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Engaging the Diaspora in the Reconciliation Efforts in Sri Lanka: Lessons Learnt

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Abstract

With nearly three million Sri Lankans living overseas, across the world, there is a significant role that can be played by this constituency in post-conflict reconciliation. This paper will highlight the lessons learnt from a process facilitated by International Alert (IA) and led by the author, working to engage proactively with the diaspora on post-conflict reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The paper shows that for any sustainable impact, it is also critical that opportunities are provided to diaspora members representing the different communities of the country to interact and develop horizontal relations, whilst also ensuring positive vertical relations with the state. The foundation of such effective engagement strategies is trust-building. Instilling trust and gaining confidence involves the integration of the diaspora into the national framework for development and reconciliation. This will allow them to share their human, social and cultural capital, as well as to foster economic growth by bridging their countries of residence and origin.

Keywords: *trust; diaspora; capital; reconciliation; definitions.*

Introduction

With nearly three million Sri Lankan's living overseas[2] across the world (approximately fourteen per cent of the country's population), Sri Lanka's diaspora-to-population ratio is known as one of the lowest in the South Asian region (Reeves, Rai, & Kirrupalani, 2013). This ratio is the product of different waves of migrations that can mainly be attributed to: post-colonial developments, the need for better economic prospects, political instability, including the JVP[3] insurrection and the 30-year civil war[4] as well as to take up educational opportunities. As such, the Sri Lankan diaspora is by nature not homogenous, as it represents the many social, political, ethnic and religious ideologies and experiences that exist in Sri Lanka. Much of this heterogeneity, as detailed below, has to do with how diasporas left Sri Lanka and the extent of the 'grievance' with which they left the country[5].

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[2] There is no accurate data available on the figures, but there are approximations that have been made. The figures of Sri Lankan refugees (exiles) abroad, who now make up a large portion of the diaspora, are around two million, whilst the number of migrant workers is around one million (Institute of Policy Studies, 2016).

[3] The JVP or the "People's Liberation Front" is a group inspired by Marxist ideas aimed at Sinhala youth that emerged in the late seventies and eighties, which eventually became a political party (Bennet, 2013).

[4] In July 1983, Tamil separatists stepping up militant attacks in northern Sri Lanka killed 13 soldiers, who had reported for duty only a day earlier. Over the next few days, mobs of the Sinhalese majority took revenge, killing between 400 and 3,000 Tamils around the country and triggering a civil war that lasted 26 years and sent hundreds of thousands of Tamils into exile (Havilland, 2013).

[5] The majority of the Sri Lankan diaspora are made up of Tamils, who largely left after the 1983 pogrom and which saw the start of the 28 year old conflict which ended in 2009. Thus, much of this constituency has a political grievance against the state, which they see as curtailing the rights of the minorities, especially the Tamils. Other ethnic groups have also moved at different times throughout Sri Lanka's history and have different emotions towards engagement with the nation and the state.

However, by virtue of this heterogeneity and diversity of influence, the Sri Lankan diaspora can play a role in post-conflict reconciliation[6]. It also complements existing research and work being undertaken to examine the role of diaspora in post-conflict reconciliation.

The role of Diaspora in Peace Building and Development Cooperation

Today, the diaspora is best approached not merely as a social entity, but also, as a concept that helps explain the world of migration and development in terms of the maintenance of links between countries of residence and heritage (Sheffer, 1986). As such, this is a perspective that is based on the three interrelated dimensions of movement, connectivity and return (Cohen, 2008). Members of the diaspora, regardless of generation, may belong to multiple communities based on compound and multifaceted identities. These identities[7] mean that they will have intimate knowledge about several different countries and communities, which allows them to navigate both "home" and "host" countries more fluidly and be embedded in multiple country systems. Thus, this allows diaspora to be ideal facilitators of connections between the societies of origin and residence (Vanore, Ragab, & Siegel, 2015). Hence, they can harness resources for peaceful development, such as human capital, social capital, economic capital, cultural capital and political capital.

Accordingly, diaspora engagement can be a part and parcel of a national process for development and reconciliation[8] (International Alert, 2016) and as transnational social agents, the diaspora plays an important role in matching resources across spaces and of growing the network of institutions and individuals that work in (post-)conflict environments. Given there seems no doubt that "diasporas have increasingly become significant players in the international political arena" (Vertovec, 2005, p. 1), there is a growing interest in the nature and impact of diaspora engagement in conflict-settings[9]. Whilst their importance and contribution must, therefore, be taken into consideration within the national discourse, they should not be thought of as potential saviours, who can solve the problems of their 'homelands' (International Alert, 2016). In many cases, whilst diaspora actors can contribute to peacebuilding in the country of origin, they can conversely, also be "spoilers", fuelling and contributing to the conflict in different ways, especially in the realms of financial and political engagement (Nielsen & Riddle, 2010)[10]. Thus, there is much to be understood

[6] It is also important to note that the diaspora will have different understandings and expectations around what sustainable peace and justice looks like in Sri Lanka. It is crucial to understand where the common ground in this is and to seek to expand that space.

[7] This raises the need to recognise that the diaspora has a strong sense of identity derived from internal clannishness, external rejection by the diaspora and of the diaspora or a combination of the two, as well as a definitive ethnic or religious identity. These groups that have migrated over a period of time have perceptions and realities, which are conditioned by the circumstances of their departure and the ground realities at the time of migration. This has influenced their level of engagement with and support for the 'homeland'. For most who left with unpleasant memories, they have no intention of engaging; for those who do engage, they most often do so informally (Cohen, 2008).

[8] Whilst important capital is sent by the diaspora this cannot substitute for the need to cultivate and sustain a domestic form.

[9] For example, diasporas are known for sending remittances back to their countries of heritage. Remittances can be counter-cyclical, in that they may be sent to the country of origin during times when other forms of foreign capital are being withdrawn. That is the diaspora may have greater willingness and incentive to continue contributing to the country of origin even during high-risk times. Such willingness to provide assistance during high-risk periods coupled with the long-term commitment of the diaspora to the country of origin, thus make its members natural partners in long-term peace and reconstruction efforts (Vanore, Ragab, & Siegel, 2015).

[10] For example, financial contributions can work towards helping to generate employment and providing greater economic stability, but these contributions may inadvertently increase inequality within communities and create new economic elites, which in turn can contribute to revitalisation or intensification of the conflict (Vanore, Ragab, & Siegel, 2015). In addition, whilst political engagement can contribute to the rehabilitaiton of political institutions promoting conflict resolution, such engagement could also support political fragmentation, producing new political elites and promoting a new perception of bias and lack of impartiality / independence.

in terms of the contribution of diasporas towards the shaping of political institutions in post conflict reconciliation and this paper contributes to furthering this discussion.

Objectives of the Paper

This paper highlights four main lessons learnt from a process facilitated by International Alert (IA)[11] that has been working in the field of Sri Lankan diaspora engagement[12] since 2010 (Perera & Yacoub, 2015), where the author was employed[13], which resulted in the development of a 'Roadmap for Engagement with Overseas Sri Lankans' (International Alert, 2016)[14]. Over the course of six years, IA facilitated the formation of several multi-ethnic second-generation working groups from diaspora based in the UK, focusing on dialogue and professional initiatives. These professional initiatives sought to develop partnerships with Sri Lankan-based organisations in support of professional projects that also built understanding and collaboration between communities (both in the UK and Sri Lanka). This process-led approach enabled Alert to challenge prejudices, provide opportunities for exposure to new contexts and multiple opinions as well as building core peacebuilding competencies with a new constituency, i.e. second generation diaspora[15]. The paper will suggest options for engaging diaspora in reconciliation in a similar process of creating a safe space as lessons learnt from the engagement towards developing the roadmap.

Lesson 1: Definition and Terminology of Diaspora Matters

One of the main challenges coming out of the engagement was that terminology matters. Words are important as they help shape narrative. There are many definitions of diaspora, which is defined at its simplest as the dispersal of a group of people from its original homeland (Cohen, 2008)[16]. Until recently, the term was most closely associated with the dispersion of the Jewish people, although there are extensive historiographies of the Armenian, Greek and African diasporas. Since the 1980s, the usage of the word has become increasingly complex and difficult as to force a reassessment of its meaning (Butler, 2001). Moreover, the lack of a common understanding

[11] This builds on previous work done by Alert, which included diaspora outreach and engagement trips between 2010 and 2014. Coming out of this work was the need to understand and analyse the achievements and the role that can be played by diaspora in engaging with Sri Lanka through avenues, such as economics, education and reconciliation. Furthermore, the opportunities and challenges of engaging with the diaspora in reconciliation efforts for a more open Sri Lanka, as well as the need to leverage the diaspora for investment and knowledge were discussed.

[12] Whilst there have been many other international peace building organisations working on reconciliation in Sri Lanka, IA is the only one at that time that worked on diaspora engagement.

[13] The author was employed by IA from 2014 -2017 primarily in the project of diaspora engagement after being involved as a diaspora stakeholder in the initial phase of the project from 2010-2014.

[14] The work towards developing the roadmap, which was led by the author and his team, was made up of convening meetings, facilitating discussions and preparing the documentation. In order to establish a widely endorsed framework for engagement, IA conducted both individual and group consultations with key stakeholders from the government of Sri Lanka (ministers and civil servants from ministries directly interested in engaging with the diaspora), members of parliament, provincial councils and local government bodies, the diplomatic corps, the corporate sector, civil society organisations, academia, the media, diaspora members and returnees artists, among others (With the objective of making the document as inclusive as possible, the consultations were not limited only to Sri Lanka, for parallel meetings were organised in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. A survey was also conducted, which had an outreach to OSL around the world, including non English speaking countries.

[15] This also points to the differences in approach and relationship towards Sri Lanka being dependent on the diaspora generation. The first generation often have direct emotions about the country that they left, with nostalgic or painful memories of the country frozen at the time they left. The second and third generations, whilst being fed those memories do not have the same issues and thus, can be engaged with but can have different interests to the first generation

[16] The use of the term in policy discussions usually leaves behind the historical roots of the term in favour of an empirical description, as in the definition offered by Gabriel Scheffer: "Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origin residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin — their homelands." (Sheffer, 1986)

regarding the term "diaspora" has been reinforced by the absence of a common definition acknowledged globally. This can be attributed to the uniqueness and differences of relationship and constituency maintained by each community with their respective homeland.[17]

In this regard, 'diaspora' had a certain negative terminology for Sri Lanka. With the end of the conflict in 2009, there has been much confusion and contemplation about the term 'diaspora', which was used to label a particular segment of the Sri Lankan community overseas that was perceived to be taking negative stances against the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL)[18]. In labelling this particular constituency as the 'enemies of the country[19]', the GoSL, along with the media, played a crucial role in changing public perceptions about the diaspora[20] by portraying them as entities that were working against the interests of the country. It cannot be refuted that there were/are those elements working against the notion of sustainable peace in the country. However, the majority of those living outside the country were/are not opposed to any lasting solution for peace, provided that truth, justice and equity be observed. Despite the antagonism of the GoSL between 2009-2014 towards the diaspora, the 'Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission' (LLRC)[21] set up by it to look at post conflict reconciliation and restitution, identified the importance of constructively engaging with the diaspora, noting that they have the potential to 'instigate and energise' a movement that can ignite a fragile situation. In particular, the Commission's Report highlighted that (Government of Sri Lanka, 2013):

> "It is clear to the commission that these 'hostile diaspora groups' can potentially undermine the genuine efforts in Sri Lanka towards reconciliation. The Commission feels therefore that the Government together with the relevant stakeholders, especially the civil society, should keep a comprehensive approach to harness the potential of the expatriate community."[22]

Thus, it is evident that in order to overcome the impasse regarding the terminology, there has to be a different approach. This is not helped by the fact that the term 'diaspora' is incredibly contested within both academic and non-academic circles who attempt to deconstruct the term while constantly unearthing different meanings and connotations. Hence, it would be more sustainable to approach the concept of 'diaspora' as an evolving 'process', or a more 'dynamic' term, rather than referring to it as a label, an individual or a group.[23] For the purposes here, diaspora is considered to be "individuals with distinct links (ethnic, social, cultural, economic) to a country of heritage other than their country of residence".[24]

Over the past decades, the engagement of diasporas in issues conventionally seen as relating to development has generated increasing interest among a variety of stakeholders, including

[17] Key informant consultations by International Alert, August 2015.

[18] See, for example, how this played out in the media and public gallery: http://www.eyesrilanka.com/2014/04/28/tna-criticises-ban-on-diaspora-groups/

[19] See for example: http://www.tamilguardian.com/article.asp?articleid=11930

[20] This has come out of the consultations conducted by IA.

[21] See details of LLRC at http://www.mea.gov.lk/index.php/media/news-archive/3146-the-lessons-learnt-and-reconciliation-commission-llrc-concludes-its-work-the-final-report-will-be-handed-over-to-the-president-on-20-november

[22] See LLRC report at http://www.defence.lk/warcrimes/lessons_learnt_and_reconciliation_commission_final_report.html

[23] Key Informant Consultations by International Alert, September 2015

[24] This is the definition that International Alert has been using in its work. See International Alert (2015), What's Diaspora Got To Do With It?; Background Paper (http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/SriLanka_DiasporaEngagement_EN_2015.pdf).

governments and multilateral institutions (IOM, 2013)[25]. Today, the diaspora is best approached not merely as a social entity, but also, as a concept that helps to explain the world of migration. It is an idea that is based on the three interrelated dimensions of movement, connectivity and return.

From this perspective, the resources that they can mobilise are similar to those that anyone can. However, the diaspora communities are unique in that they can be mobilised in a way that links, directly or indirectly, two or more countries. Thus, diaspora communities can be mobilised through the following potential resources or "capitals" (IOM, 2013).

- Human capital: Diaspora members will contribute to the economy and society of the country where they live. They may, however, also engage in the development processes in their country of origin through knowledge-sharing. The specificity of the diasporas' human capital is that, at least potentially, it facilitates skills' circulation and knowledge transfer that benefit a country's development, particularly in a period of post conflict reconciliation, when there is a lack of local expertise.
- Social capital: This is commonly understood as the set of resources embedded in the (actual or potential) social networks that diaspora communities maintain. These social networks are not limited to links with the country of origin or to those between diaspora members within the country of residence. Rather, they can extend globally through members of the same diaspora who are scattered across several countries. Social networks are based on relationships with families, friends, colleagues and/or associations. They are crucial for identifying further opportunities to facilitate the engagement of diasporas in development and for mobilising such engagement. They are also a very useful tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation in the space that is created for conversations to take place. In this regard, social media is increasingly playing a major role in sustaining and extending these networks.
- Economic capital: This lies in the opportunities that diaspora communities can bring in terms of investment and remittances, as private funds, which are an important feature of their economic contribution to the well-being of their families or members of their communities in their countries of origin. However, this contribution is not limited to the transfer of financial capital. Trade between the country of origin and country of destination, operated by diasporas, is now widespread. Diaspora members who invest in their country of origin, setting up small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or through foreign direct investment, have a prominent role to play in poverty reduction and economic dynamism.
- Cultural capital: This relates to the globalisation of ideas, knowledge and, to some extent, social models. While establishing themselves in a country, transnational societies bring with them a rich cultural background, which, while representing the visible features of their identity, also provides them with the means for their integration and acceptance into their new society. Cuisine, arts and festivities are among the elements that allow exchanges and mutual recognition, releasing the potential benefits of more diverse societies.
- Political capital: This has the potential to affect the relationship between the country of residence and the country of origin positively through enhancing policy and regulations to improve engagement, political lobbying as well as mutual understanding. Diaspora

[25] See https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/idm/workshops/IDM-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference/Background-Paper-2013-Diaspora-Ministerial-Conference-EN.pdf

members can also play a role in the democratic processes, especially when granted the right to vote, either in their country of origin and/or their country of residence.

As such, the diaspora communities are an important stakeholder within their host countries and their homelands. They have the ability to enhance and build relations that can either positively or negatively impact on their country of origin. As unique actors with multiple ties to the country of heritage and residence - in financial, emotional, cultural and political terms - they have the potential to play a significant role in peacebuilding, reconciliation and recovery. However, diaspora engagement is not done in a vacuum, their importance and contribution must, therefore, be taken into consideration within the national discourse and process for development and reconciliation. Whilst the important forms of capital are brought by the diaspora they cannot be substituted for the need to cultivate and sustain domestic capital. Thus, policies and programmes that aim to engage, enable and empower diasporas should share the objective of better harnessing these resources for peaceful development and reconciliation.

In the case of Sri Lanka, it is thus useful for the diaspora to be included in the dialogue on development and peacebuilding[26]. This is particularly true in a country that has ended a three-decade civil war and that needs to mobilise and channel all possible avenues for greater progression in every sector. However, to engage in this process and to engage with the Sri Lankan diaspora, there was a need for the term to change in order to create a space for meaningful discussion and engagement with different stakeholders. From the work done, it was felt that the term should be changed to 'Overseas Sri Lankan' (OSL)[27].

Lesson 2: The Heterogeneity of the Diaspora

Engaging in reconciliation using a country's diaspora has to take into account the recognition that diaspora have a strong sense of identity derived from internal clannishness, external rejection (by the diaspora and of the diaspora) or a combination of the two, as well as a definitive ethnic or religious identity. These groups, which have migrated over a period of time, have perceptions and realities conditioned by the circumstances of their departure and the situation on the ground at the time of migration. This has influenced their level of engagement with and support for the 'homeland'. For most who left with unpleasant memories[28], they have no intention of engaging and those who do so most often do it informally. This scenario, in particular, is reflective of what happens in Sri Lanka as the diaspora are very diverse and often divided in terms of: political ideologies, social status, ethnicity and religion. Thus, diaspora communities are not a homogenous group and diaspora dynamics need to be understood prior to any engagement with them. That is,

[26] In this sense, it is also important to acknowledge that there are different ideas and expectations around what this could finally look like in Sri Lanka. However, there are some common points that all the diaspora could agree on in terms of basic law and order and non violence. This is what needs to be understood and used to create this safe space to move the conversations forward. To all intent and purposes, the roadmap can be defined as one of the common points for sustainable peace.

[27]The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sri Lanka (MoFA) for their purposes have been using this term in their work (based on consultations held with IA)

[28] These memories are based on their experiences of violence as a result of the state or non state actors. So, for many of the Sinhalese, who left in the seventies and eighties, this was as a result of the JVP violence and the retaliation of the state against it. For many Tamils, they left great numbers after the 1983 pogrom and during the conflict. Whilst a majority of them had grievances against the state (and the Sinhalese majority), there were also those who fled because of intra tamil conflict. For many Muslims who fled, they did so as a result of being victims of the conflict or for economic reasons. There were other groups who also left in the fifties, sixties and seventies, for economic and educational opportunities, but also, as a result of grievances against the state.

whilst it is convenient for policy-makers to perceive diaspora communities as a homogenous group, they have multiple social, political, economic and ideological divisions within them as well as inter-generational differences. These divisions mean , that diaspora communities first need to enter into a reconciliation process on their doorstep, in hubs across the globe, to find some common consensus and this was particularly important in Sri Lanka's case.

In regard to reconciliation in Sri Lanka, it is important to understand the rationale for engagement for both OSL and the GoSL that it is not a 'one-size-fits-all' model. Other countries that proactively interact with their diaspora, such as Bangladesh, India, and Ethiopia[29], consider their diaspora as vital for development activities, having created responsive policies to foster this engagement[30]. These countries recognise the vital importance of the diaspora for remittances, export markets, investment as well as influencing public policies. For example, the Government of Bangladesh considers its relationship with emigrant Bangladeshis, who get involved in electoral politics within their countries of residence and citizenship as salient issues.

Lesson 3 – Play the Long Game

The engagement of diaspora communities for peacebuilding interventions has to retain the ability to play the long game. It involves **developing a comprehensive and inclusive vision for peace[31]**, which involves addressing the memory of violent conflict in Sri Lanka. This is an integral part of the diaspora identity, shaping, binding and dividing all communities and their potential to work collectively for peace. To overcome these divisions, opportunities need to be created for communities to engage in honest and constructive conversations, enabling them to understand deep-rooted grievances and the perspectives of the other. This is even more important for second-generation diaspora, as they usually have been passed on the version of the conflict that their elders believe in. Our experience have shown that, exposure to the context and to a wide range of opinions, especially from those who are working on some of the key conflict, humanitarian and development issues, has helped the younger generation to build a balanced understanding of the realities on the ground, independent of prejudices and misinformation that was shared within their communities. This clarity has often been key to shifting negative perceptions about 'the other'. The challenge, however, doesn't end here for facilitators like us. It is also critical that the actors that we are engaging with, in addition to a deep understanding, also have some vision for peace, so they can offer constructive and meaningful input to engagements. This takes us to our next lesson learned.

The long game needs to also include **building the skills and knowledge needed for peacebuilding**. Stakeholders should not assume that diaspora communities have the required knowledge and skills to be able to act as peacebuilders. Considered effort must be put into building the skills of individuals so that they can work with and through their differences so as to able to engage in constructive dialogue. Building the capacity of individuals on key conflict-resolution

[29] Comparative analysis has been done on 11 countries that have significant diaspora policies by IA in the development of its roadmap.

[30] See for example 'Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA' prepared by IOM and the Government of Bangladesh (2004).

[31] With this perspective, it is important to note that the vision for peace may be clouded by different expectations of what a sustainable one may look like. For this depends on people's experiences of the conflict on the ground and their relationship with the state. However, it is clear that there needs to be a safe space created in order to have those conversations aimed at seeking common ground, thereby moving towards sustainable peace for the country. This is where the long game is required to have those conversations and to get an understanding of the different expectations. The road map in a sense exemplifies a minimum agreed set of characteristics that the OSL (despite their heterogeneity and differences of expectations) could agree to in terms of creating the right conditions towards sustainable peace.

skills, such as facilitation, workshop design and conflict analysis, empowers them to carry out the like of workshops and design projects independently. This will help to ensure ownership of the process and outcome, as well as the sustainability of work and other legacies to be developed on the back of Alert's initial intervention.

Lesson 4 – Build the Trust

Whilst peacebuilding is apolitical, individuals who are attracted to engage in these initiatives tend to have an interest in politics. In Sri Lanka's case, identity of diaspora communities is closely connected to their political ideology. Whilst our work with the diaspora has shown that there are multiple channels for diaspora communities to engage and be reconciled with Sri Lanka, such as through inter-faith dialogue, cultural avenues, investment; the more invested, engaged and driven diaspora actors had an interest and understanding of politics. This meant that despite their other personal and professional commitments, they continued to remain engaged in the project cycle and beyond. Hence, engaging these stakeholders in development (and ultimately reconciliation) necessarily relies upon a sound knowledge of who they are. However, knowledge about them is not sufficient for fostering collaboration, for the foundation of effective engagement strategies, especially in the context of Sri Lanka, is **trust-building**. There is a need to move from blame and avoidance to an acceptance of shared responsibility, if effective positive change is to be a reality in the future (Corcoran, 2010)[32]. Thus, instilling trust and gaining confidence involves the integration of Overseas Sri Lankans into the Sri Lankan framework for development and reconciliation. This will allow them to share their human, social and cultural capital, as well as to foster economic growth by bridging their countries of residence and origin. It is also about humanising the 'other' through the personal narrative experienced by all constituents[33]. Their intercultural position ensures that they are uniquely placed to adapt to become part of and contribute to multiple communities. This, in turn, may lead to greater social cohesion and further social and economic integration so that their contributions can truly be maximised.

Conclusion

If we can accept that intra-state conflict can be determined, reproduced and reinvigorated by transnational actors, then the same actors can surely be called on to support peaceful community relations and governmental reform. However, this assumption works on the basis that the concept of peace is more attractive than open, dangerous and antagonistic forms of societal conflict.

This paper contributes to the discussion around the complexity inherent to the diaspora construct, the forms of offers the diaspora can make to conflict and post-conflict countries of origin as well as the multiplicity of factors that shape how (and what) diasporas can provide. These complexities have important implications for how development cooperation can interact with the diaspora in shaping joint interventions in countries experiencing or recovering from conflict. In particular, diaspora communities can have a significant role to play in peacebuilding, reconciliation

[32] Corcoran highlights four key steps to build trust: 1) begin with ourselves; 2) include everyone; 3) acknowledge history; and 4) build a team. These steps help to build authentic relationships.

[33] In this sense, diaspora communities regardless of their political, religious or ethnic affiliations and ideologies have a similar trajectory in terms of how they engage with their countries of residence and how there is a constant struggle that they face with their children and grandchildren about ensuring that their memories and cultural heritage are preserved without being lost, because of assimilation within the new country of residence. This commonality of challenge should be a catalyst as well towards ensuring the opening of a space for conversations for Overseas Sri Lankans concerned about support back to their countries of heritage. Regarding which, all the memories of the first generation diaspora are frozen in time when they left the country. They remember that era and cannot see the evolution (for the better or worse) of the country since the time they left.

and recovery. They comprise unique actors with significant ties to the country of heritage. The challenge is, first, to provide space to understand heterogeneity and acknowledge respective grievances. This space should support communities in harnessing their capacity to address the needs of people on the ground and in gaining acceptance from the political community that the diaspora is a legitimate constituent to be taken seriously and engaged with constructively, as is the case in Sri Lanka. This space also ensures that trust is built between individuals who are empowered to work for their communities. Accordingly, lesson 4, as elaborated above, is the key catalyst to ensuring meaningful engagement. As Corcoran (2010) explains, trust between empowered individuals leads to new forms of partnership and this has emerged as not only the most important marker of success of any engagement with OSL, but also, the one that needs a lot of time and investment.

In addition, diaspora communities will have different expectations and understandings of what sustainable and durable peace looks like for the country based on truth, justice and equity. Regarding which, the roadmap developed can act as a catalyst of commonality that creates a safe space for discussion on those expectations and for coming to an agreement on some common actions moving forward. In charting a process, the roadmap touches on key aspects of interest for the diaspora community, whilst acknowledging the contentious issues but at least provides an impetus to move forward. This can serve as a model for how the safe space can be created and trust built to bring the different communities together. Thus it is not a question of whether or not OSL should be engaged with in Sri Lanka, but when and how to do so. Much of this depends on the safe spaces that are created that will allow trust to be built. Engaging OSLs in development (and ultimately reconciliation) necessarily relies upon a sound knowledge of who they are, their associations and organisations, their socioeconomic characteristics, their willingness to participate in development initiatives, their expectations for sustainable peace in the country[34] and the most effective outreach strategies as well as how they work together with each other and the relationships that they hold.

In the wake of the tragic Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka (Al Jazeera, 2019), the imperative for a comprehensive and inclusive reconciliation is more crucial than ever. This is where the OSL have a future stake and can play a leading role. Understanding the role of the OSL in post conflict Sri Lanka can contribute to furthering the understanding of the role of diaspora in other post conflict environments. From the development cooperation perspective, diaspora members could be a valuable ally for bringing in country-specific programming and interventions owing to their unique identities, experiences, and capacities. Whilst the diaspora may be beneficial partners in development cooperation, collaboration with them is not without risk, which must be considered before it is chosen as a partner or ally. This is the contribution of the argument that this paper can provide to the wider discussion around diaspora and post conflict reconciliation.

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[34] This could be seen as a follow up piece of work to this initial paper to identify the expectations of OSL regarding sustainable peace in the country along the lines of truth, justice and equity.

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