administration and Language:** A major fault-line pointed out was inadequate measures to deliver state services to Tamil-speaking people (Tamils, and Muslims in certain provinces) in their own language at government institutions including at police stations and hospitals. This often leads to further marginalization and conflicts between the communities.
- **Media Misrepresentations:** The media in Sri Lanka is known to be divided along ethnic lines. How particular events are skewed in different ways by ethnic-biased media into different perspectives, thus again pitting the communities against each other, was often pointed out as a source of conflict, and barrier against effective reconciliation.
- **International Community vs. Internal Community:** While all the respondents identified reconciliation as a clear need within the country, there was also some scepticism as to whether the process currently underway is geared towards placating the international community rather than tending to the very real needs within the internal community. As such, scepticism also tended to arise on how sincere and committed the current process is.

What the WOMEN Say:

Links between Reconciliation and Transitional Justice, Development and Peace Building

Nearly all the respondents agreed that reconciliation had direct links to transitional justice and peace building. They were not equally sure about the link to development, but if they did answer in the affirmative, they took care to point out that they did not define 'Development' as limited to the development of infrastructure such as roads and schools alone. They brought within the purview of their definition a number of softer components such as survival, stability, sustainability, tolerance, resilience and accountability. And in such a case, they did see a valid link to reconciliation.

On Transitional Justice

Meanwhile, differences of opinion arose again on how to deal with Transitional Justice. The concept of Transitional Justice incorporates the four pillars of truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-recurrence. As politician Ferial Ashraff, one of the respondents interviewed points out, different countries have had different mechanisms of Transitional Justice to address their post-conflict reconciliation measures. Sri Lanka needs to figure out one for itself that is workable and acceptable to all its communities.

The Tamil community in particular is insistent that such a measure be implemented. The Sinhala community by contrast (at least going by the responses herein) while acknowledging the need for valid answers to be given to the families of missing persons, who mostly belong to the Tamil community, are rather vague as to whether perpetrators should be prosecuted or not.

"Reconciliation is only meaningful when the government is accountable for its wrongdoings during the war and comes up with solutions for the unresolved problems such as disappeared people, lost livelihoods and security threats we face as ex-combatants and as wives of ex-combatants."

Female Ex-LTTE cadre

The Muslim Community meanwhile, are again sidelined or completely left out of the process. For the Muslim community from the North and East – two of the worst war-affected provinces, the perpetrators of violence against them were mostly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). With the defeat of the LTTE, who is to be held answerable to the Muslim community, should they too quest for Transitional Justice? A few quotes across the different ethnicities capture the multiplicity of this dilemma:

“Only if transitional justice is achieved would true reconciliation be viable. We can’t expect people still mourning the dead or anguishing over the missing to move forward without addressing what happened to them first.”

Udayani Navaratnam, Women Development Officer, Tamil, Jaffna.

“Looking back at what we have lost, it is questionable whether we have received any justice. There are instances where military personnel and military widows are talked about and felicitated. However, if not for these ceremonies, people do not remember military personnel or widows. The Sinhala newspapers only remember us for one week; whereas for us, this is a lifetime’s experience. I doubt if there will ever be any reparations or justice for those who have suffered, died or have become widows.”

A Military Widow, Sinhalese, Kurunegala

“Transitional justice is good but not necessarily vital in my opinion. As a member of the Muslim community evicted by the LTTE, who returned to Mannar only after the LTTE had been destroyed, I can say that we Northern Muslims have no expectation of transitional justice for what we went through. We are not even seeking it. From my community’s point of view, transitional justice is a sham. Who is going to be held responsible? Who is going to deliver it? What could they do?”

Janooriya Begum, Development Practitioner, Muslim, Mannar

“What communities need is a space to bear their grievances, a truth commission may be able to do that – but it will not be enough to contribute to reconciliation. Those who are sharing their stories and experiences will want some action taken against the perpetrators. But do you think Sri Lanka will do anything with the recommendations of the truth commission report, when we have never taken any such action before? I doubt it will be possible to bring to justice even one person from the armed forces. We should therefore work on transitional justice practically.”

Ferial Ashraff, Politician, Muslim, Ampara

“The concept of Transitional Justice encompasses the four different pillars of truth, justice, reparations, as well as guarantee of non- recurrence. To achieve all these in the first place, there should be honest acceptance and acknowledgement about what really happened. This should not only be extended by the government but also by the different communities that did not have to face the consequences of living in the war zone. If those communities do not accept (through not understanding) what really happened, they would tend to impede the process of Transitional Justice.”

Vasuki Jeyashankar, Activist, Tamil, Batticaloa

On Development and Reconciliation

The women's views differed as to what development meant and if it had any direct connection to reconciliation, yet a common thread did keep arising on these views too:

“When development professionals talk about development, they stress on what they term the ‘soft components’ the most: survival, stability, sustainability, tolerance, resilience, accountability and so on. All these are essential for development in its true sense. This is the mistake that the previous government made. They thought simply constructing roads and schools could heal a war-wounded people. It couldn’t.”

A Senior Government Official, Tamil, Batticaloa

“Howeve development would first mean taking care of their mental and physical wellbeing. What they ask for is lot more basic – they want their own captured resources back from the military and from the foreign investors. These resources have been unfairly and arbitrarily taken away from them in the name of security and development. Give them back their illegally captured lands, sea and forests.”

Shreen Saroor Activist, Muslim, Mannar

“As a person who has been engaging in community development and continues to do so, I feel if we all come together, we can make a change, even in attitudes.”

Neerthi Thanuja, Community Development Activist, Sinhalese, Hambantota

On Peace-building

Twenty-nine of the thirty women interviewees agreed that peace-building would be the natural consequence of reconciliation and transitional justice, correctly implemented. If genuine peace is to be built upon, genuine reconciliation should underpin it. Thus they said, they were waiting for meaningful reconciliation to take place first.

“You can’t even attempt peace-building before reconciliation. If you do attempt it, it would be mere eyewash. I see many NGOs engaging in this currently. The so-called peace-building they have worked on will dismantle once the NGOs themselves are gone, because there is no genuine reconciliation underneath. You need to build a foundation before you can build the edifice. Otherwise the whole thing will come crumbling down.”

Janooriya Begum, Development Practitioner, Muslim, Mannar

“A key component of peace building involves strengthening the capacities of state institutions in the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government to be responsive and accountable to all its citizens. Effective and non-discriminatory institutions instil confidence in citizens across all segments of society to trust in the state’s ability to resolve issues that affect their day-to-day lives and meet their aspirations.”

Sonali Dayaratne, Development Practitioner, Sinhalese, Colombo

“The link between reconciliation and peace-building has been difficult to establish because of the deliberate efforts made time and again at inciting racism. Inter-communal cooperation is vital for peace-building.”

A Female Politician

On the Role of Religion in Reconciliation

While a few of the respondents did see a need for religion in the process of reconciliation, most were opposed to it, or cautioned the need to be careful, in its use. They tend to view religion as another major driver of conflict within the country, apart from ethnicity – and so were wary of religious leaders or hardcore religious sentiments being given undue prominence. Many of them did agree that religion still played a major role in the lives of people, but they also felt that this was best left to the private sphere for individuals to peacefully follow, rather than be given state sanction and prominence.

“Religion is important but it should also be a private matter, not a public one. I wouldn’t recommend that it be prioritized in reconciliation measures therefore. Attention should be paid to religious sensitivities, however, so that they might not inadvertently be stepped on, thereby causing offence to people, which could in turn set back the reconciliation process. Be sensitive and aware therefore, but do not overtly bring religion as a concept into reconciliation.”

Janooriya Begum, Development Practitioner, Muslim, Mannar

“Any role religion plays has to be based on the essentials of religion. This does not always happen. It is the fundamentalists that seem to be vociferous, which is damaging to the process of reconciliation”.

Prof. Sharya Scharenguivel, University of Colombo

Role of Women in Reconciliation

Every one of the respondents agreed that women had a vital role to play in the reconciliation process. While some did give the view that this was because women were softer and more nurturing, and thus better at initiatives involving reconciliation between conflicted communities – others were very clear that this is not the only reason. As equals in population density, they view it as a basic right to have an equal role alongside men in the reconciliation process.

“Get people to tell their stories. People, especially the affected women, really want to tell their stories and to be heard. Make the spaces available for all these stories to be heard and documented. Not only via counselling but also via art, singing, safe spaces and so on.”

Vasuki Jeysankar, Activist, Tamil, Batticaloa

Also to be noted they say, is the fact that women are disproportionately affected in the post-war context, with many having to juggle the dual roles of breadwinner as well as household nurturer, mostly without societal or infrastructural support. There is a large number of female heads of households across all ethnicities battling these challenges on a daily basis, and this requires the reconciliation process to take their needs and views into account.

“A reconciliation process needs to factor in the gender facets and perspectives, such as the views and specific needs of female heads of households across the country who have lost their husbands to war and have taken on added responsibilities for their families”

Sonali Dayaratne, Development Practitioner, Sinhalese, Colombo

What the **WOMEN** Want:

Recommendations to Government and Civil Society

- **Common Narrative:** Prepare a common narrative, with facts and figures, capturing the whole story about how each community was discriminated against and what the consequences have been. It should be a national narrative that takes into consideration all the individual narratives of communities where each community feels their story was included. This will help people to come out of their enclaves and understand what other communities also experienced. In the preparation of this national narrative, men and women have to work together at all levels to collect and present facts and figures. In the process, it is important to listen to the women of different communities and hear what they have to say in terms of experiences and grievances. It is also important to work with religious leaders from all communities to make sure their views are represented. We must then share this narrative with the whole country so that we have a common story.
- **Unbiased and Efficient Public Sector / Services:** The public service, security forces and public mechanisms need to be representative of the socio-political strata of society at large so as to foster confidence and trust between different communities. The public service needs to be reformed so that it is independent of narrow or short-term political interests and can serve the long-term development agenda of the country and its citizens. A merit-based system that will cater to all socio-political groups is critical to enabling the public sector to function for the public good.
- **Introduce Structural Reforms in Government:** There is a need for greater checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, within an overarching framework of human rights and the rule of law. There is also a need for greater citizen's engagement in the public sphere and civic responsibility, which can incentivize political actors to take difficult decisions in the long-term interest of the country, in areas such as introducing a values-based education system, public sector reforms, land reforms, and political party reforms, which have been advocated for years over successive governments. There is a need for a transformation in our society, moving away from privilege and patronage-based systems to those which are based on values, mutual respect, dignity for all and social justice.
- **Devolution of Power:** Institute constitutional reforms and adequate devolution of power from the centre to the provinces. Ensure through these measures that everyone is treated equally, with their due rights in place.
- **Introduce Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation:** A 25% quota for representation of women has been approved at Local Government level. This must be taken right up to Provincial Governance, and eventually the Parliament.
- **Remove the Barriers Obstructing Women:** To facilitate the above process, study all the barriers and oppressions currently curtailing women from becoming active in politics. Then actively work to remove all those barriers via new rules and regulations specifically formulated to address them. In the meantime, support women with extra help (positive

discrimination) to grow in the political sphere; keep at this until such time as it can be said that all barriers to their organic entry and growth in the political domain have been removed and therefore they would not need special support.

- **Streamline Legal Mechanisms:** With regards to constitution-making, implementation is equally important as law reform. Revising existing law must be accompanied by enforceability mechanisms, and such implementation must reach the lowest tiers of society, in order to be meaningful.
- **Minority Representation:** Ensure representation of the minorities and underprivileged at all these political processes. Especially of women. The process shouldn't be steered by Colombo's elite alone, as is usually the case. Give adequate representation to the affected parties directly – and don't squash their voices. Allow them to speak and be heard.
- **Proportional Representation of Women:** Make sure that 50 per cent of those involved in all political processes are women, including transitional justice and constitutional reform.
- **Raise Awareness:** Use media to disseminate information and raise awareness on the various women's issues plaguing the country. This will help to bring about a public change in consciousness and thus kindle positive civil movements towards change.
- **Facilitate Interaction of communities:** Get the different ethnicities to mix with each other as much as possible – through having diverse student populations at universities, deployment of government officials into different localities and so on. Let the people get out of the echo chambers of their respective community bubbles and interact and live with each other on a regular basis.
- **Compensation / Acknowledgement:** Acknowledge the wrongs done in the past. Give compensation where possible (houses and property) and at least acknowledgement where not possible (as in the case of family members gone missing).
- **Therapy and Documentation of Stories through Art and Other Forms of Expression:** Get people to tell their stories. People, especially the affected women, want to tell their stories and to be heard. Make the spaces available for all such stories to be heard and documented. Not only via counselling but also via art, singing and the use of safe spaces.
- **Memorialization:** Enable memorialization for the affected people, via a national day of mourning to remember and honour the war-dead.
- **Truth:** The Government should also take measures to inform the majority population about what really happened during the war. Give them as comprehensive and genuine a picture as possible, as many of them still have no idea about what actually happened in the war zones. Only then would whatever measures the government takes for reconciliation in the North and East, be accepted by the Southerners.
- **Southern Perspective:** Many tragic atrocities took place in other parts of the country, including the South, which too needs to be retold to the North and East.
- **Reform Personal Laws:** Communities must be asked what reforms they wish for in the personal laws. The government and policy makers must understand how important these

laws are to communities. Also, it must be identified whether these laws should remain in the present state or be amended.

- **Establish Transitional Justice Mechanisms:** Ensure that transitional justice mechanisms, with its four pillars of truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-recurrence, are established through transparent and credible processes and reforms.
- **Remove Corruption and Discrimination:** Generate and sustain the political will to build communities, promote co-existence and eradicate all forms of discrimination and corruption from political parties as well as political leaders in the country.
- **Form an independent Women's Commission:** This should be similar to the Human Rights Commission, with a mandate to review all laws, mechanisms and structures operational in the country, with a view to curbing violence and oppressions against women.
- **Recognize and Compensate Women's Contributions:** Bring about legislation that recognizes women's worth and contributions to society in terms of both paid and unpaid labour. A social security structure needs to be set up for women (with an immediate prioritization for war-affected women), to ensure a sustainable and dignified life for them.
- **Promote Inter-ethnic Harmony:** Bring the communities together to interact, discuss, and identify their needs – at rural, provincial, and district levels. Include representation of people across all possible demographics in this process: language, culture, religion, gender etc.
- **Enact Laws to Ensure Peace –** and crack down hard on those who work at causing conflicts, whether religious, ethnic or any other conflicts. Trouble-making in this regard should not be tolerated.
- **Best practices:** Study the mechanisms employed by other multi-cultural countries to ensure peace and stability, especially in post-conflict scenarios. Analyze the best-fit mechanisms suitable to Sri Lanka and apply them here.
- **Launch and Maintain a Government Website:** A website, dedicated to the reconciliation development process, should detail all strategies and activities the government is undertaking in this regard, making it a transparent process that people can track. Also make the website interactive so that people can express views, ask questions, receive answers, and give feedback.
- **Ensure Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods for War-affected People:** This is particularly crucial as people affected by the war need to have these basic needs taken care of, before they can move on to think of longer-term issues such as reconciliation.
- **Train Government Officials to be sensitive and aware of people's needs and how to best serve them:** This should be carried out especially with reconciliation in mind.
- **Form Committees to Drive Reconciliation:** Ensure that these committees are well represented by the different ethnicities, social classes, and genders.
- **Recruit Effective Mediators** in these communities to promote reconciliation.
- **Deliver Justice:** Ensure and implement a strong and effective legal/justice system to deliver justice to the wronged.

- **Youth Outreach:** Focus on reconciliation programs among the youth – they are the future of the country.
- **Facilitate Learning of All Three (official and link) Languages:** Communication is key – and language continues to be a barrier in Sri Lanka. Therefore make Sinhala, Tamil and English compulsory languages to be taught across all schools.
- **Schools Should be Multi-Ethnic:** Discourage the practice of having mono-cultural schools as is currently the case with Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim schools operating countrywide. Let the children intermingle and learn first hand to accept the country's unity in diversity.
- **Effective Implementation of Rules and Policies:** The government already has certain well-thought out policies to bring about reconciliation; the problem is their lack of effectiveness in implementation. For example there is a government policy that documents sent from their Departments to Tamil speaking areas should have Tamil translations attached. Yet to this day, it is not properly implemented.
- **Define the Role of Provincial Councils:** There is still doubt and lack of understanding prevailing over what the provincial governments should (and could) handle apart from what the central government should handle. Have an institutional body of professionals study the matter and put out a clear and transparent document of guidelines on the issue, to guide the central government and the provincial councils, as well as the general public who make up their constituencies – specifying clearly what the demarcations are.
- **Increase the Cadre of Female Government Officials:** Employ and deploy female officials in equal numbers to male officials across all districts.
- **Criminalize the Politicking of Disunity:** Make it illegal – in fact, have it constitutionally enshrined – that political parties cannot cause or exploit divisions among people, especially as regards to race and religion. There should be severe punishment mandated for those who violate this.
- **Ensure Equal Rights for all citizens in Sri Lanka:** People's cultural and religious rights should be secured in the constitution.

CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY — 01

Name :	Ferial Ismail Ashraff
Profession :	Politician
Age :	63
Ethnicity :	Sri Lankan Muslim
District where she works :	Previously represented the Ampara District for the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA)

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation suggests making the views and beliefs of one group compatible with the other group and implies a time when we didn't have issues. Reconciliation in my opinion gives the idea of basically bringing back or going back to the better time in which all communities were fine. I wonder if we are even clear about where we want to go back to or which period was satisfactory for all communities.

But we have to honestly question what each of us and the communities actually feel about reconciliation and of going back to a period in which everything was supposedly okay. If we properly analyze the history of Sri Lanka, I don't think we have times to go back to where we all lived happily. Sri Lanka, as small as this country is, was always divided on many issues. We haven't experienced something fully as a nation, unlike other countries in which the whole country stood up and fought for freedom, like in India. Sri Lanka has a different experience. Historically, struggles have been isolated and various people have managed to keep us divided, while our geography too played a role in allowing us to be complacent in our own enclaves.

Even now when you talk about the war situation and how it affected us, what the North went through, the rest of the country is unaware, and the story is the same for the South and the East. Amidst this, in Colombo you get people who are comfortable sitting and talking about reconciliation from the perspective of the whole country. Every group has a narrative and we have to ask whether we as a nation have ever given importance to these diverse narratives. A process of reconciliation must consider narratives of all the communities. I am unaware of how Sri Lanka is planning on going about a process of reconciliation and whether we are only looking at it with regard to the conflict period. There were many issues before the war – even before and during the time of independence. We may not be able to go back to solving all those issues but we have to understand the key issues and root causes that led to the conflict.

Even currently we have many concerns. You often hear the rhetoric from Buddhist monks that, "Tamils and Muslims should understand that we have been very kind to them in this Sinhala Buddhist land." Yes we do have so-called press freedom, but why is the press giving so much importance to this rhetoric and narrative? What is the editor trying to tell us when they highlight such narrow views? And are we trying to talk about reconciliation in this context?

Personal Role in Reconciliation

As a politician – I lived in Kalmunai and represented that area; so I had access to Tamil, Sinhala and Muslims communities. There is a lot of division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and likewise the Muslims. They live in little pockets of their own community and there is little interaction with other communities. For example, Muslims have the Muslim schools, Muslim shops and their own institutions. When I went in, I tried to make my office space welcoming to everyone. And whenever I got the opportunity I talked to women from all communities. One thing I understood clearly is that everybody is hurt. The Sinhalese, with whom I had a lot of interaction, had lost many family members and young boys during the time of the JVP at the hands of the army in the 80s. After the conflict, they seem to have forgotten about that period and their trauma is lumped together with what happened during the war and how they lost their sons who joined the army to fight and all that hurt is prejudiced against Tamil people. The Sinhalese community says, “We were just there, they came and killed us.” It was only after the 2004 tsunami that I had access to women from the Tamil community and when we spoke to them their narrative was also, “We were just there, they came and killed us.” And in the midst there are the Muslims and when you talk to them they too say the same – “We were just there and they – the Tamils and also the Army – both came and killed us.” So these communities don’t trust each other. When you really analyze the narrative, it is the same for all the communities.

I have wanted reconciliation to begin while the war was happening and we made various attempts at getting the communities together and to get rid of animosities. But when we used to talk to the Sinhalese community about reconciliation they used to say, “Sure, let us be compassionate towards the Tamil community.” But they are doing it in a way that is an offering of kindness from a higher pedestal to someone who doesn’t deserve it, rather than being kind to them as equally deserving. I have never heard of anyone saying that the Tamils are as good as the Sinhalese and are not to blame for the actions of the LTTE. So then, how and where does this reconciliation come in? How do you deal with such a past? What do you do to reconcile such feelings?

Women’s Role in Reconciliation

If you take politics – the best people to talk to are women. When you go to the polling station in the first few hours and you compare the women’s queue to the men’s queue –the women’s queues are longer. The usual excuse for this is that they want to finish voting before doing their other work. However, if women didn’t actually think and believe that their vote was important, that it mattered to the outcome, then they wouldn’t be there first thing in the morning. There is a sense of urgency and commitment for women. Even during the election period – it is the women who are campaigning on the streets and door-to-door. Men usually need a bottle of alcohol or a lunch packet to be compelled to do the same work, but women just do it because they are committed.

Women are also more approachable and can spread the message of reconciliation better. So once a message of reconciliation is internalized in women, they will take the message forward. From my experience, it might also be easier to make the women understand what reconciliation really is. In the villages the mother is still the person who is feeding the next generation of

children with ideas. We need to start with this generation of Sri Lanka's children and I strongly believe if you start now then at least in 20 years, we'll definitely have a peaceful Sri Lanka.

On how to undertake a process of reconciliation

We first need to understand what we are looking to achieve with reconciliation. We are aspiring for equality as citizens – to be treated equally regardless of ethnicity or religion. This is my land and I should be treated as any other. I feel whoever is interested in reconciliation in this country must first and foremost tell us whether they themselves treat everyone equally. Whether they, in their minds or even when they are casually talking to friends, don't have any bias against the communities they are talking about. First and foremost, those involved in reconciliation should get rid of stereotyping and generalization of ethnicity and human behaviour.

In order to start a process of reconciliation we need to prepare a national narrative. It should be prepared by a few people with good heads and open hearts, who are committed to addressing the root causes and understand the importance of bringing the communities together; not because somebody is funding them, but because it is genuinely needed in the country.

I feel we should prepare a narrative, where we go through history with facts and figures, and prepare the whole story about how each community was discriminated against and what the consequences of our actions have been. A national narrative that takes into consideration all the individual narratives of communities where each community feels their story was included. I do feel that the nation must experience a common story – then it's easier for people to come out of their enclaves and understand what other communities also experienced. In the preparation of this national narrative men and women have to work together at all levels to collect and present facts and figures. In the process, it is important to listen to the women of different communities and hear what they have to say in terms of experiences and grievances. It is also important to work with religious leaders from all communities to make sure their views are represented. We must then share this narrative with the whole country so that we have a common story.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

In terms of transitional justice, we need to decide to what degree we should engage and how much effort we should put into each of the mechanisms. You can't leave out any one of the proposed transitional justice mechanisms – for example the Office of Missing Persons may not be important to one person but it will be the most important to others. We also need to decide whether Sri Lanka really wants some of the transitional justice mechanisms or are we being forced by someone else to establish them. I am wary of more commissions – we have had many commissions over the years but to no avail. Who are we really trying to satisfy by setting up these commissions? We need to establish commissions only when we as a country decide it is needed for us and not just to satisfy other countries.

What communities do need is a space to bear their grievances, a truth commission may be able to do that – but it will not be enough to contribute to reconciliation. Those who are sharing their stories and experiences will want some action taken against the perpetrators. But do you think

Sri Lanka will do anything with the recommendations of the truth commission report, when we have never taken any such action before? I doubt it will be possible to bring to justice even one person from the armed forces.

We should therefore work on transitional justice practically, but also give importance to the national narrative. We can't go by other countries' experiences, because our context and communities are so different. For South Africa the perpetrators accepted the violations – do you think anyone in Sri Lanka would be willing to do that? That leadership was so sincere to the cause and there was political will in South Africa, but I don't think we have the same political will. The experiences of Liberia and how to women were involved in the peace building process – those are examples we need to learn from.

When you talk of Rwanda, it was an experience a majority of people went through. The whole of Sri Lanka hasn't been equally affected by war. As a nation we have not all risen together on a common cause and that is why every time we try to do something, people are trying to protect their own biases and past baggage. A common narrative will help establish a common suffering of the country and women will be able to carry it through to the next generation as well. The Liberian and South African women wanted a solution – there were community initiatives that the women themselves started together. Sri Lankan women have to take the space that we have right now to work on reconciliation and peace building and not wait for someone else to initiate or for the donors to set the agenda. Unfortunately, so much is contingent on donor funding. Those who are working for a cause – especially Sri Lankan women – have to work together to stop the 'othering' of each other and to begin promoting common values for everyone.

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CASE STUDY – 02

Name :	Sarala Emmanuel
Profession :	Development Practitioner
Age :	38
Ethnicity :	Mixed
District where she works :	Batticaloa
Has the war affected her :	No

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a term that I am uncomfortable with, especially in this post-war context in Sri Lanka. Given the historical context of structural inequalities for decades on certain communities of people, I am skeptical about how that terminology is being utilized. The term seems to be telling the affected people to forgive, to reconcile, to move on, yet where is the justice and the accountability for all that has happened in the past, to go with it? Thus I very rarely use the word myself. And if I ever do, I ensure that I use it in conjunction with words like justice and accountability. Deep-rooted, historical, structural injustices which led to the conflict in the first place need to be addressed.

Actually achieving reconciliation of the different communities within Sri Lanka is going to be a tall order. It's possible but will it be achieved is the question. It definitely needs to be achieved though – not only between communities but also within communities. War caused deep fractures and distrust even between members of the same communities, which continue to linger. Thus reconciliation within communities is going to be much harder to achieve than between communities, I think.

As for reconciliation between communities – for this, my personal opinion would be that accountable histories be drawn up in a way that is both dignified and respectful. There has to be a due process of acknowledgement and accountability. We have to recognize that there is not just one history (which is usually the dominant victor's narrative) that is valid here in this multi-cultural country; there are a multiplicity of histories which are all equally valid – addressing this alone will create the space for acknowledgement and respect between the different communities living here.

We need to collect and collate the different histories of the different regions of this country and make them widely available for dissemination. These histories, on how their stories are being shaped, should be owned by their respective communities and not be a biased national narrative. We must also ensure the women are included in these histories, as women within the same communities would have histories differing from their men; they would have different histories across regions and ethnicities as women too. For example, a Sinhala Buddhist woman would have a different history from a Tamil Hindu woman or a Moor Muslim woman – and they each will again have different (or similar) histories depending on where they live. Bring all those aspects in so that they can learn, review and understand from each other.

As for reconciliation through women's perspectives; all my reservations of the term that I cited above primarily stem from my work as a women's rights activist. My issue with this terminology begins from the bedroom, extending from there to the home, and the rest of society. See, women are the ones, always told to 'reconcile.' There is a power dynamic that the women are constantly negotiating – as mothers, sisters, daughters and wives in our patriarchal cultures. Reconciliation is something pushed upon the women in these structures – with the onus on them to reconcile with their husbands, or other family members – and the rest of society. "Put up with the injustices meted out to you meekly" they are told. "Don't tell anyone else about your oppressions either, lest you bring shame to your family members or to society." Thus the continuum of violence extends from a woman's home to her society at large. So I am not a fan of the word reconciliation in this context either.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I am part of an organization that has worked with war affected communities for 25 years now. But we don't use words like reconciliation. We use words like discrimination, justice, and society free from violence, instead. We are working in a society that still deals with systematic issues of discrimination, violence and lack of justice – so the words we utilize reflect that.

All women should constantly question the narratives they are told and the systems they operate in, thus. You can make an impact not only on yourself but also on broader society if you challenge yourself this way – but the impact would be stronger if you were part of a network. I would recommend individual women to be part of broader activism and collectives. Feminist solidarity is crucial for women. What can't be done individually most certainly can be achieved with the strength of a collective.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Women **MUST** play a role in any and all future processes of reconciliation, good governance, transitional justice, and so on. It's not a question about whether they can or cannot – my argument is that they must, because they are 50 percent of the population of this country. I don't feel the need to bring up that clichéd, essentialist argument that women are more sympathetic, tolerant, loving etc to back up this demand. It might be true, but why do we even have to justify why we should have a role to play in the reconciliation process? We are rightful citizens of this country too, and that's all the reason that is needed.

Currently women are just being used as eyewash – to hold hands at protests or mark attendance at meetings... This needs to be done away with in favour of women's actual participation in decision- making and implementation of processes.

There are lots of issues pertaining to women exclusively which need to be resolved for the reconciliation process to move forward; non-discrimination, equal rights, justice for the women affected by war – and in all these as well as broader issues, women should have their due say.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Transitional Justice is a much broader term than reconciliation - because it incorporates the four pillars of criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparation programs, and institutional reforms. I have less cynicism over this term therefore as it has concrete pillars to address injustices of the past, instead of brushing them under the carpet. So if these pillars are addressed in the Transitional Justice system, then yes, a genuine reconciliation is definitely possible.

In these processes of transitional justice and reconciliation, women must be involved at decision making levels; especially women who have been affected by the history of war and violence. The Transitional Justice mechanism should examine the structural, historic and socio-economic reasons for why the conflict arose and what exactly happened, during its many phases. For example, rape. Why did the different players in the war accused of rape, actually commit rape? What were their motives? What did they seek to achieve? What effect did it ultimately have on the women being targeted? I ask this because rape in these contexts is never just about arbitrarily assaulting a woman – it is a systematic undermining of communities. Social violence on women during conflicts or war is all about undermining the honour of the communities they belong to.

There are also other aspects in which women are the ones directly affected – such as in the case of female headed households and the challenges they face; the plight of the mothers, sisters and wives of the disappeared, and so on. Thus I would strongly emphasize the need for women to be a part of these processes.

As for Development - my conceptualization of it involves socio-economic freedoms, access to equal resources, being involved in decision making, having a voice and the facility to use it, the mechanisms to address issues of social injustice and land reforms etc etc... Then, and only then, would reconciliation come in, at a point where there is good governance at a local level. Otherwise, if the system itself is flawed, if the system is the one that caused the conflict in the first place - then by continuing at that trajectory, what would you be reconciling into? That is my question.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

I have heard that the government is involved in sponsoring some reconciliation activities among communities though I have not seen any personally. I understand that these are mostly of a religious nature with religious leaders at the helm.

Personally I think the reconciliation process should be independent of religion. Within as well as between communities, we need to find a way to interact with each other beyond the stereotypical divisions, which we can't seem to move past – Muslims, Tamils, Sinhalese and Burghers (if we even remember the burghers these days). We just need to be able to address each other as fellow humans and citizens with diverse identifications. Every single religion is discriminatory and structurally violent towards women, so I wouldn't advocate for their having a place in the reconciliation process.

As to what else the government can do:

- First of all make sure that we have a constitution that is much more representative of the different communities living here. Prioritizing just one community and one religion is what led to all this conflict.
 - Ensure devolution of power to the regions as promised. This is something that the war affected people in these regions are really looking forward to – so the government needs to show its sincerity in respecting their needs and wishes. It is also something that the government pledged to do – so showcasing its sincerity in this regard is paramount to achieving a meaningful reconciliation as well.
 - Ensure representation of the minorities and underprivileged at all these political processes. Especially of women. Make sure that 50 percent of women are involved in all political processes, including transitional justice and constitutional reform. Don't give excuses about why it can't be done. Women are more than 50 percent of the population currently. Why should we not have due representation wherever it counts? There are no excuses. Get it done.
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CASE STUDY – 03

Name :	withheld on request
Designation :	politician
Age :	withheld on request
Ethnicity :	withheld on request
Hometown :	withheld on request / Residence: withheld on request

1. What reconciliation means to me, its chances of success in Sri Lanka, and ways of realizing it

Women are inherently broad-minded enough to live in peaceful co-existence, while acknowledging diversity. Among the women who form 52% of Sri Lanka's population, a large variety of backgrounds and walks of life can be witnessed. Women affected by abject poverty, women in leading managerial positions who are heading their organizations, women who are married, unmarried, divorced and widowed, all form this 52%. The North-East area of the country is home to 90,000 Female Heads of Households. Highlighting this variety is important because women learn and advance in groups. They are team-players. Bringing together women from all walks of life is important to reconciliation because women can share and learn from one another. Despite the diversity among women, they will be able to recognize the common grounds in their collective experience. This convergence of women and their stories is reconciliation to me. Moreover, women can mutually empower one another through this process, and learn from the more empowered.

I believe that reconciliation is on the cards for Sri Lanka. Positive thinking is imperative to achieving positive outcomes. The new government of January 8th, 2015, is premised on the foundation of peace, safety and freedom – three vital requisites for women to realize their potential. Religions play a significant role in reconciliation. Each citizen is given the freedom to follow a religion of her choice. Whatever this choice may be, the moral and ethical guidance given by all religions is invaluable to lead a peaceful life. Thirdly, families must be guided well by its female or male head. These may appear to be an agenda for private life – positive thinking, religion and family life. But we cannot be closer to the goal of public peace and order, if not through individual circumstances. In drawing this link between the individual and collective, we will learn to examine ourselves first, then our families and eventually ensure that our societies are at peace.

2. A woman's role in peace-making and how I am fulfilling this role

Women are predisposed to be peacemakers. Be it in the household or in the workplace, a woman is seen to be making the first attempt at reconciliation, addressing everyone's needs, smoothing out hiccups, and being the nucleus of her community. A woman's behavior sets an example for how everyone should be treated and treat others. A woman's dispute settlement skills are unmatched.

As a female head of household with three children I am tasked with the responsibility of being their mother and father. Through my sorrows and hardships, I believe I send out a strong message to all similarly circumstanced women about healing and recovery. I am here today, because I believe no other women should have an experience similar to mine. I lead my Ministry the way I lead my family. Women are valued here, and I treat everyone like my own.

3. Reconciliation, transitional justice and women

It has been seven years since the end of war, but normalcy has not returned for the women. Their worlds which were altered by the 30 year war, remain thus altered, and are perhaps getting worse in the absence of psycho-social assistance. It must be admitted that redressing the grievances of women has seen a slow, lackadaisical progress even under the new government. Bringing the issues of women to light has not resulted in the redressing of injustices inflicted upon them.

A concrete and workable legal framework is the only possible solution in this regard. In countries like India and Bangladesh, perpetrators of sexual violence against women and children are governed by strict laws. This is not the case in Sri Lanka. A sound legal framework and criminal justice system is imperative to punish the perpetrators and deter crime. Only under a framework that protects them and enables the realization of their rights, can women play their due role in reconciliation.

4. Development, peace-building and women

Development is achieved through inclusiveness, thus reconciliation is a requisite for development. Development should include all communities. Vulnerable sectors in society must be assisted with aid and relief.

The link between reconciliation and peace-building has been difficult to establish because of the deliberate efforts made time and again at inciting racism. Inter-communal cooperation is vital for peace-building, and it is heartening to see the efforts made by the January 8th government towards inclusive decision-making, and consensus governance.

5. Issues women face which need solutions in order to realize reconciliation

Women are living in physical and emotional loneliness due to various reasons and are thus vulnerable to various ills in society. There is no age limit for victims of sexual violence, and women of all ages fall prey to this. Sexual violence is a direct result of poverty and drug abuse. Migrant working, while appearing as a solution to many, is far from a solution, and is in fact a fount of many problems. The absence of equal rights and opportunities has resulted in women seeking employment abroad. The state and the private sector have a responsibility to come forward and offer opportunities and ensure diversity in workplaces, without discrimination.

6. State initiatives to promote reconciliation

It has been one year and two months since the current President came into office, 6 months since the Parliament changed and five years more for the government to remain in power. While people may have huge expectations, the damage caused by a protracted thirty year war cannot be reversed within a short period. Short circuiting reconciliation is bound to be counter-productive.

Satisfactory steps taken in the right direction include development of under-developed areas and return of property. The latter of these is a commendable sustainable solution. Ex-combatants are provided relief and offered opportunities, which are good first steps towards reintegration. Over 30,000 disabled persons receive an aid of 3,000/- per month.

A long-term solution for peace is being discussed. Efforts at reconciliation have made hardliners, and hopefully will continue to, drop extreme claims. The appointment of the Tamil National Alliance leader as the Opposition Leader is a massive step forward.

7. The role of religion in reconciliation

Religion cannot be abandoned as we move forward. Sri Lankans have strong cultural roots, and religion is part of the lifestyles of most. Moreover, ensuring religious freedom and equality is vital to reconciliation. Religion is an oft overlooked dimension, perhaps due to the emphasis placed on language and ethnicity.

8. Next steps for reconciliation

A 25% representation of women has been approved at Local Government level. This must be taken right up to Provincial Governance, and eventually the Parliament. However, the more difficult change to witness would be women coming forward to contest. In order, women at all levels must be empowered. Women who have a legal training and expertise in the law, specifically, should join politics in order to provide other women with the much needed concrete framework for gender parity. In a country with 52% of women, female representatives form only 5% of all public representatives. Various factors withhold women from coming forward to represent their communities, and they remain voiceless and disempowered, thus. The government and the media have a responsibility in encouraging women to participate in representation. Women's rights advocacy groups must also persuade women at grassroots level to come forward to represent their communities, their interests and needs. In a society where much stigma is attached to women who come forward to find employment, encouraging them to contest in elections is an onerous task. When it comes to employment, women are deprived of opportunities because of men, which in turn leaves women frustrated and withdrawn. State and non-state sponsored empowerment is truly the need of the hour.

With regards to constitution-making, implementation is equally important as law reform. Revising existing law must be accompanied by enforceability mechanisms, and such implementation must reach the lowest tiers of society, in order to be meaningful.

CASE STUDY — 04

Name :	Udayani Navaratnam
Designation :	Women's Development Officer, Jaffna
Age :	38
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	Jaffna

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a very broad term, often poorly understood in its scope and reach. Many people within Sri Lanka including policy makers assume reconciliation only relates to matters of nationhood but in my view it is something that starts at the individual and family units. Only if there is empathy, understanding and cooperation between family members would those members be productive citizens of society - which would then enable them to build a harmonious and united country. The capacity for reconciliation therefore begins with individuals and family units possessing the required aptitude and attitude for empathy and understanding.

Reconciliation of the different communities living within Sri Lanka is not only possible but achievable. The different communities living in this country already possess a good understanding amongst themselves and thus enjoy harmonious relationships with each other if left to themselves. It is the politicians and their politicking that seeks to divide and rule over us.

I recently had the privilege of attending a Hindu Temple Festival in Batticaloa in an area where all three communities of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims live in harmony. All three communities attended the festival and cooperated with so much joy and understanding between them to make it a success. It was a joy to watch them. I think, left to ourselves, this is how we would all live, as our people do possess an innate sense of empathy, understanding and cooperativeness with each other. We have often amply demonstrated this when left to our own devices.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

As a Women's Development Officer working for the government, in Jaffna, I am uniquely placed to aid a number of people especially women in ways that aid reconciliation. When they come to me and see that the government has such a position and staff member in place to see to their needs, it goes a long way towards gaining trust in government services.

In a personal capacity, I try to raise awareness in my own community and the communities of people accessible to me on certain entrenched notions of 'the other.' We are all guilty of stereotyping and 'othering' other communities of people based on religions, castes or ethnicities. I try to address any wrong stereotypical notions I come across whenever I can.

Also in my line of work, I get many people coming to me for help – trying to trace missing relatives or gain compensation to rebuild broken houses, reclaim lost properties and so on. I try to link them with those who can best help them and follow up on their cases.

Apart from this, here are a few ideas I have to expedite the reconciliation process:

There are many Sinhalese tourists who come to Jaffna regularly – but they don't really interact much with the locals except for shopping. They tend to stay within the confines of their own tourist buses and pilgrimage circuits in the company of their own community's guides. They seem to view the touring of Jaffna as almost akin to visiting a foreign country, especially due to the language barrier and lack of comfort in interacting freely with the local people. This does not help much in breaking down the stereotypes that each community holds of the other. This is a wasted opportunity for reconciliation in my opinion. If the people themselves feel uncomfortable in breaking through their barriers of discomfort to interact and collectively learn from each other, then the process ought to be facilitated for them by a third party. If such a process were to be facilitated for them by the government or an aid agency I am sure many people would grab the opportunity.

There should be a mechanism to have willing volunteers among the Sinhalese tourists to our areas volunteer two hours of their time, to help needy Tamil and Muslim families so that they can see and learn firsthand, the circumstances and issues faced by the people locally. For example, there are currently many needy families in Jaffna who are struggling to put up part-funded Indian Housing in lieu of their war destroyed housing. Since the funds granted are not enough, many of them are struggling to pay the labour fees of the masons. This kind of volunteer work among them would go a long way towards reducing the masons' fees – as well as promoting better understanding between the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

If you take the family unit, if ever a conflict arises – 'reconciliation' is considered solely the woman's work. It is she who has to be understanding, forbearing, forgiving... with no such expectations by society upon the man. This is why we have cases of conflicts and domestic violence in family units. It takes all parties concerned to work at this and make compromises where necessary. If it is only going to be solely one sex's responsibility, it's not going to work.

At a national level, lack of peace and conflicts affect women the most. Thus genuine reconciliation is very important for us. Yet we are rarely asked for our views or allowed to be decision makers at a macro level, even though we are held solely responsible for it at the micro level. The way it works currently is to hold women responsible for peace while not giving us the adequate agency to achieve this.

Decision making by women at strategic levels should be increased, especially at apex government bodies and parliament. As per my earlier points, I think women in this country have been socialized to 'reconcile'; i.e. be subservient, quiet and not forceful in pushing forward their views or needs – and this works to our detriment. This needs to change.

A prevalent view hereabouts is that the 2002 ceasefire might have failed because neither the government nor the LTTE took the effort to get much input from their respective women leaders when going in for peace talks. That might not have been the sole cause of the ceasefire later crumbling but it almost certainly contributed towards it. Women's needs and views, and their

decisions on how to address them needs to be incorporated more at strategic levels in nation-building, if the reconciliation process is to be sincerely followed.

The fault is not with the women. Women's groups across the country, on their own initiative coordinate and collaborate with each other actively to achieve reconciliation. Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim women rights groups actively collaborate with each other, and we in the North, gain the support of our sister organizations in the South (and other parts of the country), any time we ask for it. So at least at the women's grassroots organizational level, we already possess a network of healthy friendship and cooperation. The groundwork has already been laid. It just needs to be utilized and built upon.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Only if transitional justice is achieved would true reconciliation be viable. We can't expect people still mourning the dead or anguishing over the missing to move forward without addressing what happened to them first.

Most of those affected by the lack of adequate transitional justice currently are women; widows, those with husbands detained as political prisoners, mothers and wives of those gone missing... Their collective anguish needs to be resolved for reconciliation efforts to move forward.

Meanwhile, at a local level, societal attitudes towards women need to change; especially regarding the inauspiciousness of widows, remarriage taboos, independence and strength exhibited by women entrepreneurs etc. There is an entrenched notion in society that women should not be in control of their lives, that they are the property and as such subservient to father, husband or son – and in the absence of all three – to society at large, which has many arbitrary rules to curtail them. In a post-war context where many women have lost their husbands and/or male guardians, these arbitrary rules serve only to crush already traumatized women who are obliged to be the bread-winners of their family. There are too many barriers stacked against them. These need to be addressed.

Women should be empowered to be able to take charge of their lives and be unashamed to do so, as the current culture and societal structures keep them subordinated and inferior. A woman having an abusive husband for example should be empowered to leave him instead of putting up with the domestic violence as is currently the case. She should also be given the courage as well as societal constructs necessary (such as child care facilities, equal pay, regular and safe public transport) to facilitate her to stand on her own feet as well as provide support to her dependants, such as children, elderly parents or disabled siblings.

Link between Development, Reconciliation and Peace Building

Our society tends to assume that development means only infrastructural development. Yet underlying this is the aspect of psycho-social development which is currently not much addressed. Eg: Granting housing or livelihoods to war-traumatized families and expecting them to move forward, without addressing their war trauma – this is bound to fail. Development without reconciliation is ultimately meaningless.

There should be due processes and genuine intentions to address this. If there were a space for people to feel free to talk, express their feelings, have what happened to them acknowledged and addressed – then there is a bigger chance of genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation cannot be built by brushing burning issues under the carpet.

Meanwhile peace-building efforts needs to take into account that over the war years, the three main ethnicities living in Sri Lanka (Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims) have moved apart into segregated communities with their own neighborhoods and schools. There is not much intermixing happening to give us a chance to break each others' preconceived stereotypes. Those preconceived stereotypes were shaped a lot during the war years, especially with propaganda from our respective medias, catering to each demographic.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

In recent years, religion is becoming a conflict-rider as seen in the clash between Buddhists and Muslims. We do need inter-religious harmony measures, but I don't think the government should use religion in their official reconciliation measures. Religions tend to be divisive in their approach and so it is better not to bring them into the reconciliation process. A process taking a neutral approach on religions would be healthier. As the different ethnicities and communities intermix with each other via the reconciliation process, their understanding of each other would help break each others' stereotypes – fuelled often by religion amongst other societal constructs – and this might help them overcome the brainwashing they had been subjected to.

There are several measures that the Government has at its disposal to achieve this intermixing and thus understanding between the different communities. Here are just a few:

- Get the different ethnicities to mix with each other as much as possible – through having diverse student populations at Universities, government appointments into different localities etc. Let the people get out of the echo chambers of their respective community bubbles and interact and live with each other on a regular basis.
- Acknowledge the wrongs done in the past. Give compensation where possible (houses and property) and at least acknowledgement where not possible (as in the case of family members gone missing).
- Form committees to review what went wrong and strategize on how to avoid it happening again.
- Form inter-ethnic committees from within communities to address community issues. The State should also work actively to bring in women's views and needs into their reconciliation and peace-building measures. They should increase women's participation and decision making at strategic apex bodies. Meanwhile in the short term, access the many women's grassroots organisations across the country and get their inputs and views on various issues. Then sincerely incorporate those views in government strategic planning.

There are many barriers currently operating against such initiatives – beginning from women's own shyness and reticence, to society's strictures on them not to be forward with their views

and needs, to strategic decision makers (mostly male but also females) at apex bodies not willing to incorporate these women's inputs seriously. Serious strategizing needs to take place to overcome this as well, so that women's voices are finally heard, their needs finally addressed.

CASE STUDY – 05

Name :	Vasuki Jeyasankar
Profession :	Feminist / Activist / Artist collaborating with different networks
Age :	49
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	North & East

Views on Reconciliation

I don't think I even know how to define that term clearly – even though I have supposedly worked on this theme in collaborative networks for years. I don't have a real definition for it. Does it mean co-existence? Accepting, forgetting and moving on from the brutalities of the war? Managing to have a meaningful life without dwelling on the traumas and injustices of the past? Is that a realistic expectation to have, and are we going about achieving it the right way?

First of all, do we even have an appropriate Tamil translation for the term 'Reconciliation'? Do the Tamil masses we work with understand the term? My experience in regard to this would make me answer, 'No'. The translated Tamil term currently used for reconciliation is *nalinnakam*. Yet the community people we work with give us puzzled looks when we talk of *nalinnakkam* in their midst. They blink and ask us, "What do you mean by that word?"

So my question is, do the people we work with for the purpose of reconciliation know that such a term has been codified by the powers that be? That the government and NGO Sector are working with them, the people who have been through a brutal war, to achieve 'reconciliation'? If not, then what is the actual purpose of all this?

My long term work and exposure in this regard has tended to make me cynical about such lapses. It shows a lack of meaningful engagement.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I work actively in connecting women at the grassroots across the multiple layers of society, with decision and policy makers, wherever possible. So I help women whose voices and views matter (but are not necessarily sought for on their opinions) to have their voices heard by the layers of society removed from them who nevertheless make decisions on their behalf. My efforts are mostly at the ground level to encourage women to be part of the process wherever possible. I do this via discussions, either individually or in focus groups, among the community women residing across the North and East, almost all of whom have been affected by war.

I also work with independent researchers on their research projects as well as artistic groups on artistic collaborations in this regard. Currently for example, I am engaged in illustrating a book of poetry written by a lady Muslim poet from Trincomalee. It is part of an initiative to get Tamil and Muslim artists to collaborate together, sponsored by GIZ Sri Lanka.

I do believe such measures and initiatives are important. Just like everyone else living in the North and East, I too have been affected by war. I consider myself fortunate in that my immediate family did not die in horrific circumstances such as bombings or landmines as so many other people here. Nevertheless, my mother died in the middle of the war, due to not having access to proper medical treatment for her asthma. I could not even attend her funeral, as I was in Batticaloa at the time, while she passed away during displacement time in the 90s in Jaffna – the routes of travel were cut off at that time. The same happened again when my father died. I could not be with my parents in their last days, and could not attend even their funerals of my mother. This is a source of lasting sorrow to me.

My family was originally from Tellipalai in Jaffna, but I lived in Nallur for most of my childhood and youth. I moved to Batticaloa due to my husband's work in 1995 just before the exodus while my family was still living in Jaffna. All the paintings I had done through my growing-up years, stored in my house living, were lost, as were various other memorabilia and valuable assets, which comprised our lives up to 1995.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Already, the different women's organizations across the various ethnic groups are working together. Women have the capacity to reach out and easily reconcile yet sadly, they are not much included at the forefront of decision-making – either during war, or now in the post-war context. There are only a few key women leaders at the forefront and even they have mostly been trained to think like men. We saw this during the ceasefire peace process. The few LTTE and Government women leaders we had during war time negotiations didn't appear to be adept at thinking like women at the grassroots who had to bear the consequences of their decisions. They went along instead with the men's decisions.

We do see some progressive changes now, which is a good sign. In the recently conducted constitutional reform process by the government for example, many of the women were excited and happy about being actively included and consulted on their views and needs. This was a first for many of them. The men in the community were not similarly excited simply because this was nothing new to them. This clearly showed the differences in treatment, coloring the women's and men's perspectives. While the women were happy with this process therefore, the men were cynical.

We live in a heavily patriarchal structure with many structural inequalities being currently inflicted on women. These need to be resolved for the reconciliation process to move forward. Here are just a few pointers:

1. Ensure women's security; it's a huge form of oppression in their lives right now. Women are not fully able to achieve their potential in large part due to lack of security; the

dangers of traveling alone, being out after dark, leaving the children alone at home... all these prevent them from contributing to the community at large as well as towards their own self-sustainability.

2. Once and for all, resolve all outstanding cases of missing persons, injuries, deaths, abuse, grabbed lands and properties etc. The government should take responsibility to give reasonable answers to people demanding them.
3. Facilitate livelihoods for them; and by this, I don't mean give the affected women some chickens or a goat. Currently Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese women across all war affected areas are treated as charity cases on which such measures can be offloaded without thought to the suitability of the intervention. Please take the effort necessary to find what each woman is capable of in terms of talent, experience, environment and family circumstances - and tailor the livelihood measures granted to them accordingly.
4. Memories: get people to tell their stories. People, especially the affected women, really want to tell their stories and to be heard. Make the spaces available for all these stories to be heard and documented. Not only via counseling but also via art, singing, safe spaces etc.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

I am skeptical of these conceptual definitions – and how they actually get played out in real life. The concept of Transitional Justice encompass the four different pillars of truth, justice, reparations, as well as guarantee of non- recurrence. To achieve all these in the first place, there should be honest acceptance and acknowledgement about what really happened. This should not only be extended by the government but also by the different communities that did not have to face the consequences of living in the war zone. If those communities do not accept (through not understanding) what really happened, they would tend to impede the process of Transitional Justice. Only if all communities concerned take part in, understand and accept the process of these mechanisms, can genuine reconciliation efforts then move forward.

Make sure women are involved in the process because women tend to have different perspectives from men. As yet, it is only the men's perspectives that are given weight, which should not be the case. Women were the ones most affected by the war. They are the ones who are demanding reparation through the Transitional Justice system for their dead or missing relatives. They are strong enough even to demand that the terms in which their relatives are discussed be changed: eg it is not 'missing people' (kaanamal poena aakal in Tamil) that they are looking for they say. It is people who were made to disappear (Kaanamal aakapatta aakal); i.e. the missing didn't just disappear, they were made to disappear – and the women are campaigning for the terminology (in Tamil) to reflect that.

“We handed over our sons, brothers and husbands to the security forces at such and such points in the Wannu,” the women state with determination. “The government and security forces owe us an explanation on where they are now – or how exactly they were made to disappear. “

As for Development; certain aspects of development undeniably do help a lot – the opening up of the roads and transportation for example - they have finally given an opening for cut-off communities to intermingle.

I am a little skeptical however of how much the factories and other industries opening up are actually of benefit to the people at the grassroots. Exploitation of an already exploited populace is an issue we need to be careful about. As such I see problems with what the country perceives as ‘Development’. Raising the GDP and infrastructure is not enough – we also have to address various other problems including women’s issues at the core; not just war related but their current domestic realities.

To build peace through a viable reconciliation mechanism, we need the political will as a country, to bring about these changes. The people should be actively consulted and the process should be transparent – which I don’t see happening currently. Take the constitutional reform process for example. Even we, the civil society activists who gathered together people and discussions / feedback to aid this process are not sure what the government intends to actually do with all this feedback. Are they going to change the constitution? Or are they going to amend the constitution? What exactly are their plans? We just do not know – which leaves us feeling as if we are not being taken seriously enough by the government even when they reach out to us.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

The government should inform and consult people at all levels – and do them the courtesy of actively utilizing their input as well as keeping them informed on how their feedback is being taken into account and implemented (or discarded as the case may be).

As a district level women’s group leader with access to counterparts in Colombo, I am still not aware of what it is the government is doing – how they are going about reconciliation work, what it is they are planning to achieve etc. This is not ideal. Develop a transparent mechanism in which the people are consulted and can also track the process as it moves along.

The Government should also take measures to inform the majority population about what really happened during the war. Give them as comprehensive and genuine a picture as possible, as many of them still have no idea about what really happened over here. Then only, whatever measures the government takes for reconciliation in the North and East, would be accepted by the Southerners. If that alone happens successfully, many of our other issues would be automatically resolved.

For example, when my mother, and then my father passed away in the North during the war years, the pathways were cut off to us living in the East – and so I could not attend even their funerals. When my Sinhalese friends heard this, they asked me if it was due to the LTTE cutting us off? This is because they have been told that any and all ills are attributable to the LTTE when in fact, the LTTE was just one player in the field. The LTTE did carry out many atrocities, not only on the Muslim and Sinhala communities, but also fellow Tamils – but they were by no means the only source of misery to the people. I have friends and distant relatives who died in crossfire, direct shootings and revenge killings, landmines, claymore attacks, cluster bombs

and aerial shelling – in many of these security forces and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) played a role too. The Southerners appear to have very little awareness on this. If they are better informed about the various atrocities inflicted on the people here by not just one but many different players especially by the armed forces of the state - then with the help of civil society associations from the South, we would be able to make progress in the reconciliation and peace-building process.

As for religion's role in this process; that is a tricky one to navigate. It might help. But alternatively it might hamper the whole process too. Sensitivity is key. If quite sensitively handled, it certainly has the potential to be a force for good.

Traditionally in these parts, the communities on their own have used religious festivals to reach out to each other and build harmonious relationships. For example in Batticaloa, many Hindu temples had one day of their festivals dedicated to honoring the Muslim community living in their midst. Muslims were welcomed with ceremonious honor to raise the flags at the temple on a certain day, for the festival to proceed. Older people of both communities remember this with nostalgia. It has died out in many places now due to the conflicts brought about by war and the increasingly strict interpretations of religion being disseminated among the Muslim community.

When the communities themselves reach out to each other through religion as in the case above, we see that it helps build harmony and respect for diversity – but if it is going to be implemented in a top-down approach by the government, they need to be very careful as to how they go about it. There is potential for either good or bad to come out of that process, depending on how it is handled.

CASE STUDY — 06

Name : **Sharya Scharenguivel**
 Designation : Professor
 Age : 63
 Ethnicity : Sri Lankan

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is an exercise in thinking as a nation rather than as a divided people. There are aspirations that are common to the people, and it is those that must be focused on, and not aspirations based on what religion or race people belong to. Reconciliation is a process leading to thinking as one people. As a woman, reconciliation has the same meaning: it is to think more as one group of people, it is the same meaning as a man would give to reconciliation. The barriers faced by women when achieving reconciliation will be different to those faced by men, as their priorities could be different. However, as a process, it is the same.

I think that reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka. Especially if, the majority community looks at the concerns of the minority groups without taking the view that they must conform to common law. If they take this view of conforming, reconciliation is not possible. If there is an understanding of the trauma the people went through as a result of the war and an acknowledgement of their experiences, only then will reconciliation become a reality. If the emphasis is on forgetting the past and moving on, reconciliation is not possible.

If the main attitude of the country is that minorities must absorb all the laws of the land, then there will be no reconciliation there. To achieve one voice and equal aspirations of all, we must take the path of preserving what is important to every community. It is only then that a country can speak with one voice on national issues.

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

When looking at the place of women in society and the economic position of women, one can see something that is common across communities: they are economically marginalized. They cannot build up capital or exercise economic rights. Their dependence increases their vulnerability. Across communities, there might be things that are far more common between women than between men: the position they play in the family, lack of decision-making powers (through a culture or dependence), etc. Also, sharing is possible between women and it is easier for women to act as bridges: The Sinhala woman may not face some of the problems the Muslim woman faces, but it is easier to understand each other. There are commonalities, which could make women play a useful role in reconciliation. For example, there will be problems common to women in a fishing community, whether they are Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim.

Thus, women have a major role to play in the reconciliation process as they can interact with other women, on aspects that are important, such as family, land, etc. In communities where there are women belonging to different communities living in one locality, there is a deepened

understanding of family, legal, and cultural aspects. They are a disadvantaged group and they can understand the effects of marginalization because they too have been marginalized. Thus, they can understand other forms of marginalization and act as a bridge.

In a recent program, for example, women from the deep South and women from the East visited India to observe and learn how the coir industry functions there. There was no common language but at the end of the training program, there was a relationship built among them. While it can be questioned as to how they built this relationship given their different languages and cultures, it is easy to surmise that they would have faced the same issues: access to credit, marketing products, what happens to the money they made (in both groups of women, much of what they made would have gone to the family), and what aspirations they have (educating children, better housing, etc.). These would have helped them communicate across what appeared to be major barriers. They face the same issues, have the same aspirations.

In addition, women face certain issues such as land, housing, violence, and complications with their role in the family and in the community that need to be resolved for reconciliation between communities. They deal with interrupted education and forced marriages where even if the married couple is no longer together, the trauma continues, and they need counselling from trained and skilled personnel. Accessing education and health facilities require trained assistance.

In a personal capacity and as a woman, I can promote reconciliation in many ways, especially through legal education and training, which are my specialty areas. I have a deep interest in the personal laws, and I write on personal and family laws, as well as children's rights. In that area, my role would be in creating an understanding of these laws. Personal laws can be beneficial to people because of their inherent conditions.

For example, the law known as "Thediathettam" (found within Thesawalamai law, the traditional law of Sri Lankan Tamils) is founded on aspirations of marital partnership: it is the recognition that both partners have equal rights to property and this is absolute equality, which is not found in the general law. I look at why it is a part of the Thesawalamai law: I see value in this concept as it alleviates injustices in the general law. There is a conclusion that the general law is superior but some aspects of the personal laws are quite good. There is also a Muslim personal law that benefits the individuals. It is imperative to look at these aspects when changing laws.

I have served on law reform committees (Muslim, Thesavalamai), and I can help to develop a greater understanding of, and dispel some of the myths surrounding, these laws and institutions. My role lies in understanding the law, examining the curriculum of the university, training of judges, and creating greater awareness of the law in society by disseminating information and knowledge to the family unit across all communities where we should be looking at change. A two-way process is needed in any reform if it is to lead to a more meaningful reconciliation.

My role in the field of education and law reform is in the training aspect: devising training for women and community leaders, government officials, judiciary, etc. I am involved in drawing up short training programs for public officials and the police, and distance learning courses

for universities. I try to make an impact to bring about a change in these groups of people. I also am involved in formulating programs conducted by the university and the Human Rights Centre. I create a deeper understanding of institutions. My current tendency is to look at more useful legal subjects but it is important to look at areas such as family where there are greater barriers to reconciliation. When it comes to commercial law, the normal practice of society is to want more effective commercial laws, and for company laws to become easier to understand. However, division can be seen in the other areas and institutions (such as family, etc.). Thus, I focus on understanding these dissimilarities and reasons behind these dissimilarities and teach people to value these differences.

Previously, I was the Director of the Human Rights Centre. I was involved in training and conscientization programmes and also helped in programs that worked with communities in Jaffna. This was done in collaboration with FOKUS, and we did a common curriculum for women belonging to three communities, which was an intensive study program done simultaneously in their respective locations. It went beyond imparting what the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 encapsulates, as we built relationships and continued to work with these communities over time. The people in the North face many barriers, so taking the staff to them proved to be more useful. This program was sustained throughout one year. It was also conducted for the armed forces and police; In the process, we too were able to benefit as we learnt how to gain a clear understanding of what the real needs were and tailor our teaching accordingly.

Reconciliation and its Relationship with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

A link can be made between transitional justice and reconciliation: through transitional justice certain issues that prevail will be brought to light. A mechanism will emerge when addressing these issues and this will help to proceed to the next stage.

Sri Lanka experienced a breakdown of normal processes of law that led to a need for devising special mechanisms to deal with the ensuing chaos. Normal courts were not sufficiently equipped to deal with such situations. With the foundations of established systems being shattered it becomes imperative to bring in a different system that can deal with the immediate issues that crop up. Such a system is a short term strategy to regain a level of normalcy. Recognizing that there are certain urgent issues to be dealt with immediately, is a must. Issues and laws pertaining to land must be a priority. The courts may not be able to effectively deal with such issues and the procedures will be cumbersome. There are no short-term solutions. Transitional justice, once in place, will bring us closer to achieving the greater objective of reconciliation. Although Sri Lanka has not been effective in achieving transitional justice, it is essential.

In the absence of reconciliation, development that takes place will be of an artificial nature: only infrastructure, employment, access to education, and better health facilities will result. Issues such as loss and grief will not be dealt with. Such development offers people who have gone through grief and loss only a partial remedy. It would never erase what has happened and it is not based on a humane approach, as only economic needs are satisfied. This does not embrace the full human personality and does not acknowledge what is lost in the lives of people. The humanness of people is not addressed.

Sustainable peace is understanding what people went through and building upon it. It requires building in a mechanism that will ensure such a tragedy will not occur again. No lasting peace is possible without reconciliation. Until consciousness is awakened, peace-building will not be a reality. Sri Lanka has seen development without reconciliation or a development model that has not taken reconciliation into consideration. Development is important, but development alone is not enough. A country can neither be rebuilt nor has experience effective peace, until it confronts all that it been through.

The Role of the Government and Religion

There are many issues in the state mechanism: laws and public administration remain insensitive to the different communities. For example, even on a Ministry's public day, there are no Tamil-speaking officials, and there are none at police stations and hospitals. Patient-doctor communication also falters due to language barriers. It must be understood that language is important to foster meaningful relationships. In the past, speaking Tamil was essential condition to be part of the civil service. Even in my life time I have seen this. My father knew Tamil and spoke fluently, which made it easy to build relationships. If one is a public servant, one needs to have an understanding of language and cultures. This language capacity is no longer seen as imperative. Back in 1850 British public servants were made to learn Sinhala (British dispatches are proof of this practice). They knew the language, laws and customs of the country they conquered. Now, the public service, comprising people mainly from the majority community, has no real appreciation or understanding of other cultures.

The Government has in hand, the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (LLRC) report, which provides an idea of the policies that are needed. However, one cannot be sure about how these recommendations are to be translated into policy. The Government while dealing with livelihood and land issues, ignore other matters. The need from the current Government is for a more open attitude to decentralization and devolution, and the Government must have position papers on all mechanisms they will put in place, including how they will address war crimes. They must make their position clear on what are the fundamentals that will govern the constitution. There is a lot of discussion, but citizens need to know the fundamentals (e.g., devolution): How will it address disappearances and other unanswered questions? What is the land policy of the Government? Will compensation be paid for damaged property? If not, will people be eligible/able to receive loans? What are the priorities in the area of law reform? A clear direction is needed possibly along with the formation of committees to address each area and to develop position papers. Such position papers will go a long way to help the situation. Position papers are only seen at election time; that is not a progressive situation. Clarity is essential, especially since the Government is often engaged in dealing with a crisis situations. Long-term goals are needed. These papers, which were part of the state system in earlier times, would address the position of the Government from issues ranging from the economy to universities, and be of great help to the general public.

The immediate need for achieving reconciliation is a new constitution, coupled with a strengthened fundamental rights chapter. Also, it is imperative that some fetters in the constitution currently preventing people from assessing existing laws are removed. A much more inclusive constitution

is needed along with broader dialogue prior to its creation. This will allow all communities to feel part of the constitution. A closed process will not lead to reconciliation. Additionally, personal laws must be looked into: The communities must be asked what reforms they wish to include in those laws. The Government and policy makers must understand how important it is for the communities to have those laws. Also, it must be identified whether these laws should remain in the present state or return to its original state. There is a question about why these laws still exist, which is a view voiced by the majority because it is not a part of their experience. A uniform law is important, but it is not to be imposed on a community, as it will not facilitate reconciliation. How important those laws are to their communities must be brought forth by the communities in question.

More dialogue across communities is needed. It is important, in various ways, to attempt to build bridges between the communities. There are many ways of doing this: through the performing arts, understanding of each other's cultures, religious traditions and festivals, etc. It can also be done by changing the school curriculum to be more inclusive and with a three-language policy so that much more effective communication can happen. Also, the Government must facilitate judicial training to make judges sensitive to the communities so that they have a better understanding of the different values operating in different communities. Much more openness and understanding between the different groups is needed. Ostracizing of communities must be dealt with. This is a process which requires pro-active intervention.

Religion too can play a role in reconciliation, but it is my hope that religion would not dominate the discussion/process. The tenets could play a role (of tolerance) but currently, religion is a game of personalities. Any role religion plays has to be based on the essentials of religion. This does not always happen. It is the fundamentalists that seem to be vociferous, which is damaging to the process of reconciliation. It is important that those who subscribe to the essentials or the tenets come to the forefront. Recently, the Muslim Religious Foundation in Sri Lanka put forward their position on the following: Muslims living in a mixed community, ISIS, the foundation's attitude to other religions, etc. This is important as it dispels the idea that every Muslim is an extremist. A common statement from such an entity is good and this should come from all religions. If that emerges, religion could play a role in reconciliation. The pure fundamentals of a religion could play a role but there continues to be a fear that it will not happen in this way.

In addition to all this, women must be brought into the process. To bring in women's perspectives into the reconciliation process, the Government must begin with consultations with women's groups, and some leadership is required from the women members of parliament who need to become a voice for all women. Women's organizations can provide practical ideas for the process. Women must be placed on the constitutional council too. The Government must go beyond the existing mechanisms to make women a part of the process. Given that women's associations have worked in all relevant issues in all areas, the Government can identify which organization works in which sphere and using the same mechanism as in the dialogue on constitution, bring these women's organizations into the process.

The National Committee on Women is very active. There are many mechanisms that can be used to ensure participation of women. The Government can even use the model for the report

on CEDAW, which made use of many consultations. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is printing consultative papers to become the voice of women. A sense of openness is lacking, and that is what is needed: The general public is not aware of what each ministry and organization is doing. This lack of awareness may be due to a fear of criticism or the consequences. The consultative papers can be made available on the ministry websites, and the website can also promote feedback by the public. Openness and transparency are the most important components in the reconciliation process.

CASE STUDY — 07

Name :	Shreen Saroor
Designation :	Activist
Age :	46
Ethnicity :	Northern Muslim
District where she works :	Northern Province

Views on Reconciliation

To me, reconciliation is a social transformation wherein there are no discriminations or violence. It would be a system within which people are treated equally and they are free to express their perspectives, particularly women and the minorities.

The war has affected me personally and deeply, both as an ethnic minority and as a woman. I was one of the Northern Muslims evicted from Mannar by the LTTE in 1990. I lost a few family members to war before that. When I was eleven, my grandfather was killed by an armed group. This was before the time of the LTTE when there were diverse groups comprising both Tamils and Muslims operating in the area. My grandfather was a known trader of his village – he was shot dead over disputes of accessibility of a seashore adjacent to his property. Next an uncle of mine got caught to a landmine placed by the LTTE targeting the army, and died. His body was so dismembered we couldn't identify it.

From the time I was a small child, I have been exposed to the tensions of war. As teenagers, we had to regularly walk past dead bodies to school. I saw the neighbourhood male youths I grew up with, both Tamil and Muslim, get killed on a regular basis. They fought with each other in internecine paramilitary clashes in addition to being targeted by the government's security forces, or the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF). When the IPKF arrived at my hometown of Mannar in the late eighties, there was widespread fear amongst our people that they would rape women. Rumours abounded that they targeted fair skinned women especially – and as a fair skinned girl, my mother feared for my safety. She cut my hair in a pixie cut and dressed me in male clothes so that I might be mistaken for a boy. Stories of rape, and then revenge killings of individual IPKF soldiers to avenge those rapes, abounded during the IPKF's time here. I saw the bodies of IPKF soldiers hanging from trees as part of these revenge killings.

Before our final forcible eviction from Mannar in 1990, I had been exposed to the gamut of war, killings, curfews, constant packing up and leaving at a moment's notice in periodic displacements...

Somehow, even with those periodic displacements, we had never dreamt of a day when an ultimate displacement would come about – that we would be permanently thrown out of our homeland in 1990. That was the hardest of all to bear.

As a woman born to the Muslim community in the North, reconciliation personally for me is about returning to our identity as a Tamil-speaking northerner. Our identity was stripped from us in 1990 when we were evicted at gun point by the LTTE. Currently we are identified only by our religion and IDP status, not by our ethnicity or where we belong. For me, acknowledging my community's ethnicity, roots and heritage are important for reconciliation.

Personal Role in Reconciliation–

In my personal capacity, I have helped women's organizations come together bridging ethnic lines, religious polarizations and religious differences. For example, the Mannar Women's Development Federation (MWDF) and Women's Action Network (WAN) in the North; I have been instrumental in founding these and many other successful women's rights groups in these parts. I have also worked to ensure that these groups work beyond their territories and communities to reach out to each other and aid each other.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Women's inclusion in these matters are crucial because not only have we been subject to war-related disparities, but also traditional disparities which serve to place us at the bottom rungs of society– from where our views and needs are not much heeded. This needs to be addressed effectively for which women's representation in decision making structures is necessary.

Women should work to get into every possible post-war rebuilding structure there is out there –including electoral structures. I urge women to run for public office and thus ensure that the marginalized women's issues are addressed adequately. These structural bodies must recognize not only war-related oppressions but also the traditional disparities caused by culture, religions, and nationalism, all of which continue to keep women vulnerable and oppressed.

War of course in past years has been the major force for women's oppression but addressing that alone exclusively while ignoring all the other societal structures' contributions towards women's oppression is not ideal. The women were already vulnerable and oppressed before the war – the war only added to it. Now, even after war, these oppressions continue. Strong women need to get into policy-making structures to address, and then redress all these issues so that they and their fellow women can access and achieve their dues.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

There are a number of links between all these. Let's examine them one by one.

Transitional Justice: If at all we are to achieve reconciliation in this country, then those due processes detailed under the four pillars of transitional justice should be carried out in a transparent manner. People should be able to heal, gain confidence and move forward with their lives – and for all that transitional justice is needed. The state must ensure that the mechanism of transitional justice is not just relegated to talks about 'forget and forgive' therefore. There should be transparent systems operating whereby the perpetrators of atrocities can be brought to book and punished. Truth, Justice, reparation and non-recurrence – all of these should be guaranteed. Only then would reconciliation be possible.

Inculcate women's perspectives into these processes is a Must. It is mostly women – mothers, grandmothers, wives, aunts and sisters – whom we see demanding justice. They are the ones on the streets protesting, colliding with the State apparatus and demanding answers and justice.

The women were disproportionately affected, far more than men, during the war, due to their various losses, their own vulnerabilities, and added family burdens – all these need to be addressed. However in the process, it is important to not view women as only vulnerable and marginalized. We have to also recognize their extraordinary strengths, their contributions to the family, society and economy when their menfolk died or became disabled. Acknowledging and addressing both their needs as well as their contributions will ensure an inclusive transitional justice processes and thus reconciliation for all.

Development: Ever since the war ended, most of the government's efforts have been concentrated on bringing about reconciliation through development. But what they mean by such 'development' is mostly construction of buildings and roads – and this was done without any consultation with the affected communities. This is basically infrastructural development geared towards expatriates. The idea is to attract foreign investment and foreign exchange.

For the war-affected communities in the midst of whom all this is happening, however, development would first mean taking care of their mental and physical wellbeing. What they ask for is lot more basic – they want their own captured resources back from the military and from the foreign investors. These resources have been unfairly and arbitrarily taken away from them in the name of security and development. Give them back their illegally captured lands, sea and forests. Leave the beaches to the local fishermen to dock their boats on as they have traditionally done, instead of developing them as tourist attractions without the concurrence of the local people. This would in fact posit little benefit to the local people and instead benefit already wealthy investors from outside. If the government is sincere about lasting development and achieving reconciliation through development, then they ought to revive and re-energize the rural economies instead of impairing them thus. The current drive in 'development' the way it is going, is serving to impair rather than promote reconciliation.

Peace-building: Unless and otherwise there is some political will exerted by the Sinhalese politicians and leaders of this country to ensure genuine reconciliation – which would involve

ensuring that the Tamil speaking minorities (including the Muslims) have equal rights and dignity – there won't be genuine peace.

Discrimination and prejudice is currently enshrined in our constitution. The precedence given to Buddhism as a religion and Sinhala as a language ensures an unfair advantage to the majority community over the minority communities. The constitution needs to be revised so that all people living in this country feel acknowledged as equals with their due rights in place.

We are running out of time. Many of us working in this field of reconciliation and peace-building, fear that unless the government does not get all these basic processes right within the next two years, it will be too late to achieve lasting reconciliation or peace in this country.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

These days, the government through ONUR is taking the initiative to collectively celebrate important festivals of each others; Thai Pongal, New Years, Eid, and so on. It is a good practical process to recognize each others' values as well as bring ourselves together in harmonious celebrations.

There is another nascent idea that they are seriously considering at the moment. That of memorialization. The government is considering the introduction of an annual nationwide process to officially mourn the many tragic lives lost to war. Just this first step of recognition– that there is a valid need by the different communities affected by war to mourn as well as memorialize their dead– is a step in the right direction being taken by the government. Such an initiative is long overdue but at least they are finally considering it. I hope it materializes soon, for the sake of the affected communities who yearn for such a process to remember and mourn their lost kith and kin properly.

As for religion's role in reconciliation, I am ambivalent about this. Many people might value the religious dimension while a few who are like me would not. Personally I do not think very high of religious leaders. However I also recognize that many people who have undergone trauma depend on their faiths for fortitude and healing. This should be acknowledged and thus religion be given its due place in reconciliation measures, if the people themselves desire it.

However apart from these feel-good mechanisms, I also strongly advocate that the government take concrete steps to ensure justice, accountability and non-recurrent. Here are just a few of the measures the state needs to take in this regard:

1. Institute constitutional reform and adequate devolution of power from the centre to the provinces. Ensure through these measures that everyone is treated equally, with their due rights in place.
2. Tender a public apology to all the war-affected, particularly the Tamil Community: an acknowledgement from the leaders of this country to the various war-affected people, is long overdue in this country, especially to the Tamils. In this apology, the elected

leader of the country (President) has to tell the truth – as well as answer all the thus far dodged questions by the State on charges of war crimes.

3. Ensure that the Transitional Justice mechanisms with its four pillars of truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-recurrence is enacted through transparent and credible processes and reforms.
4. Generate and sustain the political will to build communities, promote co-existence and eradicate all forms of discrimination while addressing the corruption within the political parties and its leadership transparently in the country.

In all these processes, the government also has to ensure women's inclusion and participation. There are due processes needed to achieve this too:

1. First of all, ensure that the 25 percent quota allocated to women is achieved not only in local bodies, but also in parliament. This has to materialize in tangible form for all to see.
2. Each of the political parties, apart from ensuring nominations for women, should also give women places in their decision-making structures. Women should have ample pathways to become leaders, secretaries and treasurers in these political parties. Added to this, the central committees of the political parties should have at least 50 percent representation of women.
3. There should be an independent Women's Commission, just like the Human Rights Commission, with a mandate to review all laws, mechanisms and structures operational in the country, with a view to curbing violence and oppressions against women.
4. Bring about legislation that recognizes women's worth and contributions to society in terms of both paid and unpaid labour. A social security structure needs to be set up for women (with an immediate prioritization for war-affected women), to ensure a sustainable and dignified life for them.

Conclusion

It is hard to say at this point whether genuine reconciliation is possible or not in post-war Sri Lanka. Yet we have to try. We just need the political will. It is not that the people across the different communities are unable to co-exist – we can see ample evidence that they can, and in fact they do co-exist; quite harmoniously. It is mostly the politicians and their party politics defined by ethnic, religious or nationalistic demarcations that seek to divide us. If only our politicians could get past politicking over these kinds of divisions, then reconciliation would not only be possible but achievable.

CASE STUDY – 08

Name :	withheld on request
Profession :	none/housewife
Age :	34
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	Northern Province

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation is living in harmony with people from all communities and religions. It means living together in a peaceful situation and having access to the same level of livelihood opportunities, information, political rights and justice. I believe that the understanding between the government and us as survivors of war is the most important part of reconciliation. We have been victimized by the government during the last phase of the war and reconciliation is only meaningful when the government is accountable for its wrongdoings during the war and comes up with solutions for the unresolved problems such as disappeared people, lost livelihoods and security threats we face as ex-combatants and as wives of ex-combatants.

I don't believe that reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka in the nearest future. As a survivor of the war and having experienced the horrible events that followed the end the war, I remember every event and I am not yet ready to accept the 'other' as one of us. If you ask me whether I am okay living with a Sinhalese family next door, the answer is that I am not. I am sure that Sinhalese who experienced war feel the same way. In a country where two communities don't interact and yet not ready to forget the past, reconciliation cannot take root. The current government seems to be trying hard to ensure a better future for the country and to resolve our problems. At the beginning of this year, families who have disappeared members were called for meetings through the AGA office and we were promised that we will be given an answer about the disappeared members, they promised that they will make sure to find the disappeared people or at least let us know if they are alive or not. I see this as a first step towards reconciliation. It is just a promise, but it is better than the promises we were given before.

I have been trying to locate my disappeared husband for seven years now, but this is the first time the government promised to at least give the information whether he is alive or dead. I am looking forward to seeing how they are going to keep their word. I have faith in this present government; however I think it will be foolish to believe that this government can change everything. Even if President Maithiripala Sirisena wants to bring change, the fundamentalist and chauvinist parties in this government will not allow any changes that might benefit Tamils. There will always be a party or a politician to complicate the system.

First of all, people should be informed about what is reconciliation and how it is being done. I do not know enough about reconciliation or transitional justice. I don't know what government does to bring about the change. I don't know how we can participate. When there are a lot of people like me who don't know about these terms and concepts, it is not realistic to expect reconciliation from people like us. In order to bring reconciliation and national unity, people in

grassroots should be informed about these concepts and process. There are a lot of NGOs and community based organizations across the country now. These organizations can help people to understand reconciliation, because only someone who understands about reconciliation can work towards reconciliation on a personal level and community level.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I am a housewife and a mother. I spend most of my time making sure that my family is safe. My husband used to be an important member of the Intelligence Unit of LTTE. Since the day he went missing, I faced many problems from army, CID and the community as well. The Army and CID always wants question me regarding my husband. I have spent remarkable amount of time visiting NGOs, camps and government offices in search of my husband. When a woman does not have a husband, the society judges her and does not respect her. It is somehow re-victimizing the victims. My point is that as a housewife and someone who doesn't have a strong connection to the outer world, I doubt that I can do something to promote reconciliation in this country. I am afraid to share my experiences with others because of the consequences I might face. This country is not safe for women like me.

Last year, I was approached by Channel 4 to share my story with them. As my husband and I are ex-combatants, they wanted me to share the experiences of the aftermath of war. I participated in their documentary on the condition that my identity should never be revealed. I believe that being able to talk about our past, our struggles and our experiences should be the first step toward reconciliation. We are not prepared to let go of the grudges we hold against the Sinhalese. If that is the case, how can one expect us to be reconciled? I was a combatant for 10 years and I lived under the LTTE's regime for so long. It feels different living here now for the last seven years. Sometimes, reconciliation doesn't make any sense to me.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Uniting women from all communities will make the reconciliation process easy. Although women do not have power and control over the political decisions that are made in this country, women have the power to change situations in their communities. There are a lot of women in the working sector all over the country. Most of the working women are in the larger industries such as garments, tea estates, and food companies. If the women in these working places have a good relationship among themselves regardless of their differences, that can be considered as reconciliation.

In order to increase the interaction between our community and other communities, government or private sectors can recruit women from all religions and ethnicities and let them work together. For example, if there is a garment factory in Jaffna, instead of recruiting all the workers from Jaffna, hiring workers from Sinhala and Muslim areas will be helpful in interacting with other women, thus, creating connections and understanding among women. How can we reconcile with a community we don't even interact with? I heard that the garment factory workers visit the factories in other districts sometimes. That is a good example how people network. All communities should be given chances to meet and interact with others.

Most of the women in war-affected areas are widows, differently able, and poor. Government should focus on resolving their problems by either giving them compensation or by providing them with livelihood opportunities. By livelihood opportunities, I don't mean what we were given in these past few years – poultry, cows and sewing machines. I mean sustainable livelihood opportunities to generate a monthly income, because we are worried about our daily food and children's education. When we have all these problems lined up, we don't have the time and energy to think about reconciliation and peace building in Sri Lanka. The government should try to deal with what is important right now and then find a mechanism to implement reconciliation through that.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

I don't think there is a difference between reconciliation and transitional justice. I have heard about the concept of reconciliation, but I haven't really heard about transitional justice until now. I think reconciliation is achieving harmony among the citizens of Sri Lanka and transitional justice is making sure of the achieved reconciliation's sustainability and credibility. Other than that, I don't see a clear difference between these two concepts.

I didn't know of any initiatives implemented by the state to ensure reconciliation. However, I know that the present government is trying to find the disappeared people and to bring justice to us.

Link between Development, Reconciliation and Peace Building

Development will be boosted by achieving reconciliation in Sri Lanka, because reconciliation would mean equal rights for all and fair chances for all communities in business, commodities and education. If all our problems are addressed and our areas are as developed as the Southern areas, then we can begin to assume that there is peace. Peace building can only begin after we accomplish reconciliation. I suppose that it would take a long time to accomplish reconciliation.

Reconciliation is irrelevant to development. Whether we have reconciliation or not, there will still be development, because development is a natural process and vital to our country's future, but reconciliation is not. We can still have development without reconciliation as we do now. For example, we are developing now in our infrastructure, education and agriculture, but we don't have reconciliation. I don't think the development now is affected by not having reconciliation among the communities.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

Religion is not an important aspect in reconciliation. Religions are often complicated. Religious leaders seldom make good leaders/politicians. They manipulate people into their own agendas; we have seen enough examples of the bad influence of religion. It is better that we try to promote reconciliation without religion.

Government can do a number of things to promote reconciliation between communities.

1. Help people, especially women, to interact with other communities such as organizing cultural trips or celebrations where women from different communities come together and make friends. As there are many WRDS and NGOs across the country, connecting women should be an easy task.
2. Address the issues of the victims/survivors of war: finding disappeared family members, providing compensation, solving the issues of unemployment, land issues and safety issues of ex-combatants.
3. Making sure that our representatives have a voice in any decision that is made in the top level: at the moment, most of the people we chose to be our voice in national politics are succumbed to the party politics. Even within TNA, there are mini parties and it is the same with other parties as well. Politicians and decision makers should put aside their own benefits and commit themselves towards resolving people's problems.
4. Include more women in decision making and prioritize women's issues: undeniably, women are the most affected and oppressed group of people regardless of their religion, language and ethnicity. The government should do everything in its power to make sure that we have a violence-free and just society for women.

It is important to have more women in power to speak for women. There should be proper strategies to take the opinions of grassroots women to the parliament. At the moment, I don't know of a strategy that does that. May be that is one reason why many of our problems are still not addressed. I understand that not a lot of women like to be in politics or put themselves in the front, because our society does not allow them to; but I wish the society supports women who want to help other women. I think if women are given enough support and power, they alone can achieve reconciliation.

CASE STUDY — 09

Name :	Mahaluxmy Kurushanthan
Profession :	District Coordinator, Mannar Women's Development Federation (MWDF)
Age :	47
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	Mannar

Views on Reconciliation

Sri Lanka's civil war caused rifts between the different ethnicities living here by constantly clashing them against each other. Repairing these rifts and ensuring that such clashes do not happen again, is the process of reconciliation. It is important to note in this context that what the affected parties themselves need and want for such a reconciliation process should be taken into account. As direct stakeholders, their active participation and views should be incorporated to ensure sustainability and success in a meaningful reconciliation process.

In this post-war context, all the ethnicities living in the country need to be reconciled to each other, not just two particular ethnicities. This aspect has been disappointingly overlooked thus far. We keenly feel this in our region because here in Mannar, there are more of Tamil-Muslim clashes occurring than Tamil-Sinhala clashes.

Let it be noted however that the present government with President Maithripala Sirisena at the helm is better than the last government as far as reconciliation is concerned. At the very least, they appear to have stopped the practice of actively pitting one community against the other, as we saw in the case of Muslims and Tamils in Mannar, in recent years. Politics played a part in dividing us and keeping us at loggerheads with each other. Let us hope that a more responsible government will take the initiative to reconcile us now. It is not going to be an easy process but at least now, there is some hope on the horizon.

There are some strategies though that the government needs to get right. Currently decisions and policies affecting the people at the grassroots are being implemented in top-down mechanisms. Such an approach, due to lack of judgment and knowledge by those at the top, are not really suited in what they deliver to the people at the grassroots. As usual, the most vulnerable to be hit by this are the women. As an example, let us examine the housing schemes being built for the war-affected; in order to ensure community ownership and participation, those who planned the scheme factored into account some beneficiary contributions, assuming that there would be an able-bodied man about the house to earn as well as contribute in physical labour towards the building of the house. This completely marginalized female-headed households whose special needs were not taken into account by the scheme's planners.

Due to patriarchal structural norms in the Northern Province in general, women have traditionally depended on men to be the breadwinners, as well as to do work like masonry or carpentry. That is still very much the case in many areas. War however, and the loss of a disproportionate

number of men have caused chaos in women's lives by blurring the lines between what they can do, should do and are equipped to do. Not taking all these churning sociological considerations into account is a mistake.

In future therefore, there has to be a bottom-up process in decision-making, at least on matters that affect the grassroots themselves. Ask the people at the grassroots directly what they need and want for proper reconciliation; also ask how they want their solutions implemented. Extra-importantly make sure you involve the women in this process.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I was born and grew up in Mannar which was badly affected by the war. Twice, my family was displaced to India in the thick of war (in the 1990s) due to which my studies were disrupted. I was studying for my O-Levels the first time and was scheduled to sit for my A-Levels the next time. I had been a studious and high performing student but ultimately I could not sit my exams at crucial stages, marking a full stop on my educational ambitions. The frustration of this led me to take up social work within the refugee camps we lived in, in India. Without anyone asking me to, I took it upon myself to clean the common toilets there. I also appointed myself a truant officer and kept an eagle eye on the refugee children attempting to cut school. This was a common problem there among our children as many of their war-traumatized parents didn't supervise them adequately.

As my own education had been disrupted, I was keen to ensure that theirs would not be any more disrupted than it already was. The Aid Agency working for our welfare in India – the Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation (OFERR) noticed my voluntary work in our refugee camp and appointed me as one of their health workers. That's how I got into a lifetime of social work via aid agencies and community-based organizations.

As District Coordinator of MWDF now, we have done plenty of reconciliation work here in Mannar. Our circumstances in this region were especially challenging because even post war, politicians were seeking to pit the two main communities resettling here (the Tamils and the Muslims) against each other. We therefore had a lot of work to do to overcome this.

The resettling communities of Muslims and Tamils were dissimilar in their specific circumstances, and therefore needs. This is because the types of displacements undergone by the two communities were markedly different. While the Muslim community was evicted en masse in 1990 within 24 hours, the Tamils went through periodic displacements during war which culminated in the 2006 – 2009 period.

Among the Muslim community therefore, there are a lesser number of war widows and disabled. However, they had lived in limbo for nearly 20 years in refugee camps. They had been stripped of all their wealth before leaving. In resettling, their primary issues and needs took a backseat to Tamil resettlers' needs in many districts in the Northern Province. These are all unfair machinations that they continue to battle, and we support them in trying to overcome this.

We took to working with youths in youth collaborations across the two ethnicities to stem the tide of this conflict-mongering. We also worked with women's networks in a similar manner to achieve the same. Apart from this we wrote and published several articles in this regard to raise awareness among the people and to prevent them from succumbing to these political machinations. At the community level, neither the Muslims nor the Tamils actually wanted fresh conflicts between themselves. Yet strenuous work needed to be done to stem a malignant maneuvering that was beyond the ordinary people's individual agencies to handle – which is what we have been engaged in handling, in Mannar.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Women, more than men, prefer peace and stability in society. They know firsthand that women and children are the first to suffer when their communities get embroiled in warfare. As approximately 50 percent of the population, if only we had proportionate representation in decision making bodies in society, we would ensure war would not be as easily pursued an option as it currently is.

Men by contrast, have little clue about women's lived realities or vulnerabilities, due to their male privilege which blinkers them from seeing the myriad ways in which the other half of the population is affected by patriarchal norms. Yet men are the ones who mostly get to make decisions on our behalf. You can tell from the decisions they take – ranging from law-makers at the State level to grassroots level community leaders – how little they actually understand the genesis of issues such as gender-based violence and sexual violence against women, or how to properly address them. At least on these kinds of cases where women are the ones directly affected, why can't the State incorporate women in the decision-making structures, in order to come up with adequate solutions?

There are so many barriers still, to women freely moving about or interacting with others. This is the reason that the various aid projects directed their way, to stabilize female-headed households and other women breadwinners, so often fall apart. To adequately address all these issues, women need to be included in the decision-making processes at all levels – from the government to the grassroots community-based organizations.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Transitional Justice incorporates four pillars: truth, justice, reparation and guarantee of non-recurrence. If all these were sincerely carried out, then it would go a long way towards achieving stability and thereby reconciliation among the communities living here. Even today, there are so many people searching for answers and/or justice for their dead or disappeared family members and friends. There are parents still holding on to hopes of finding their missing children, devoting all their energies to this endeavour and neglecting their remaining children in the process. Deliver closure to all such people through the transitional justice mechanism. Help them to move forward with their lives. Only then can a stable reconciliation be achieved.

Keep in mind also that transitional justice would entail treating differently affected groups in different ways in order to best address their specific needs. There are diverse groups of people in the post-war context who seek transitional justice:

- The families of disappeared people.
- Former LTTE cadres, including women, child soldiers and the forcibly recruited.
- Families dealing with loss of land and other assets (to the High Security Zones for example).
- Those dealing with war related sexual abuse including rape.

The above are just a few criteria by which we can categorize people who will need tailored transitional justice mechanisms to address their needs.

Women's participation in Transitional Justice

It is important to ensure 50 percent representation of women through the reconciliation process, including transitional justice. You can see for yourselves the multi-pronged backlash against women due to their lack of power and representation currently. They have to face backlash ranging from security lapses, sexual bribery, blackmail, exploitation, shame and stigmatization. To address all these adequately, women's proportionate representation is necessary, especially in politics and parliament.

Currently the laws pertaining to women's safety and rights are poor, and their implementation even weaker. We joke (in frustration) around here that if a person throws stones at a courts complex, he will be jailed; yet if he rapes a woman, he will walk free. That's the kind of legal system we have functioning at the moment, which is quite disappointing.

Very few women will be brave enough to push past the barriers set up in their way to seek justice in court. Yet even when they get this far, male politicians and religious leaders actively work to undermine their cases. They also heavily stigmatize such women in the societies they move in, thus preventing many other women from following their example. We actively need more women in positions of power to fight from our corner, and repel these attacks.

In the meantime, here are a few crucial measures I would recommend the State to take, in order to curb violence against women:

1. Sexual abuse, murder and robberies are rampant in the North and East these days. Formulate and implement strict laws to curtail these fearsome trends.
2. Have a special judicial system to handle women's cases such as rape or abuse with sensitivity. Right now, the system is further traumatizing already traumatized women – and for this reason many women prefer not to pursue justice within the existing legal system.

3. Have special courts to fast-track the process as well. A rape or murder case should not drag on for years till it drops out of public memory, and then have the perpetrators walk free citing 'lack of evidence'.
4. Bail should be denied to perpetrators of serious crimes against women such as rape or murder. Right now they walk out easily with the help of political or religious leaders, if they happen to have such contacts.
5. Even though Sri Lanka is a signatory to CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the Government has not implemented the legal and judicial system needed to follow up on it. Even the existing laws put in place to safeguard women are not being implemented properly which is unfortunate. Our women are not free of molestation if they choose to be more active in public life. This could be over something as simple as walking on the street unescorted by a male. This is not an individual's problem or a particular community's problem. It is the entire country's problem and so the government needs to take adequate steps to resolve it.
6. The Government needs to function as a Secular State that looks beyond ethnicity, language and religions to serve its citizenry as a whole. Prioritize serving the most vulnerable first – which include war-affected women and children. Take care of their basic needs such as food security first.

Development

Reconciliation needs to be in place first before you can think of any meaningful development. For that, conflicts over land disputes, resource allocations, building places of religious worship without community participation on community lands, forced settlements and so on, need to be resolved first. At the moment, such issues are still causing and perpetuating conflicts between communities.

Now we see forced Sinhala settlements in Tamil areas. All these need to be stopped. If we want people to develop, we need to ensure a stable, secure and harmonious environment for them in the current context. Only then can they be freed of internecine squabbling and clashes to concentrate on ideas and ideals for their future – leading to development both for themselves, and consequently the country.

As for peace-building – well, if the reconciliation process is carried out correctly, then peace-building will automatically follow. Thereafter, even if occasional conflicts were to arise between communities, they will have the maturity and capacity to resolve it themselves.

As of now though, we are clearly not yet a stable, post-conflict country with reconciliation and peace-building fully achieved. If that were the case, the various Tamil diaspora members living abroad, yearning for their homeland, would feel comfortable enough to come back and resettle here. Yet they are not doing so. Instead they are still taking their tales of woe to the international community, demanding justice.

In the number of years since war ended, why have we not made much progress in assuring the minorities living here, and their diasporas abroad, that this is a safe, equitable and peaceful country for them to live in? This is something to ponder on.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

The Government recently formed a task force to review and implement transitional justice. Right now they are raising awareness at multiple levels regarding their work. They claim that their mandate is to review all that has happened in previous years in order to ensure it does not happen again.

However the people are afraid. Their past experience in this regard is that whenever they testified in front of the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) or similar truth-finding commissions, they drew threats and abuse from CID, TID and military personnel for their trouble. Nor have they gained much in terms of progressive outcomes from these commissions – no answers to their questions or justice delivered so far.

Thus the people have mostly lost faith in these sporadic overtures proffered by the Government. We have little idea about what the government can do, or even will do, with all this information that they collect from us, anyway.

As for religion, I believe that people's freedom to practice their respective religions is a fundamental right that should be protected. All religions should be treated equally however. As we see now, Buddhism has precedence over the other religions and that is not a desirable state of affairs.

It is my personal opinion however that religions and religious leaders serve more to fragment the people rather than unite them. I would be wary of incorporating religion into the reconciliation process therefore. Yet people's wishes should be taken into account. Many of them are religious and so if they want religion to play a role in the reconciliation process, let them have it. Otherwise, if it is not expressly asked for, I would recommend that it be avoided.

Recommendations to the present government to promote reconciliation between communities

1. Bring the communities together to interact, discuss, and identify their needs – at rural, provincial, and district levels. Include representation of people across all possible demographics in this process: language, culture, religion, gender etc.
2. Open up avenues for increasing women's representation in the political sphere.
3. To facilitate the above process, study all the barriers and oppressions curtailing women from becoming active in politics currently. Then actively work to remove all those barriers via new rules and regulations specifically formulated to address them. In the meantime, support women with extra help (positive discrimination), to grow in the political sphere; keep at this until such time as it can be said that all barriers to their

organic entry and growth in the political domain have been removed and therefore they would not need special support.

4. If such measures are not taken, we might be forced to form a women's only political party single-handedly to address our rights.
5. Enact laws to ensure peace – and crack down hard on those who work at causing conflicts, whether religious, ethnic or any other conflicts. Trouble-making in this regard should not be tolerated.
6. Study the mechanisms employed by other multi-cultural countries to ensure peace and stability, especially in post-conflict scenarios. Analyze the best-fit mechanisms suitable to Sri Lanka and apply them here.
7. Engage the Diaspora's participation in the reconciliation process; don't completely dismiss them all as a bloc of trouble-makers as there happen to be sizeable elements among them too, working for reconciliation and development in Sri Lanka. Teaming up with them and hearing their ideas and solutions might be of value.
8. Launch and maintain a government website, dedicated to the reconciliation / development process, detailing all strategies and activities in this regard. Make it a transparent process that people can track.

Also make it an interactive website where people can express views, ask questions, receive answers, and give feedback.

CASE STUDY — 10

Name :	Rajany Chandrasegaram
Profession :	Women's Rights Activist
Age :	45
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	Northern Province

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the process whereby communities split apart by conflict are reunited. So in Sri Lanka, this process would involve reconciling communities split apart by war.

As a women's rights activist from a minority community, I am often asked what reconciliation means to me as a woman. In response I do not bring up that hackneyed idea that women are going to be good at reconciliation because it starts from individual homes and we are brought up to be peace-makers and home-makers, so on and so forth.

Too many people around here spout this line of thinking which I find reductionist. I say women should have a place in the reconciliation process simply because we are half the population. That's all.

The keen disappointment I feel in this regard is that we women are sidelined in this country's reconciliation process, due to the prevalent chauvinistic perception that we do not have the capacity to contribute in a meaningful manner. This is currently a source of much distress to me, this blatant discrimination, which keeps us women from playing as much of a role as we could in the reconciliation process.

I do believe however that reconciliation of communities within Sri Lanka is actively possible. I frequently observe at inter-community discussions I arrange to explore what went wrong in the past, as well as how we can heal and move forward collectively, that the people are more than willing to reach out to each other, forgive, forget and move on. It might be a long-term process but I have hope that it is certainly possible, given what I have seen, of the people themselves. It is politicians and government officials who divided the communities, not the communities themselves. If they would only stop doing that, reconciliation is certainly a given among our communities.

To achieve this however, women's participation is vital; and I don't mean just those elite women sitting in air-conditioned offices in Colombo. I mean the women at the grassroots themselves – they need to be included in any measures of reconciliation. They were the ones most affected. Their contributions are necessary for us to learn and strategize on how best to take this forward.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

Most of my work focuses on bridging women and enabling them to form bonds across conflicted ethnicities; Tamil-Muslim communities in Jaffna; Sinhala-Tamil communities in Mullaitivu etc. I work to bring them together in groups to interact as well as work with each other so that they can understand and forge friendships with each other. If the women of the communities form such friendships, they can form lasting bonds.

Apart from this, in a personal capacity I actively reach out to and talk to other war-affected women across all ethnicities. This is very important. There are so many undocumented stories of women's war trauma. So many people anguished by having no one to listen to their tales of woe. Listening alone serves a great deal to heal and soothe such people. In addition, we get to learn about the multiplicity of women's experiences across the ethnic divide, due to war. Whether Sinhala, Muslim or Tamil, they were all badly affected, especially at the grassroots. Whenever I get the chance, I also take these stories to committees and agencies that could dispense justice to these people, where possible.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Whenever there is a conflict, women are the worst affected. They should play a role in addressing their own rights, and the resources directed to rectify them, at such times. The issues of loss of dignity for women, security hassles and land rights are some examples that they directly have to deal with. So they should be the ones with the right to strategize and implement solutions to their specific challenges too. More often than not, the men are blind to these gender-specific challenges.

Recently in Jaffna for example, the Tamil and Muslim communities got together to prioritize what needed to be rebuilt for our communities to move forward. The Muslim men came alone without the women as is their practice for community meetings – and they said that the primary need in their community right now was the building of adequate drainage channels. When we met the women later however, they all stressed that they needed house toilets more than drainage channels. The men did not value the issue of privacy and security in such matters as much as the women – and had not even considered the women's priorities when putting forward what it was that their community urgently needed for resettlement.

Similarly, in cases of voting; Women in certain communities continue to be told by their husbands whom to vote for. Some of these political campaigners therefore, don't even bother to address women at all in their campaigns. This needs to be actively challenged and changed.

Most importantly, the issue of rape and sexual abuse needs to be swiftly dealt with. Often these heinous crimes of war are not addressed properly. The affected women are patronizingly told to go for counselling. The male leaders working at national level reconciliation are not bothered enough to bring up these matters to seek justice on them, or work to prevent their recurrence.

We need female leaders for this across all ethnicities – to acknowledge what happened, ask forgiveness, and to heal – as happened when Pakistani women went as a group to ask

forgiveness from Bangladeshi women for the rapes committed by the Pakistani Army in their 1971 war.

Our male leaders are unlikely to consider or prioritize such measures, but these measures are also vitally important to the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Both reconciliation and transitional justice mechanisms should work together in parallel, to ensure lasting peace and future development. There are fears in some quarters that justice sought through the transitional justice mechanism might serve to wreck the reconciliation process, but I disagree. Transitional Justice is necessary in post-war Sri Lanka if reconciliation is to be meaningful.

The many mothers and wives campaigning for justice for their dead and disappeared; they are not going to be able to move forward until they have the answers they seek. They want justice for their disappeared or dead sons, daughters and other relatives, not necessarily reconciliation. Reconciliation however would be possible only after ensuring justice for such affected people.

As for development, when there is sectarian conflict still broiling under the surface, real development wouldn't be possible. Development work in this context would serve just to paper over the cracks, until they burst open again. So for meaningful development to occur, meaningful reconciliation has to occur first.

In the Tamil-Muslim society in Jaffna for example, they now have separate schools though they initially attended the same schools before the conflict. This is not development; it will just serve to further drive the rift between the two communities. It is a disappointing development brought about by the conflict and inadequate reconciliation, after the conflict.

Regarding reconciliation's link to peace building, both are necessary and intertwined in Sri Lanka. Due to conflict and the hegemony imposed on the minorities such as 'Sinhala only' and Buddhism, it still serves to irritate me whenever I see this hegemony in operation in the North – such as the Sinhalese tourists arriving by the busload to see the various landmarks of war victory they have triumphalized all over these war-ravaged areas.

Recently I was traveling to Colombo in a bus and the bus driver put on Sinhala songs to be broadcast over the sound system. Usually the practice is to have Tamil songs playing in Tamil areas and Sinhala songs while passing through Sinhala areas. Here I noticed that Sinhala songs were playing while we were still in the North, so I got up and told the driver to change to Tamil songs. It is not that I meant to be petty but due to the hegemony thrust upon us, we have come to resent what we ordinarily would not – the Sinhalese language and Sinhala Buddhism as an ideology.

Some genuine and long-standing measures of reconciliation and peace building should take place if we are to heal over these rifts, yet I don't currently see this happening.

Women's Needs to be accounted for in Reconciliation

Throughout the reconciliation process, it is important to keep in mind that there are specific women's issues which need to be specifically addressed and resolved. Here are just a few such issues:

1. Address issues of gender-based violence and sexual abuse against women swiftly. The justice mechanism should be efficient and not the current sham it is.
2. Study all the different ways women's dignity and rights are abused and address them. Get the women to make decisions on policies to address this. Males shouldn't be the only ones or even the majority stakeholders to make decisions on such issues relating to women, as is currently the case.
3. Do away with customary laws allowed to be practiced by communities that are discriminating against women; such as thesavalamai for Tamil women and sharia for Muslim women. The men in the same communities will try to suppress these issues from being addressed as the patriarchal customary laws work in their favour – but the women are being sidelined and being oppressed from addressing it on their own. The government should not allow this to continue.
4. Serve the transitional justice that the mothers and wives of the war disappeared and dead ask for.
5. Ask the affected women themselves about the kind of compensation they want in case their relatives cannot be restored to them. Take steps to ensure adequate compensation, whether the matter be missing relatives or something else such as withheld land by the security forces.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

Personally, I believe that religions are more often than not, the source of conflicts between people. Communities should be allowed to practice their own religions freely but it's best to leave religions out of official reconciliation strategies. Religion should be a private matter, not a public one.

There are other steps that the government can take however to promote reconciliation. Here are my recommendations in this regard:

1. Reform the constitution into a secular one representing and respecting all resident ethnicities and religious orientations within the country.
2. Ensure food security and sustainable livelihoods for the war-affected people. They need to have these basic needs ensured before they can move on to think of more long-term issues like reconciliation.
3. Train government officials to be sensitive and aware of people's needs and how to best serve them, especially with reconciliation in mind.
4. Form committees to drive reconciliation. Ensure that these committees are well represented by the different ethnicities, social classes, and genders.

5. Recruit effective mediators in these communities to promote reconciliation.
6. Ensure and implement a strong and effective legal / justice system to deliver justice to the wronged.

In order to ensure that women's perspectives are also adequately represented in the above measures, the government should additionally have their policy makers contact and establish dialogue with women's group leaders across the country, from the grassroots upwards through the various social strata.

Also, use media to disseminate information and raise awareness on the various women's issues plaguing the country. This will help to bring about a public change in consciousness and thus engender positive civil movements towards change.

CASE STUDY — 11

Name :	Menaha Kandasamy <i>Trade Unionist, Workers' and Women's Rights Advocate, and Freelance Consultant</i>
Profession :	General Secretary of Ceylon Worker's Red Flag Union
Age :	50
Ethnicity :	Tamil
District where she works :	Kandy (Head Office), Central Province, Southern Province and Kegalle District

Since 1991, Menaha Kandasamy has been advocating for the rights of plantation workers, and workers from all over the country. She has been working with female workers in the plantation sector as well as other sectors. She is the founder of both the Red Flag Women's Movement (women's section of Red Flag Union), Kandy and the Domestic Workers' Union, Kandy. She mobilized plantation workers since 1991 and later formed as Red Flag Women's Movement in 2005. In the same period she also began to mobilize domestic workers who did not identify themselves as domestic workers and then registered them as a union in 2012. She unified them as societies fighting for collective rights, and managed to formally register these organizations in 2012 after many setbacks. Her work revolves around mobilization, research, advocacy, trainings, negotiations with state and trade unions and awareness raising through magazines, bulletins and newspapers.

Reconciliation and women

Where there is a plurality of actors, no one must be subject to injustice or deprivation. This is reconciliation according to me. There must be consensus for a just and peaceful society. There can be no gender disparities in reconciliation. Due to the conflict-ridden history of Sri Lanka, we tend to confine reconciliation to the period of the war and war-affected areas and persons.

However, in line with the manner in which I defined reconciliation, it becomes imperative to any society torn apart by tension. Moreover, the war affected one and all in Sri Lanka. From state initiatives to the basic family unit, reconciliation is wanting in Sri Lanka. However, several initiatives undertaken in the name of reconciliation are carried out with a shallow or superficial understanding of the concept. By contrast, it is a very deep concept that requires, at times, the work of generations. Tackling symptoms and not root causes is an approach to reconciliation that lacks depth.

Plantation workers are an essential dimension to reconciling communities in Sri Lanka. Female plantation workers are especially subject to injustices, discrimination and violation, and mostly, invisibly. My stance is that women are indispensable to realize the ends of reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Realizing reconciliation in Sri Lanka

I think it is possible to achieve reconciliation in Sri Lanka, and I say this because the example of the times when Sri Lankans lived amicably and peacefully is a strong one. However, political expedience and partisan politics has made sure that such peaceful co-existence did not last long. Thus, we have the “genes” for reconciliation as Sri Lankans! The Sri Lankan society has many distinct groups classified according to culture, ethnicity, religion and class. There are problems that are universal across these groups, and are inherent to the distinct groups. Those who work towards reconciliation must work with a good understanding of these problems.

There are several actors in the field of reconciliation who need to carry out due responsibilities effectively. They include the state and state-oriented actors, non-state-oriented groups, labour and trade unions and so on. The role of NGOs is important. With long-term goals and missions that are not confined within a time-specific project, NGOs also can become key actors in reconciliation.

Children are an oft-neglected group when it comes to reconciliation, and this could be a fatal omission, because that is where the seeds are sown. Teachers and parents must be mindful of what they feed into children, and this certainly cannot be seeds of enmity and hatred. Racial divisions must be uprooted, not cultivated, in order to avert the passing on of racist propensities to the next generation. In recent times, we have witnessed a spurge of pro-racist groups who easily permeate through society by appealing to popular sentiments. The work done by those working towards reconciliation must supersede the divisive work of such groups. The media also has a very important role to play. There are two ways in which the media aggravates the divisions which are inimical to reconciliation. One is by subscribing to partisan politics and unknowingly sowing seeds of division. Secondly, by compounding casual patriarchy through mainstream media. It is disheartening to witness even the celebration of International Women’s Day revolving around gendered stereotypes like cosmetic products and cookery programmes. Finally, there is a need to monitor and scrutinize the activities of all actors, and censure divisive behavior. This responsibility indubitably lies with the State.

The role of women in reconciliation

Women play a vital role in reconciliation. However, most often, the enabling mechanisms which should allow women to participate, fail. For instance, the most recently passed National Minimum Wage of Workers Act 2016 excludes domestic workers. The role of the state is to be the guardian of vulnerable factions, and not compound those vulnerabilities.

Every individual is very important. The thought processes of individuals culminate into larger social outcomes, and this is why I am very careful about what I think. To think objectively, to unlearn and re-learn and to identify and eliminate bias in our thinking is of utmost importance. Apart from what I do in a professional capacity, I empower the women around me, enlighten where I see prejudices, and speak up on behalf of those who cannot for themselves. All my professional and personal efforts are directed towards this. At the crux of reconciliation lies the contribution of individuals, and individual thought processes are important.

The work that I do is not directly related to reconciliation, but if this is understood to mean the equal sharing of resources and opportunities, then my work is indeed related. We strive to promote female leaderships in our unions. Equal pay, equal opportunities and gender-sensitive employment all relate to female labour rights. With empowerment and enlightenment, female plantation workers can achieve much. Recently, the privatization of a state land worked on by women, was halted because female plantation workers raised their voices against it. There is a lack of initiatives relating to livelihood, sustainable development, skill and knowledge development, which can go a long way in improving the lives of female plantation workers. My work is primarily on three tiers. At ground level, empowering and working with workers, lobbying and exerting pressure on the government and policy makers, and strengthening solidarity among trade unions and like-minded organizations.

Female leadership

Historically, women have been deprived of opportunities in leadership capacities. Likewise, it has also been established that when given the chance, women make exceptional leaders. There is a common accusation that women are reluctant to take up leadership positions. I think it is easy to empower women and convince them into taking up leadership. What is difficult is to sustain women leaders in essentially patriarchal systems. How open are people, including women, to accept a woman leader? When joint leaders, i.e., a man and a woman speak to officials, I find the male leader being addressed and spoken to. Training, opportunities and an enabling environment are essential to foster female leadership.

Transitional Justice, Development, Peace-building and reconciliation

The above are all related concepts, and cannot be viewed in isolation. Transitional Justice is a prerequisite for reconciliation. To identify and close the lacunae in legal and political measures towards justice and peace, these concepts must be viewed as a whole. Human resources development and economic development are two sides of the same coin. A human rights and democracy based criteria is being increasingly used to assess development, and identify a

“developed” nation. This reiterates that all the concepts mentioned above are interdependent and are mutually reinforced.

Religion and reconciliation

Reconciliation must ideally be a secular process, with which religion must not be confused. Faith and the freedom to exercise faith are personal matters, whereas reconciliation has its basis in humanity. The focus must be on peace, which is the commonality in all religions. While religion can be instrumental in peace, unfortunately, we have witnessed the contrary too often. Religious tenets have been exploited to escape the common obligation towards peace building and co-existence, and have been cited to evoke division or incite communal alienation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The identification of root causes must precede any efforts at reconciliation. For this, research conducted must be in depth and comprehensive. Women’s security and vulnerability is a problem to women from all over the country. Illiteracy too plagues a significant number of women living in poverty. Law reform as well the implementation of existing mechanisms are important recommendations. The ripple effect of reconciliation must commence from individual thinking and span across to families, communities and the country.

CASE STUDY — 12

Name :	<i>Withheld on Request</i> <i>Psychiatric Counselor, Social Worker, has served as a Trainee Social Counselor, Volunteer, and Volunteering Teacher</i>
Designation :	Program Officer at an NGO in the Development Sector
Age :	26
Ethnicity :	Muslim
District where she works :	Kalmunai / Residence: Colombo

Reconciliation and Women

In my opinion, reconciliation is about building understanding through friendly relations. The defining characteristic of all humanity is diversity. We are all different, and our perspectives differ accordingly. To collate these perspectives is reconciliation. As a country affected by decades of war, reconciliation is all the more important to us. I find trust to be the vital prerequisite for reconciliation. Justice and forgiveness are significant as well. Without these elements a process of reconciliation cannot be facilitated. Women hold the potential to be drivers of reconciliation.

I think reconciliation in Sri Lanka is within the scope of realization. The war left several thousands wounded in many ways. A good understanding has to be reached between the perpetrators and victims of these wounds, for healing to take place. The government and civil society must come together and make concerted efforts towards realizing reconciliation.

Modalities of achieving reconciliation

Sri Lanka is a pluralistic society. At the root of making this plurality work in practice, is building understanding across diversity. Also the central failure in making this plurality work has been the inability to empathize with one another, and hence the tendency to alienate and demonize the “other”. We must strive to enable this understanding, however difficult the initial “ice-breaking” stage may be. All religions advocate tolerance, respect and dignity for all lives. Reconciliation must also be adaptable to grassroots level. I think the following five elements are imperative to reconciliation.

1. Trauma and wounds resulting from the war must be addressed. Victims cannot move forward without healing. For this, victims and perpetrators should be able to connect.
2. Non-state actors like NGOs and religious institutions have an important role to play in connecting people.
3. Many women in the post-war context are Female Heads of Households. They must be economically and personally empowered, in a sustainable manner.
4. Violence must be hauled out of our formal and informal systems.
5. Personality empowerment is a sustainable means of achieving peace, which is often overlooked in Sri Lanka. Positive reinforcement and capacity building are methods I recommend.

Personal involvement in efforts directed at reconciliation

I am currently engaged in a youth exchange program. A group of young people with a possibly violent, war-affected past from the areas of Batticaloa, Galle and Jaffna are sent to one another's districts for a three-year program replete with vocational training, empowerment and exposure. The participants are selected from varying cultures and communities. They are taught languages besides their mother tongue, and receive cultural exposure. They are expected to return to their communities and build other youth. Most youth in war-affected areas find themselves disempowered and lacking a will to engage in anything. This exposure activity ties up with what I initially said about reconciliation – that it is about understanding and empathizing with the “other.”

Reconciliation, Transitional Justice, Development and Peace-building

I find peace building to be the main task of these four concepts. They are all important and are vital in reconciling the past with the present and moving forward into the future. All of them relate to justice and peace, and how the former is a precursor to the latter. Policy makers must bear these concepts in mind during the decision-making process. For this to occur they must be aware of them, and their implications.

Challenges faced by women

Women are adversely affected by conflict. Their vulnerabilities multiply and create intersectional ways in which these vulnerabilities may be exploited. As aforementioned, many Female Heads of Households may lack the resources, personal and economic, to lead a household. Women must be empowered. In educating and empowering a woman one builds a family, and an entire community.

Religion and reconciliation

Religion is important and can be used as a device in reconciliation, especially to avert violence. Unfortunately, this has not been the reality. A return to peaceful religious tenets can be impactful in achieving reconciliation.

Reconciliation can be achieved, on the other hand, independent of religion as well through individual self-restraint, self regulation and exposure.

Conclusions and recommendations

The state has an important role to play. Existing biases and divisions must not be compounded. An equal distribution of resources and benefits will avert misunderstandings between the communities and placate communities which feel wronged. There must also be transparency with government efforts. Cooperation and coordination from all actors will contribute towards concerted efforts. People anguished by the absence of closure should be allowed to grieve and enabled to find such closure. Women who have been marginalized must be re-integrated into society and empowered.

CASE STUDY — 13

Name :	Anusha Alles <i>Lawyer by qualification. Head of CSR at Brandix</i>
Occupation :	Head of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Communications, Brandix Lanka
Age :	41
Ethnicity :	Tamil (Colombo Chetty)
Place of work :	Brandix (<i>The work of Brandix spans across the country, from the East downwards.</i>)

Reconciliation and Women

My understanding of reconciliation is two-fold. Firstly, it is the general impact of the term. It is important not to identify the “affected” persons in the North and East of Sri Lanka as “victims” or “internally displaced persons”. I am not sure if they feel like victims, but we sure do make them feel that way when we apply these labels. This identification of them as victims is also disempowering. The real object of reconciliation is to bring them back to mainstream society and integrate them.

Secondly the brunt of the war fell on women. It is a proven fact that women are the most adaptable and resilient. The true lack is with regard to opportunities. Some of these women do not have the means of getting themselves out of the situations that they are in right now. Such women need a helping hand, but not to be treated like “victims”. A lot of the aid or help we provide could be directed by the motive to self-elevate ourselves. I find this to be the wrong attitude. In fact, there is much more that we can learn from them, than they can from us. To treat them with dignity and respect is at the core of reconciliation, to me. I always recall the experience of the Tsunami with awe, in this regard. The Northern community reeled back from the Tsunami faster and better due to their resilience because they have been through the war. This is in contrast to the rest of the country, which is still struggling to bounce back from the disaster which ended a decade ago.

The need for opportunities is so great, that if you give them an inch, they could make a mile out of it. This need for opportunities exists within all vulnerable communities, and the South cannot be forgotten in this regard.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka is possible. The general population and the private sector have a key role towards its realization Government is focused on politics. Moreover, in reality, a government always has its limitations, and this was elicited during the floods in Sri Lanka in May 2016. The burden is with the general public and private sector to spearhead reconciliation and development. However, this is not an unchallenging process, and is easier said than done. I cannot reiterate enough that mindsets have to be changed. I also feel that we have got over

the rudimentary Sinhala-Tamil racism, which I have not witnessed in excesses in any ordinary person as of late.

In terms of modalities, empowerment is key. Providing a means of income and economic empowerment are imperative. If this happens, reconciliation will follow as a matter of course. This also has to happen across the country, and does not mean empowering only one community.

It is equally important to start unification with the next generation. The children and youth must be brought up to be race-blind and oblivious to ethnic differences. Our common identity as Sri Lankans is our strength. Though important, it is sadly lacking today, that people are able to take pride in their differences, without drowning in a sense of superiority.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Women indeed have a significant role to play in reconciliation. Women are more emotional and tend to forgive more easily. An important way in which they contribute towards facilitating reconciliation is how children are brought up. Sri Lanka has a generation which has known nothing but war. This generation must be healed, and this occurs through empowerment, education and skills training.

I do not like to identify women as victims. What they truly need is opportunity, over and above the means, and this is what Brandix focuses on as well. We try to give the workers basic necessities, opportunity and openings. Women do what they can with what they have, and an opening will suffice for them to grow.

As the Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, I would like to view "helping" as an obligation rather than charity. There is so much that Brandix has to give back to society. Ninety percent of staff at Brandix are women, most are also sole income earners for their families.

Reconciliation, Transitional Justice and Development

The quest for justice should not turn into vengefulness. The affected need to be economically empowered in order for them to come out of their predicament. They left their homes because of the war and now their lands and assets ought to be returned to them. What is duly theirs cannot be short-circuited.

Reconciliation and development are akin to two sides of the same coin. There cannot be one without the other. Development is reconciliation and reconciliation leads to development. They go hand in hand. However, it is important not to let the two goals compete with each other. This will defeat the objective of achieving one, which is also achieving the other analogously.

What has to change for women before reconciliation can happen?

The government needs to be educated about the plight of women, and what women need. A huge mind change has to happen in the system. The right people need to be doing the right jobs. A man, or for that matter, a woman, who does not know anything about women's

issues cannot hold positions of influence which impact women. When I say education, I mean education beyond qualification or degrees – it is the exposure and awareness of women's issues in leaders that can bring about change. Female representation is much needed, and this is true of organizations as it is of politics.

Moreover, with regard to various sectors and organizations involved in reconciliation and development, there can be no competition. All have to be singing the same song. Like mindedness and unanimity in desiring the same goals are crucial. Hidden agendas must be cast aside, and the focus must be on pursuing the same ends and tackling common issues. This too, is rather challenging, and easier said than done.

State's role in reconciliation

I am positive that the new government can achieve reconciliation. The alternate option is to hand the task over to the development sector. However, regardless of whether it is the government or any other sector, playing politics has no role in this. Though it is a long road ahead for Sri Lanka to reconcile, when the efforts at reconciliation are jeopardized by "politics", the task becomes all the more onerous.

It is also alarming that as a country our thinking is patriarchal and male leadership-oriented. This is surprising in light of the fact that Sri Lanka is home to the first female Prime Minister and first female Governor of the Central Bank. This needs to change, and the new government has the resources to do it.

The Role of Religion in Reconciliation

Religion should be kept out of reconciliation. Religion is too personal a matter to be part of the efforts aimed at unifying a diverse country. Asserting a sense of superiority is also dangerous to the essence of reconciliation. For an example, if it is said that Christians are better acquainted with reconciliation, that will only sow seeds of division and enmity. Religious division can trigger a religious war, and for a country that is struggling to rebuild from an ethnic war, we cannot risk the possibility.

CASE STUDY — 14

Name : **Dharisha Bastians**
 Occupation : Journalist
 Age : 36
 Ethnicity : (She did not wish to specify)
 Place of work : Colombo

Reconciliation is essentially a hearts and mind exercise and I think gender has little to do with it. What needs to be acknowledged and celebrated is the idea of being Sri Lankan. This great commonality has to be celebrated more than our differences. In Sri Lanka I would consider the reconciliation process to comprise building trust between the North and the South. The warped perceptions that have developed overtime and have become compounded with the war have to be changed. Interaction and dialogue are crucial to this. Making an effort to connect with people who are different will help us realize that we are all essentially human with more similarities than differences.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

I think that reconciliation in Sri Lanka is well within the reach of realization. What I have learnt through my work is that rights are rights everywhere, irrespective of community or location. Everyone feels the need to have their rights recognized and respected. There is so much common ground to be found in how all Sri Lankans have been affected by the war, both in the North and the South. The commonalities in the ways in which all people have been affected can itself serve as a starting point for discourse. We can find ways to heal from here onwards.

The identification and acknowledgement that “you suffered as much as I did” will be sufficient, as that is the language of reconciliation which needs to be spoken between the two groups. In terms of the present, reconciliation is more than possible with the government no longer actively destroying every chance it gets to bring reconciliation to fruition. I find that people are beginning to speak the language of reconciliation more now.

Women’s Role in Reconciliation

Women play the biggest role in reconciliation. The majority of people affected by the war are women, as they are the remnant after their men who died in warfare, or during the course of the war. Women play significant leadership roles in heading their households and running their villages after the end of war. Similarly, most of the post-war issues are to do with women. Many issues that are impeding reconciliation or standing in the way of reconciling are about women.

While I do not intend to stereotype, women indeed have more empathy. They are able to recognize the suffering of another as equal to one’s own. It is this recognition of the universality of suffering in the Sri Lankan experience that lies at the crux of the reconciliation process.

Women are capable of leading the process of reconciliation, provided that their suitability is recognized and opportunities are opened up for them.

Rather than defining my role in reconciliation as a woman, I prefer to define the same as a journalist. I care and have always cared less about guns, military strategy and the defense aspect of war. Even during the war, my writing has been more focused on the people. I have preferred to keep my focus on the human cost of fighting a war.

I also opine that Sri Lanka should reconcile and heal for the sake of its own soul. We need not reconcile because the United Nations or the United States of America wants us to do so. We need to recognize how invaluable reconciliation is to Sri Lankans ourselves. Reconciliation has to take place in order to prevent history from ever repeating itself.

A main objective of my writing has also been to present the story of the 'other' side. The pain of the 'other', as felt by individuals or communities, cannot be discounted. This applies to presenting the stories from the North to the South and vice versa.

Reconciliation, Transitional Justice and Peace-building

Reconciliation and Transitional Justice cannot be distinguished from one another. There is such desire, at least on the part of one community, for an acknowledgement of their suffering and experience. This desire is reflective of their need for a space to grieve, and to validate their experience and suffering is an important requisite to reconciliation.

There is also a notion that reconciliation can be bartered for truth seeking. No community or individual can be pushed into reconciliation. There is much debate around war crimes allegation and prosecution, but I find truth seeking to be far more important than prosecution, which may not even adequately provide closure or justice to one and all affected by the war. Victims have to be brought to face the perpetrators, who they think caused violence against them.

Stories have to be heard and exchanged. There is much to do in finding closure, which is essential for anyone to heal. There has to be an acknowledgment that horrible things happened in the South as well. Their stories cannot be discounted. I would insist that the identification of everyone's suffering as valid and relatable is imperative to the process of healing.

Women's Involvement in Reconciliation

There are several issues faced by women which have to be addressed before reconciliation can be realized. This is also because the war adversely affected women and they are the ones left behind. Key issues which require attention include, gender based violence, empowerment of women and bringing women to the forefront of leadership, land rights, and livelihood issues.

A woman's perspective on reconciliation also amounts to invaluable input into the facilitation of reconciliation. This is because women are playing important roles in their communities, as well as on a personal basis, after the end of war. It is crucial that they are heard.

State's Role in Reconciliation

The role played by a government is important, because it sets the tone for the entire country's efforts at reconciliation. I find that the present government is starting to have discussions about credible Transitional Justice, after a long time since the end of the war. It is a very positive sign that the government has decided to give land back to the people who lost it due to the war. Another step forward was the appointment of civilian governors. When we visit the North now we are well aware that there has not been a scaling down of the military. Nevertheless, the fact that they have been confined to the barracks now, speaks volumes. Yet another sign of hope is that the language of devolution is beginning to be spoken in the new constitution.

That being said, there are several other areas where the government is making very slow progress: to name a few, Transitional Justice mechanisms and the problem of detainees. Despite the lofty promises which the government has made, there exists the question of whether the government has the political will to undertake and facilitate Transitional Justice. The leaders need to win their constituencies over to realize the goal of reconciliation.

The Role of Religion in Reconciliation

While it is not imperative, there is nothing wrong with religious leaders taking leadership in the process of reconciliation. What is important, however, is that the moderate, rational and sensible factions of each religion have influence over the shaping of opinions. We have witnessed radical monks in the South stymieing efforts as reconciliation, not to forget similar instances in all religions. A positive example would be the manner in which Catholic priests and Bishops in the North have been involved in the issues of accountability and disappearances in the North. Should a positive influence be wielded by religious leaders, this can create significant impetus and momentum towards achieving a people-driven process of reconciliation, provided how important religion is to the vast majority of the Sri Lankan populace.

CASE STUDY — 15

Name :	withheld on request
Designation :	Academic Lecturer
Age :	31
Ethnicity :	Tamil
Place of work :	Colombo

Reconciliation and Women

I would not be comfortable defining reconciliation. It is considered to have specific ideas attached to it. Discourses that the term “reconciliation” draws are problematic to me. It could be used as a tool for suppressing certain other demands, as well. Moreover, socio-cultural and religious connotations make it a sticky point. However, I can spell out what reconciliation is not. It is not forgiveness at the expense of certain other costs. It is also difficult to see reconciliation from a state perspective in Sri Lanka as well, as the state has manipulated the terrain of reconciliation, time and again.

The broad canvas of reconciliation suggests that the state should allow people to define reconciliation for themselves, rather than superimposing what reconciliation means. The passage of time may be important to reconciliation but it cannot be assumed that reconciliation takes place naturally over time.

What reconciliation means to a woman, as with all persons, is a matter of context. My understanding of reconciliation too, is subject to a context. Overt social, political, economic discrimination and marginalization are what women fight against. It must be noted that these discrimination are not even carried out unconsciously, most often.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

While reconciliation in Sri Lanka is not impossible, a lot of thought needs to go into realizing it. Possibilities of realizing reconciliation are very complex, and different actors have roles to play. A good grasp of this complexity is a prerequisite to working towards reconciliation.

Secondly, the politics behind the brand or the kind of reconciliation advocated for must be understood. In line with my understanding of reconciliation – that there is no fixed definition of reconciliation – there must be heightened awareness of the particular type of reconciliation we are pushing towards.

I do not see reconciliation happening in the near future. This is due to the presence of some social cleavages that are far too deep. The absence of cross-cutting cleavages is not merely with regard to ethnicity, but class, religion, gender, access to resources and socio economic disparities. This comment is with specific reference to holistic national reconciliation, rather than reconciliation for ethnic communities alone.

The Role of Women in Reconciliation

Women already play a significant role in reconciliation in their day to day lives. However, women need not be the only ones who need to play a role. Traditionally, women have played the role of and are seen as peace-makers, and that is a heavy duty to deliver. It is especially too much to ask of a group in society which has been discriminated against. Men need to start realizing that they have an equally heavy role to play, in order to realize reconciliation.

I view my professional role as an educator, important to the process of reconciliation. I reiterate that each has their own understanding of reconciliation. I perceive that my duty is to help students unpack their own understanding of reconciliation, rather than define it for them. Defining it for them will be contrary to my critique that the state is quick to mainstream definitions for reconciliation, something very personal. In other words it is the step that precedes reconciliation, i.e. disseminating an understanding of reconciliation, whatever that may be to each individual.

Personally, I try to be conscious about the lifestyle choices that I make, and how I interact with people. An awareness of how one lives is important.

My area of interest professionally is linguistics. Therefore, I am also interested in language based issues in Sri Lanka, towards which I think the State and individuals have much to do.

Reconciliation, Transitional Justice, Peace-building and Development

These concepts fuse into and build each other. For this reason, we cannot slot these concepts into stages and prescribe a step-by-step process where one has to precede the other. Because they are inter-connected, these ends need to be pursued analogously. Compartmentalizing them is an unhealthy exercise, especially when the state does so.

These terms are also loaded in terms of definitions, and cannot be restricted to their technical definitions. I do not see Transitional Justice as the legal concept, which would be rather limiting. Likewise, peace-building cannot be restricted to its definition in studies on peace and conflict resolution.

Reconciliation for Women

It is absolutely essential to bring in the perspectives and ideas of women into the process of reconciliation. Leaving out a segment of the population, during consultations and construction is extremely dangerous, if not foolish. However, it is also important to be cautious enough about where we apply the gender label and not to romanticize it.

Much has to be done for women before reconciliation can be take place. Sexual rights, economic rights, education and labour rights for women are important areas.

What is most difficult is to change or tackle is the socio-cultural aspect. It is difficult to break discriminatory attitudes and behaviour masked by culture and tradition. Due to the deep-seated nature of culture in the Sri Lankan society, it is difficult to navigate the terrain of a rights-based

approach. Battling discrimination perhaps has to be conceptualized differently. When one is born into and grows up in strong cultural or religious settings, one's thought process is far too deeply embedded in such a backdrop. Thus rights and culture can rub each other the wrong way, sometimes. I place the utmost importance on rights, but unfortunately, the Sri Lankan thinking is not well posited to welcome and engage rights readily.

The Role of the State

I am more aware of the many initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations, rather than by the state. It is not that the state is not aware that there has to be a gender-sensitive approach, but it is disregarding or nonchalant of the fact, in my opinion. Thus, state initiatives are lacking.

With the new government, the agitation for and movement towards female representation can be seen as a good move, albeit the possibility of the same being an eyewash. The attitudes of and about female leaders are in fact symptomatic of society at large.

Religion and Reconciliation

While there is no necessity for religion to be involved in the process of reconciliation, there is no reason why it should not be either. We have a fairly strong religious system in place, and for this reason religions can harness the process very well. Religions practiced in Sri Lanka can become the main domain under which reconciliation can be rethought. The notion that reconciliation is apparently embedded in Judeo-Christianity can become problematic to other communities. Therefore, reconciliation must be re-invented to suit the local context. For this to occur, religious institutions are well placed, as each religion presents a version of peace-building and reconciliation, albeit with changes in approach. There are different understandings of justice in each of the main religions present in Sri Lanka. These different ideas of reconciliation in different religions must be married so that reconciliation is facilitated.

CASE STUDY – 16

Name : **withheld on request**
 Profession : Senior Government Official
 Age : 52
 Ethnicity : Tamil
 Place of work : withheld on request

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation to me means the correct identification of the specific needs of the war-affected people, and working to satisfy them. As a District Secretary in a war-affected area, I feel reconciliation can include initiatives that might contradict State laws.

Take for example the fishermen's conflicts in certain Northern areas where Southern fishermen are also visiting to fish. The law states that Sri Lankan fishermen are free to fish anywhere within Sri Lanka. Yet if we allow Southern fishermen to come and exploit the newly resettled Northern fishermen's resources, the process of reconciliation would be further set back.

I blame the politicians for this, and not just the Sinhala politicians. Just like opportunistic Sinhala politicians in the South, even Tamil politicians hereabouts engage in rabble-rousing to undermine the course of reconciliation. They keep trying to widen rifts, splitting the people apart instead of smoothing things over.

Nor do they practice what they preach. If we, the Tamil people feel we have a legitimate demand for freedom and rights as minorities, we ought to extend those same rights in our turn to those minorities living in our midst. Yet we see Tamil politicians trying to suppress Muslims' rights and dues, which is shameful and disappointing.

Women's perspectives and the war's after-effects

We have suffered a lot as a people through the war, especially women. As a woman, I do not want to see a war arise ever again. I saw, and continue to see, so many heartbreaking repercussions of the war on the people – disturbed youths and children, endangered and exploited women, societal upheavals – war caused all this. Never Again.

As a senior government official, I get employment applications from local youths who passed their Ordinary Level Examination with flying colours – but they were then forcibly recruited by the LTTE or displaced due to the war and had their studies disrupted. They are clearly intelligent and capable adults now, yet without at least Advanced Level qualifications they are unemployable in the government sector. I feel so sorry that I am unable to get past such strict criteria to secure them employment. They were victims of circumstances beyond their control, and the repercussions of those are still being felt in their lives. They are part of a lost generation now. It's a daily reminder that life is unfair and will continue to be unfair.

Having undergone all these and more, the people at the grassroots absolutely do not want another war in their midst. Yet certain people with vested interests try to keep their blood boiling via rabble-rousing and rumour-mongering. Such antics also serve to set back the process of reconciliation.

Yet I do believe reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka. Ours is a small country and the two main ethnicities that went to war – the Tamils and the Sinhalese – have more in common than differences. We have similar cultures, religions, languages, festivals, attitudes and so on. Therefore what is to keep us from getting along? There aren't any insurmountable differences between us.

One needs only look at Colombo to see this. All the different communities are well-integrated and get along well with each other there, already. Why shouldn't we be able to achieve that country-wide? It's not impossible.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I think the need of the hour is first meeting people's basic needs – such as food security, sustained employment, women and children's rights etc.

Also crucial is instituting measures to heal the war-affected people's trauma by making available a wide range of healing therapies, including counselling and art therapy.

I also believe that it is important to raise awareness among the people on all that they have been misinformed about thus far – pertaining to their histories, leading to their present circumstances. There is a lot of nationalistic misinformation floating around on all sides, which should be addressed because they are serving to engender feelings of grievances, victimhood and/or aggravation in their target audiences which are not organic. That is to say, the common people do not form these opinions or come to these conclusions on their own. They have been (and are continuing to be) fed certain noxious narratives which ought to be challenged, if reconciliation is to be taken forward.

In my role as a senior government official, I have been able to do much work at least in some of these measures, which contribute to reconciliation. I have instituted measures to study and address people's basic needs and arrange for counseling of the war-affected.

In addition to these, there are so many other basic needs, apart from food security and sustainable livelihoods, continuing to plague the people – loss of legal documentation and certificates, lack of medical care and so on. The ordinary war-affected people do not feel capable of travelling to towns and getting past bureaucratic procedures in order to access services such as identity cards and land documentation on their own. Thus, we have arranged for these services to travel to the people instead – the officials and doctors have been facilitated to move about in vehicles from village to village offering mobile services directly to the people, in order to make their lives easier.

I have also organized forums to formulate strategies to address gender based violence, especially sexual violence against women.

We also regularly conduct trainings for the local people on women and child rights. Mainstreaming women and children's rights is a very important need in our communities right now and we have taken steps to address it.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

I would say women are the ones who can play a main role in reconciling communities. They are the ones worst affected by conflicts. Thus they are the ones who can give wise and practical counsel on how to reconcile as well as how to ensure that conflict never arises at these magnitudes ever again.

The State and non-State agencies working at post-war rebuilding and reconciliation should look into economic development geared specifically to women's needs. Their livelihoods, housing, education for their children – all these need to be planned for, whilst taking into account the women's specific circumstances and abilities to cope.

Women are strong and capable, but our male counterparts do not often give us that recognition. At village and district level meetings I chair, I am frequently told by complaining men that women are not suitable for certain jobs. The bias is so entrenched that they often think saying 'she is a woman' is argument enough.

Recently I was listening to a village headman in charge of their farmers' society telling me that the government Agricultural Officer appointed to their village was not doing an adequate job. When I asked him what the problem was, the all-male farmers' society simply noted, 'She's a woman.' I told them that being a woman was not a valid complaint in itself. They needed to specify to me exactly how she was failing at her job – and her sex was irrelevant in the matter.

Similarly, when we were looking to employ a cleaner for our office, one of my male staff members advised me that it would be better to hire a woman. His reasoning was not that a woman would do a better job at cleaning than a man, but that she could be paid less than a man for the same type of work. I told him that the government did not employ such arbitrary criteria; that whether male or female, if they did the same type of job over the same number of hours, they were going to be paid the same salary.

This is not the case in the wider community however, where men and women are paid different rates based solely on their sex. It is difficult to challenge the casual labour norms operating in these regions but I try in my own small way.

It is not that the men are unused to seeing women in power. They appear to have no problem accepting that I am a senior government official and that I got to my current position on merit alone, which is worthy of their respect; they do accord me that respect; and yet, they have

trouble accepting their female peers as their equals. These are entrenched societal notions which need to be challenged and done away with.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice

Reconciliation has to come from the heart. And if hearts and minds are to be soothed enough to reach such a stage, then transitional justice is the bridge that is needed to get us there.

People need to resolve and let go of (or accept) what happened to themselves and their loved ones, before they can move on. I myself have such issues buried deep within me. One of my brothers was abducted and murdered by fellow Tamil paramilitary forces while another joined the EPRLF and was later caught and tortured by the Army till he managed to escape abroad. To this day I have no closure over the fact that we never even got to see my elder brother's body after he was murdered by the militants. Whether it was the government's military forces or our own Tamil militants who inflicted this suffering upon us, we all need closure. Addressing all these crimes inflicted against us and delivering justice is thus important. Otherwise there wouldn't be a meaningful reconciliation.

It is important to include women's perspectives in this process. If you observe those who regularly attend the missing persons' commissions, truth-finding missions etc., you will note it is mostly women. They are the ones who feel the need for transitional justice to be served the most. They are the ones who clutch pictures of their dead or missing loved ones and cry out, demanding answers and justice. It is important that their voices be heard, their questions answered, and the justice they seek delivered.

Reconciliation's Link with Development and Peace-building

The process of development does help with reconciliation to some extent. Improvements to rural infrastructure leads to the generation of livelihoods and employment, leading to basic food security and sustainability, leading in its own way towards reconciliation.

As for peace-building, you can't work at peace-building without first achieving reconciliation. One has to follow the other.

I think these processes of reconciliation and peace-building need to be focused on in certain key regions rather than in the country as a whole. Or to put it another way, certain regions need far more work than others. For example, in many areas of the Northern Province, we have opened up only recently to a multi-cultural influence after being mostly a mono-culture in our own echo chambers for years through the war. People from these areas have many misconceived notions about the Sinhalese and Muslim people, mainly due to propaganda by the Tamil militants and politicians. They have only recently had a chance to intermingle with the other communities and form opinions by themselves to counteract this.

In Vavuniya by contrast, that is not the case – because there the three communities of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims managed to live together even during the war – thus they already

possess harmonious relationships and healthy understandings between themselves, which is not seen in the other districts.

To this day, our politicians are the trouble makers keeping reconciliation and peace-building from gaining momentum. Extremists on both sides (Tamils and Sinhalese) are fuelling each other in a tug of war, keeping the moderate majorities on both sides hapless.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

The government has already taken some steps to reach out to, and settle the problems faced by the war-affected people in these regions. These are a few:

- The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliations Commission (LLRC) did help resolve certain land issues. Through complaints made to them, some people had some of their withheld lands (by security forces) released, lost land documents restored, land disputes settled etc.
- The state also invested in public infrastructural development such as schools and hospitals to help the people be functional again.
- They also formed inter-religious committees, comprising religious leaders, to bring about inter-religious harmony, across all districts. These committees have been functioning for about 2-3 years now.
- As for religion's role in the reconciliation process – religion and religious sensibilities should be considered, simply because they hold an important place in the hearts of the people. I also notice that certain communities – mainly the Christians and Muslims – can be easily mobilized to do much good via their churches and mosques. So we can work with them in that regard. However, no one religion should hold sway over another. They should all be accepted and respected equally.

If asked what more the government could do to promote reconciliation, here are my recommendations:

1. Focus on reconciliation programs among the youths – they are the future of the country.
2. Communication is key – language is still a barrier in Sri Lanka. Therefore make Tamil, Sinhala and English compulsory languages to learn across all schools.
3. Make the schools intermixed – like Royal College in Colombo. Discourage the practice of having mono-cultural schools such as Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim schools. Let the children intermingle and learn firsthand to accept our country's unity in diversity.
4. Settle all outstanding issues of transitional justice – missing people, withheld lands and so on. Take into account people's sentiments when settling such issues – such as their attachments to their ancestral lands for example. Offering them land elsewhere does not always work due to this, which needs to be understood, sensitively handled and accommodated as much as possible. The people's satisfaction is important if they are to heal and move forward.

5. The government already has certain well-thought out policies to bring about reconciliation; the problem is their lack of effectiveness in implementation. For example there is a Government policy that documents sent from their Departments in the South to the North should have Tamil translations attached. Yet to this day, we continue to receive only Sinhala documents from our colleagues in the South. We can't read and understand these ourselves and have trouble procuring resource personnel to translate documents from Sinhala to Tamil over here. Over there however, it should be a simpler process for them to have the documents translated before sending, yet they are not following this very pertinent government policy, so that our work and lives might be made easier. Such oversights and gaps have connotations for reconciliation, or rather the lack thereof.

The Government should also take care to include women's perspectives in these processes. My recommendations as to how this can be done are as follows:

1. Gather feedback from village-based women's rural development societies (WRDS).
 2. Develop mechanisms to gather input from other women across all societies from the grassroots upwards.
 3. Employ and deploy female officials in equal numbers to male officials across all districts. I believe being a female senior government official in the Wanni soon after war ended, enabled me to identify and serve many unique problems faced by the people, especially the women.
 4. I am not saying that men can't do this but you need women too to supplement their views and to incorporate aspects which men might miss. Women officials are also considered more accessible by the common people – the people view me as a maternal figure rather than an authoritative figure so they feel comfortable enough to approach me and tell me what their problems are.
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CASE STUDY – 17

Name : **withheld on request**
 Profession : Senior Government Official
 Age : 54
 Ethnicity : Tamil
 Place of work : withheld on request

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation entails the different communities living in Sri Lanka, harmoniously and equitably sharing space and other resources with each other. This ought to be constitutionally taken care of for them.

As a woman, I can say that women are the ones most affected in conflict, and therefore the ones most benefiting by reconciliation and peace. We want to protect our families, bring up our children in a safe environment, and ensure quality education and employment for them in a viable democracy. In short we seek stability and sustainability overall. For all this, we need reconciliation in this post-conflict country.

Despite all that we've been through, I still believe reconciliation is achievable. Sri Lanka is a part of South Asia where democracy has had a long history of stability and exposure. A few of these countries might be prone to military or other dictatorships but Sri Lanka and India have not succumbed to such over the years.

Moreover, we have only 3-4 main communities living here, speaking two main languages. We have cultural similarities with each other. Before 1957, we all lived together, studied together and worked together. It is still possible to regain that state of affairs. To this day, I believe that the people themselves are not inherently racist towards each other. It is only the politicians who cause rifts between the people to achieve their own ends. Conflict in Sri Lanka did not flare up on its own. It was provoked and manipulated. If only such manipulation were to be stopped, we would have no problems living together harmoniously as Sri Lankans of different ethnicities.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I too was affected by the war. My husband lost three of his brothers to crossfire, and landmines. I lost my childhood home in Jaffna and later, the house we built in Vavuniya as well, a brand new stately house. My properties were taken over by the security forces. The Navy set up camp on my Vavuniya property for 25 years and released it to me only after 2010.

Yet I do not complain because I know I am one of the luckier ones to have survived in this country. There was no loss of life or limb within our own family. My husband and I were able to earn stable salaries to provide for our children through the war. I am grateful for that alone.

Many of our relatives were not so lucky and so fled abroad in droves. My family is the only one in our extended family network left back here in Sri Lanka. Despite the war, my husband and I made a conscious decision to stay on here because this is where our roots are and we wanted our children to grow up here.

Now, in a personal capacity, I try to work with academics and various other professionals across diverse fields in conjunction with women's groups, to bring about better understanding between the different communities. We function as an unofficial but well networked think-tank, reaching out to each other, brainstorming and learning from each other.

Also, in my official capacity as a Government Official, I have implemented certain programs to ensure development and reconciliation in the communities I work with. For example in Vavuniya soon after the war ended, I formulated a program to develop promising youth of rural areas into future leaders. We selected motivated, intelligent youths across the villages for a three-month extension program at universities, where they were mentored in a wide array of courses and practical activities: business planning to identify and utilize the natural and human resources available in their communities, disaster management, psycho-social programs, leadership workshops, reconciliation and networking between the different communities, and so on.

I started this as a UNDP funded project in 2011 in Vavuniya while stationed as a senior government official there. It was an instant success and was quickly adopted all over the Northern Province by other Government Officials. It has now come East as well. The program is all about empowering youths who would otherwise sit at home moping after finishing their Advanced Levels, because they couldn't enter University. They tended to be unemployed because their career expectations cannot be met in their rural areas, and their aspirations are too high to follow their parents' traditional livelihoods.

These youths tend to be an overlooked human resource in our districts, so the program is actually about fully utilizing their potential to build up their villages. Through them now, we are able to disseminate powerful motivational ideas as well as practical development oriented systems to their distant communities; so it is a very useful system overall.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Right now we don't see much of women in reconciliation, because women's participation in politics is very little. Since the so-called reconciliation process is being handled by the politicians (who are predictably messing it up), we don't see women at the forefront of the reconciliation process either.

It ideally should be handed over to the citizens to deal with themselves. In such a context, women can play a major role. They have to come out as a force to be reckoned with, all these community-based organizations and other women's forums and groups. They should wrest the management of the reconciliation process from the politicians and handle it themselves. The politicians were the ones who divided us in the first place. We can't depend on them to unite us.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Transitional justice is about consoling and compensating affected parties. The reconciliation process should run parallel to that so that both processes work in tandem. Otherwise it would not be a success. We can see this in our own communities between the rehabilitated LTTE cadres and the community they once ruled over – their own community to begin with. The government invested heavily in rehabilitating the cadres – but it ignored the common people who were in many cases oppressed by the LTTE. When former cadres returned to their communities after being away in the rehabilitation camps, they found the people angry and hostile towards them. This situation is still causing rifts and conflict within the community.

One aspect that we often forget when talking about reconciliation is the reconciliation within communities that are needed, quite apart from reconciliation between communities. During the war years, sections of the same communities oppressed others in their midst, and many of those conflicts continue to broil and ferment to this day. We ideally should take measures to address these as well.

Regarding development; I don't consider development as limited to just infrastructure development, which is the mistake many of us including our politicians make. True development would encompass the fields of health, nutrition, education, employment, women and children's rights and so on. If all these are developed simultaneously, then reconciliation would certainly be possible.

When development professionals talk about development, they stress on what they term the 'soft components' the most: survival, stability, sustainability, tolerance, resilience, accountability etc. All these are essential for development in its true sense. This is the mistake that the previous government made. They thought simply constructing roads and schools could heal a war-wounded people. It couldn't.

I teach a Disaster Management Course as a visiting lecturer to Masters students at Peradeniya University. In the 2013 batch, one of the Sinhalese students once asked me, "Ma'am, my Tamil friend from Kilinochchi said he was not grateful to the government for their shiny new carpeted road as his people were literally starving. He was bitter that the road could not be chopped up and eaten, because food was what they needed most. Is this true? If the war-affected community's primary need there is food security, why did the government ignore that to build a road instead?"

This shows that if the Sinhalese community only understood what their fellow Tamils are suffering, they would reach out with empathy and understanding. Lack of information on what 'the other' is going through in our country now, as each community lives in its own bubble, is part of the problem.

Peace building? I do not see how peace-building as a concept relates here. It is not the right context. Peace-building is something you engage in to solve minor conflicts – say two villages fighting over a common well. Here, the situation is much more serious; thus it is reconciliation that is needed, not peace building.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

In order to ensure reconciliation the government should ideally:

1. Remove all clauses facilitating discrimination, either by religion or ethnicity, in the constitution.
2. Do away with sectarian schools catering exclusively to their different communities. There shouldn't be Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim schools. There should only be common secular schools where the students learn the same subjects with the option of choosing native languages and religions as optional subjects to be studied separately.
3. Remove the communication barrier currently operational in the country. Tamil speakers should compulsorily learn Sinhala and Sinhala speakers should compulsorily learn Tamil, at school.
4. Make it illegal – in fact, have it constitutionally enshrined – that political parties cannot cause or exploit divisions among people, especially as regards to race and religion. There should be severe punishment mandated for those who violate this.
5. All citizens should be ensured equal rights in Sri Lanka and their cultural and religious rights should be secured in the constitution.
6. Ensure devolution of power to the provinces.
7. There is still doubt and lack of understanding prevailing over what the provincial governments should (and could) handle apart from what the central government should handle. Have an institutional body of professionals study the matter and put out a clear and transparent document of guidelines on the issue, to guide the central government and the provincial councils, as well as the common people who make up their constituencies – specifying clearly what the demarcations are.

Also yes, religion has a role to play in the reconciliation process too. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of the people. As we know, some communities such as the Muslims identify themselves by their religion and not their ethnicities. If it is that important to them, then it needs to be acknowledged.

Some people however are wary of religions and religious leaders in general because they find religious leaders to be manipulative. I say, be aware of their potential to manipulate and use it for reconciliation instead. People listen to their religious leaders. So rather than leaving such leaders to divide communities, co-opt them to unite the communities.

Addressing women's issues and participative representation

The government needs to take steps to address specific women's issues if reconciliation is to move forward:

1. Settle the outstanding issues of transitional justice. All the affected women's complaints should be heeded and settled if possible, or else they should be compensated. This

applies to women across all the communities, not just Tamils. All women suffered, so find out precisely how they suffered and then address it.

2. Women and children's safety should be ensured.
3. Facilitate their economic stability.
4. Put a stop to exploitative agencies abusing the disempowerment and vulnerability of women – such as fraudulent foreign employment agencies, microfinance institutions and leasing companies who sell on credit at massive interest rates. All these agencies are moving into rural villages and hard selling their goods and services to clueless, vulnerable women who are not savvy enough to escape the nets being cast over them. It is high time the government looked into this social malaise that has developed post-war and took measures to protect the women.
5. Organize the reconciliation process in such a way that policy makers in Colombo gain access to, and have interactive sessions with the women at the grassroots. Academics, development and other professionals, religious leaders as well as women across community-based organizations in the country should get together and brainstorm on how to best implement reconciliation measures amongst themselves. Representative participation is important.

In the meantime, the women at the grassroots themselves should take the initiative to form themselves into a power that the government needs to reckon with. Just like trade unions. Teachers, doctors etc., have powerful trade unions that are united across the country and they thus have power to negotiate with the government. Women's organizations across the country should do the same. Rather than waiting for the government to give you power, reclaim your own power.

CASE STUDY — 18

Name :	Janooriya Begum
Profession :	Project Officer in an NGO
Age :	44
Ethnicity :	Northern Muslim
Place of work :	Mannar

Views on Reconciliation

Reconciliation is something that should come from within us. It is an intrinsic sense of harmony brought about by inter-cultural understanding, transcending barriers placed between us. Women should be given their due place in this process. As a woman as well as an aid agency field officer who visits multiple villages across Tamil and Muslim communities in Mannar, I have found women to be more adept at reconciliation. They are much less sectarian in their thinking, and quicker to reach out in friendship, than the men of those same communities. I think reconciliation work would have a higher chance of success if the women were to be more actively engaged in it.

There is also much structural discrimination against women in our cultures. So I also hope for a reconciliation between the genders one day. The female sex ought to be given their due recognition and respect as contributing, intelligent members of society. As of yet, we do not have this.

Personal Experience of the war

In 1990, as a Muslim I was evicted from the Northern Province at the crucial age of 17. I was in the midst of studying for my Advanced Levels; I had just completed my first year.

I was considered brilliant in my studies and my parents had high hopes for me – but after eviction, those studies were hopelessly disrupted. In Puttalam where we relocated to, the schools did not have enough space to accommodate all the refugee children that first year in 1990. So we could not attend school. After much lobbying, the following year, they allowed our community to conduct classes at their schools in the evenings, after their own community children were done with their schooling in the mornings.

My parents were elderly and so devastated by the eviction that they were unable to work. My father became paralyzed on one side. He had been a wealthy landowning farmer in our community prior to eviction. To help the family survive, I went for coolie work at a local farm and attended A-Level classes in the evenings. All my hopes of acing my A-Levels and entering University were shot by then, so I didn't focus on my studies. Priorities had changed. Now, years later, I bitterly regret my missed chance of a University education.

When we came back to our villages in Mannar after the war ended in 2009, two decades had passed and our village was unrecognizable. The jungle had taken over the village. Though some

houses were still standing, ours was not. It had been completely demolished. Ours was a big stone house once filled with happiness and laughter. We had grown up in that house, and no other building will ever replace it. I still frequently dream of that house.

Currently I am living in a thatch hut. We were not included in the Indian Housing Scheme in our area because the Tamil community feel that Minister Rishad Bathiudeen is covering the housing needs of the Muslims in Mannar. He is covering the needs of those closest to him, whether Muslims or Tamils first, and I, an ordinary villager, do not come high on that pecking order.

Many people in surrounding villages have their permanent cement houses completed now but my family still lives in a thatch hut. Yet the Tamil community in our surroundings blames us for supporting Minister Rishad Bathiudeen. Do they consider what rights we would have if we were to vote for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) instead? Does anyone in the TNA ever speak for us or consider our needs? So long as the Tamil politicians keep marginalizing us as Muslims, we will have no choice other than to vote for our own Muslim representatives.

It's a sad state of affairs. We do want integration and reconciliation but our politicians keep dividing us.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I firmly believe that change should come from within first. So my priority has always been to constantly challenge myself – to review and change my views, my personal biases, my activities and capabilities – and grow through the process. If only each individual would take the trouble to exert and examine themselves like this and change what they don't like or is not suited for their harmonious living in society anymore, the country as a whole would see a change.

Apart from this I also take the opportunity offered by the Aid Agency where I work, to do a lot of work on my own initiative, in the cause of reconciliation. My workplace has given me some milestones to achieve in community work – I not only achieve those but go over and beyond them to achieve targets and goals of my own. In order to do so, I have actively worked on myself to be a transparent person of integrity whom people can trust.

My personal goal is to build a women's group from the grassroots, who cut across many villages – who will eventually grow enough in numbers until they cut across districts – and thereby grow to be a nationwide body with close links to each other. I have already made inroads by forming such a group – the KESSA group, originally formed with members across five villages in Mannar. The group has since expanded into more villages and we are growing steadily.

The original five villages have a volatile history of Tamil-Muslim relations. Before 1990, the area covering these five villages was occupied and farmed, almost entirely by Muslims. After the LTTE evicted us in 1990, they repopulated these areas with Tamils – mostly the family members of the LTTE themselves. They too eventually got displaced during the 2006-2009 period in the final stages of the war. When these displaced Tamil families came back to resettle after 2009, so did the Muslims who believed the land to be their own, but who had been away for two

decades. Conflict immediately arose on whom the land belonged to, and relationships between the two communities were ugly at first. When I too resettled in my original area, close to these villages, I found it a toxic environment to live in. Neither community had anything good to say about the other, they hated each other with an active vengeance, and communication was limited to hostile spats.

When I set out to work forming a women's group comprising of both Muslims and Tamils at this time across these villages, it seemed an impossible task, they were like the proverbial snake and mongoose at each others' throats.

Come see them now though. Just a few years later, they are now the best of friends, sleeping over and eating at each others' houses and actively helping each other out as and when needed. They have bonded in genuine friendships, which is heartwarming to see. I have personally witnessed this change unfold in relationships across these villages. This is what gives me my motivation to continue. I want such networks and friendships to form throughout the country.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

For success in reconciliation, women's participation is essential. That adage about every successful man having a woman behind him is absolutely true. It is a truism that is not limited to only individual families either. It applies community wide and state wide. When men alone take decisions without consulting women, they are bound to fail. Therefore include and consult the women in the process if you want to see success.

Women should have more representation in structural organizations across the country, beginning from the grassroots village organizations all the way up to parliament. We need more representation in politics. The men have a hegemony over these structures that women need to break through. For this, some active policies by the State are needed to enable women to gain their fair share of access in these structures. That applies even to government jobs. I was going through the telephone directory recently to jot down numbers of government offices, and I noticed that men hold nearly all the top-most posts. Only the deputy posts seem to be allocated to women, if that. Change that system. We need to have more women at the top-level government positions too.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Transitional justice is good but not necessarily vital in my opinion. As a member of the Muslim community evicted by the LTTE, who returned to Mannar only after the LTTE had been decimated, I can say that we Northern Muslims have no expectation of transitional justice for what we went through. We are not even seeking it. From my community's point of view, transitional justice is a sham. Who is going to be held responsible? Who is going to deliver it? What could they do?

Return our lands? Return our houses in the condition they were in? Return all our stripped wealth? We haven't a hope of all this and so we don't even discuss it. What is the point? Even if all the above were to be compensated for, would it remove all our trauma and lost years in

exile? Thus, in the absence of any mechanism of transitional justice for us, we Muslims yet seek reconciliation with the Tamil community.

I have to say though, the situation is different for the Tamil community members demanding transitional justice. I have seen those Tamil mothers traumatized and living in limbo or with little hope that their disappeared children might still be alive somewhere albeit being tortured in prison. That is a terrifying situation to be in, no mother should ever have to go through that. For them, transitional justice is absolutely needed. Give them answers, even if those answers are that the children are dead. Give them closure and help them to move on.

Also for war-affected women, especially widows, there is no safety net in the society we live in, so transitional justice would have to make up for the shortfall. Not just the truth, justice and guarantee of non-recurrence parts of the Transitional Justice process, but also the compensation part of it, which is vital to alleviate the sufferings and marginalization of such women. Deprived of their male breadwinners in the family and not equipped to be breadwinners themselves, compensation to make their lives sustainable is essential. Therefore Transitional Justice matters more to women than to men.

As for development – I don't see any link there. That is not to say therefore that development related works should be stopped in war-affected areas – but on its own, I don't see how that would lead to reconciliation. All those massive roads and buildings that the Government has built in Kilinochchi for example doesn't seem to have served to bring about reconciliation.

As for peace building's link with reconciliation, you can't even attempt peacebuilding before reconciliation. If you do attempt that it would be mere eyewash. I see many NGOs engaging in this currently. The so-called peace building they have worked on will dismantle once the NGOs themselves are gone, because there is no genuine reconciliation underneath. You need to build a foundation before you can build the edifice. Otherwise the whole thing will come crumbling down.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

Religion is important but it should also be a private matter, not a public one. I wouldn't recommend that it be prioritized in reconciliation measures therefore. Attention should be paid to religious sensitivities, however, so that they might not inadvertently be stepped on, thereby causing offence to people, which could in turn set back the reconciliation process. Be sensitive and aware therefore, but do not overtly bring religion as a concept into reconciliation.

If asked what the government can do to promote reconciliation, I would offer the following recommendations.

1. Implement a constitution which would be non-partisan with regards to religion, ethnicity, language or gender.
2. Have 50 percent representation of women at conferences and committees formed to address reconciliation. Among these, also ensure a fair representation of women from

the grassroots, and women who have researched and interacted with the grassroots. The process shouldn't be steered by Colombo's elite alone, as is usually the case. I have watched with skepticism, Colombo Tamil women being chosen to represent rural, war-affected Tamil women at Colombo forums. Such token actions are a sham. Give adequate representation to the affected parties directly – and don't squash their voices. Allow them to speak and be heard.

Frankly though, I am skeptical that the government could or would work at this. Even their well-meaning moves fall flat, because bureaucracy and elitism is entrenched in the government and its various organizational arms. People who get jobs in government offices, even if they are from the grassroots, thereafter settle into a bureaucratic, elitist way of life because they think that it is their due as government officials. They want other people to go to their offices and kowtow to them calling them 'Madam' or 'sir', but don't do much work to earn their respect.

Just for an example, the Government has created posts such as Rural Development Officers and Women Development Officers to work among the people at the grassroots and empower them. Yet in my experience, these two particular officials stationed at our district hardly ever bother to visit our villages, even though their work is supposed to be field based. They prefer to sit in their air-conditioned offices and behave with uppity insolence if the villagers go to them to access any services. We are perfectly aware that they are not fulfilling their mandate, but we can't do much about it.

I am not looking to the government therefore to solve our problems. As a member of the grassroots, I am working at the grassroots to mobilize ourselves into a strong enough body to address our own problems. That is the only possible way.

CASE STUDY – 19

Name : **Margaret Croos**
 Profession : Former IDP/Volunteer Social Worker
 Age : 59
 Ethnicity : Tamil
 Place of work : Mannar

Personal Experience of the War

I was married with young children by 1985, when the war started to intensify in our area of Mannar. Periodic displacements with young children – ensuring their continued schooling, shelter, nutrition etc., as we shifted from place to place amidst artillery shelling, bombs, and shootings – were very difficult.

As the children grew older, not just keeping them alive but protecting them from being forcibly conscripted by the militants or getting arbitrarily arrested by the army, became a frightening concern. I watched over my children like a tigress yet lost one to forcible conscription by the LTTE. They are all thankfully alive today, although severely traumatized still, especially the one who was conscripted. This son has lost part of his foot and walks with a limp. All of them (two daughters and four sons) still carry shrapnel in their bodies, which has given rise to various physiological complications for them over the years.

Moving continuously from place to place without any environmental or economic stability led to the breakdown of affected families in many cases, including mine. My husband stopped caring about the family and began extra-marital affairs. He also took up drinking and was abusive in the home, so I divorced him. The repercussions of divorce on a woman are heavy in our culture but I decided it was still better than the repercussions of staying married to an abusive man. I brought up my six children singlehandedly after 1990. Afraid for my daughters' safety, I sent them to live with one of my sisters in Mannar town. From there, one of them gave up on her education and eloped at the age of 18. I managed to educate all my children except for this daughter, and apart from her and the conscripted son, who is unable to hold a job due to post-traumatic stress, they are all earning, functional members of society today.

My second son was an adult working for an NGO in war-affected rural areas when he was conscripted in 2008. My other children had by this time fled into Mannar town, which was under government control and as such did not undergo much fighting. This son of mine however was working amongst the war affected people for an international aid agency, and refused to leave them behind to ensure his own safety. So I stayed with him. After he was conscripted by the LTTE however, I lost all contact with him and did not see him again till May 2009. By this time, I too had been displaced all the way up to Mulliwaikal. I was in severe trauma not knowing what had happened to my son.

In the last days of the war in May 2009, someone told me that they had seen him lying unconscious at a makeshift hospital on the way. I immediately made my way over there and managed to find

him. He was barely conscious and heavily injured. As we made our way over to the security forces in order to cross to safety, I cautioned him not to tell them he had been conscripted by the LTTE. They were repeatedly announcing that all those who had been with the LTTE, even the forcibly conscripted ones, had to surrender to them. We feared the worst for such cadres so I was trying to protect my son from whatever fate lay ahead of him at the hands of the armed forces. As we neared the army soldiers however, they asked my son if he had been with the LTTE, and he nodded his head. He was whisked off my hands before I could so much as blink and I was left screaming in agony. I had just found him only to lose him again.

Thereafter, at Menik Farm where I was placed as a refugee, I would run to police, army and government officials or international aid workers who visited, begging to have my son back. I was frantic with worry as there were horror stories floating around, about what the government was about to do to the captured LTTE cadres.

I can speak Sinhala so I spoke in their own language to visiting government officials. They assured me that my son was in safe hands and nothing bad would happen to him but I didn't believe them. When international observers visited, I would rush over and speak using the few English words I knew. "I want my children, I want my children," That's all I knew to say, and I kept parroting it. I couldn't understand their accented English but I sensed they were trying to comfort me too. One white lady from the ICRC reached out and hugged me tight when I burst into tears at the frustration of not being able to communicate adequately to her. I wanted to tell her that my son was a good person. That he had given his best years to serving his people. That he had not fled to safety even when he could have done so, only to serve the people. That it was not his fault; the LTTE had conscripted him and he should not be arrested or punished on account of it. Yet I couldn't. The international and government officials I spoke to tried to comfort me by offering me food, chocolates or medicine. I kept pushing those offerings away, insisting, "No, no, no I want my children."

A month later, I was lying curled up in a ball in my tent when someone came and told me that the government had set up rehabilitation camps for the LTTE cadres they had detained and were publishing the names of those cadres enlisted in different camps. In that day's Tamil newspaper, the *Virakesari*, the first batch of names had been published – and my son's name was apparently on it. For the first time in ages I came to life. I ran out looking for a copy of the *Virakesari* paper. Only one family in the camp bought the paper and I ran from tent to tent asking for their whereabouts before tracking them down. There indeed was my son's name in the paper, proof that he was alive and well at last. I rolled the paper and whisked it about my head like a flag, whooping with joy.

I revived with this piece of good news, and again set about my volunteer social work in the camp with gusto. Hygiene at Menik farm was a disaster. Flies were buzzing about everywhere. Toilets initially were open grounds and the flies would buzz from there to the open kitchen area where cauldrons of food were being prepared. I would wet my towel and go and swat the flies away from the kitchen area.

Because I could speak Sinhala, many people came to me to translate what they had to say to the army and police personnel or government doctors tending to us. I did this willingly; there were instances however when I was not always willing to act as an interpreter, as that could lead to conflict for me too. Once for instance, there was a violent conflict between two families in the camp in which one person apparently brandished a knife – and the police came to settle the matter. In order to speak to the concerned parties, they needed me as an interpreter and came to collect me first. I knew what they were coming for as soon as I saw them approaching me and ran off. Embarrassingly, they gave chase. I did not want to be involved in that matter, but after getting chased by the police through half the camp with the people gaping at us, I realized how ridiculous it looked and stopped. I didn't want the people to think the police were chasing me for some personal demeanor. So when they caught up with me, I had to go translate for them, as there was no one else to translate. To this day, people who stayed with me in Menik farm, treat me with gratitude, because I acted as an interpreter as well as all-round go-to person for any and all troubles, in their midst. Now, post war, I have resettled in my village and am dependent on my adult children based in Mannar town for support. Meanwhile I still engage in social work to bring about stability and reconciliation.

Views on Reconciliation

The day we humans learn to live as human beings – i.e. with humanity, we would have reconciliation. The cause of conflict, the cause of lack of understanding and empathy, the inability to reach out to each other, is all caused by a lack of adequate humanity in our midst.

I have close Sinhalese friends at whose places I stay over regularly – even though they love me dearly, I noticed that whenever they are angry, they curse at even their fellow Sinhalese as *para demala*. It shows the depths of their prejudice, which sometimes even they might not be aware of. Many of them were mortified when I pointed out they had used those offensive words in front of me, and tried to assure me that they had meant no offence to me.

I do believe that they had meant no offence to me, but that's beside the point. We Tamils are not free of such prejudices either. Until we all work to purge ourselves of these deep-seated prejudices, we will not be reconciled.

Giving up because the situation seems impossible is not an option however. I actively work at reconciliation measures between the three communities of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese wherever possible. I do not waste time wondering if my efforts will bring about a lasting reconciliation or not. It is all our collective duty to try, and keep trying, till it does seem possible.

Personal Role in Reconciliation

I believe firmly that reconciliation should start with oneself first (as a state of mind), then move on to the family, the village, and then only to the wider society. If there are conflicts within my own small village, which I have not solved, what is the point of working for national unity?

Thus I actively work to unite the people in and around my own village – the Tamil Christians and Hindus, and the Muslims. One of the biggest problems in the village currently is the blasting

of music through loudspeakers from the local Hindu temple, beyond reasonable hours. My house is one of the worst affected, being directly opposite the Temple; but as a Christian, I am conscious of the potential for conflict to arise if I complain. Hindu families in the vicinity have complained however – to no avail. The leader of our village rural development society (RDS), also a Hindu, suggested that we complain to the police if the temple authorities are not heeding our request to tone down the loudspeakers and not blast devotional songs in the middle of the night or early in the mornings. But I didn't want to do that, as I do not want conflict to brew.

As a Christian, I believe that all religions are worthy of respect. I decided to pray, but I did not go to my own Church to pray to Jesus. I did not want a conflict between the Hindu and Christian deities in Heaven either. So I went directly to the deity in the Hindu temple – Ambal, and lit some camphor and prayed to her to take care of the matter. Soon after, the loudspeaker system broke down. I took that as Ambal heeding my prayers, and went and thanked her at her temple by lighting more camphor.

I have long been engaged in volunteer work with community organizations and NGOs working in the region. Whenever I hear of any programs working for the common good in our vicinity, I rush to join it – and they frequently utilize my services as a community mobilizer.

If I am away from my village at that time of a local wedding or funeral, for example, people severely miss me. Not necessarily because they value my presence at the event itself but because I shoulder many of the burdens of preparing for those events beforehand. My personal motto is to live in such a way, that people are glad to see me approaching. I want to hear them say as I draw near, 'Yay, Margaret aunty is here!' rather than, 'Oh no, is that Margaret aunty coming this way?' It's not always possible however because I question corruption and mismanagement wherever I go, and that sometimes unavoidably leads to conflict.

I also value the experience to travel, meet other people and reach out to them in the reconciliation process. I can't afford to travel too far on my own but take up opportunities whenever organizations working for peace offer them to me. Many of our communities are content to be 'frogs in the well' where we are content to live with our prejudices regarding other communities rather than face them head-on. We need to break such strangleholds and expand our minds and views by travelling and reaching out to other communities where possible.

Recently, I went with Valvothayam, a local Christian NGO, as part of a group of war-affected Tamil women to stay in a Sinhalese village in Badulla with war affected Sinhalese women there. Our Christian priest and their Buddhist priest had a very good rapport with each other and they wanted to foster this relationship between their respective communities too. Many of their men were employed in the Army. Many of ours had been in the LTTE. Yet, as women who had suffered similarly in war across the ethnic divide, we were able to reach out to each other and form strong friendships.

It was a disconcerting experience at first to walk into the village and see army uniforms hanging all on the clothes lines – but the women were so kind and gracious, they soon made us feel at home. Many of the men were either away on duty or kept out of our way in the village, but if

they happened to meet us, they were gracious and kind too. It was quite a change to see army soldiers as ordinary villagers in their own homes.

Right now, I am a member of the KESSA Group. We are a volunteer network of social service oriented women across five villages in Mannar who regularly engage in social service work such as helping people access health, legal or other services as needed in our villages. We also address issues of conflicts between families, communities, genders etc. As a village-based organization we formed ourselves, we were initially scorned by fellow villagers who did not accept our mandate as legitimate and treated us instead as upstart busybodies. Now however, after just two years of functioning, we have gained widespread recognition, acceptance and appreciation for our work in our community. People who used to ask, 'What business is that of yours?' whenever we intervened in conflicts, now come to us to resolve their conflicts. Husbands who beat their wives and threatened to beat us too if we intervened, now run off if they see us coming.

Women's Role in Reconciliation

Women are emotional by nature, so we are the ones who feel the repercussions of the conflict more. Therefore, we especially are the ones to hanker more for peace and stability. The capacity for reconciliation is engendered in us from an early age – in order to navigate potentially conflict-prone relationships with husbands, mothers in law, children etc. So we can extend these skills to the wider society too.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace building

Right now, we the war-affected people are being cheated by what appears to be a semblance of the transitional justice system. It is mere eyewash and not the real thing, happening here. All those amongst us who held out hope that their disappeared relatives are being kept alive somewhere finally saw an end in sight when the current president Maithripala Sirisena was voted in. He promised to solve all outstanding issues of this nature, yet to this day, I do not know of anybody who has heard any news about their missing relatives. They have no closure; unlike those of us who are sure our relatives are dead. I have many relatives who died, but at least, I am not living in limbo, yearning for their return and fearing for their current safety. I am able to grieve and light candles in their memory; this is a form of healing and acceptance that families of the disappeared, unwilling to accept that their loved ones might be dead unless shown concrete proof, need to have.

Though all my children escaped, my favourite nephew died in the war. I light a candle in his memory on his death anniversary and cook his favourite foods on his birth anniversary in celebration of his life. I do grieve but I have had some sort of closure with my certainty in knowing what happened to him. In contrast, my next-door neighbour, who was a newly married young woman when she lost her husband in 1990, has not erased her red kumkum (the mark of a married woman) from her forehead to this day. She refuses to register her husband as dead event though it would help her gain benefits as his widow or remarry if she chooses to. She still lives in hope that he will come back one day and is constantly careening across the countryside, visiting jails, detention camps and truth finding commissions in search of her husband. Her

husband was one of a number of men rounded up in our village and taken away in 1990, by the security forces. We haven't heard of them since.

Not just for the war-disappeared; also in cases like rape – we notice that the courts keep extending the case for years on end before delivering a judgment. How is that justice? That is just prolonged punishment for the victim on top of all her trauma.

So yes, transitional justice is necessary for reconciliation – but it should be the real deal, carried out sincerely and effectively. The process should heal rather than further traumatize already traumatized people.

Link with Development

I do think development is necessary for reconciliation – but that development has to be grassroots oriented. I do not see many of these smooth main roads and big buildings in town as having contributed to our development in the rural villages. It has made it easier for big companies and people who travel up and down in cars from Colombo to Jaffna but not for us.

It has also put paid to traveling salesmen of the kind we used to see in our villages in the past. Sinhalese and Muslim salesmen came regularly to our houses bearing goods (and news as well as good will) from the South. They could speak all three languages. We would invite them into our homes, ask after their welfare and of news from the South, buy their goods and also ask for certain specific goods to be brought from the South on their next trip. Likewise, some of our people from the North went selling ware from the North to the South. That was a village-based networking of selling and buying where we could not only get goods cheaper than in town right at our doorsteps, but we also learned and interacted with the other communities. This system has mostly disappeared now, which I am sorry to see. Big and exploitative corporations selling on credit at heavy interest rates have taken the place of these simple but honest village traders. It's worth the companies' while to sell only expensive goods such as televisions and furniture, so we have to come into town ourselves to buy other goods and clothes. It is both expensive and time consuming for us. I miss the days of the simple traders.

They stopped coming in the middle of the war years because the LTTE suspected them of being intelligence agents and thus their lives were at risk. They haven't reappeared since the war ended either, and our village-based economies are suffering as a result.

Link with Peace-Building

Of course there is a link between reconciliation and peace-building. Only if you have a good relationship to begin with (via reconciliation) can you have genuine peace-building.

Otherwise it will be peace-building of the type conducted by the LTTE and the Army during the ceasefire. We all know how that turned out. As a villager in Mannar, I have frequently seen firsthand the LTTE and Army fighting with each other. When I saw those same parties shaking hands on national television during the ceasefire, I blinked and wondered if it could be true. Unfortunately, as it turned out, it was not true. It had all just been smokescreen and mirrors.

Role of Religion

We are religious people, our respective religions are important to us. So yes, they should have a role to play in reconciliation too but care needs to be taken to include and respect all religions and not allow leeway for religious chauvinism of any one (or more) denominations to oppress or wound.

If sensitively handled, people would be soothed. Conversely, if insensitively handled, there is scope for more conflict arising rather than the reconciliation we are working towards, so we need to be very careful. Whenever I am asked to start with a prayer at community meetings in which diverse religious members are represented for example, I always say a generic prayer that everyone can accept and appreciate. I am a Roman Catholic used to praying directly to Jesus, but at common gatherings rather than reciting, "Oh Lord Jesus, in thy name..." , I say "Oh God, who creates and sustains all of us, thank you for all your help...". God is a common word so all religious communities will be included in such a prayer.

As an individual, I have no problem saying Assalamu Akaikum to Muslims and Vanakkam to Hindus. All religions should be respected and our commonalities celebrated. Our differences however should not be stressed on, especially during the reconciliation process.

Role of the Government to Achieve Reconciliation

These are my recommendations as to what the government can do to achieve reconciliation between communities:

1. Do away with standardization in education; this is what led to the war.
2. All schools should teach all three languages. Everyone in this country should be able to talk to each other. Do away with the barrier of languages.
3. Give us state services in Tamil. To this day, we are afraid to make a complaint at the police station because they write down our complaints in Sinhala, and we have no idea what we are attesting to when we are asked to sign.
4. Do away with police discrimination towards women. In my experience as a volunteer social worker in my village, I have repeatedly noticed that they do not take complaints of domestic violence seriously enough and tend to side with the husband over the wife. They ought to be trained to be more sensitive and aware of women's rights.
5. Do away with the different wages being paid for men and women. We should be paid according to our work, not our gender.
6. State officials and politicians should act without bias towards a common good, applicable to all. Those who pit one community against another should be fired as being unfit for their posts in government.

Women's Issues to be Resolved to Ensure Reconciliation

We have many outstanding women's issues which need to be resolved if reconciliation is to be sincerely effected. Here are the most urgent that need to be addressed:

1. Food security, and sustainability in terms of employment / livelihood: In the absence of these, there won't be reconciliation even in a woman's own home. Such contexts lead to conflicts with her husband, children etc.
2. Access to networking and contacts with a wide network of people: government officials, community based organizations, civil society activists and so on.
3. Transparent and accountable governance in our village-based organizations such as the RDS and WRDS (Rural Development Societies and Women's Rural Development Societies). Many of them appear to take their cue from the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime in the way they govern with family nepotism and dictatorship in organizations set up to work and be accountable to us, the common people.
4. Access to women in these CBOs. The RDS are not solely for men but because so many RDSs cut out women, we had to form WRDSs. Yet for village development activities and meetings, the Government and NGOs continue to network with the RDS alone – so we women absolutely need a place in it. We are still fighting for such a place in my own village. The RDS men tell us that we women talk too much and will only disrupt proceedings so they don't want us at their meetings. They don't have the right to exclude us but it's still a challenge to get in.
5. Politicians, especially the local politicians whom we voted for, should be accessible to us so that we can ask them questions on what exactly they have delivered from their promised election manifestos.

Grants and projects to aid the war-affected people should take into account the needs of female-headed households (FHH), who in most cases are women breadwinners who have lost their husbands to war, yet not empowered by society to take a male's place.

6. Take for example the housing schemes here. They are geared towards male-headed households with an able bodied male able to earn as well as contribute to basic masonry work. About 1/3 of the cost and labour of constructing the housing is expected from the beneficiary family. Men can manage but how did they expect FHH like me to cope? I am a confident, strong woman and I actively tried to contribute to the masonry work on my own, yet I couldn't. I had to get severely into debt and even then could not complete my house building. My house is still standing incomplete. I have halted construction for the moment as I can't afford to do anymore.
7. Safety and Security: in the LTTE days, they took women's safety very seriously. No male dared to even so much as whistle at us in those days on the streets – punishment for such actions was severe and men were afraid to mess with us on that account. I was a young woman at that time. Now though, even as an elderly woman, I do not feel safe, not only on public roads, but also within my own house. I am unable to lock my

door and sleep in peace at night, secure in the knowledge that no-one would break in. Such is the situation now.

Yet, during various displacements, I have slept in the open, under trees, secure that the LTTE cadres standing guard nearby would protect us. We dearly miss that sense of safety and security now. We absolutely need that sense of safety and security to deliver our best as women.

The government in order to address all these women's issues needs to ensure that they gain women's own input on the solutions we choose to resolve the problems we face.

There are a number of women's groups functioning at the grassroots. When the government gathers information and feedback from the villages, they should ensure that they don't access only the RDS, which is male dominated. They must inform the WRDS and other women's groups that they are coming and gather our input too.

We also need more representation of women in politics – both at local and central government levels. We however don't expect the government to just hand out seats to us. We are building ourselves up at the grassroots to be more politically active and knowledgeable so that we can meaningfully contribute. The government in their turn should work to facilitate our pathways into politics. They have brought a rule of 25% quota for women in local politics, which is a start. We have many barriers set against our entering or growing in the political sphere, so the government needs to actively work at identifying and removing these barriers. Let the women have a say in the governing process; we can solve many of our own problems.

CASE STUDY — 20

Name : **withheld on request**
Designation : Female Ex-Military Personnel
Age : 49
Ethnicity : Sinhalese

Reconciliation

There were many causes for the conflict and some of these causes remain unidentified even today. It began because of differences in how people were treated and disregarded for humanness. Everyone should have the same rights (to life, movement, religion, language, politics, etc.). Everyone must be thought of as a Sri Lankan.

There were many instances that we came to hear even as children where one community favored its children and helped them excel. This resulted in many from that community excelling and reaching heights that could not be accessed by the other communities once they entered the job market. Such things should not happen. Everyone should have equal access and should receive the same treatment. The Government must take the time to delve into such issues and address the causes that give rise to them, because when one community gets unfair advantages that lead to better economic prospects, this hurts other communities and creates feelings of disappointment and ill will.

These feelings then can translate into conflict and violence. The hurt feelings of a community are much more dangerous than the hurt feelings of an individual because of the possibility and potential for groups engaging in violence to form. There is a lack of understanding in society, even of understanding humanity and its meaning. This lack of understanding has led to many issues such as killings among communities. Without resolving such sentiments and understanding the reasons behind such sentiments, there cannot be any peace.

Following the 30 years of war, Sri Lanka has many unresolved issues that still remain hidden like fire beneath the ashes. People help others based on religion or the community they belong to; they help only those who belong to the same community or believe in the same religion. What is needed is a fair and equitable society that does not work along ethnic or religious lines. Experts in the country need to work as a cohesive group to move beyond such divisions and take decisions that affect and benefit the entire nation.

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

It may be men who go forth to battle but it is the woman who suffers in every area of her life and therefore women have a role to play in reconciliation. This suffering leads women to protest and call for change. Their sensitivity leads them to feel more than their male counterparts.

It is of course the right person who must be involved in the reconciliation process. It is people with the capacity and ability who must be involved, and they should do so with sensitivity.

Reconciliation must address the issues that touch the heart and makes people fearful. It is essential to look for the root cause of any conflict. Even the smallest of causes must be identified by talking to aggrieved parties. Now that there is peace in the country, more must be done to achieve reconciliation. It is not clear if what is shown in the media is true or not.

I would like to be involved, in my own capacity as a counselor or even in any other way I can contribute, in the reconciliation process. As I needed to gain a professional qualification, I obtained a Higher National Diploma in Counselling. Although I have not yet been able to formally provide any counselling services, I feel like I can do so much for the country. So, I volunteer my time for counseling. I give hours to those in need of a sensitive ear and a helping hand. I am trained in meditation and offer my services in counseling, meditation, empowerment, Dharma discussions, etc. I would like to continue working towards empowering others, which is something that I enjoy so much.

A woman is strong, and is capable of doing so much. I know the issues women face because of my counseling experience. Despite being considered vital to a family, the issues they face are rarely recognized, even within the family. There are many issues that exist in families but are not shared with the society. There is no widely recognized and well known counseling service in Sri Lanka, but if one looks carefully such places do exist. Ideally, such a place should take the structure of a mental health center for persons and not an institution such as Angoda. At least, a meditation center, perhaps coupled with yoga, should be started, where such activities are the front, but people can go for counseling and help without being judged.

I lost my husband, and he cannot be brought back. I do not make this lack of information a problem. His parents, though, still cry and lament. This is an issue to be looked in to at an individual level. It affects relationships for an entire lifetime. So, all information (on any disappearance or murder) must be made available to the public and there should be transparency. Also, such things must not happen again. Government support is essential, and only then is 100% reconciliation possible.

Reconciliation and its Link to Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

There is a direct relationship between reconciliation and development. It happens simultaneously, on two parallel lines. Women can support this development and reconciliation process. Peace building and transitional justice too have a direct relationship with reconciliation and go hand in hand. Reconciliation is very important for peace building.

Both parties continue to suffer and both parties are guilty. Equality and justice are essential for the country. If not, there will be conflict, especially because today's younger generation is changing. Without justice and equality, they may be pushed into a violence that will be more dangerous than the previous conflict.

All problems that women face must be solved. Due to her multiple roles, women suffer the most, both economically and mentally. If the woman of the family is under stress everything falls apart, so her needs must be met and her psychological wellbeing must be looked after. There is

currently no place in Sri Lanka that looks after the needs of mothers. This is an area of interest for me and I hope to be able to create such a place in the future.

The Role of the Government and Religion

The Government can definitely do so much for reconciliation. There are many talented women in the country whose talents are not being utilized properly. Even with widows, there are so many women who are skilled but remain at home (without putting their skills to use). If their talents were used productively, the country would benefit. Identification of talents is of the utmost importance. However, it is not done well in Sri Lanka. Also, people who are not talented or right for the position are assigned positions while those with talent remain unidentified or under-utilized. This is unproductive. The Government can and should implement a strategy to rectify this.

The Government should take steps to include women in the reconciliation process. I have done what I can alone as a volunteer counsellor, to the best of my abilities (although I do not know if it is enough), because I do not know how it's done through the system. There is more I must learn if I am to fulfill my wish of working for my country's betterment.

Even though the media says that there are many things being done by the State for reconciliation, I am not sure that these endeavors are successful.

Religion is an individual preference. It is up to each person to decide. One cannot convert another to a religion, and people should have the freedom to follow whichever religion they like. What should be done is to take all that is good from each religion. However, it makes sense for religion to have a place in the reconciliation process if all people in an institution where all its members belong to the same religion. If that is the case, going ahead with one religion can be justified. If not, it is not proper to give prominence to only one religion.

CASE STUDY – 21

Name :	Rathran Arukattupatabendige Neerthi Thanuja
Profession :	Community Development Activist
Age :	39
Ethnicity :	Sinhalese
District :	Hambantota

How the war affected her:

The war affected me because everyone in the country felt its effects. Many men from the South went to war as Army personnel of which many died. Transport became problematic to the point that travelling was nearly impossible. There were road blocks and security checks that interrupted the mobility.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a situation where there is no conflict between communities or parties; where there is mutual understanding that allows for mutual cooperation. Through dialogue between communities issues can be addressed and mutual understanding can be achieved.

In theory, the benefits of reconciliation are equally enjoyed by men and women. However, in practice, it is only with the change in politics in 2015 that the term reconciliation entered the general parlance of the country. There does not seem to be any reconciliation in practice, especially for women and it is only within the realm of politics that the term reconciliation exists. Sri Lanka is a multi-cultural and multi-religious community, and thus requires reconciliation. The people must first and foremost think of themselves as Sri Lankans.

National unification entails working together with all communities as human beings. This involves transcending the divisions that were created due to war and terrorism. We have worked with all communities in our professional capacity, but major differences and divisions exist between these communities. It is a problem to have such division in a country. National unity is very important for reconciliation. In addition, attitudes need to change within the country. It is attitudes that determine everything in society and there is a vast amount of traditional thinking and attitudes which do not help reconciliation. All attitudes must be geared to promote peace.

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

A woman should take the main role in peace building. Even within the family, she is sensitive, and will not be quick to jump to conclusions. Thus, she is the best person to find solutions to the issues related to division within the country and to achieve reconciliation. A woman has great strength and capacity to find a solution to the challenge of reconciliation as well as to bring people in to the process of reconciliation. This capacity and strength make it possible for women to work towards reconciliation; build a sense of togetherness and create unity among communities.

Women can do much for the community, but their actual contribution is tied-up with the concept of power. If they have power, any woman can do a significant amount of work and influence or lobby. However, if a woman lives in a society where she is powerless and cannot make an impact, she cannot make the desired impact alone; so women must work together. It is difficult for individuals, whether man or woman, to make an impact; because for one thing, working alone can create dictators. By working together, people can make a positive impact.

While I have not worked in projects specifically focusing on reconciliation, I was part of the negam yaema (exchange visits) program that linked the community (women) leaders of the South with those in the East and North. We shared experiences and came to understand each other's cultures. There was common anger towards other people in the minds of those affected by war, but we managed to change that with this program and to make them see we are all the same. In addition, we teach our children Tamil. At the end of the exchange programs, we could not leave them and they still stay in touch, inviting us to their festivals, etc.

As a person who has been engaging in community development and continues to do so, I feel if we all come together, we can make a change, even in attitudes. Sometimes, there is no reconciliation or harmony even within the same community. There is no understanding or respect for the beliefs or attitudes of other people. To respect and understand these attitudes and to build a community of peace through such understanding and respect, we have to bring together people who have the desire and the knowledge to build such a community. It is better to live together as humans, rather than bear placards and shout slogans at certain events.

Reconciliation's Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

The right to life is inalienable. If injustice reigns, then damage is caused to the family. It is important to raise a voice for the loved ones who have been lost. We must preserve the family. This is a very timely need given all that's happened recently. Women are the most affected (by issues of transitional justice). They have lost husbands and families. They need to be safeguarded while they safeguard their families. In addition, these women must all feel that their suffering is equal to that of the women in the North and East, and everyone must work on behalf of their loved ones who are lost.

Development and reconciliation are connected. One cannot exist without the other. Any work that is done in economic, social or political arena must keep this connection in mind. The goal is to ensure that the lack created by their loss is remedied. Both sides must be involved in any development initiative, which will lead to the discovery of diverse and innovative ideas and unique skill sets that will enrich both communities.

Peace building and reconciliation are interconnected. In theory, there must be peace for there to be reconciliation although this is not the case in the present situation. Both sides have suffered and continue to suffer, thinking about their losses. They need some peace. Psychological conflict lead to verbal conflict. So, what is needed is to create reconciliation for everyone.

To create a respectful society, we need both peace building and reconciliation. To achieve this we require peace, and we can contribute to this effort. Reconciliation is essential to building peace. Without it, there cannot be peace, since individuals continue to harbor ill will about the other.

The Role of the Government and Religion

Women need more leadership opportunities to be part of the reconciliation process. At present, there is only a 4% female representation in parliament, but we must increase representation of women in both parliament as well as local governance.

A district-level commission could be set up to resolve problems. In the legal arena, a gender-sensitized panel or adjudicating body is needed to handle women's problems. Currently, their problems, including rape cases are discussed publicly in the courts, creating more mental trauma to victims who are women and young girls. To prevent this, a private hearing in a suitable location with sensitive people is needed.

Additionally, women need more educational opportunities to achieve greater heights in their professions. Local traditions and the religion(s) have restricted women by dictating what they can and cannot do: it tells them what to do and how to live. Certain concepts that are detrimental to a woman's wellbeing restrict their access to services and rights by advising society to look at her in different ways. The concept of "woman" is a societal one. A woman must be given equal rights, without relegating her to a secondary position in society. We must be free of these misconceptions and cast away the shackles.

Religion is not necessary to the process of reconciliation. As Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country religion creates disharmony and we are trapped by what is dictated through religion. Therefore, reconciliation should not be religious in nature.

The present Government can be involved in minimizing damages from the war, by providing opportunities to rebuild lives, and looking into disappearances and loss of lives during the war. There are still many camps of displaced people around the country, and their living conditions should be investigated. They need their own environment, to live free and progressive lives. In addition, the Government could start more projects in the community development sector without religious intervention.

In addition, the parliament should be a source of moral education, where parliamentarians are people the general public could look up to with respect as role models. However, that is not the case in the Sri Lankan parliament. The parliament is more interested in its own conflicts and does not pay attention to the needs of the people. Thus, those suffering continue to suffer. There is no place in Sri Lanka where a person can learn from observation.

Reconciliation must guide the way to policy decisions. Where change can be made, it must be done, to create an equal society. In doing this, more representation of women is essential. Women should be involved in the reconciliation process, from design to implementation up to

monitoring. If women are not involved, it is men's ideas through their viewpoints that become programs, which is of no use to women. It is important that more workshops are conducted at the grassroots level, where women (including widows and female heads of households, and those who face threats such as the elderly) can voice their thoughts and make suggestions.

The Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) is engaged in peace building and reconciliation initiatives. This is the only work I know of that is carried out by the Government. Many big words are being bandied about, but the common man does not understand this. It is only understood in the political arena. These words must be explained through the media. The media has a big role to play.

CASE STUDY — 22

Name : **withheld on request**
Profession : A Military Widow.
Age : 33
Ethnicity : Sinhalese

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is harmony between communities and races. As a woman, I feel that reconciliation and unity should exist within the minds of all people. We should all think as one. However, sadly, this cannot be done. Women have to always face society, and as a widow, I need to do everything alone. People are different from one another, and some are cruel. We cannot always expect reconciliation from society.

I do not believe that widows must be pitied. I have been a widow for 11 years. At first, I did not interact with people and was not strong enough to face hardships. However, through the experiences of the past decades, I can now face hardships. There are times that we (widows) are vulnerable. This could be even in public places such as the bus stops or in shops. There are some people who do help us without belittling us or making us feel vulnerable, but this is only one per cent or two per cent of all people. We cannot change people's attitudes.

It is possible to create reconciliation in society. People might be different in some ways, based on their religious beliefs or thinking patterns. But, we must think of ourselves as Sri Lankans, not as Sinhalese, Buddhists or Tamils. Sadly, people do not think this way. We should all think freely, and we must not think that all Tamil people are from the LTTE. Even though my husband died in the war, we cannot hate them. If we all think as Sri Lankans, we can prevent the recurrence of another war. Sinhala people should learn Tamil, and Tamil people should learn Sinhala. Inter-racial marriages are also helpful. We have a problem with our attitudes. If society does not think collectively, it will create big problems.

A woman's Role in Reconciliation

I personally do not discriminate based on religion. I like to work with everyone in society. It is possible to think of things that can be done to achieve reconciliation, but it may not be possible for one single person to do them. If society can co-exist, it would be greatly benefit people. But this is not the case at present.

I believe we have to find solutions to resolve the root cause of the problem, which in turn will reduce conflicts. Firstly, family issues need to be addressed and thereafter the wider social issues.

Society judges us based on our behaviour, and looks at how we behave and carry out transactions with people. I talk with everyone and I do the most I can. I do not hesitate to help others. Even if what I can do is small, I will do it. If someone is making a mistake or doing something wrong, I tell them that what they are doing is wrong. Money and political clout are not needed to do what we can do. When we women speak, people listen. However, there are also those who do not.

There is both respect and disrespect for women in society, no matter what our beliefs are. Some men (and women) do not heed the words of women. In the present societal context, women are not second (in position) to men. Women are more tolerant than men. Women do much for society, but do not get recognition for their efforts. They are not allowed (by men) to come forward. There are times that women have to confine themselves to certain limits. Sometimes there may be no theoretical limits, but there are practical limits that we experience.

I have participated in a research study carried out by FOKUS WOMEN. I have also worked with the Ranaviru Seva Authority (RSA) and the Ranaviru Seva Sansadaya (RSS) for the past 10 years, and have seen disabled soldiers and parents and widows of soldiers who died in the war. I have personally gone to a lot of places (to meet the members of the RSA), and I have witnessed their sorrow. For example, some disabled soldiers live only on their salary, even though they need more money for houses that are in the process of building. They are also worried about the safety of their wives, fearing that other men will pose a threat to them.

Some villagers who were affected by the war also cannot understand these issues and fall victim to those who wish to exploit their vulnerabilities. People take decisions emotionally and they do not think far, which leads to much suffering. Awareness programs on all these issues must be held for the villagers so that they can make informed decisions. We go to the homes of people and help the best we can, but some people need psychological help. We direct them to the relevant channels. These are the things women (and men) in the RSA do for their counterparts.

Military widows also have to deal with health issues related to pregnancies with their second partner. This is because their vulnerability gets in the way of their ability to make sound decisions. There are some that are misled by the loving words of a man when they are vulnerable and in need, and they usually make wrong decisions because of the mental state they are in. Many widows do not think too long or too hard about anything: they take light decisions, and this makes me sad. It is quite surprising and sad why someone would hurt a widow. For example, one widow killed herself by using poison. Widows do not really work in or with society, but

only with people they already know and not others. They do not always want fancy things, maybe only a house or a good education for the children, but they are sometimes without plans. Widows enter into self-employment and lose money because they are too trusting or are naive. It is important to understand what they need and to provide what is needed, and women can carry out these activities to help other women and widows.

Reconciliation and its links with transitional justice, development, and peace building

Looking back at what we have lost, it is questionable whether we have received any justice. There are instances where military personnel and widows are talked about and felicitated. However, if not for these ceremonies, people do not remember military personnel or widows. The Sinhala newspapers only remember us for one week; whereas for us, this is a lifetime's experience. I doubt if there will ever be any reparations or justice for those who have suffered, died or have become widows.

Whether a soldier died in the war or disabled in the war, the benefits should be similar. I doubt if the government has all the relevant information as some widows get double the benefits, while others get none. There are always criteria for receiving benefits. Some have bettered themselves through hard work, and others have lost to tricksters. The RSA receives only a small amount of money to be given to the deserving, but the resources are not divided properly. There is lip service for us, but they do not materialize. I have never taken even a scholarship for my child, in the 10 years I have worked with the RSA. Events are held for publicity only. Justice has not been delivered and people suffer.

In the village, very few attend RSS meetings, even though they are held only once a month. Only 30–40 attend meetings, out of 200 in the Pradeshiya Lekam Kottasaya (District Secretariat). We do not even have the number needed to create a committee. The widows can receive benefits if they come to the meetings. We cannot always go to them to give them their benefits. Some widows do not care at all about obtaining the benefits they are entitled to. There is no interest on their part, which is a weakness. There are some widows who should not be benefiting but who do.

We have social ties because we attend the RSS meetings. There are five RSAs in one Kottasaya (District Secretariat). We discuss matters so we know what happens in the world but we cannot find solutions to some issues the widows face. Since there is a certain weight to the opinions expressed by war widows, we must help increase their awareness and with the involvement of the government, a proper mechanism should be adopted to address the concerns of war widows.

There is also a need for change in attitudes. Trust in the RSA must be created. However, even when people can benefit, they do not attend the meetings. These meetings of the RSS also provide psychological help, and in addition, they hold almsgivings and sil observances, and organize pilgrimages.

Reconciliation and development are also similar. It is important to go forward. This country had no development because of the war. There were limited resources available to people. But now, people are living peacefully and enjoying the benefits of development. People should be united in their endeavours towards reconciliation. If there is no unity, people cannot live in a society. Unity is essential for growth and it has to start within yourself, then at home, and then in society. Family, society, and nation, all need to be united. People cannot be brought together if different ideas clash. No decision can be taken in haste even in a family. If someone attempts to develop the country, there is always another against it.

Without reconciliation, there are problems. Without reconciliation, there is no peace. People are selfish, so there are problems. Little things added up and led to war. Some may think that we won the war, but what was left for the people was so much destruction. There were definite issues for Tamil people from the Sinhala people, which led to the war. If people thought of themselves as Sri Lankans there would not be selfishness. If reconciliation exists, there would possibly be no war in the future.

Widows' problems need to be addressed if reconciliation and peace are to be achieved. Many of the widows do not trust the society and need to be given reasons to trust others. If trust is created, they will all engage. If not, they will not come forward to work in society. They have so many problems, which will disappear if trust is established among people. Earlier, the other widows and I too did not have self-confidence. However, now we have become better at managing social transactions, because of the work carried out with the RSA and through our own experiences.

Widows need the respect of the people because we suffer greatly and have suffered in the past. We have no security. Other women have their husbands who help ensure their security. I do not believe we have to be burdened by events, and I feel that we must deal with events with a light heart. If we are good to people, I believe that we will be fine. If respect is accorded, reconciliation is possible.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

The state is involved in certain activities for reconciliation through the RSA. They provide assistance to widows to face any challenges, including the educational needs of children and housing. The RSA builds houses for widows on their own land, providing resources such as contractors and masons. The beneficiaries (widows) are selected based on the relationships they maintain through earlier meetings. Some widows miss out on these benefits as they do not maintain these relationships with RSA and are hard to locate, given that some have not provided addresses and do not come to the offices to meet the RSA officials. In addition, some widows hesitate to approach the RSA for funds.

The RSA has given loans, especially for the purchase of three-wheelers, the money for which will be reduced from the monthly salaries received by the women. Money is also given to parents of married soldiers. Additionally, money is also provided to enroll children into schools.

Widows receive money for self-employment ventures. However, this amount is inadequate for some women to meet their daily needs. Also, some widows have poor financial management skills. Currently, they are being taught financial management. They have been provided some knowledge on the legal and court systems of the country. In addition, there are also programs initiated for children over 15 years. I do believe that the RSA under the new management, will do much for the betterment of the widows.

Religion should definitely be involved in the process of reconciliation, because it creates discipline in people. It also provides a sense of relief to people. All religions teach the same good thing.

The government can also be part of the process by not inciting nationalism. The government must be careful in the words it uses. There is no need to separate people according to their race and religion, and inter-marriages should also be encouraged. Everyone should get together for any emergencies. This would stop any language problems from surfacing. Additionally, each community could learn the language of the other community. This will arrest thoughts of division entering the society. This is the way things are in my village too, where everyone lives in harmony.

Women in parliament only look into their own wants and do not truly know the needs of other women. Women need to pass on their experiences and knowledge to other women. Women also need leadership training and practice. Women would then have the capacity to work with anyone – and do so much more service for Sri Lanka.

CASE STUDY – 23

Name : **Ms. Sheela Ratnayake**
 Age : 51
 Ethnicity : Sinhalese
 Profession | Executive Director, Rajarata Praja Kendraya

Reconciliation

Due to the ethnic conflict the country experienced a long term war. Reconciliation means creation of an environment that is favourable to both communities. Each community sees the other as the enemy. Reconciliation is bringing people together to discuss the problems lying deep within their hearts and ridding them of bitterness, without inciting communal feelings. Each community thinks that the other is responsible for the problem. Both communities must be given the space to discuss what happened and reveal whatever rancour there is in their hearts. It is important to create an open environment that enables people to express themselves fully.

Government policies should be fair by both communities. In such an environment, it is possible to achieve reconciliation. There should be a sense of camaraderie between the people. Even the staff at Rajarata Praja Kendraya, gained better understanding of the Tamil community through the “Negam Yaema” (exchange visits) project organized by the Government. Language too works as a barrier for mutual understanding between communities. The Rajarata Praja Kendraya also conducts programmes aiming at reconciliation. It’s members now understand that I is not only the Sinhala women who lost their loved ones; Tamil women too lost their families; their husbands in the war.

A Woman’s Role in Reconciliation

Women can do much for the process of reconciliation. The main aim should be to change attitudes of youth through the creation of new programs. It is important for the youth to hear stories from both sides. Women should be able to manage situations positively, and religious programs as well as the Rajarata Praja Kendraya projects help them to do so. It is also possible for women to impact policies but for this they must engage in politics.

The mother plays the main role in the family and she also holds the central position when it comes to reconciliation within the family. Women must be given the same role in their respective area as well as in CBOs and NGOs programmes. Exchange programs and experience sharing is helpful in creating reconciliation between communities. The youth need to be involved in this, and having exchange programs with their involvement, such as those done by the Rajarata Praja Kendraya, is a good practice. The understanding that the other side too experienced loss due to war has helped them understand that the war was not something heroic and that neither the leaders nor the armies were heroes. Now, they know enough to denounce war on the basis of the harm it causes to society.

I have attended training programs on reconciliation and been part of research programs done by FOKUS WOMEN. Using the knowledge and experience we have gained through these programs, we have now started programs for young men and women.

Its Links with Transitional Justice, Development and Peace Building

The process of transitional justice paves the way for reconciliation. This creates self-awareness and trust. Transitional justice is needed to create reconciliation without discrimination. Transitional justice means making accessible information on the disappeared and remembering them. The danger in this is that it could again give rise to sentiments hatred. Women want to lessen the anger but pursue justice. Reconciliation is important for development. Otherwise, it will not be actualized for some people.

Additionally, it is not possible to determine clear ownership of lands in the absence of reconciliation. The land and its ownership must be made clear and written proof of ownership must be given to rightful owners. Reconciliation must be borne in mind in any development initiative.

Peace building too can only happen if there is reconciliation. People with hearts full of pain and suffering cannot build peace. It is important that all people who have suffered due to war and enmity, be returned to normalcy.

When a woman becomes a widow, she loses everything. The rights of a widow have to be guaranteed and her self-confidence boosted. Also, counselling is needed for dealing with psychological needs. They have experienced tremendous loss and their lives need to be brought back to normal. Also, they need to regain what was lost. If this happens, reconciliation can take place. Some policies need to be changed, such as policies on land, minimum age for marriages, etc. There are many girls who are sexually active at 16 but must wait to marry until 18, because 18 is the legal minimum age for marriage. This need not be so and the laws should be amended taking this situation into account, to safeguard these young girls.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

Land and psychological issues are the most important problems faced by women that need to be resolved through the reconciliation process. Any reconciliation process should have long-term and futuristic goals when being formulated. Land should be provided along with funds and loans to those in urgent need of land. All these points have been proposed but don't seem to be taking place on the ground.

Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country; so all religions must receive equal status. One religion must not take priority over another. For example, if only Buddhism is given importance, reconciliation cannot happen. The process can be religious, but with equality, in the sense that all religions must be accorded respect. Then, reconciliation can be achieved. But in truth, the process need not necessarily be religious. One can follow whichever religion he/she wishes because it is a universal human rights.

Widows and youth should be given goals and receive training for the future. The dependence mentality that they are trapped in must be done away with. Also, women must be encouraged to enter politics and it must be highlighted that there is more to politics than violence and crime. It might be more effective to have a quota for women in parliament. Support needs to be extended to the Tamil community to recover from the damages caused by war, without which we cannot achieve reconciliation. Individuals need to be transformed if the situation is to be.

CASE STUDY – 24

Name :	Ranaweera Mudiyansele Thakshala
Designation :	Women Development Officer
Age :	47
Ethnicity :	Sinhalese

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is creating relationships between conflicting parties. It is good for women to become involved if there is a reconciliation program in the country. They are the most affected by conflict, and it would benefit them to be part of the process.

Reconciliation can take place within Sri Lanka. However, the most pressing problem is the issue of language. This can be mitigated through programs aimed at reconciliation. If the people are divided, there is no understanding between the communities.

Nationality and community are different, and programs must be carried out for all three major communities. Even at the grassroots level, there are issues arising due to language. Hence opportunity must be provided for people to learn languages. Also, a dialogue should be created between the communities. It is not culture that is the major problem but language issues. Making space for learning the other's language will help create national unity.

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

The woman is a "sama mawatha" or a pathway to peace. When compared with men, women have more capacity to be friendly towards any person. They are the main link in reconciliation even within the family. Women can play a main role in reconciliation, because she can feel the pain of others. She can bring people together through dialogue.

As a Women Development Officer (WDO), we work with grassroots-level women, sharing information and knowledge. Additionally, we share and exchange experiences with others in the community. We direct them to the proper channels when they are faced with a problem. Even in our individual capacity as women, we can contribute to the reconciliation process. We have gained knowledge on the subject through workshops that we've attended. We do not create division but speak with and work with everyone irrespective of whether they are Sinhala,

Tamil or Muslim. Also, all WDOs maintain friendly relations with each other, irrespective of the language they speak.

Women must be part of the process of reconciliation. Otherwise, it poses a problem. However, they may not have the opportunity to participate in the process. I have received a two-day training on the LLRC, which constitutes my official training. The Department of Official Languages conducts workshops and programs on language for the WDOs and for the different communities. It is this that led me to this path. If not for this I've not had any exposure to the subject. In our capacity as WDOs, we can engage with the process through directives given to us and whatever programs we are assigned. Engaging in the process by ourselves may not be fruitful. Exchange programs and training programs with equal numbers of members from all three communities would be productive.

Reconciliation and its Links to Transitional Justice, Development and Peace Building

Transitional justice must include addressing the issue of the disappeared. Proper compensation must be paid to those who have lost family members. People who lost land must be relocated. Perpetrators of any kind of injustice must be punished. Finally, justice must be restored, so that fear will dissipate.

Many women are now alone because of the disappearances. They do not have ownership of anything, whether land or rights. Some (Tamil) women cannot even obtain loans. Unlike in the Sinhala community, Tamil women do not have access to and ownership of land because of the special features of the law governing them. Also, land is given to the males of the family, either the husband or the elder son. They are not paid compensation either also due to missing certificates of ownership. They are separated from others, and they need reparations.

Reconciliation leads to development. It is essential to have development in all areas. However, if one area is not reconciled, there will be no development. Development is not simply making more roads. Infrastructure, education, all service areas, etc. must be developed.

War created fear in the conflicting parties. Creating mutual friendship between people is essential. Then, people will not look at each other in fear. This leads to peace building. Villagers live in cooperation and have good relationships with each other, but politics creates rifts between these people. These people who live in cooperation do not think there will be a problem when they look at others from different communities. It is politics that creates this fear and mistrust.

It is important to build peace through reconciliation. If peace building is undertaken alone, one community will not have a good idea or opinion of the other community. If the opinion about the other party is good, there will be trust between communities. Love cannot be achieved alone. One should not be separated as state or as people; building bridges is important. If this can be done together in some way, people can come to the process of peace building faster and easier, and peace will be easier to achieve.

If reconciliation is to be achieved, certain issues that most women face, such as land issues, must be solved. The many widows must be given benefits to raise their living standards. They must be allowed to live in dignity. They are not currently allowed to join society. They are labelled and this is not a good practice. Other people take advantage of the widows in the guise of helping them. This happens even at army camps when the widows go to obtain their benefits. These women have to solve all their problems alone, so they should be given methods of self-employment. The present situation is better than it used to be as many ministries are involved. Also, in the matter of pensions, the amount received by the widows is good, and there is no cancellation of payment even if the widow remarries.

The Role of the Government and Religion

The state is engaged in many ways in the promotion of reconciliation. These include promoting and assisting with self-employment, the housing project through the Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs, loans, surveys on widows for the purpose of having a database, trainings for women, training and educational opportunities for children and providing support for children who have lost parents.

Religion has a role to play in the reconciliation process. The temple, the kovil and the church can do much to help reconciliation. They can for example teach Muslims meditation. It is not with an intention to convert or shoving a religion down another's throat. This must be done as a sharing exercise. Where religion doesn't prove to be a barrier, there is no conflict.

Language is a major issue, and the two main languages of the land should be learnt by all. The concept of "negam yaema" (exchange visits) between the North and the South initiated by the Ministry will help the reconciliation process. Additionally, the skills unique to one community could be shared with the other. For example: cooking practices and skills of the North can be taught to the women of the South, and vice versa. However, merely visiting is not productive unless coupled with trainings. Any endeavour at reconciliation must go beyond mere exchange visits and should involve training for both communities so that both stand to benefit through acquiring new skills.

Women have always suffered due to war. The Government should include more women in the reconciliation process. Even now, women are mostly involved at the office level. Both men and women should be given training. Also, attitudes must be developed. People with positive-thinking are needed if we are to achieve reconciliation. More than material resources, what is needed is programs that address a person's spiritual aspect. Government officials do not feel the need to do anything because they are dispensing Government funds. Each successive Government has given-out benefits but it has not reached the people because not many have the right attitude to make full use of these trainings and benefits. They must be guided to transform their negative attitudes in to positive attitudes. At present there is a lack of understanding among people. They are self-centred. Though they need to start empathizing with others, the fact remains that, the family unit has created selfish people by encouraging children to think of themselves; to not share their food or resources with a neighbour or friend.

CASE STUDY — 25

Name :	Prof. Sitralega Maunaguru
Age :	69
Ethnicity :	Tamil
Profession :	Retired University Professor, Freelance Consultant on Gender Issues, Writer

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is when people live the way they want to. They should have enough food on their table, an adequate house, health facilities, transport facilities, and leisure – without much fighting. They must live and talk to each other happily.

In the context of Sri Lanka, reconciliation has more meaning for women, because women are most affected by the conflict. As a woman who has lived in many parts of the country including the North and East, I have many friends representing many communities. During the 1990s (when I lived in Jaffna) and 2000s (when I lived in the East), I was unable to meet my friends, as there were restrictions on travel and communication. While many see the conflict as having started in the 1980s, I see it from the late 1950s.

I was able to see the general situation as it was in the earlier days, the days before the conflict – even when I was five years old. When we were school children we used to sing the National Anthem in Tamil. It was peaceful. When I was a child, I heard of conflicts in relation to family disputes and boundaries of houses, but I never heard of any fight on ethnic lines. In fact I lived in a Muslim village as my father was teaching at the training college (which had Muslim students). I never felt the difference of them being Muslims and me and my family being Tamil. Even though I now refer to the Muslims as “they”, it was “us” during those days. I lived there for about eight to nine years. We shared a culture that had water and land, agriculture and fishing at its base. We shared the sea, the tank, the lagoon, the trees, the forest. Muslim students used to come to my house and I was carried by them as a child. I never felt a difference even in terms of dressing as there were no identity-based clothes for women. Muslim women covered their heads with their saris. The identity politics and the divide between the Muslims and Tamils need to change. It affects me personally: If we go to Muslim people’s houses now, the Tamil community will look at us as if we are strangers, trying to stay friends with Muslim people.

It is indeed difficult to reconcile communities in Sri Lanka. However, it is a small country and it is not impossible.

I see this conflict as a fight over resources. There are vast natural resources to share. When the Sinhalese from the dry zone were settled in the East and the North, sharing resources became a problem. Subsequently, political opportunism took over and divisions based on community were encouraged. Muslims and Tamils were pushed to the side during elections. Ampara is a vast geographical area with diverse ethnicities. A study carried out on land issues in this area found that Tamils and Muslims were living in only 40% of the land while the other 60% was

unused. The Digavapi Temple is situated in the area. The priest interviewed by the researchers had mentioned that the land belonged to the temple. He explained that the size of the land was as far as the drum sound carried. I find this a humorous fact because the reach of the sound depends on how the drum is made, the person who drums, and the hearing ability of the person, among other things. These types of arguments lead to bigger issues. For example, Muslims lost cattle in this area, and land was lost by all communities when the Tsunami occurred. There is fertile land and vast water sources in the area that can be shared between communities. You cannot uproot the people in the area now because they have been there for 60 years. The government can settle disputes relating to land through administrative processes. This can be easily solved with political will. My question is whether that political will, will materialize. Today, we see unstable politics in the country. I do not want to say no at all to reconciliation. It is my wish that reconciliation takes place and is achieved.

I have doubts about the phrase “national unity”. What I envisage is people living in diversity, accepting other communities and languages, and finding their own way to live instead of needing to assimilate into one another’s cultures. They learn each other’s ways when they travel and conduct trade, and this contributes to understanding of each other. This allows people to accept and live without much fighting.

I do not think unity should be imposed. Unity should come from within the society. There are programs like children being brought from Jaffna to Hambantota and those from the South being taken to Batticaloa. They need these, as they have never experienced other cultures. During the war, there was not much space to travel, and these children want to travel and entertain themselves. Such programs should not stop there. It should be done with understanding and a broader perspective and not because money is received for a project on unity or reconciliation. Projects are written for these two aims, and they are imposed on communities. They are written in Colombo or overseas and implemented in local communities. However, the local communities have lived and traded and have commonalities in worship practices and cultures that are not reflected in the plans prepared by these unconnected parties.

When discussing unity in the political context, minority people think that their culture and their religion are submerged while the culture, religion and language of the majority become dominant. That is the pattern now. Things should be done with understanding and sensitivity. I do not accept the concept of national unity so I will not answer on national unity.

Currently I live in Batticaloa but I have periodically lived in Colombo. Speaking of reconciliation, I saw name boards on roads and on buses when I was in Colombo. There were many spelling mistakes and incorrect words in Tamil. The Polonnaruwa Museum is beautiful but there were mistakes in the Tamil words. I have been a language teacher for so many years. I do not tolerate mistakes. Nobody is taking care of this and I feel sad. As a gesture, people (and/or various bodies set up by the government) can take up a small project of correcting these mistakes. Work on this matter can be undertaken by the state as they are practical and simple gestures.

This will build trust in people; the people now see a gap. No attempts to correct failures have been made so far. I look at small things and academics/artists doing this work. The Official

Languages Commission can reprint, develop and/or update the Tamil glossaries. They started doing this in 1996. We worked hard and coined words but there was no result. We were simply told that the computer crashed and everything was lost. We need more Tamil books in the libraries. The ethnic balance has changed in the streets of Colombo because of apartments. There are many Tamil people in these apartments. Books mean children have something to engage with. They can have books from India as well as from here.

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

Traditionally, in our country as well as in all cultures, women are involved in settling disputes. Men are also involved in settling disputes and should not be left out. However, women are mostly housebound and witness the fights within the family while men are out in a bar or at sea or at work. When there are fights between siblings, the mother would intervene. She has negotiating and resolving skills developed through these experiences within the family. As a mother she talks with all parties and tries to resolve issues because they affect her. However women are not always peace-loving. Some women fight and are arrogant. In common, however, they are skilled because of their roles in the home. So I see the role of women in reconciliation as settling disputes in the context of Sri Lanka.

Women are more prone to settling disputes, and endeavors must be expanded to include women in the national context. In 2002, following an assessment on the status of women in the country, various organizations from the South, East and North (who felt that women bore the brunt of the war) wanted a gender subcommittee to represent (and address) gender issues at the peace talks table and to make the talks more gender sensitive. This was agreed to by both the government and the LTTE and we mobilized people who have experience, such as gender specialists, from Africa and other countries. They met the women in the North and East, government officials, and members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). They proposed to put women's concerns on the table. It was a short-lived peace but women had many aspirations.

As an individual woman, at this point in my life, I write and I will continue to write. I have an attraction towards the arts and poetry. Luckily, I know basic Sinhala and I can converse with three-wheel drivers and go to exhibitions, music shows, and read translations of Sinhala fiction in English. I do what I can through the medium of art and literature. I review programs (such as exhibitions) on print media. I was the editor of a trilingual work of poetry ("Let the poems speak" – 2010).

I have done some translations from English to Tamil on gender issues and human rights, and these were published. I was involved in the publication "Pravatham" in Tamil, and edited "Sol" in Tamil. This has not been published in recent times (I am not the only editor). I gave the name Sol to the magazine (which started in 2005/06). "Sol" means 'word', and is used as both noun and verb to symbolize that women must express their thoughts.

Reconciliation means you have the right to food/pleasure, and that you are not denied access to resources or justice. Justice exists and is available. If it is denied, it is injustice. These are

simple explanations of the concepts. Reconciliation is justice, which is denied today. The cases of people who have been murdered, caught in crossfires, abducted in white vans, imprisoned for many years without trial, mean that justice has been denied. You cannot satisfy people without justice. It is intrinsically linked. It is also for their past/present/future concerns. Denial should not happen when seeking answers in these three areas and there should always be justice. We cannot express what justice is. One must talk to those who experienced war. Some women asked us, "Who am I to punish? God will see to that". They don't want to punish the perpetrators.

However, a young woman whose husband was abducted said that she wants justice, not a death certificate, house or money. "I want to know what happened to my husband," she said, "When my son asks 'where is my father' do you want me to show the certificate? I want to tell him what happened. How can you compensate? How many children would I have birthed to him if he had lived?" I was shocked at her interpretation. They have their own interpretations of the situation. They have thought deeply and philosophically. We do not need to go talk to them or teach them. Translating this into a very workable solution requires understanding all this and then making a proposal. I have lost a colleague, as well as a student: To this day, we do not know what happened to her and there were other friends who went missing. In Batticaloa, people say they do not want to use the word "missing", as these people were taken and forcibly disappeared.

Reconciliation and its Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Transitional justice, peace building and development lead to a peaceful and enabling situation. I do not see development simply as building highways with four or five lanes. I do see travel as a basic requirement, and development cannot happen without it. For example, building materials have to be transported. For that, the enabling situation is that there should be no delays or blocks on the road, for which peace is essential. Additionally, if roads are developed and are not barricaded, vegetables can reach their destinations still fresh.

Reconciliation can definitely take place within communities in Sri Lanka. Reconciliation is repairing damaged relationships. Peace is very broad and deep and cannot be achieved without reconciliation. How do you get peace in the home? What about women getting raped and abused? Then where is the peace? If I fear to go in the three-wheeler at night and if I have to pay more for a cab because of my fear, then there is no peace for me.

We are divided by caste, religion, etc. and men oppress women, and children are oppressed by elders. There is suppression of skills. Without the contribution of youth how do you achieve peace in the future? To know peace and its meaning, people on the road should be asked what they think. Their opinions are very important. We may produce high-flown theories and projects but what do the ordinary people who do small businesses think? Peace is not only political initiation, but democratic values, which require a very conscious effort.

All that we have addressed here are connected. A feasible holistic solution is needed to achieve reconciliation. Women in this country are exploited. Data that is separated by sex are not

available so we do not know how the same issue affects men and women differently. That is another indication that the government does not pay attention to gender equality, which concerns the wider society. There is currently a move in universities to set up gender equality and equity units to curb ragging and gender-based violence (GBV). It is a good initiative, but some people say it must not only be done in universities but also tackled in the national arena as well. However this argument leads to inaction. The initiatives have to be workable plans.

I am in the consultation taskforce on reconciliation mechanisms that is situated at the Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms. It is a government initiative but constituted of civil society people such as academics, lawyers, researchers, community organizations, NGOs, and university academics. It is not pro-government.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

Practically, religion has a role to play in the process. There is no single representation or one philosophy. I am very much attracted to the Buddhist philosophy, which is deep. Hinduism can be philosophy-based or ritual-based and has many strands. Religion is also a dividing factor as seen in what happened in Aluthgama between the Sinhala and Muslim people, when Muslims were attacked, with political involvement. Fundamentalism appears in the main narratives and one must be very aware of this; for example, there are elements of caste distinctions or discrimination in certain religions, which do not support reconciliation.

The government has to listen to the citizens, but I am not aware if they listen. This is a small country, but politically volatile. It is a difficult path, but they should listen to the people. The current government should make political and administrative arrangements to realize reconciliation at every level of people's lives. This should reflect in the administrative system of Sri Lanka and people will benefit. There is also racist propaganda. It is not easy to navigate through these dangers. What is needed is to think things through tactfully and strategically before undertaking anything.

In the Eastern University, there was a violent dispute about language and the President sent people there to investigate. That is important. The gesture of having the national anthem sung in both languages this year at the Independence Day celebrations was welcome and Tamils were happy. However, it should not stop there. Gestures should not only be on the 4th of February. Those gestures should continue. It is a historical moment that we are in. People in power want to be in power till they die. They have to rethink this approach: when you die, there is nothing. You can't take power along with you.

We must have more women in everything. We at the consultation taskforce on reconciliation mechanisms are calling submissions (of opinion) from the general public about: the four mechanisms of reconciliation proposed by the government, the pillars of transitional justice, and any other concerns put forth by the people. Here, women who have experiences working with women can bring in more substantive inputs.

Women engage with passion because they think about their children and the future. I am not suggesting that we include women for the sake of having women. Include committed women, with patience, diplomacy and negotiating skills. We should not lose this moment. Nothing will happen easily, as it is a delicate moment and we must protect the delicateness.

CASE STUDY – 26

Name :	Dr. Fazeeha Azmi <i>Lecturer, Researcher</i>
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Age :	46
Ethnicity :	Sri Lankan Muslim
Place of work :	Kandy

Reconciliation and Women

Reconciliation is the linking of all groups of people and individuals, with different ideas and attitudes, especially after a dispute. Diversity of thought and lifestyle is characteristic of a multicultural society. Women play a huge role in bridging gaps between communities and individuals.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Achieving reconciliation in Sri Lanka is by no means an easy task, but possible nevertheless. I opine that it is possible, because of Sri Lanka's past. There was a time when all communities lived in peaceful co-existence. The impediments to peaceful co-existence created by thirty years of war and the few years immediately following the war were not only harmful, but also serve as a good lesson to all of us. We have all felt the brunt of division and hatred. The recent flooding of May 2016 is a good example of the chances at reconciliation Sri Lankans have. There was a lot of helpfulness and understanding without any discrimination or self-serving interests.

Reconciliation talks engineered by outsiders may not be the best option. The process of reconciliation must be desired by Sri Lankans and worked for, by us. I do not believe in specific methodologies. Best practices from other countries that have undergone similar experiences are often cited by many working in the field of peace building and reconciliation. Sri Lanka, however, has a unique history, and solutions must be particular to the Sri Lankan scenario.

Where we can start this process is at home, then at schools, and thirdly at the government sector. The home environment is truly the starting point, even before community level efforts. There are different dimensions to reconciliation – political, legal, cultural. Out of these, cultural reconciliation is something important, according to me. Teaching respect towards one another's culture at schools is no feat to be attained through textbooks. Learning one another's languages

and cultural practices is the best example of a value-based education system. That being said, parents are also in need of education on diversity and tolerance. It is important to note that such teaching cannot be injected from outside, but must be internalized.

A contemporary issue is that the tension built up between the Buddhist and Muslim communities post-war, and during the previous regime, has not been entirely deleted from the minds of people, although there has been a significant improvement after the presidential elections of 2015. In this light, it is important not to restrict reconciliation efforts to war-affected areas, but to extend such efforts to the entire country. The possibility of tensions building up in the future must be predicted and visionary preventative measures must be taken.

It makes me very upset when I witness where Malaysia and Singapore are in terms of peace and development, but find that Sri Lanka no longer corresponds with their indices. There was a point of time in history when Sri Lanka was parallel to these countries in these aspects. The ravages of war is something that Sri Lankans have a collective experience of, apart from our individual suffering. For our future generation to be able to live the development we dreamed of there must be reconciliation.

Role of Women in Reconciliation

Women have a big role to play in reconciliation. Sri Lanka is an example of how the war resulted in women from all communities suffering. As such, it is important to include women in the process of reconciliation.

Traditionally, women have been viewed as playing a reconciliatory role and making peace. Reconciliation, problem solving and negotiation have been considered natural skills of women. In the post-war context, women have assumed important leadership roles in their households and communities. This is reflective of the fact that women had the essential capacity to lead all along.

There is a theoretical proposition that the war was caused due to economic inequality. Whether or not this claim is merited, the importance of economic empowerment cannot be under-stated in a post-war context. Various organizations have worked towards the economic empowerment of women, as well. When women share their stories of personal economic empowerment, we are a step closer to economic reconciliation.

As an academic I strive to achieve reconciliation within the classroom. I lecture students hailing from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, and I allow them to participate in class in a language of their choice. There is a tendency among many young people to associate only with those who they already know, and this is invariably people from within one's own community. When I allot students for group work, I make sure they move out of their comfort zone. I always push for interaction. The subjects I teach have much to do with demographics, and I always encourage my students to mix. Our prime object as Sri Lankans must be to prevent another war. I use my classroom, in addition to lecturing, for this purpose. My belief is that if one student understands, she or he will enlighten others.

Reconciliation, Development and Transitional Justice

Reconciliation is important in terms of development. Any effort at development requires a peaceful backdrop. The Sri Lankan past serves as a good example and lesson in this regard. Trust between communities, and a peaceful backdrop are indispensable to development.

Transitional Justice is another important aspect for a country recovering from war. There is a lot of doubt and distrust among communities. This distrust must be taken out of the way, before any reconciliation programs can come to fruition. The trust-building exercise is so crucial that it must be done in a proper manner. It must also be understood that reconciliation is a long-term and ongoing process.

Reconciliation and peace building are parallel concepts. Reconciliation is a process and invariably takes time. The acknowledgment of past mistakes by communities is a pre-requisite to not repeat such mistakes. There is a serious link between reconciliation and peace building and they mutually enable one another.

Issues Relating to Women that must be Solved

Education, access to information, access to the decision-making process and economic empowerment are the chief focus areas which need attention in order to solve issues faced by women. These issues impede not only women's development, but also the reconciliation process as a whole.

It must be acknowledged that women do not form a homogenous group. Diversity within the gender must be understood. Though at the grassroots level, non-governmental organizations take serious efforts at giving women a voice, there is a lack of policy level input from women. I am not sure if voices are heard at that level. There have been complaints where economic empowerment meetings were organized for women at grassroots level, and they were unable to effectively contribute any input. This is because such meetings have been organized at inconvenient times, like when a woman had to take her children to school or keep watch over children at home. The gendered roles played by these women have been neglected when scheduling such meetings. Small, but important omissions like these are not inconsequential and have serious repercussions for the input from women at policy-making level.

What the State has done and can do

I am a firm believer in the ability of school education to turn things around. The introduction of 'citizenship education' at secondary school level is a commendable first step. The broader version of this step would be to bring parents to understand the multicultural backdrop of the students their child studies with.

I am not the happiest with the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations as there has been much criticism leveled at them. There are grievances against the Human Rights Commission as well, i.e. that it takes a prolonged period of time for applicants to obtain redress. Such responsible stakeholders with important mandates should deliver more effectively. I feel

that NGOs and INGOs working at community level are doing and delivering more than government initiatives. This may be because government programs always have a political agenda. Only genuine, people-driven processes can achieve results. My opinion is that the political setup of our country cannot bring people together, because the longer people are divided, the greater chances politicians have at survival. This is a serious impediment to successful reconciliation. Reconciliatory mechanisms must therefore be sought and implemented independent of the government apparatus.

Reconciliation and Religion

I firmly believe that there should be a religious dimension to reconciliation. Cultural identities cannot be severed from religious ties. To achieve both religious and cultural reconciliation, religion must be included in the process. This is important to Sri Lanka in particular. The past conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government has been termed by some as both an ethnic and religious conflict. In the recent past, the activities of the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and Islamist extremist groups have only served to widen the gap between the religious communities. Because Sri Lanka has rich religious diversity, and is home to some of the major religions in the world, religious reconciliation is a vital dimension to overall reconciliation. Most Sri Lankans do not have a clue about any religion other than their own. We must learn one another's religions as that is the starting point for respect. My son requested a Bible for research purposes at a school assignment on religious diversity, recently. After going through the Bible, my 13-year-old son acknowledged that there were many similarities between the Quran and the Bible. If all Sri Lankans make the effort to learn about and respect one another's religion, it would lay a strong foundation for religious reconciliation.

CASE STUDY – 27

Name : **Juwairiya Mohideen**
 Designation : Executive Director – Muslim Women’s Development Trust
 Age : 47
 Ethnicity : Muslim
 Place of work : Puttalam, North and East

Reconciliation

Reconciliation means two things to me. In the present Sri Lankan context, it is the strengthening of relationships between races. Secondly, it is also a healing process that restores normality or a state of affairs prior to conflict.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

I do think reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka. However, it is a long and difficult road. Language is a massive obstacle and has always been so. A lot of damage has been done to inter-communal relations, especially Sinhala-Tamil interactions, because of language differences. The state has an obvious responsibility to even out the issues created by language. The present language framework is highly unsuitable for reconciliation. The issues created by language are multifarious and countless, and they remain unnoticed, however widespread they may be.

In my opinion, the process of reconciliation has been unduly hastened. This may also be due to lack of real understanding for its need. Reconciliatory mechanisms are put in place so that we can submit a report to the international community. This raises serious doubts as to whether we are intrinsically motivated and are genuine about seeing a reconciled Sri Lanka. Reconciliation to me is an incremental process that has to be undertaken step by step: an understanding of needs, ascertaining methods and thereafter implementation. Haste is unlikely to produce long-term, efficient results. Reconciliation has to do with the mindsets and attitudes of each and every Sri Lankan and cannot therefore be short-circuited. For this reason, I do not see reconciliation coming to fruition in the near future. That being said, the opportunities for realizing such meaningful reconciliation are more open now than before. Civil Society Organizations being included in the government consultation process is a good sign of this.

The views of the state on reconciliation have always played the dominant role in terms of modalities. These views may not necessarily reflect the views of people. Whether these methods have been taken to the ground level, and feedback has been obtained on them, remains unanswered. It is difficult to think that the content of state reports submitted at international fora is indeed the input from people at ground level. Supposing there are 10 Grama Sevaka divisions in each of the 25 districts, a team of researchers and experts will have to go there and work in each division for at least a month, collecting information and input. This will go a great distance in bringing in perspectives, recording them, and taking it back to the people for reviewing before submitting it to higher authorities.

Another important issue is the treatment of Muslims vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan history of conflict. The 30-year war is largely focused on the Sinhala-Tamil tensions, to the omission of the Muslim community's story. There has been brutal violence and injustice leveled against Muslims during the war, but their collective experiences and memories have been denied a place in history. Such denial of truth cannot be helpful in reconciliation.

Women and Reconciliation

Women act as a bridge between the affected parties as well as with the state. Reconciliation has much to do with women and it is therefore important to involve them in the process. It is vital that their voices are heard at the top tiers. There is a need to work on issues relating to reconciliation at a local, national and international level. Within Sri Lanka there is a great lack of enlightenment and clarifications. It is important to reach out, so that ignorance is dispelled.

The households under female leadership are in need of permanent solutions for their many issues, and this has been a lingering issue since the war which has not received sufficient government attention, despite its immensity and frequency. Law reform is bound to be a permanent solution to their problems.

Sexual violence is a rampant and grave issue. While commissions are established from time to time to conduct inquiries there has been no adequate remedy. Both inquiries and the granting of remedies must be expedited.

Relationships between women themselves must be strengthened. The Tamil-Muslim rift, albeit swept under the carpet in view of Sinhala-Tamil tensions, is a dormant yet potentially dangerous issue. Such divides between women need to be cleared, so that they can raise their voices in unison. The economic status of women and their psycho-social issues are also in need of immediate attention.

When bringing in the perspectives of women into the reconciliatory process and mechanisms, it is important that the voices of affected women are heard. It must be an inclusive process with women who have been affected by social ills, and from diverse backgrounds. This is an important consideration when constituting commissions relating to women's affairs as well. The perspectives of affected women can be brought in through civil society organizations, online feedback or at village level. The village level input is very important, as the perspectives of these women have been largely ignored so far, or have at least not been comprehensively covered. It is ironic that it these very women who have been directly affected. The input and discussion remains within a group of women who are already educated and enlightened. This continuous internal circulation of information has to flow out of that small circle of women not directly affected, and trickle down women at grassroots who have indeed endured the brunt of social and political ills.

Reconciliation and Development

A unified community is the basis for everything in that society. Roads and aid mean nothing in a divided community. The strengthening of relationships is the cornerstone of a society.

Role of the State

What the state has done so far has been towards general and ordinary ways of assistance. Nothing has been done with a focus on specific groups of identified victims. This is especially true with regard to gender and female heads of households. Many years after the end of war, nothing has been done regarding land rights, an important consideration in a post-war context, where massive displacement previously took place. Female heads of households should receive treatment after taking into consideration their unique position, and not be held to the same yardstick as everyone else. For instance, when a Female Head of Household is required to contribute Rs. 200,000 towards a general housing scheme, she is in a place where it is impossible for her to raise that money with her other responsibilities and sparse income. There must be concessionary programmes for women, which offer necessities with reference to their unique circumstances.

Whatever measures have been undertaken are only on a nominal basis, and it is difficult to witness real changes at ground level. This has also been largely due to political agendas and political expediencies. The sporadic, short-term efforts undertaken in the name of reconciliation cannot be named as serious, genuine efforts. These efforts are more similar to fig leaves to cover up the existing tension.

Female political representation is yet another important facet of including women's perspectives. While there is much debate around this issue, there seems to be no seriousness or genuineness to such talks. Political parties have the greatest responsibility in nominating female candidates. This issue has remained in the discussion phase for a long time with no fruitfulness. It is my opinion that much is being done at various levels to prevent women from coming to the forefront, and ensuring that they do not participate in national or regional politics.

Religion and Reconciliation

A religious dimension is important to reconciliation. Religious rights and religious empowerment are vital to the realization of human rights, such that denying them could result in tension and acrimony.

CASE STUDY — 28

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Ethnicity :	Sri Lankan, Sinhalese – Burgher

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not an easy concept to define as it is informed by the country's socio-political context, historical events, the values and aspirations of its people, etc. There is no one definition, as can be seen from documentation and research over the past years. In Sri Lanka, there are different definitions and expectations of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a coming-together of the society and is a societal or interpersonal phenomenon. It is an opportunity to inclusively acknowledge social injustices of the past, identify remedial measures, and address the underlying or root causes of conflict. To me, this process goes beyond the ethno-political conflict. In its volatile recent history, Sri Lanka has experienced post-colonial politicization of ethnicity and religion, which stems, from amongst other factors, the "divide and rule" policy of our colonizers. We have also experienced youth insurrections, and a brutal 30-year ethno-political war. Going beyond the ethno-political conflict, there is structural and systemic social injustice that has been experienced by many segments of society in different ways. Most of these structural and systemic barriers are based on privilege and patronage systems, which have enabled the elites from national to local levels to influence political decision-making, dictate public policy, and control resources.

There is a need for a holistic and nuanced approach to reconciliation, placing those most affected at the centre of the discussion and decision-making process. This is by no means an easy or simple task. The actors leading the reconciliation process have a herculean task of having to take into account the views and demands of people, alongside the underlying causes of conflict which go beyond Sri Lanka's post-independence era. Reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka, but much rests on the ability of key political actors, administrators and facilitators to engage in the process having in mind the broader public interest and long-term development needs of the country. Political will is based on popular support, which will inform the process. It is essential for the majority Sinhala Buddhist community to be involved, because they too feel their interests are or may be compromised, which has critical implications for the feasibility of the process. Thus, their interests and fears (both perceived and real) must be taken into consideration and addressed alongside the concerns and interests of minorities, if the process is to succeed. All segments of society must be able to trust in the reconciliation process and the state's ability to facilitate mutually acceptable solutions and address past injustices.

The process of reconciliation must be meaningful and credible, and the underlying structural causes of conflict need to be understood. Identifying and talking about the structural issues will facilitate the reconciliation process. Whilst there have been conflicts between different communities at the ground level, they have escalated largely due to the politicization of issues by national actors. The Sri Lankan ethno-political conflict has predominantly been about a conflict

between the state and citizens. The state has adopted discriminatory policies and practices in employment, education, public security, land administration, public administration, etc., which have infringed the equal rights of minorities and their confidence in the state.

One of the key opportunities to achieve reconciliation and national unity would be to address underlying structural issues of conflict through the ongoing constitutional reforms process. Greater checks and balances must be created between the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government, alongside a comprehensive human rights framework which provides adequate protection and enforcement of civic and political as well as socio-economic, cultural and environmental rights.

Additionally, the public service, security forces and public mechanisms need to be representative of the socio-political strata of society at large so as to foster confidence and trust between different communities. The public service needs to be reformed so that it is independent of narrow or short-term political interests and can serve the long-term development agenda of the country and its citizens. A merit-based system that will cater to all socio-political groups is critical to enabling the public sector to function for the public good.

Substantial educational reforms need to take place so that a values-based education system, which focuses on the quality of delivery, can be reintroduced. This will foster civic conscientiousness and equip the younger generation with the cognitive as well as technical and soft skills required to meet the fast-evolving needs of a globalized economy. Education system reforms must inculcate co-existence and non-violent methods of resolving conflict within a framework of mutual respect and dignity as well as human rights and civic responsibility. Approximately 20% of the youth population in this country is unemployed. As such, youth are more prone to manipulation by political actors and forces due to frustrations of unemployment or underemployment and the lack of viable opportunities to improve their skills base and employability. The lack of a merit-based employment system (where privilege and patronage continue to play a role) adds to these frustrations. There is also a strong gender dimension to the unemployment or underemployment problem. Whilst statistics show that women are more educated than men, they comprise only one-third of the formal employment sector. Finally, access to land, which is a valuable resource and an income-generator, is important. The lack of access to productive land is one of the issues that have affected socio-economically vulnerable segments of the population for generations. Land reforms are long overdue. Importantly, such reforms need to take into account the specific needs of women, who face greater impediments than men and are also differently impacted on account of their gender (for instance, under the general land laws).

A Woman's Role in Reconciliation

A reconciliation process should involve looking at the gender dimensions of conflict and peace building. Men and women experience and are impacted by conflict in different ways. A reconciliation process needs to factor in the gender facets and perspectives, such as the views and specific needs of female heads of households across the country who have lost their husbands to war and have taken on added responsibilities for their families. Women must rebuild their families and communities in the absence of men.

Women have many different roles in the reconciliation process given that the impact on women is also different. Research has shown that having a greater number of women meaningfully involved in reconciliation and political processes increases the chances of addressing and resolving collective or societal issues. Women have different experiences and thus bring different viewpoints to the table. Women are perceived to be less threatening than men, and are most engaged in addressing societal issues.

Adherence to international standards, which requires states to give equal rights and recognition to women in reconciliation and security, is important. Adherence to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions means that states must have strategies, and importantly, must convert them into concrete action to overcome the under-representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions as well as in conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. They must be given equal representation and power in decision-making. In Sri Lanka, statistics show that women constitute more than 50% of the population, and are more educated than men. However, this has not translated into political representation and economic empowerment for women in society.

The involvement of women in the political sphere is critical for the reconciliation and peace-building process in Sri Lanka. Only 5.8% of parliament consists of women, and this goes down further at the regional and local levels, with women constituting just 4% of provincial councils and 1.9% of local government bodies in 2012. It is encouraging that a 25% quota was introduced in early 2016 for female representation in local government bodies. It is to be seen as to how this will be given effect to in the next local government elections. For this policy measure to be a success, it is important that women from all walks of life and who are competent to represent the interests of their constituents are absorbed through the quota system to local government bodies.

Women's economic empowerment is also a critical contributory factor to their effective participation in political and reconciliation processes. On the economic front, women comprise only 1/3rd of the formal labour force in Sri Lanka. Men continue to monopolize the upper levels of decision-making in the economic and business sectors. These sectors do not adequately take into consideration the different circumstances and needs of women in harnessing their potential to be equal players and beneficiaries of economic development.

My own work in the post-war recovery and development phase has focused mostly on the policy aspects of reconciliation, particularly the structural and systemic issues. Looking forward, my interests lie in continuing to advocate for the structural causes of conflict to be addressed, through for instance the new constitution-making process as well as institutional reforms. The transformative agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals and its overarching objective of leaving no one behind provide a platform for Sri Lanka to address issues of patronage and privilege at all levels. These systems have continued to marginalize segments of society along socio-economic and gender lines and prevented them from realizing their full potential.

Reconciliation and its Links with Transitional Justice, Development, and Peace Building

Sri Lanka's reconciliation process needs to be informed by international human rights principles that it has adopted and is bound to give effect to under international law. Having regard to our international obligations, I would think there is a need to develop a local and mutually acceptable understanding of reconciliation and what that entails through a process of consultation and dialogue across the country. Such a process must involve the marginalized and the disempowered segments of society. It should be formulated from the bottom up, and owned by all Sri Lankans. Such a process could be a vehicle for meaningful transformation in society and our values system.

Reconciliation links to development in many ways. An underlying cause of the Sri Lankan conflict has been identified to be the discriminatory policies and practices adopted by the state pre- and post-independence with respect to education, employment, land use, public security, civil administration, etc. Communities with equal access to quality education, health, social protection and justice, ultimately have greater confidence in the state and each other, which lays a sound foundation for coexistence and collective action.

The Roles of the Government and Religion

A key component of peace building involves strengthening the capacities of state institutions in the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government to be responsive and accountable to all its citizens. Effective and non-discriminatory institutions instil confidence in citizens across all segments of society to trust in the state's ability to resolve issues that affect their day-to-day lives and meet their aspirations. This strengthens the social contract between citizens and the state, and facilitates cohesive societies which have the capacities to resort to non-violent means of resolving disputes and work towards common goals.

A government's approach to reconciliation must be long-term, geared towards not just addressing the symptoms but importantly the underlying causes of conflict. This requires a long-term approach to reforms, which is admittedly no easy task when taking into account the realities of political survival. It requires strong leadership and commitment to the overriding public interest, even at the cost of quick political gains.

Religion's role in reconciliation is dependent on what people feel are the key constraints or factors that need to be taken into account in reconciliation. Religion is both a barrier and an enabler. If the people wish for it to be taken into account, then it should be taken into account. Religious leaders are influential and play a big role in changing perceptions and, for such reasons, religion could be a part of the process. While religions can be interpreted from a moderate or extreme stance, there is a general consensus about commonality between religions, in that they espouse similar values and principles.

There is a need for structural reforms in government, where there are greater checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, within an overarching framework of human rights and the rule of law. There is also a need for greater

citizen's engagement in the public sphere and civic responsibility, which can incentivize political actors to take difficult decisions in the long-term interest of the country, in areas such as introducing a values-based education system, public sector reforms, land reforms, and political party reforms, which have been advocated for years over successive governments. Ultimately, a government is as good as the people that elect it. There is a need for a transformation in our society, moving away from privilege- and patronage-based systems to that which is based on values, mutual respect, dignity for all and social justice.

CASE STUDY – 29

Name :	withheld on request
Designation :	Law Student/ Legal Apprentice
Age :	25
Ethnicity :	Muslim
Place of work :	Colombo

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the bridge that we have cross in order to deal with preceding tension or underlying problems. To me, this is a process whereby different communities start speaking to each other. Yes, we have been speaking to each other, but the dialogue that needs to take place in order to realize reconciliation is much deeper. In Sri Lanka, the tension between the Sinhala and Tamil communities has been the focal point of the discourse on reconciliation, and at times, this has taken away from the tensions between and among other communities, significantly, the Muslim community.

While I do not have exposure through working in the field, my views on reconciliation have been largely shaped by my university experience. The vast majority, in my opinion, has largely misunderstood Muslim women. Conclusions have been drawn about Muslim women in religious attire about their unwillingness to mingle with others. Making assumptions about other communities has largely obstructed the potential for engagement. Inter-communal dialogue has been misunderstood, abused or underutilized. We talk to other communities, sometimes, only to re-affirm our misconceptions. Arrogant confrontation about Muslim women's choice of attire has not only failed to be useful, but in fact, worsened the problems of isolation and distance. The most frequent conclusions drawn are that women wearing a hijab, abaya or niqab do not want to talk to others or that they are religiously oppressed and the freedom of choice has been thus constrained. After genuine engagement however, many misconceptions are almost always cleared. This dialogue, in my view, is reconciliatory.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Despite the lingering tension and strife, I believe that reconciliation is possible in Sri Lanka and that we have the potential of overcoming such strife. I also find that the urban-rural divide is problematic to a meaningful dialogue between the communities taking place. In Colombo, I feel that there is more potential for engagement, starting from the school level. The potential for such engagement is limited in rural areas which are more conservative.

In terms of modalities, I think that educational institutions have a large role to play. Segregations along communal lines and offering facilities on an ethnic basis severely distort the worldview of children at a very early stage. Our attitudes and perspectives are a result of our experiences. It is important that these experiences are shaped or re-shaped in order to build understanding and trust.

Women and Reconciliation

Women have been traditionally viewed as caretakers and there is a general argument that upon educating a woman, a household is educated. The example that a woman sets in a home is very important with regards to attitude towards other communities. Even across the world, there is a widespread misconception that Muslim women who wear religious attire isolate themselves and shut out the rest of society. This is a huge misconception. My contribution towards reconciliation has been to educate my friends about my community in order to dispel myths and misconceptions.

My hometown is Beruwela and I find that there is much narrow-mindedness and conservative thinking, on the other end of the spectrum. Poverty is a factor which severely aggravates every other social ill. This is true of how women are restricted from achieving their potential due to poverty, as well.

There are complicated issues within the Muslim community in rural areas. While on the one hand, all claims of a Muslim woman are invalid until she is married; marriage is sometimes the only chance some Muslim women have at getting freedom.

Reconciliation, Transitional Justice and Development

For ethnic strife to never occur again, there needs to be an acknowledgment that different communities suffered in different ways. The dialogue has always been centred on the conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. It is absolutely vital that the scope of the dialogue is broadened in order to encompass the suffering of Muslims too.

With regards to the right to truth and reparation, the need for memorialization and compensation are important, no doubt. However, a more symbolic way of this 'reparation' happening is this dialogue, whereby the pain and suffering of all communities are acknowledged – and acknowledged on a deeper level than a formal apology alone. Likewise, gender justice is an important aspect of transitional justice to Sri Lanka.

Reconciliation is crucial for development. All communities and genders working together is essential to build the Sri Lankan economy.

Religion and Reconciliation

Religion plays an important role in reconciliation, being a key factor in shaping an individual's identity. As such, there is a strong motivation to give reconciliation a religious dimension as well (in addition to racial, ethnic, economic and gender dimensions) due to this intimate role of religion in people's lives. All religions preach certain universal values such as respect, dignity of a human being, equality, justice and call against oppression of others. This can be found in Islam as well, where even a smile is considered an act of charity. Therefore, what individuals have in common, outweighs their differences by far, and facilitates reconciliation. Through religion this common ground can be found and celebrated, instead of using religion to compound differences.

The Role of the State

Topical political issues have always impeded work relating to reconciliation. By this I mean corruption, the mismanagement of state resources and administrative inefficiency. Such issues have always stood in the way of a meaningful dialogue due to their overarching impact. These issues have prevented reconciliation from being the centrepiece of government efforts. Political agendas have also jeopardized the chances of meaningful dialogue taking place at the macro level.

The ongoing constitutional reform process can be promising. I believe in the potential of a constitution to enrich the diversity in a country. As with the South African example, this occurs with the acknowledgement of diversity.

It is recommended that consultative processes must include the voices of the shunned and those who do not have a saying otherwise – particularly women who are confined to their households and do not have a say in the smallest of affairs. A quota system and devolution of power will also go some length in ensuring women's participation.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that we need to put aside any underlying hostility, on an individual basis. I believe that while macro-level changes are good and impactful, micro-level changes are truly indispensable.

CASE STUDY – 30

Name :	Mallawarachchige Chathurani Rasika
Designation :	Small Enterprise Owner and Director of Shakthi Kantha Organization (Shakthi Women's Organization)
Age :	34
Ethnicity :	Sinhala

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is another term used to describe the inter-relationship between all living beings. Understanding and helping another individual can also be viewed as reconciliation.

There is always a preference among women folk to avoid conflict and live peacefully. Every second of their lives involves thinking of ways to help others and understand them. As a woman it is my belief that it's mostly women who think about reconciliation. Likewise, it is women who feel (and feel the need for) reconciliation the most.

All three communities can live together in peace. The Sri Lankan public are an intelligent people with a mature mentality. How to live in peace without conflict is something that can be explained to all communities. If one community refrains from betraying another, reconciliation can be achieved.

Identifying the problems that exist between communities (and their root causes) is the first step. Next, solutions must be found to address those root causes. Through mediation, people must be trained to ensure equal rights and responsibilities of all citizens (A balanced spread of rights and responsibilities across the different communities). This mediation process and all related activities must be carried out by the State.

The Role of Women in Reconciliation

Women have the capacity to bear immense pain and to rise above it. They are also a group who can take on leadership roles. Every second of their lives women are playing different roles within their society. Similarly, she can play a role in a reconciliation process.

She can begin with the family and then, through awareness raising, carry it forward to the community. For example, a group of women could organize a street theatre performance for community members on the theme of reconciliation. Within her family, she can shape the mindset of the family members. She can individually target her husband, daughter and son. This will enable them to understand how to coexist peacefully with other communities. Such interventions may help in curbing the aggressiveness men tend to have when dealing with others. A single woman can set in motion activities such as this and gradually a group can be formed. The State can support a group such as this to function independently. I can personally commit to help with increasing awareness on conflict sensitivity between communities.

For the past two to three years I have been a stakeholder of the National Peace Council. I have organized many mediation programs for women living in war-affected regions. In addition to this, I have selected women with exceptional leadership skills from Trincomalee district and formed a network for furthering reconciliation activities.

Reconciliation and its Relationship to Transitional Justice, Development and Peace Building

After the war, we live in hope of sustainable peace. What is important is to move towards realizing the collective aspirations and dreams of all peoples and communities rather than focusing on ourselves as isolated beings. For this, the bridge named 'reconciliation' is of utmost importance. Transitional justice can only be reached by crossing this bridge.

As a woman I feel that it was women who suffered the most due to the war and therefore their intervention in the process of reconciliation (and transitional justice) is vital. What qualifies them to take on leadership roles is because once in that position she will strive to eradicate the suffering faced by others. She will work on behalf of others in order to make their lives better. Men, especially those that are involved in politics, focus on their own wellbeing and are uninterested about the plight of others. Women are much less likely to do this. Although a few women change after entering politics, a majority of them continue to work for the betterment of others.

The bridge called 'reconciliation' also supports development. It (development) must equally benefit all communities. All three communities must reach the same level of development within the same time frame and if we forget reconciliation, this cannot be achieved.

There is a close interconnection between peace and reconciliation. One cannot exist without the other. There are many ways to create an appearance of peace, like exchange programs and celebratory events. But real peace can only exist if there is reconciliation within the hearts of the people.

To achieve reconciliation, there are issues faced by women which must be solved. They must be brought into leadership roles at the community level and in politics. If reconciliation is to be realized, the exploitation of women's labour must be addressed while increasing their access to education and leadership roles.

The Role of the State and Religion

I know that the State gets involved through Committees of Religious Leaders and other village level activities. But I don't know too much about that.

Religion also has a role to play. Although everyone believes a certain religion, a reconciliation process must not be partial to any one religion. When drawing up a plan for reconciliation, all religions must be included. In that sense, I believe that religion has a role to play.

The State can include reconciliation in all its offices and programs. There are officials of all faiths and religions serving in those offices and if each one of them makes reconciliation a priority within their area of duty, it will not be difficult to achieve. For example, if it's building homes – then by ensuring that members of all three communities are included as beneficiaries, there will be a good inter-relationship among them.

I have a doubt about women being included at the start of many programs. There is no use in consulting women half way through a program or at the end of it. Women must come in not only mid way and the end but also at the start of a program. I find this token inclusion somewhat problematic – as it is often not just or complete. Female representation in all programs is a must.



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