

Irrigation in conflict Cross Boundary Water Management in a Context of Violent Conflict in East Sri Lanka

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The research project described in this paper is conducted in the Allai Extension Scheme in Trincomalee district. In this scheme, covering some 7,000 hectares in its present form, farmers from Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim background have been living together since the 1950s. During the conflict that has ravaged much of North-East Sri Lanka, the villages in the scheme have seen extensive death and destruction. However, despite all this, the relevant government agencies and the farmers have managed to keep the irrigation system functioning to a reasonable extent.

The central objective of this study is to gain insight into how the actors involved managed to keep large-scale irrigation schemes in Sri Lanka functioning to a reasonable extent during the conflict, and into what the consequences of the possible return of peace will be for the relationships between the different stakeholders.

A more theoretical perspective underlying the study is on conflict and co-operation between non-combatants in situations of violent (intra-state, 'ethnic') conflict. In much of the research done on violent conflicts, non-combatants receive relatively little attention. If they do, they are often treated as either a pretty non-distinct support base, or as victims (refugees, traumatised people, raped women). I have found virtually no literature on how non-combatants identified with opposing groups of combatants deal with each other.

The research is mainly qualitative in nature, primarily consisting of informal interviews, with some quantitative analysis where required to support the thesis.

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